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REVERENCE

MEMBERS OF THE ATHENAEUM SOCIETY AND GUESTS:

IN RECENT YEARS, I HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT OUR SOCIETY, AND SPECIFICALLY, OUR APPARENT WILLINGNESS TO ABANDON OUR HISTORICAL NOTIONS OF CIVILITY AND RESPECT IN OUR DEALINGS WITH ONE ANOTHER AS PEOPLE, AND AS VARIOUS COMMUNITIES SHARING COMMON INTERESTS AND THEIR INTERACTION WITH OTHER DISSIMILAR COMMUNITIES. PERHAPS YOU HAVE HAD THE SAME FEELINGS, TOO.

IT JUST SEEMS THAT WE ARE NOT AS RESPECTFUL AND MANNERLY AS WE USED TO BE. THE DRAGGING DOWN OF OTHERS TO BOOST OURSELVES UP HAS BECOME COMMONPLACE. IF YOU DO NOT BELIEVE IT, NOTICE THE NATIONAL POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENTS, AND THE ELECTION IS STILL SIX MONTHS AWAY!!!

MY MOTHER, ONE OF THE MOST AVID READERS I KNOW, GIVES ME BOOKS AS GIFTS – USUALLY ABOUT POLITICS AND POLITICAL HISTORY. LAST YEAR, HOWEVER, SHE GAVE ME A BOOK ENTITLED “REVERENCE, RENEWING A LOST VIRTUE” WRITTEN BY PROFESSOR PAUL WOODRUFF. WHILE I DON’T AGREE WITH EVERYTHING WOODRUFF HAS TO SAY, I THINK HE MAKES MANY POINTS WITH WHICH I CAN IDENTIFY, PARTICULARLY AS I THINK ABOUT HOW WE, AS PEOPLE, TREAT OTHERS.

WOODRUFF EXPLAINS THAT, THROUGHOUT HISTORY, REVERENCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN IMPORTANT VIRTUE IN SOCIETY, AND THAT IT REQUIRES

RECOGNITION AND NURTURING. HOWEVER, HE BELIEVES THAT WE NO LONGER RECOGNIZE OR TEACH THIS VIRTUE, ALTHOUGH MANY ASPECTS OF REVERENCE ARE PART OF OUR EVERYDAY LIVES.

AS IN MOST STUDIES, A DEFINITION OF TERMS IS ESSENTIAL. WOODRUFF DEFINES VIRTUE AS "A CAPACITY TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT." REVERENCE IS DEFINED AS "THE WELL DEVELOPED CAPACITY TO HAVE FEELINGS OF AWE, RESPECT AND SHAME WHEN THESE ARE RIGHT FEELINGS TO HAVE." THE DICTIONARY DEFINES REVERENCE AS "FEELINGS OF DEEP RESPECT OR DEVOTION." THESE FEELINGS MAY BE FELT TOWARD SOMEBODY OR SOMETHING. NOTE THAT WOODRUFF EMPHASIZES IN HIS DEFINITION "WELL DEVELOPED," MEANING THAT REVERENCE MUST BE CULTIVATED AND USED. THE FAILURE TO CULTIVATE AND PRACTICE REVERENCE IS DANGEROUS FOR SOCIETY.

HE BELIEVES THAT REVERENCE LIES BEHIND CIVILITY AND ALL OF THE GRACES THAT MAKE LIFE IN SOCIETY BEARABLE AND PLEASANT.

BEING AWARE OF THE PROHIBITION AGAINST PAPERS ON THE TOPICS OF RELIGION AND POLITICS, I WANT TO ASSURE THAT THIS IS NOT WHAT THIS PAPER IS ABOUT. WE OFTEN THINK OF REVERENCE IN RELIGIOUS TERMS, AND IT DOES HAVE RELIGIOUS CONNOTATIONS. FOR INSTANCE, WE OFTEN REFER TO PASTORS AS REVEREND, AND, IN THE CATHOLIC TRADITION, REVERENCE IS A TITLE. CERTAINLY, THIS IDEA OF FEELINGS OF AWE AND THE RECOGNITION OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN US, IS A PART OF WHAT I AM SPEAKING ABOUT. BUT,

AS WOODRUFF NOTES, MUSICIAN MAY HAVE FEELINGS OF AWE ABOUT A PIECE OF MUSIC, WITHOUT ANY THOUGHT OF THE DIVINE.

