

12th September 2020

Revisions

**“In life one corrects *oneself* – one improves *oneself* – so people say;
but one cannot correct what one does.**

It’s the power of revising that makes writing such a colourless affair.”

André Gide, The Vatican Cellars

In the 1970s and 80s, I did a lot of TV work, mostly with Scottish Television under the guidance of the Head of Religion, the remarkable and charismatic Rev Dr Nelson Grey. Once I got over being “starstruck”, I knuckled down to preparing scrips and questions for “pieces to camera” and interviews. After I’d submitted the first of these, Nelson called me to his office and handed me my script. It was full of deletions, changes, arrows, comments, all in red pen, like a badly-received school essay.

“What?” I asked myself (I was too much in awe of Nelson to ask him directly ...) “This is *my* work. What right has *he* to change it?” Well, he had *every* right. For not only was he Head of Religion for good reasons, but there was no way he was going to be associated with an inadequate piece. He knew what worked. I had to learn. Nelson’s revisions made me better.

Smetana’s opera, *The Bartered Bride*, started life as a two-act operetta and was a complete flop. It needed a revision. Most of the best-known parts were added later – and some removed. One of these was an Act III duet between two circus performers which Smetana cut before a visit from Emperor Franz Joseph, thinking it was too risqué. He needn’t have bothered. The Emperor walked out after Act I.

Every “Thought for the Day” I write goes through a revision process, for my wife regularly proof-reads and comments on the text. Some parts are changed, some added, some left out. It’s Gide’s “power of revising”. We’re always the better for listening to the wisdom of others, for things we write, or do, or say. *We* can’t always correct what we do. We’re too close to it, wrapped up in it, or possessive of it. Wise revisions are always beneficial ... though, unlike Gide, I believe it makes writing – and life – not colourless, but a *much* more colourful affair!

A prayer for today

Lord, you see me, you read me, and you know me. You understand what needs to be changed in my life. Help me to know I am improved by your revisions. Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>