

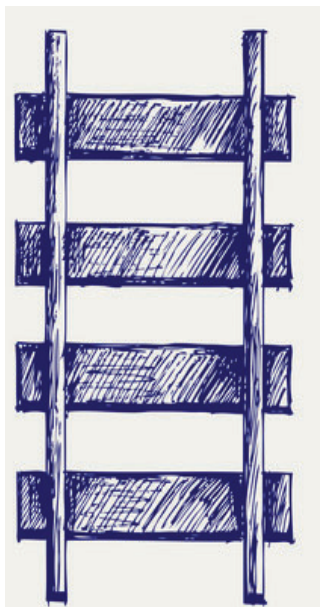
Brazil News



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Editorial

The Railroad Track



To say that trains run on rails would offend the intelligence of my readers. So I won't say it.

But, do you know that three fifths of all trains in the world run on standard gauge tracks? Probably not. And do you know the distance between the rails on a standard gauge track? Or on a narrow gauge track? Or what the advantages of one is over the other? Probably not. That doesn't mean you're dumb. It just means you don't know.

For what we are about to write, it is sufficient to know that the rails on standard gauge tracks have an inside distance of 4 ft 8½ in (1.435 m). This is true on a little spur only several hundred feet long or on a transcontinental rail measuring thousands of miles.

Four feet, eight and one half inches. Widen or narrow that measurement by half an inch and trains will derail.

The reason for two rails four feet, eight and a half inches apart, is to keep trains from tipping over. Since trains don't have the dexterity of a tightrope walker, a single rail, or two rails a foot apart, would be disastrous. On the other hand, rails placed six, eight, or even ten feet apart would make trains unwieldy and cause the construction cost of railways to raise exponentially.

James Harriot and his lifetime partner, Siegfried Faron, were opposites. James was methodical, unflappable, and by his own admission, a non-genius. But, as his books make very clear, a topnotch veterinarian. Seigfried, on the other hand, was impulsive, mercurial, a veritable genius, and like his partner, a topnotch

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veterinarian. Their friendship and professional respect ran deep and for a lifetime.

Decades ago it was debated by British veterinarians whether it was better to inject large animals in the rump or the shoulder muscle. Both James and Siegfried had definite opinions. In an argument between the two vets, James staunchly defended the rump and Siegfried the shoulder.

But, as Harriot pondered his partner's arguments, he decided to inject in the shoulder muscle to find out for himself if it was actually a better technique.

Sometime later while making his rounds on neighboring farms, James injected an animal in the shoulder muscle. The farmer chuckled. "You vets are something else. You inject in the shoulder, but your partner, who was here a few days ago, injects in the rump!"

What happened?

Siegfried had the same idea as James. He decided to see if maybe the rump was a better place to inject than the shoulder.

That, folks, is what I call a "railroad track" partnership. Two men, with different ideas—let's just say, four feet, eight and a half inches apart—respected each other's views enough to experiment rather than continue arguing.

Since we're talking about railroad tracks, four feet, eight and a half inches apart, let's give them names. How about "Left and Right"? Or maybe "Liberal and Conservative"?

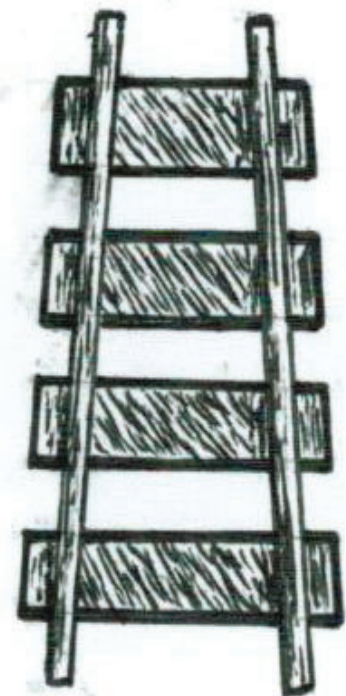
Recently in a discussion with a minister, he made the statement that "we don't need liberals and conservatives in the church; we need God's way." I agree that we need and want God's way, but I respectfully disagree on the liberal/conservative idea. We desperately need both liberals and conservatives in the church. The same is true in partnerships, in corporations, in government, in marriage, in fact, in most human interactions. The vision that success is based on everyone seeing things alike is a sure formula for disaster.

