

# "You were *Dancing with Words!*"

Before I tell you who said what's here as a title, I should explain that this Think-sheet is a follow-up on #3264, "Alberto deMarco," a thumbnail of an undersung Religionslehrer (religion-teacher) in post-WW2 Germany (& the best friend I ever had in Europe). People-threads make up the weave we call "history," & some threads are gold.

Now, to take up the thread from #3264, here is the story. Loree took this photo of Al & me just before we three had what was for him the last supper in the U.S.

(except for Ellis Island). Loree had cooked a duck dinner in an only slightly familiar kitchen (in Chicago, 1946; '45-'46, our first year of marriage, Loree & I had to live seriatim in 11 places). As an ex-POW, he could never return to America.

After dinner, as Loree was cleaning up (that not yet having become men's work), she heard Al & me in the livingroom having a riotous conversation. Afterwards, she said "You were dancing with words!" He was fluent in German-Italian-French & spoke elegant British English (having two degrees from English colleges). We were both language-lovers & did indeed enjoy word-play, playing with words--as in the much later movie, "Dances with Wolves," which was the name some Amerinds gave Kevin Costner when they saw him playing with a wolf. (My 4-page Thinksheet theology-&-culture review of the film--my best even--shows its multicultural word-dancing.)

1 As evangelical Christians, Al & I had a numinous-sacramental expectation about language: it was God's creation-instrument (Gn.1.3, "God said"; "not one thing in all creation was made without" the incarnate Word [Jn.1.3 TEV]), is God's instrument of presence & guidance (the last sentence in Mt.), & at the end of canon provides a lively & steadying hope (Rev.22.20 TEV: "I am coming soon!"). The bio-fact distinguishing our species from all others is the voicebox-cortex connection, providing a vastly greater phoneme/sememe connection than any other creature's. In our outer & inner lives, we can play/dance & pray/love & ponder/plan with words!

2 In a summer/47 letter to Al (then back in Germany), I had this comment on an essay in which I thought he'd overcredited the scientific method of knowledge-attainment: "As our Billy [a bit past 1/2 year old] is in a rather advanced stage of learning to use his hands, so are you with your terms and ideas. There is still that freshness, that experimental curiosity, which gives the reader at times the feeling that words and thoughts have not yet become tools, are still toys. But this is encouraging rather than disconcerting, for the young toyless will become the old toolless. And may God deliver us from toollessness when there is so much work to be done!.... Having a child and teaching languages [Hebrew & Greek] combine to sensitize me to the transition from audio-toys to audio-tools. In both cases, where there is no fun there is no profit. Here God has given me an unanticipated opportunity to serve through wordplay. Students come to me in word-slavery, their words so much the masters of their ideas and so little a part of their thinking selves that prejudice sticks out all over on them. I use the biblical languages to pry the biblical ideas loose from the students' English words, and the biblical ideas loose from the devotional realities. The history of modern propaganda, religious as well as political, indicates that freedom from sin is impossible without freedom from words. I would not rob my students of their "gospel narrowness," but I would help them to obtain a broad narrowness, a breadth of sympathetic and appreciative understanding in combination with the 'Jesus-only'-ness of the gospel--rare combination, indeed!....More and more I am impressed with the apostolic injunction, 'Speak the truth in love!'....The human communicative ideal...."



**Elliott**  **Thinksheets**

309 Lake Elizabeth Drive  
Craigville, MA 02632  
Phone/Fax 508.775.8008  
elliottlw1@comcast.net

Noncommercial  
reproduction  
permitted

1.6.06

3265B

193 Delaware Road  
Kenmore, New York

Mr. Alberto deMarco  
Gustav-Adolf Str. 12  
21a Bielefeld  
British Zone

Dear Al,

I do not rebuke you for correspondential dilatoriness when I remind you that in yours of April 19 you promised to answer my letter "more fully no sooner than I shall have struck home base." Home base cannot have taken this long, but getting settled again, as settled as the general unsettledness of your land will permit, has doubtless absorbed all your time and energy. It is not a mere pleasantry when I say that I'd like to be with you in your situation: with the rest of the world as it is, there is an unreality, an outoftouchness about life in these United States, what LIFE magazine recently called, as the title of a pictorial article, "This Pleasant Land." There's a relaxedness about the American way of life which could not exist were we Americans more christianly concerned about the plight of four-fifths of the human race.