IN ANCIENT GREEK AND CHINESE CULTURES, REVERENCE WAS A CRITICAL VIRTUE. IN 322 B.C., PROTAGORAS WROTE THIS ABOUT MAN:

NOW MAN, HAVING A SHARE OF THE DIVINE ATTRIBUTES, WAS AT FIRST THE ONLY ONE OF THE ANIMALS WHO HAD ANY GODS, BECAUSE HE ALONE WAS OF THEIR KINDRED; ... BUT WHEN [MEN] WERE GATHERED TOGETHER, HAVING NO ART OF GOVERNMENT, THEY EVIL INTREATED ONE ANOTHER, AND WERE AGAIN IN PROCESS OF DISPERSION AND DESTRUCTION. ZEUS FEARED THAT THE ENTIRE RACE WOULD BE EXTERMINATED, AND SO HE SENT HERMES TO THEM, BEARING REVERENCE AND JUSTICE TO BE THE ORDERING PRINCIPLES OF CITIES AND THE BONDS OF FRIENDSHIP AND CONCILIATION. HERMES ASKED ZEUS HOW HE SHOULD IMPART JUSTICE AND REVERENCE AMONG MEN:-SHOULD HE DISTRIBUTE THEM AS THE ARTS ARE DISTRIBUTED; THAT IS TO SAY, TO A FAVOURED FEW ONLY ... "SHALL THIS BE THE MANNER IN WHICH I AM TO DISTRIBUTE JUSTICE AND REVERENCE AMONG MEN, OR SHALL I GIVE THEM TO ALL?" "TO ALL," SAID ZEUS; "I SHOULD LIKE THEM ALL TO HAVE A SHARE; FOR CITIES CANNOT EXIST, IF A FEW ONLY SHARE IN THE VIRTUES, AS IN THE ARTS. AND FURTHER, MAKE A LAW BY MY ORDER, THAT HE WHO HAS NO PART IN REVERENCE AND JUSTICE SHALL BE PUT TO DEATH, FOR HE IS A PLAGUE OF THE STATE."

WOODRUFF ADVISES THAT REVERENCE REQUIRES ADHERENCE TO CUSTOM AND CEREMONY, BUT THAT IT IS ATTITUDE THAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO REVERENCE. AN EMPTY RITUAL OR CEREMONY IS NOT REVERENT WITHOUT THE PROPER ATTITUDE. REVERENCE IS A STATE OF MIND.

A GOOD EXAMPLE WOULD BE FUNERALS. WHILE DIFFERENT CULTURES HAVE HAD DIFFERENT BELIEFS ABOUT DEATH, AND ITS ATTENDANT CEREMONIES. ALL CONSIDERED FUNERALS A VERY IMPORTANT RITUAL. THE RITUAL ITSELF IS NOT WHAT IS IMPORTANT. IT IS THE ATTITUDE OF REVERENCE, WHICH MAKES THE RITUAL MEANINGFUL.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE IS THE MILITARY. WHEN WE THINK OF THE MILITARY, WE THINK OF ORDER AND DISCIPLINE. WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE THAT MILITARY PERSONNEL WEAR UNIFORMS, OR MARCH IN STEP, OR HAVE SPECIFIC DUTIES ACCORDING TO RANK?? IT IS BECAUSE THIS ORDER AND DISCIPLINE PROVIDES ALL MEMBERS WITH THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY, A PART OF A TEAM, WHERE ALL WORK TOGETHER TOWARD A COMMON GOAL.