We are living in a changing world. Constantly we must make decisions. Do we change or do we maintain the status quo? What are the implications of changing or resisting change? Some of these decisions are of a personal nature; others weighty with lasting consequences.

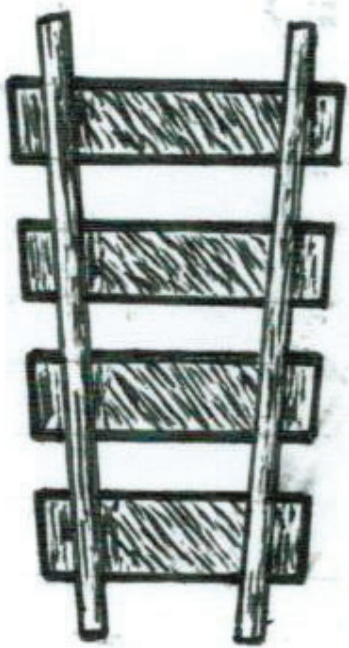
In an almost simplistic definition, the liberal believes we need to be "liberated" from the past; the conservative wants to "conserve" past values.

Both are right. And both are wrong. In a time of constant change, changes *must* constantly be made, while at the same time millennial values *must* be maintained. In a predominantly conservative society, in which the views of liberals are ignored or combated, this is what will happen...

The road will get narrower and narrower.



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On the other hand, in a predominantly liberal society, in which the views of conservatives are ignored or combated, this is what will happen...

The road will get wider and wider.

Which is worse?

You decide.

The train will derail on both of the tracks. A derailment is a derailment..

The inability to see or accept a differing viewpoint is called radicalism. Liberals label intransigent conservatives as radicals. And, of course, conservatives label intransigent liberals as radicals.

We don't appreciate radicals. The more radical they are, the less we appreciate them (and the harder we have to struggle to love them).

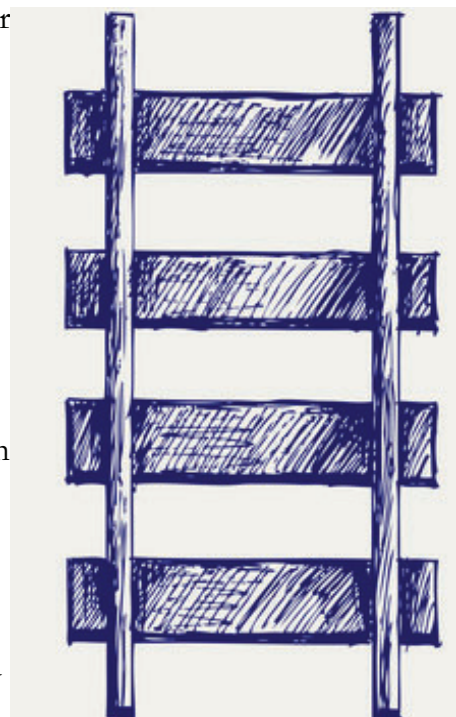
Many of us have a stereotypical conception of liberal and conservative. We see them as applying principally to politics and religion. This is unfortunate, as they are a mind set that come into play in marriage, in the way we run our farm or business, in partnerships, in our purchases, in our moral and ethical values, in family life—in a word, in what we are.

Furthermore, it can be an error to generalize someone as being intrinsically liberal or conservative. It is positively amazing how an individual can be very liberal in one area of life and ultraconservative in another. Such individuals tend to be radical in their views.

And finally, there are those who have a liberal or conservative leaning in all areas of their life. They are moderate in the application of their views and are never radical. I tip my hat to these individuals—whether they be liberal or conservative.

We sing that “life is like a mountain railroad.” This railroad is made up of two parallel rails and cross-ties to which they are fastened—exactly four feet, eight and a half inches apart. Normally these rails are level, except for curves, where the outside track is higher than the other. In real life this also happens, when one partner, spouse or brother must give the other the benefit of the doubt. It's give and take; today it is a left curve, tomorrow it is a right curve, but the rails remain the same distance apart.

