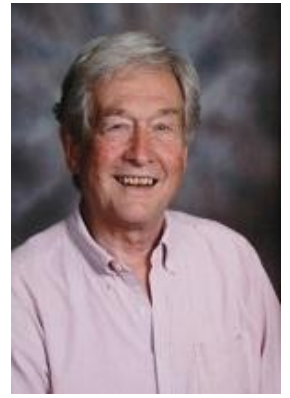


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**“...WONDER, LOVE, AND PRAISE.”**  
**A Meditation on Thanksgiving**

1 Over recent years, I have amassed a modest collection of sea shells. On vacation trips to Florida and Mexico, I’ve been entranced by their variety and opulence of design. On almost every visit, I bring home one or more magnificent specimen: a new sea shell for my collection. Each one is a masterpiece of ingenuity and inexhaustible inventiveness.

2 My favourite shell is the chambered nautilus. An elegant cream coloured spiral as big as your open hand, with lovely brown striping, the nautilus is what is called a cephalopod, related to the squid and octopus. In life it trails tentacles from its open end.

3 And it’s a splendid example in nature of the Fibonacci Sequence in geometry.

4 The Fibonacci Sequence is an unending mathematical formula expressed as 1,1,2,3,5,8, etc, where each term is defined as the sum of its two predecessors. In geometry, it describes an elegant, ever widening spiral. In short: A nautilus shell. T

5 But the nautilus shell is not alone. Nature is full of examples that follow the Fibonacci Sequence. The arrangement of seeds in the head of a sunflower describe a Fibonacci Sequence. The petals in a pine cone. The arrangement of leaves on the stems of many flowers. One wag has even discerned a Fibonacci Sequence in the head and pompadour of Donald Trump’s profile!

6 All this brings me to the substance of this posting. And to my title.

7 My title this month is a quote from the very last words of Charles Wesley’s magisterial hymn, “Love Divine, all Loves excelling”, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)* hymn number 631. In that magnificent text, the redeemed Faithful are “lost in wonder, love and praise!”

8 I’m suggesting here that these three qualities – Wonder, Love, and Praise – not only represent a description of some truly spiritual impulses in human life. They also represent a journey, a trajectory. For Christians, Wonder leads to Love. Love in turn leads to Praise. Let me spell this out.

9 **WONDER:** The spiritual life begins in Wonder. All spiritual impulses begin in wonder. That Fibonacci Sequence: Who will deny the wonder, the marvel, of that altogether astounding mathematical formula? Who can observe that Fibonacci Sequence in nature without a sense of awe? The chambered nautilus again.

10 If you have never stood in awe of a beautiful sunset, if you have never marveled at the genetic intricacies of the human epigastrium, if you have never wondered about the geometric complexity of a sea shell – well, there is clearly something wrong with you. A sense of awe, of marvel, of wonder is simply part of the experience of being human. We're not fully human without it. A sense of wonder is part of *homo sapiens*.

11 One of the saddest commentaries I have ever heard about anybody is the description of the temperament of America's 43rd President. This is the assessment I have heard about him: "He has absolutely no sense of curiosity, no sense of wonder..." My guess is the same could be said about US President number 45.

12 LOVE: And the next step, among *homo sapiens*, is love. How can you not love what you wonder at?

13 It is love, among other qualities, that motivates much of the struggle for justice in every age. It moves and motivates the environmental movement in our day. Love motivates those active in trying to reduce and reverse the effects of climate change on our planet home. This marvelous world we are given: How can we heal its wounds? How can we preserve its marvels?

14 I had occasion in early September to travel to Ontario's Bruce Peninsula, that finger of land, whose backbone is the Niagara Escarpment, that separates Lake Huron from Georgian Bay. The autumnal fields we passed on our three hour bus trip were jaw-dropping. Dark evergreens as background to trees just beginning to change: scarlet maples and golden oak and birch. Fields – of winter wheat? Canola? – that glowed neon green from a recent rain, as if they were plugged into an electric outlet. A favoured land indeed! I was almost brought to tears by the sight of their beauty.

15 I wondered at what I saw. And I discovered that I deeply loved what I wondered at.

16 PRAISE: I suppose praise, as the final step in the spirit's journey, is left to people of faith. Perhaps there are some among us who are content to wonder, and to love. And to stop there. But the instinct to praise must surely stir somewhere in every human heart.

17 I can recall sitting at table with twenty other members of our extended family, plus assorted guests, on a recent Thanksgiving Day. And I recall someone asking, "Whom do atheists have to thank, on Thanksgiving Day?"

18 The question stayed with me, you can be sure. Who indeed? Ourselves? I suppose you could make that case. The cooks and produce vendors? The truckers who deliver all this gastric opulence? The farmers who grow it? I suppose they all certainly deserve our praise. Is there any Infinite Absolute, any Beyond, that merits our praise? The question begs for some kind of answer.

19 People of faith are often perhaps too quick to answer. We can be faulted for a glibness that is sometimes off-putting to others. But most Christians feel compelled to conclude in the words of another hymn: "How can I keep from singing?" (ELW 763).

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