IN OUR DAILY LIVES, WE DEMONSTRATE THIS REVERENCE IN MANY WAYS THAT WE DO NOT NORMALLY GIVE A SECOND THOUGHT. THE PRAYER BEFORE TONIGHT'S MEAL – A MOMENT IN WHICH WE EXPRESS OUR THANKS FOR EACH OTHER AND FOOD FOR THE NOURISHMENT OF OUR BODIES. MANY OF US MAY HAVE SAID THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE RECENTLY -- THAT, TOO, IS A RITUAL WHICH REPRESENTS REVERENCE.

BUT REVERENCE GOES FAR BEYOND POLITICAL OR RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS. REVERENCE CAN BE THE RESPECT THAT WE HAVE FOR OUR SURROUNDINGS.

FOR INSTANCE, I CAN EXPERIENCE FEELINGS OF AWE IN A WALK ALONG A BEACH, OR VIEWING THE GRAND CANYON. REMEMBER THE DEFINITION: THE WELL DEVELOPED CAPACITY TO FEEL AWE WHEN IT IS RIGHT TO HAVE SUCH FEELINGS. BUT SUCH REVERENCE CAN LIKEWISE BE FOUND AND EXPERIENCED WHEN THE DOGWOOD TREES BLOOM.

✓ WOODRUFF SUGGESTS ANY OBJECT OF REVERENCE MUST SATISFY ONE OF THE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS: FIRST, IT CANNOT BE CHANGED OR CONTROLLED BY HUMAN MEANS. SECOND, IT IS NOT FULLY UNDERSTOOD BY HUMAN EXPERTS. THIRD, IT IS NOT CREATED BY HUMANS. FOURTH, IT IS TRANSCENDENT.

HOW DOES THIS CONCEPT RELATE TO OUR LIVES? WOODRUFF CITES SEVERAL EXAMPLES TO WHICH, I THINK, WE CAN ALL RELATE. IN THE ARENA OF SPORTS, WE HEAR OF INSTANCES WHERE REFEREES ARE BERATED AND, EVEN, ATTACKED. WOODRUFF EXPLAINS THAT A REVERENT PARENT, FAN OR PARTICIPANT FEELS RESPECT FOR A REFEREE. CONVERSELY, A REFEREE MUST BE REVERENT IN HIS OR HER RESPECT FOR IMPARTIALITY IN DECISION MAKING. IN OTHER WORDS, THE DEEP FEELING OF RESPECT MUST EXIST NOTWITHSTANDING A BAD DECISION BY A REFEREE. THE SAME COULD BE SAID FOR THE PARTICIPANTS IN A SPORTING EVENT, THERE MUST BE A HEALTHY RESPECT FOR THE GAME, ITS COMPETITORS, AND FOR PLAYING BY THE RULES. WITHOUT IT, INCIDENCES SUCH AS WE RECENTLY OBSERVED IN A NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE GAME WHERE ONE PLAYER BROKE THE NECK OF ANOTHER MIGHT BECOME COMMONPLACE.

MOREOVER, WOODRUFF NOTES THAT, IF YOU FEEL THAT YOU MUST ATTACK AN UMPIRE OR A FELLOW PLAYER, YOU HAVE ALREADY FAILED IN REVERENCE -- IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO SIMPLY "CONTROL YOUR EMOTIONS." WOODRUFF NOTES THAT, IF YOU FEEL THAT YOU MUST ATTACK A REFEREE OR A FELLOW PLAYER, YOU HAVE ALREADY FAILED IN REVERENCE.

THIS IS AN AREA IN WHICH I HAVE SOME DISAGREEMENT WITH WOODRUFF. THIS CONCEPT IS SIMILAR TO THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT WHEN JESUS COMMANDS THAT IT IS NOT ENOUGH THAT WE DO NOT KILL, WE MUST NOT GET ANGRY; OR, THAT IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, LUSTING IN ONE'S HEART IS JUST AS BAD. I THINK THAT CONTROLLING EMOTIONS, AND DOING THE RIGHT THING, EVEN IF ONE HAS TO MAKE ONESELF DO IT, IS OKAY -- PERHAPS EVEN REVERENT.