In religious circles it is possible that over a period of years we have formed a mind-set that liberals are carnal and that conservatives are self-righteous. Without a doubt these situations exist. But don't let that throw you for a loop; it doesn't change the equation. A standard



gauge railroad, with rails four feet, eight and a half inches apart, is built of liberals and conservatives. Consecrated liberals. Consecrated conservatives.

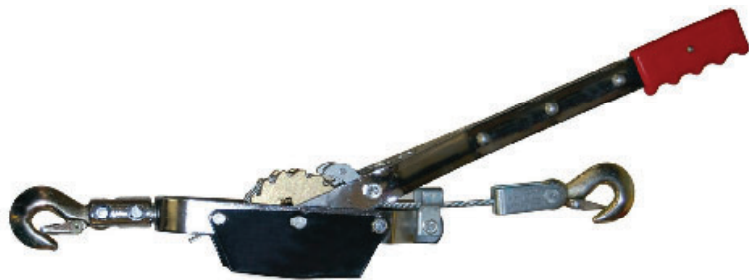
When an issue comes up and the liberal brother seeks the opinion of a conservative brother, rather than that of another liberal, before making a decision—and the other way around—that is God’s way; the standard gauge track, with rails four feet, eight and a half inches apart, with the same destiny. ▲

Thinking Out Loud

The Come-along

There are few human inventions that try men’s souls more than the common come-along.

“A come-along is a hand operated ratchet lever winch...



convenient and portable enough to use in almost any situation... [It] can also be used for stretching, lifting, and lowering objects” (WiseGEEK).

As anyone who has used a come-along knows, it is easier to tighten than to untighten. This is especially true when wanting to release the tension just one notch at a time. Either nothing happens or it releases all at once. (Five minutes of struggling with an uncooperative, flopping come-along reveal more of one’s basic character than psychoanalysts can figure out in five months of couch time.)

Increasingly, the world is facing what we can call the “ratcheting effect,” or described another way, the come-along with a defective release mechanism.

The Creator has given man both the prerogative and the duty to rule and determine the course of human events, while maintaining for Himself the supreme right to overrule. This power is exercised by elected officials at all levels, including the executive, the legislative and the judicial branches of democratic governments, and dictators in authoritarian regimes. Churches and their religious leaders are in the vanguard of the determination of events, either for good or for evil.

In military campaigns, the principal objective to victory is to encircle the enemy, or to use a common expression, “to tighten the noose.”

No one today is feeling this noose-tightening effect more than fundamental Christians, those who believe that the Bible continues to be the gold standard to be applied in both the secular and religious realms.

In the previous article, we used the terms “liberal” and “conservative” with a positive connotation. We now return to these terms as used in secular life, also known as “left” and “right.”

If one word could be used to describe the current world scene, it would be

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radicalism. Radical is “tending or disposed to make extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions” (M-W6). A fabulous description. Run it through again: *tending to make extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions*.

Increasingly, sinister forces are using radical movements as tools to alter the face of society. This change, in a word, is an attempt to substitute God with humanism. Indeed, citing the establishment clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution, the declared goal of atheistic groups is to transform America from “one nation *under* God” to “one nation *without* God.

Lawsuits are filed that begin in the lower courts and work their way up through Federal courts, with a few cases finally coming before the Supreme Court. Before the cases are heard, we know the outcome will probably be a 5-4 decision, occasionally finding for the defendants (in these cases, those defending Christian values) and more often for the plaintiff (those hoping to abolish religion on a governmental level). With each decision to curtail religious freedom, the ratchet on the come-along clicks. And the noose is drawn tighter.

A case in point can be taken from the little central Kansas town of Buhler, population 1,300. An atheistic group filed suit against the city demanding that the emblem of the Christian cross be removed from the town seal, the billboard in the park and from the city limits sign. Interestingly, no one in Buhler had any problem with the cross. Knowing that fighting a suit of this nature is very expensive, the city dads opted to remove the crosses.