THE ASSUREDLY REAL, to my knowledge the most closeknit and competent of your philosophical exercises, is before me. As our Billy is in a rather advanced stage of learning to use his hands, so are you with your terms and ideas. There is still that freshness, that experimental curiosity, which gives the reader at times the feeling that words and thoughts have not yet become tools, are still toys. But this is encouraging rather than disconcerting, for the young toyless are the old toolless. And my God deliver us from toollessness when there is so much work to be done!... While I am on this toy-tool business, I may say that having a child and teaching languages combine to sensitize me to the transition. In both cases, where there is no fun there will be no profit, where there was no fun there is no profit. In the second case particularly I find God has given me an unexpected chance to serve. Students come to me in word-slavery, their words so much the masters of their ideas and so little a part of their thinking selves that prejudice sticks out all over on them. The biblical languages I use to pry the biblical ideas loose from the students' English words, the devotional emotions loose from the English words, and the biblical ideas loose from the devotional realities. The history of modern propaganda, religious as well as political, indicates that freedom from sin is impossible without freedom from words. I would not rob my students of their "Gospel narrowness," but I would help them to attain a broad narrowness, a breadth of sympathetic and appreciative understanding in combination with the "Jesus-only"-ness of the Gospel-rare combination, rara avis, indeed!

More and more am I impressed, to continue in the same vein, with the apostolic injunction, "Speak the truth in love!" These few words express for me the human communicative ideal. One cannot speak the truth in love when one does not understand error, in ones own communication as well as in that of the other. One cannot understand error in oneself without a repentance which dispassionately examines ones prejudices and a faith which beneath ones affirmations. And one cannot understand error in another without that sympathetic appreciation of a viewpoint not ones own which only disciplined reason (under your broad definition of scientific method) can provide. Much of what I hear from pulpits hurts me because it is closer to speaking ignorance in malice than to speaking truth in love. And this at a stage in the panorama of human affairs when the preaching of the Gospel could be more effective than ever before! As for you, preach the Gospel! You have it in you in your generation and nation to be another and a greater Barth!

But let me calm down from such unbecoming exhortation to explain that I've not gotten out the pictures you asked for. Haven't been near Philadelphia for ten weeks, in fact. The doctor wanted me to take it easy this summer, so I've stayed away from the schools for the first time in thirteen years. The Theological Conference (Northern Baptist) at Northern Baptist Assembly Grounds, Green Lake, Wisconsin, was the first time all the professors in our twelve seminaries over got together--and, as far as I am aware, the first time this has happened in the life of any American denomination. We had a great time! Eastern was der Mitler. Incredible misunderstandings of both theological extremes were waylaid. Then I farmed for a month (working mornings) in central Nebraska, Loree's father's place. Now we're a month with my folks in Kenmore, a Buffalo, N.Y., suburb. (A sidelight: Even since Loree took a course in logic at Eastern, law has fascinated her. She's sat through a number of trials in my father's court lately, seen four gamblers--horse bookies--sent to jail in the last week.) At month's end we'll return to Philly.

I agree with the position you assign scientific method, but should like to add a caveat. While science criticizes itself (as you correctly say), there is in most scientists a distortion of attention which scientific method seems to necessitate and which is not eliminable through scientific selfcriticism alone. That which appears most demonstrable is apt to appear most important, with the result that the quantitative dominates and the qualitative (ethics, esthetics, religion) is given short shrift. The usual reply to this objection is that when the ethical, the esthetic, and the religious realms of human concern become scientific, the new material thrown up in the processes will correct this distortion. This sounds plausible. My plea, however, is that philosophers of science should not speak of that stage as already accomplished.

Your friend, In Christ, *Willis*

Self  
Bladder  
(H.O.  
Lynn)