OTHER COMMON EXAMPLES OF REVERENCE INCLUDING VOTING, AND ATTENDING MEETINGS. VOTING IS AN ACT OF REVERENCE, ACCORDING TO WOODRUFF, IN THAT IT EXPRESSES NOT SUPPORT FOR OUR GOVERNMENT, OR ANYTHING MAN-MADE—RATHER, IT EXPRESSES THE NOTION THAT WE, AS A PEOPLE, ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN OUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES, OR OUR GOVERNMENT ITSELF. WOODRUFF EXPLAINS THAT VOTING IS A CEREMONY, AND THE CEREMONY IS REVERENT.

THE SAME IS TRUE WITH MEETINGS. ALL OF US AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER HAVE COMPLAINED ABOUT OUR ATTENDANCE AT A MEETING—PERHAPS THIS ONE RIGHT-ABOUT NOW—BUT MEETING IS AN ACT OF REVERENCE. IT DEMONSTRATES OUR NEED AND ABILITY TO WORK TOGETHER TOWARDS A

COMMON GOOD. OF COURSE, PEOPLE WILL HAVE THEIR DIFFERENCES AT MEETING – HOPEFULLY, NOT TO MANY TONIGHT, BUT MEETINGS DEMONSTRATE OUR ABILITY TO WORK TOGETHER DESPITE THESE DIFFERENCES.

ONE OF MY FAVORITE EXAMPLES CITED BY WOODRUFF IS THE FAMILY DINNER—A RITUAL HE BELIEVES HAS BEEN DIMINSHED IN OUR BUSY SOCIETY. AN EMPTY RITUAL IS NOT REVERENCE. BUT, DINNER AS A FAMILY CAN BE A MEANINGFUL RITUAL WHEN MEMBERS MEET AND SHARE THEIR LIFE EXPERIENCES – WHICH IS REVERENT. RECENTLY, TELEVISIONS STATIONS HAVE BEEN RUNNING A LOT OF PUBLIC SERVICE SPOTS WHICH ENCOURAGE FAMILIES TO STOP THEIR BUSY LIVES AND SIT AROUND THE DINNER TABLE AND INTERACT. THIS IS REVERENCE.

WOODRUFF ALSO NOTES THAT REVERENCE IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT WITH RESPECT TO LEADERSHIP. LEADERS, TO BE EFFECTIVE, MUST BE REVERENT. BY THAT, HE MEANS THAT THEY RECOGNIZE THEIR LIMITATIONS, AND TREAT EVERYONE WITH RESPECT. LEADERS MUST LISTEN TO THEIR CONSTITUENCY, AND UNDERSTAND THEIR NEEDS AND CONCERNS. THIS ATTITUDE WILL BREED A RESPECT IN RETURN FROM THE FOLLOWERS. AS WOODRUFF NOTES, LEADERS WHO RELY ON FORCE OR FEAR TO LEAD WILL NOT BE EFFECTIVE IN THE LONG RUN. SIMILARLY, LEADERS WHO THINK THEY ARE BETTER THAN THEIR CONSTITUENTS ARE NOT REVERENT AT ALL. I TAKE IT THAT THE REVERENT LEADER IS ONE WHO DOES NOT ALLOW HIMSELF OR HERSELF TO MAKE THEMSELF BIGGER THAN THEY ARE. REVERENCE IS THE ESSENCE OF GOOD LEADERSHIP.

WHILE I THINK WOODRUFF MAKES MANY GOOD POINTS, I THINK MUCH OF HIS BOOK CAN BE BOILED DOWN TO A FEW BASIC PRINCIPLES, SUCH AS TO RESPECT OTHERS, RESPECT CEREMONY AND WHAT IT REPRESENTS, AND REALIZE THAT THERE IS MORE OUT IN THE WORLD THAT IS MUCH BIGGER THAN WE ARE.