In another case in a different state, local citizens filed a suit against a courthouse that has—had, that is— a plaque with the Ten Commandments hanging in one of the halls. One of the petitioners wrote that he is deeply offended when seeing the Ten Commandments in a public building and that visiting the courthouse is not the enjoyable experience it should be.

We are left speechless by the insanity (yes, that is the proper word) of this. A billboard, a thousand times bigger than the plaque in the courthouse, seen by thousands of people daily, can show virtually anything, no matter how immoral, without being offensive.

The ratchet is clicking faster and faster. The US Supreme Court will soon hear two cases on homosexual marriage. Expect a 5-4 decision...another click. A BIG click.

As cases of criminal rights are brought before the court, we hear more clicks. And the noose tightens.

By no means is this a N American exclusivity. Most of Europe has given way to what is known as social democracy and is made up of liberal, entitlement states. Especially France and Germany have gone off the deep end morally.

We will now take a look at some cold statistics...

The combined population of China and India stands at approximately 2.5 billion, or over one third of the world population. Neither are Christian nations.

Approximately two billion of the earth's inhabitants consider themselves Muslims, the nucleus being in Middle East countries.

Statistically, there are approximately two billion Christians worldwide.

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With a world population of seven billion souls, that leaves 500 million that can be chalked up as atheists, either declared or undeclared.

Of the two billion statistical Christians, what percentage still have a preserving salt content, that is, what percent can be considered fundamentalists?

The values given vary with the source and are subject to debate. Nevertheless, even with the most optimistic application, the situation is grim. Very, very grim.

Look at it this way, there are millions who are wanting to *make extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions.*

We now use another term: *extremist radical.* Without naming any particular ethnic group (you know to whom we are referring), it can safely be said that one extremist radical can do more damage than hundreds of thousands of moderate radicals (if there is such a thing). These are men and women who place the destruction of “infidels” (you and me and billions of others) as their top priority. They are not only willing to die for their cause, but beg for the opportunity.

So what are we facing? Why is the danger today so much greater than ever before?

Historically, radicalism has always existed. Evil men are not a product of modern life. Despots intent on creating a new world order periodically arise. Military leaders determined to rule the world have repeatedly enslaved peoples and caused undescrivable suffering. At times there have been clashing of forces between these titans. The list of such leaders is lengthy: Alexander the Great, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin...

What has changed is that radicalism has taken on the armor of terrorism. One terrorist, armed with a suitcase atomic bomb, can create greater destruction in a matter of seconds than past despots could carry out in months or years. And today there are literally thousands of such terrorists who would not hesitate to obliterate the center of New York or Washington—or any other large metropolis, for that matter—if given the chance.

How has the world gotten itself into such a mess?

Edmund Burke wrote, “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”

Radicalism, and now terrorism, is the result of good men doing nothing. Except for England, Europe has transformed liberality into irresponsibility. Most of Europe is bankrupt, both financially and morally.

For obvious reasons the African continent is not in a condition to assist in the war on terrorism.

Both Central and South America are uninvolved in global politics and cannot be counted on for support.

All Asia needs to do is sit back and wait for the bomb to explode (possibly literally) to step in and reap the spoils. No one on earth has more patience than an Asian.

Australia is a large country with a small population and not prepared to give significant help in time of crisis.

The Middle East...well, let's just say that is where the bombs are made.

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So that leaves the United States of America as the last bastion against the unthinkable.

The United States is criticized abroad for the role it plays as world policeman. The truth is that now, more than ever, society needs a world policeman. Only a strong, determined hand will keep evil from prevailing.

When President Ronald Reagan left office the curtain fell on an era. He was the last chief executive to rely on his own convictions and intuition to lead the nation, more than on pollsters. It was he who had the courage to call the now defunct Soviet Union an “evil empire.” It was he who called on Gorbachev “to tear down the [Berlin] wall.”—which did come down.

To put in a basket what we have just written, what will happen if no more “Reagans” arise in the United States to look evil in the face and call it what it is? If through weak or inept leadership the badge of leadership becomes tarnished, what will happen? Can world civility be maintained without an upright world policeman?

The answer is no. When Israel was true to its divine mandate, not only was there domestic peace and prosperity, but surrounding kingdoms were kept in check. In other words, the influence of a righteous king extrapolated national borders, making “even his enemies to be at peace with him.”

