

Point of View

by Ralph Pohlman



ALL YOU NEED ARE A FEW WELL-CHOSEN WORDS

When I was a green and callow youth, fresh out of small-town Saskatchewan and a student at Queen's, I met a beautiful young girl from Ottawa.

I had never been to Ottawa but I fancied that, being the capital, it must also be the centre of Canadian culture. It was only much later that I discovered that Ottawa was a cultural wasteland, with maybe one good restaurant, which was Cantonese.

But I digress. Having met this beautiful girl, I wanted to impress her with my *savoir-faire* and, as it happened, the National Ballet of Canada, or some such organization, was coming to Kingston. They were to perform in the hockey arena.

To this day I almost remember the performance. They did Chopin's *Les Sylphides* and something else. But better than that,

my companion was dazzled by my obvious interest in the finer things of life. Anyway, it did the trick.

I have not been to the ballet since, I'm almost sorry to say, and although I said I remembered the performance, that's not quite true. What I remembered was the name of the performance. But it taught me a huge lesson, which is, to get along socially in this world, you don't actually have to know anything as long as you know some words and pronounce them correctly.

For example, if ever you are trapped in a conversation where people are talking about the ballet, you adopt a humble pose and say, "Well, yes, I suppose that my favourite ballet has always been Chopin's *Les Sylphides*." Then you just shut up. Don't mention *The Nutcracker* or the hockey cup that the guys wear. Having sounded knowledgeable, don't risk everything by saying

any more. You don't know any more. If it does happen that you know the difference between an *entrechat* and an *arabesque*, so much the better. Save it for later.

It doesn't hurt to have some backup. Then there is the matter of booze. Being a connoisseur of beers brings you no laurels, unless you happen to live in Bavaria. No, to have that aristocratic *savoir-faire* I was talking about, you need to learn the words for Scotch whisky and wines. A self-deprecating but snotty attitude doesn't hurt either.

Did you know that in Edinburgh, in 1505, the barbers and surgeons were given the exclusive right to make and sell whisky? That lasted until 1772 when it was given to the barbers as compensation for being forbidden to practise surgery.

That's a bit of trivia to throw into the conversations about Scotch whisky. The words you need to know are "single malt," and a few phrases like, "a subtle peatiness without being aggressive," or "a bit smoky with a layered finish." It doesn't matter what it means. Nobody will ask. It's also okay to

throw in words like "nutty," "peppery" or "lingering."

A few words about wine. If you get invited to a wine tasting, remember to adopt a reverent demeanour. Don't wear a baseball cap. And don't just drink it and look around for some more. You hold it up to the light, sniff it, sort of gargle with it, before you swallow. Then you say, "Ah, an ambitious little wine."

Now, these days, it is fashionable to know something about port. Port is a "fortified wine" which means it has a bigger bang and it is a "dessert wine," meaning you drink it after dinner. With Stilton cheese. That's important. No Cheese Whiz on Ritz crackers.

You can use the same baffleleg for port as for other wines. Stuff like "youthful," "gutsy," or "mature nose with good length" or "very closed on the nose." Nose is a good word, although "this wine gives good nose," may be a bit crass.

Another time we'll talk about what to say at theatre or symphony intermission.

FAITH & LIFE A MENNONITE PERSPECTIVE

by
Gord
Alton



The Passion of the Christ

Since the movie, "Passion of the Christ," has triggered so much discussion both inside and outside the church, I decided to experience this movie for myself.

The torture and suffering shown in this movie is intense and drawn out, so much so, that there were times when I couldn't watch the screen. I came away from the movie wondering 'how could any human endure that much suffering.' I suspect that this was Mel Gibson's intention--to show Jesus as no ordinary human.

For many Mennonites, Jesus' crucifixion is not about suffering; it is about faithfulness to God's way of living, even in the midst of suffering and death. Throughout the movie, we see an intense conflict happening between God's way, one of non-violence, love, embracing pain and suffering, and the way of Evil, one of violence, selfishness and supporting the corrupted religious and political systems. Jesus could, at any time throughout his life, have become like his enemies by engaging them with violent actions and responses but, in doing so, he would have sacrificed following the ways of God. Normal human response to evil is "an eye for an eye," violence against violence. Jesus realized that God's way to transform Evil was to embrace the suffering caused by evil, to take on willingly the sins of the world. In doing so, evil and sin are exposed for what they are, and change and reconciliation happens.

Within the Mennonite tradition, this way of faithfulness to God over and against the world is called the way of the cross. We believe that it is only in following the way of the cross that evil and sin are confronted and transformed.

I was also surprised by how I experienced the Jewish leaders. While

there were many despicable Roman soldiers who brutally tortured Jesus, you do leave the movie with some resentment toward the Jewish leaders. As a result, I can appreciate why some reviewers see this movie as promoting anti-Semitism. I also suspect that the current anti-Semitic violence that has broken out recently has its roots in this movie. Since the movie follows closely the Bible's gospel accounts, I believe we, Christians, need to be careful about how we portray and interpret stories around Jesus' death. For many years now, I have reframed Jesus' conflict with the Jewish establishment in terms of Jesus critiquing organized religion. Everything Jesus experienced from the Jewish leaders, our early Mennonite ancestors, in the sixteenth century, experienced from the Christian church, including persecution and death.

If Christians are behind these anti-Semitic acts, they don't truly understand why Jesus died on the cross. If they did, they would understand the way of the cross and try to follow it.

Feedback? We'd love to hear your comments. Please contact us at:

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'It's about time' unveils May 21

Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum unveils its 2004 exhibit, *It's About Time*, on May 21.

The exhibit will highlight the museum's collection of watches and clocks, examine technological advances in time measurement and explore how our concept of time has changed since the intro-

duction of railway schedules and standardized time zones. It runs until Sept. 10.

The museum's newsletter also offers some timely trivia on topics temporal: "Do you know what caused the switch from pocket watches to wrist watches? The bicycle!"

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