HAVING DEFINED AND DEMONSTRATED WHAT REVERENCE IS, IN WHAT WAYS HAVE WE SEEN IT DIMINISHED?

I THINK IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT WE RARELY TALK ABOUT REVERENCE ANYMORE, LET ALONE THINK ABOUT IT. IT IS FASCINATING TO ME THAT IT WAS RECOGNIZED AS AN IMPORTANT CONCEPT IN ANCIENT GREECE AND CHINA. OF PARTICULAR IMPORT WERE THE RULES, CEREMONIES AND RITUALS THAT PEOPLE FOLLOWED IN DEALING WITH THEIR ENEMIES. FOR INSTANCE, THERE WERE RULES STRICTLY FOLLOWED WITH RESPECT TO THE TREATMENT OF PRISONERS, AND THE DEAD.

THIS REMINDS ME OF MY LAST PAPER CONCERNING THE DESIGNATION BY OUR GOVERNMENT OF ENEMY COMBATANTS, AND THE LACK OF DUE PROCESS AFFORDED SUCH PERSONS. INTERESTINGLY, THE DETAINING OF PRISONERS AT GUANTANMO BAY AND OF UNITED STATES CITIZENS SUSPECTED OF TERRORIST ACTIVITY, WERE TWO CASES ARGUED JUST LAST WEEK IN THE UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT. AND NOW, WE LEARN OF A FEW OF OUR OWN SOLDIERS BRUTALIZING IRAQI PRISONERS.

THE MOBILIZATION OF THE FAMILY AND THE STRESS OF WORK LIFE HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE DECLINE OF FAMILY RITUALS. HOW IMPORTANT IS THE

FAMILY DINNER? LYNN AND I HAVE LIVED IN TWO OLDER HOMES IN WHICH THE DINING ROOMS ARE AMONG THE LARGEST ROOMS. IN MOST NEW HOMES, DINING ROOMS ARE VERY SMALL. I HAVE FRIENDS WHO RARELY EAT DINNER TOGETHER DURING THE WEEK WITH THEIR CHILDREN. AND WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO FRONT PORCHES ON HOMES, WHEN PEOPLE USED TO SIT OUTSIDE AND VISIT WITH THEIR NEIGHBORS.

PERHAPS WE HAVE BECOME TOO SOFT. INSTEAD OF PARTICIPATING IN OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES WITH OTHERS, IT SEEMS THAT WE ARE CONTENT TO WATCH TELEVISION, OR MOVIES ON DVD, OR PLAY WITH OUR COMPUTERS OR GAMEBOYS – BY OURSELF.

IN OUR ELECTIONS, IT SEEMS THAT MORE MONEY IS SPENT TRYING TO BLAME OPPONENTS OR THEIR PARTY, OR TRYING TO APPEAR MORE PATRIOTIC, THAN EXPLAINING WHAT IDEAS AND VISION MAKE A CANDIDATE THE BEST CHOICE. NOW, WE HAVE ONLY A VERY FEW CAREFULLY STAGED DEBATES, INSTEAD OF CANDIDATES ON THE STUMP, DEBATING ONE ANOTHER.

IN SPORTS, WINNING HAS BECOME EVERYTHING – THIS END JUSTIFIES ANY MEANS, EVEN IF IT INVOLVES RECRUITING STUDENT ATHLETES WHO WILL NOT GRADUATE. A RECENT NEW STORY IN THE COURIER-JOURNAL ABOUT THE DISMISSAL STUDENT BASKETBALL AND FOOTBALL ATHELETE GRADUATION RATES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY AND THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE HELPS DEMONSTRATE HOW FAR WE HAVE GONE.