Unless this happens, the clicks of the come-along are going to become increasingly frequent as the noose is drawn tighter and tighter around those who love righteousness. ▲

Thinking Out Loud

Several months ago My wife and I spent six weeks in the States. Following are some observations...

Cycles

Brazil is loaded with cycles; it is a mode of transportation. I understand that at least 50 new cycles are sold daily in our local town of 180 thousand inhabitants. They are everywhere. It isn't unusual to pull up to a stop light and have eight or 10 cycles come slithering between the stopped cars, finding a position at the head of the pack for when the light turns green. Actually, before it turns green. Since they are out in the open they apparently can hear a slight click when the caution light comes on for the crossing lane. By the time the light actually turns green quite a few of them are half way over the intersection.

I'm no specialist in cycles, but I think the majority of them are Hondas and Yamahas. They are—well, let's just say—work horses, maybe 150 or 200 cc's (as opposed to the elephantine beasts seen roaming concrete jungles in N America).

In the metropolis of São Paulo when rush hour traffic would have presented an undeniable challenge to patient Job, as cars and trucks either creep along, or come to a complete halt, motorists know it prudent to leave sufficient space between lanes

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for handlebar clearance. The result is a graphic illustration of the classical hare and tortoise fable. With traffic creeping along at maybe five kilometers per hour, cycles swoosh between cars, with mere centimeters separating handlebars from mirrors, at 70 or 80 kph.

Motorists know it is never a good idea to put the squeeze on cyclists. The “squeezer” will always be responsible for all damages, both to his own vehicle and the cycle, plus any physical injuries. Since cyclists tend to fraternize like a swarm of bees when one is under attack, motorists find themselves staring into a dozen irate helmeted faces—and quickly offer to pay all damages.

Rio Verde, our local town, has some 500 mototaxistas—motorcycle taxis. Needless to say, they carry only one passenger at a time. They can be seen everywhere. Not only do they provide cheap transportation for the emerging underprivileged class, but contribute to a low unemployment rate.

In our six weeks in the US I didn’t see a single “work horse” cycle. They were, as I have said, the elephantine monsters with shaggy, all male, heads on top. (Where are the feminists who like to prove they can do anything a man can do—and better? Maybe they are just a bit smarter than I thought.)

What I found interesting is that in Brazil everyone wears a helmet when on a cycle. The mototaxistas must provide helmets for their passengers. It isn’t unusual to see an adult carrying a child—wearing a small helmet. I say this is interesting because nearly 10 years ago when it became law that anyone astride a cycle must wear head protection, there was general outrage. But stiff fines do miracles and what started as law has now become conscience.

There is no need to make any comments on the kind of bikes one sees on the roads in the US, or describe their drivers.

Song Service

Since I grew up less than a mile from what is now the United Center Congregation, I gravitate to UC when in central Kansas. I had the privilege of attending a song service which has gone down in my mental record book as the best ever.

This service took some planning. Favorite songs to be sung in the service were submitted to the song leaders during the preceding week. They then chose groups to sing the songs. Before each song was sung the person who had requested it made a short explanation on why it was precious. Most went to the microphone; others merely stood and briefly told how the song inspired them.

What impressed me was the kind of songs that were sung. There wasn’t a single “modern” song (not to be confused with “new”). They were the kind that elevate the soul to heaven, as opposed to so many songs that attempt to bring heaven down to the soul.

This kind of song service takes some organizing. But the rewards are great.

Post(de)partum Syndrome

Postpartum syndrome is a depressive state that hits some women after having a baby—according to recent studies, approximately a whopping 80 percent of modern women get down in the dumps after having a baby. But that’s beside the point...

What is post(de)partum syndrome?

Simplum! (Brush up on your Latin)

When people from the Colony spend time in the US and the hour comes to board the airplane and departum for Brazil, they frequently arrive home in a state of depression, looking and acting sort of like a modern woman who has had a baby. The following non-scientific study lists some of the reasons:

ROADS. No matter how you figure it, roads in N America are the eighth wonder of the world. We drove from Kansas to Arizona, to S Dakota, to Kansas and never hit a single pothole. I saw where concrete highways were being built, some 12 inches thick and loaded with rebar. This kind of roads cross the US endlessly. The asphalt is tops too.

The highways in southern Brazil are much better than those of the central-west area where we live, where the very best aren’t as good as the worst in the US. Sloppy construction gives our highways a very short “potless” life.

TRAFFIC. The rule in Brazil is survival of the fastest. It is no wonder Brazil has produced an unproportionately high amount of Formula 1 aces. When you drive down the road here you see potential champions everywhere—if they survive (and if you survive to tell about it).

SOMETHING FOR EVERYTHING. “Make do” has gone the way of the Mohicans in the US. I estimate—non-scientifically—that the variety of products stocked in your Wal-Mart stores in the US is ten times greater than in Wal-Marts in Brazil. That goes for grocery stores, hardware stores, ad infinitum. You don’t have to cobble anything up, make do or become inventive. Someone has thought ahead and invented exactly what you need, which is then built by the Chinese. All Americans need to solve all their problems and live happily every after is a valid credit card.

CONGREGATIONS. You people living in the US enjoy a constant interaction with sister congregations. We have five congregations in Brazil. The three in the Rio Verde area are 30-45 minutes apart. The other two are a good day’s drive (or maybe an awful day’s drive) away. Do we miss the proximity of sister congregations? Of course we do!

THE LANGUAGE. Not all Americans living in Brazil appreciate Portuguese. After having English smoothly slide off their tongue for a month or two, they almost get cramps in their vocal organ when landing in the international airport in São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro.

There you have it, a few of the causes for post(de)partum syndrome afflicting those departing the US and heading back to Brazil. It hits a whopping 80% of them in varying degrees. Any cure for the syndrome? Like the common cold, time is the best remedy, maybe six weeks. When really severe, only a one-way ticket on a northbound flight out of one of the mentioned international airports will bring relief. ▲

Grayheads

When I go to church in the U States, to a restaurant, to a grocery store, or wherever, I see a lot of gray hair.

Anyway, I was at the United Center Congregation for a service and when it came time to close, a brother a third of the way back from the front broke the decorum of the meeting by loudly announcing, “We have a brother here from Brazil.” That, of course, was me. “We’d like to hear him say something.”

So the preacher asked me to come to the front and say something and then have closing prayer.

When asked to say something, people expect one will say something. So I got up front and saw all the gray heads in the audience. And was impressed. You see, in Brazil we are a young church with few really gray heads. So I talked about grayheads. Something like this...

“You have a lot of grayheads in your congregation. Since the grayheads are elderly, many no longer serve on committees, nor do a lot of things that younger members do. You may think that by the time their hair gets gray they are not much more than bench-warmers.

“Really, that is not the case. The hoary heads, as the Bible calls them, really have an important function in any congregation. They have a stabilizing effect; the younger ones know that if they go overboard with some of their ideas, the grayheads will give them some sound direction, whether solicited or not.

“All ships have ballast over their keel. Passengers never see this ballast—in fact, most crew members probably never see it. Yet it is there, stabilizing the ship. Without the ballast the ship would capsize.

A congregation made up of only younger members won’t necessarily capsize, but it will lack the stability of a congregation with grayheads.”

After the meeting someone came up to me and asked, “So you’re trying to say that the old folks are deadweight in a congregation?”

Deadweight, folks, are freeloaders. They can be any age. Never confuse the two. We can get along very well without freeloaders, but not without ballast. Long live the grayheads! (Take that literally.)

(Why two spellings: "grayheads" and gray heads"? "Grayheads are the elderly. Gray heads are heads that are gray, no matter what age.) ▲

Texting

People text all over the world. But Americans give texting a new meaning. It is what they are doing when they’re not doing something else. Actually, it is what they are doing when they are doing something else.

I’m guessing when I say that at least 90 percent of all texting is frivolous—mere chat, or worse. I suppose it’s the ballast in the bottom of my boat that convinces me

that texting isn't necessarily making the world a better place. But that's beside the point. Because I spend considerable time writing and consequently put a lot of importance on correct grammar, punctuation, capitalization and expressive text. Texting is antithetical to all this. The early Colonists were put out with England for "taxation without representation." I am put out with "textation (not a word, but ought to be) without education.