AS A COUNTRY, I THINK WE HAVE THIS NOTION THAT WE ARE RIGHT, THAT GOD IS ON OUR SIDE, AND THAT WE HAVE A DUTY TO MAKE THE REST OF

THE WORLD SEE IT OUR WAY. WE THINK DEMOCRACY WILL WORK ANYWHERE, AND THAT IT IS THE BEST SYSTEM FOR EVERY COUNTRY. RECENT POLLS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES CONFIRM THAT MANY PEOPLE OF THE WORLD DO NOT SHARE OUR VIEW. WOODRUFF WARNS THAT THE LINE BETWEEN A LEADER AND A TYRANT CAN BE THIN.

IN OUR STATE, WE ARE UNABLE TO PASS A BUDGET, BUT WE HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO PASS A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT BANNING GAY MARRIAGE, ALTHOUGH IT IS ALREADY AGAINST THE LAW – AFTER MUCH HEATED AND CRITICAL DEBATE – WITH BOTH SIDES CLAIMING THAT GOD IS ON THEIR SIDE AND REFUSING TO LISTEN TO THE OTHER SIDE.

ON OUR CITY COUNCIL, WE HAD A SPLIT VOTE ON THE ISSUE OF SUNDAY SALES OF LIQUOR BY THE DRINK WITH A SIMILAR DEBATE, WITH CLAIMS BY BOTH GROUPS THAT GOD IS ON THEIR SIDE.

WOODRUFF WARNS THAT: “IF YOU WISH TO BE REVERENT, NEVER CLAIM THE AWFUL MAJESTY OF GOD IN SUPPORT OF YOUR POLITICAL VIEWS.” ABRAHAM LINCOLN SPOKE OF THIS IN HIS SECOND INAUGURAL – WHICH WAS DELIVERED JUST ONE MONTH BEFORE HIS ASSASSINATION.

BOTH [SIDES] READ THE SAME BIBLE AND PRAY TO THE SAME GOD, AND EACH INVOKES HIS AID AGAINST THE OTHER. IT MAY SEEM STRANGE THAT ANY MEN SHOULD DARE TO ASK A JUST GOD'S ASSISTANCE IN WRINGING THEIR BREAD FROM THE SWEAT OF OTHER MEN'S FACES, BUT LET US JUDGE NOT, THAT WE BE NOT JUDGED. THE PRAYERS OF BOTH COULD NOT BE ANSWERED. THAT OF NEITHER HAS

BEEN ANSWERED FULLY. THE ALMIGHTY HAS HIS OWN PURPOSES. ...
FONDLY DO WE HOPE, FERVENTLY DO WE PRAY, THAT THIS MIGHTY
SCOURGE OF WAR MAY SPEEDILY PASS AWAY. YET, IF GOD WILLS
THAT IT CONTINUE UNTIL ALL THE WEALTH PILED BY THE
BONDSMAN'S TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS OF UNREQUITED TOIL
SHALL BE SUNK, AND UNTIL EVERY DROP OF BLOOD DRAWN WITH
THE LASH SHALL BE PAID BY ANOTHER DRAWN WITH THE SWORD, AS
WAS SAID THREE THOUSAND YEARS AGO, SO STILL IT MUST BE SAID
"THE JUDGMENTS OF THE LORD ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS
ALTOGETHER."

WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE, WITH CHARITY FOR ALL, WITH
FIRMNESS IN THE RIGHT AS GOD GIVES US TO SEE THE RIGHT, LET US
STRIVE ON TO FINISH THE WORK WE ARE IN, TO BIND UP THE NATION'S
WOUNDS, TO CARE FOR HIM WHO SHALL HAVE BORNE THE BATTLE
AND FOR HIS WIDOW AND HIS ORPHAN, TO DO ALL WHICH MAY
ACHIEVE AND CHERISH A JUST AND LASTING PEACE AMONG
OURSELVES AND WITH ALL NATIONS.

WHAT AN EXAMPLE OF REVERENCE! WE MUST CARE FOR **ALL** OF THOSE WHO
HAVE BORNE THE BATTLE AND THEIR WIDOWS, NOT JUST THOSE ON OUR SIDE,
AND TO DO ALL THAT IS NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE A JUST AND LASTING PEACE.