I understand that texting is done in a kind of electronic shorthand, which makes sense if trying to punch out a message with big fingers on a little cell phone keyboard. But it looks like it was done by someone who flunked out during the second semester of the first grade. If the people who studied out of the old McGuffey readers could have seen what 21st century writing looks like, they would have probably keeled over like so many dominoes.

School teachers who can implant in their students an abhorrence for textation without education should have their names inscribed on a literary wall of fame and be given a 50 percent increase in their salaries.

I believe that an addicted "texter" will never be a decent writer. Notice the excerpt from a Sunday School lesson written 20 years from now:

"u nd i ned 2 xersiz wsdm nd onsty in r bsnes dels. pepl juj us bi th wa we do bsnes. n onst bro lvs a gd witns" ▲

Readers Contribute

The Toothpaste Factory

A toothpaste factory had a problem: they sometimes shipped empty boxes without the tube inside. This was due to the way the production line was set up. People with experience in designing production lines will tell you how difficult it is to have everything happen with timings so precise that every single unit coming out of it is perfect 100% of the time.

Small variations in the environment (which can't be controlled in a cost-effective fashion) mean you must have quality assurance checks smartly distributed across the line so that customers at the supermarket don't get annoyed and switch to a competing product.

Understanding how important that was, the CEO of the toothpaste factory got the top people in the company together and they decided to start a new project, in which they would hire an external engineering company to solve their empty boxes problem.

Being as their engineering department was already too stretched to take on any extra effort, the project followed the usual process: budget and project sponsor allocated, RFP, third-parties selected, and six months (and \$8 million) later they had a fantastic solution—on time, on budget, high quality and everyone in the project had a great time.

They solved the problem by using high-tech precision scales that would sound a bell and flash lights whenever a toothpaste box would weigh less than it should.

The line would stop, and someone had to walk over and yank the defective box out of it, pressing another button when done to restart the line.

A while later, the CEO decided to have a look at the ROI of the project: amazing results! No empty boxes were being shipped out of the factory after the scales were put in place. Very few customer complaints, and they were gaining market share.

“That’s some money well spent!” he says, before looking closely at the other statistics in the report. It turned out the number of defects picked up by the scales was 0 after three weeks of production use. It should’ve been picking up at least a dozen a day, so maybe there was something wrong with the report.

He filed a bug against it, and after some investigation, the engineers come back saying the report was actually correct. The scales really weren’t picking up any defects, because all boxes that got to that point in the conveyor belt were good.

Puzzled, the CEO traveled down to the factory, and walked up to the part of the line where the precision scales were installed. A few feet before the scale, there was a \$20 desk fan, blowing the empty boxes off the belt and into a bin.

“Oh, that,” said one of the workers, “one of the guys put it there ‘because he was tired of walking over every time the bell rang.” ▲

The Violinist

This happened in the Metro station in Washington D.C. on a cold January day.

For an hour a man played one of the most complicated compositions of Bach on his fiddle. During this performance nearly two thousand passengers came through the station.

After playing for three minutes a middle-aged man stopped for several seconds to listen, and hastened on to not lose his train.

Another four minutes and without breaking her stride, a woman tossed a dollar into a hat beside the performer.

Another six minutes and a youth leaned against the wall to listen, but then looked at his watch and continued on.

Another ten minutes and a three-year old child stopped, but in a hurry, her mother tugged on her arm. After a few steps the child stopped again, but as before, the mother tugged on her arm. Even so, walking away, the child kept looking back.

Forty-five minutes later the fiddler was still playing non-stop. Only six people stopped for a brief moment to listen. Twenty tossed some money into the hat without breaking their stride. The man received a total of 32 dollars.

After playing for an hour the fiddler stopped playing. Once again the place was in silence, except for the normal noises of passersby. No one noticed that the playing stopped. There was no applause or recognition of the performance.