WOODRUFF QUOTES THE GREAT POET YEATS [YATES]:

TURNING AND TURNING IN THE WIDENING GYRE

THE FALCON CANNOT HEAR THE FALCONER
THINGS FALL APART; THE CENTER CANNOT HOLD;
MERE ANARCHY IS LOOSED UPON THE WORLD;
THE BLOOD-DIMMED TIDE IS LOOSED, AND EVERYWHERE
THE CEREMONY OF INNOCENCE IS DROWNED;
THE BEST LACK ALL CONVICTION, WHILE THE WORST
ARE FULL OF PASSIONATE INTENSITY.

ACCORDING TO YEATS, IN A REVERENT SOCIETY, THE CENTER WILL HOLD. WE MUST AVOID THE EXTREMES, SAYS WOODRUFF, AND I AGREE.

SO HOW DO WE BECOME MORE REVERENT? I THINK WE MUST RECAPTURE OUR SPIRIT OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY THROUGH THE VARIOUS CEREMONIES AND TRADITIONS WE HAVE DESCRIBED. WE MUST BE MORE MANNERLY. AS MY MOTHER HAS ALWAYS TOLD ME: "SON, GOOD MANNERS ARE ALWAYS IN STYLE." WE MUST LEARN TO DISAGREE, WITHOUT BEING DISAGREEABLE, AS THE LATE TOMMY GATES USED TO SAY. WE MUST RECOGNIZE THE RIGHT OF OTHERS TO EXPRESS THEIR OPINIONS AND BELIEFS – EVEN IF WE STRONGLY DISAGREE, AND WE NEED TO STOP AND SMELL THE ROSES. AWESOME IS A MUCH OVERUSED WORD THESE DAYS. WHEN DID WE LAST SENSE A TRUE FEELING OF AWE?? THERE IS SO MUCH IN THE WORLD TO BE AWED BY IF WE THINK ABOUT IT.

I WILL CLOSE WITH AN EXAMPLE.

IN THE LAST COUPLE OF WEEKS, I HAVE HAD AN OPPORUTNITY TO HEAR FORMER MAYOR WALLY BRYAN SPEAK OF HIS LIFE CHANGING PLANS. HE IS GOING TO SELL HIS HOME AND OFFICE BUILDING, AND MOVE TO THE INNER CITY OF HOPKINSVILLE. HE BELIEVES THAT HE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THESE AREAS OF OUR COMMUNTIY WHICH HE FEELS HAVE BEEN NEGLECTED. NOT BY HIMSELF, BUT THROUGH INSTILLING A SIMILAR VISION IN HIS NEW NEIGHBORS IN WHICH THEY WILL HAVE OLD CARS AND DILAPIDATED STRUCTURES REMOVED, CHILDREN WILL HAVE POSITIVE AFTER SCHOOL OPPORTUNTIES, AND PEOPLE WILL LEARN ABOUT FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND NUTRITION AMONG OTHER THINGS. THE TASK IS GREAT, AND THERE IS NO GUARANTEE OF SUCCESS, BUT, AS WALLY NOTES, EFFORTS MUST BE MADE. A CHAIN IS ONLY AS STRONG AS ITS WEAKEST LINK. IF THESE NEIGHBORHOODS CONTINUTE TO DECLINE, THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY SUFFERS. WALLY'S EFFORTS ARE TRULY ADMIRABLE AND VERY REMINISCENT OF THE JESUS COMMAND TO THE PRINCE TO SELL ALL OF HIS POSSESSIONS, AND FOLLOW HIM. BUT, THIS IS ALSO REVERENCE. AS WOODRUFF STATES: "REVERENCE BELONGS TO COMMUNITY."

THIS EFFORT IS CERTAINLY REVERENT, IN THAT WALLY FEELS A SENSE OF AWE AND RESPECT FOR PERSONS WHO ARE LESS FORTUNATE, AS WELL AS THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE. I FIND THIS AWESOME AND REVERENT, AND I HOPE WE CAN ALL LEARN SOMETHING FROM IT.