No one was aware that the performer was none other than Joshua Bell, a world-renown violinist. The complicated pieces were played with a violin valued at three and a half million dollars. In one of his presentations two days before, the concert hall in Boston was filled to capacity, with tickets selling at a hundred dollars each.

This little experiment was done by the Washington Post to discover how much people pay attention to their surroundings.

Their conclusion...

If people fail to perceive that they are listening to one of the world's best violinists playing one of the most beautiful compositions ever produced on one of the most perfect violins, how many other treasures in life are we missing simply because we don't pay attention? ▲

The Congressman

A cowboy named Bud was overseeing his herd in a remote mountainous pasture in Montana when suddenly a brand-new BMW advanced toward him out of a cloud of dust.

The driver, a young man in a Brioni® suit, Gucci® shoes, RayBan® sunglasses and YSL® tie, leaned out the window and asked the cowboy, "If I tell you exactly how many cows and calves you have in your herd, will you give me a calf?"

Bud looks at the man, who obviously is a yuppie, then looks at his peacefully grazing herd and calmly answers, "Sure, why not?"

The yuppie parks his car, whips out his Dell® notebook computer, connects it to his Cingular RAZR V3® cell phone, and surfs to a NASA page on the Internet, where he calls up a GPS satellite to get an exact fix on his location which he then feeds to another NASA satellite that scans the area in an ultra-high-resolution photo.

The young man then opens the digital photo in Adobe Photoshop® and exports it to an image processing facility in Hamburg, Germany...

Within seconds, he receives an e-mail on his Palm Pilot® that the image has been processed and the data stored. He then accesses an MS-SQL® database through an ODBC connected Excel® spreadsheet with e-mail on his Blackberry® and, after a few minutes, receives a response.

Finally, he prints out a full-color, 150 page report on his hi-tech, miniaturized HP LaserJet® printer, turns to the cowboy and says, "You have exactly 1,586 cows and calves."

"That's right. Well, I guess you can take one of my calves," says Bud.

He watches the young man select one of the animals and looks on with amusement as the young man stuffs it into the trunk of his car.

Then Bud says to the young man, "Hey, if I can tell you exactly what your business is, will you give me back my calf?"

The young man thinks about it for a second and then says, "Okay, why not?"

"You're a Congressman for the U.S. Government," says Bud.

"Wow! That's correct," says the yuppie, "but how did you guess that?"

"No guessing required." answered the cowboy. "You showed up here even though nobody called you; you want to get paid for an answer I already knew, to a question I never asked. You used millions of dollars worth of equipment trying to show me how much smarter than me you are, and you don't know a thing about how working people make a living—or about cows, for that matter. This is a herd of sheep.

Now give me back my dog. ▲

The Questionnaire

A United Nations organ is supposed to have sent out a questionnaire to all world leaders. The question was:

Please, in all honesty, give your opinion on the scarcity of food in the rest of the world.

A few of the answers...

The Europeans asked what the word "scarcity" meant.

The Africans were puzzled by the word "food."

The Argentines had never heard of the word "please."

The North Americans asked what was meant by "the rest of the world."

The Cubans didn't understand what it meant to "give your opinion."

And the Brazilians (bless their hearts) are still trying to figure out what "honesty" is. ▲

A Note to the Readers

Another Questionnaire

By the time you get done reading this little paper, you're probably trying to decide if Brazil is a tropical paradise or a tropical disaster. Since I obviously am biased, the solution for those who really want to know is to get a passport, a visa, and then a ticket to Brazil.

Are you interested in visiting Brazil?

Would you prefer to do it individually or as part of a tour group?

What time of the year works best for you?

April 8-12, 2013, our local Coop will stage its annual Tecnoshow, which is a farm show that brings visitors from all over Brazil, as well as from foreign countries. If you farmers are interested in what kind of equipment farmers use here in Brazil, you will enjoy the farm show. It is very well organized with zero hanky-panky.

What would you like to see in Brazil?

The Amazon River and jungle?

The Pantanal in the state of Mato Grosso?

Iguassu Falls and the hydroelectric dam?

A tour of Rio de Janeiro and/or São Paulo?

Other suggestions...

If you are interested, send an an e-mail to charlesbecker@outlook.com, indicating what would work best for you.