



Reflecting on beauty and change  
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## From our president, Bert Roebben



*Walking “the unbroken sea of frost.” Some highly political winter thoughts on education.*

You could call it at least a contrast experience: coming home from an exciting Pittsburgh conference on “generating hope” in education and being confronted with the “breaking” news of the elections in the USA two days later... With the time zone difference for us as Europeans watching television, it was a real “morning after” shock on that 9th of November. The political analyses have been made ever since, on all sides of the political spectrum, but I am not sure whether or not they were helpful in easing the pain of the division and the fear for the future. In the meantime cities of the world are craving healing today– to name only a few: Aleppo, Berlin, Istanbul, Kinshasa, Manilla – and Washington “of all places”...

In the aftermath of the American election people worldwide were looking for beauty – to withstand the political and moral ugliness to which they were exposed in the last couple of months. In this brief reflection I follow their initiative.

On the basis of my reading of the autobiography of the 2016 Nobel Prize Winner for Literature Bob Dylan in his *Chronicles Volume One* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2004), I would like to offer an alternative discourse – a discourse on beauty. It is highly political too, but rooted in the search for human dignity. In this book one can see how *bonum, verum et pulchrum* – the good, true and beautiful – deeply interrelate to each other, as Thomas Aquinas argued.

Dylan is searching for his own identity as a beginning performer in the early Sixties. The orientation beacons for something new to happen are absent. Everything is on the move and the only thing one can do is be moving too: going out and trying out new things. “It was like the unbroken sea of frost that lay outside the window and you had to have awkward footgear to walk on it” (35).

America as a collective identity itself is looking for orientation. After an archaic period, a classic period of consolation and the slacking off period “where decadence makes things fall apart,” Dylan as a young person “had no idea which one of these stages America was in. There was nobody to check with. A certain rude rhythm was making it all sway, though. It was pointless to think about it. Whatever you were thinking could be dead wrong” (35). How strongly these words echo today!



As a young adult with “big questions and worthy dreams” (Sharon Daloz Parks) he becomes convinced of the need “to learn how to telescope things, ideas. Things were too big to see all at once, like all the books in the library – everything laying around on all tables” (61). He begins to dismantle his anxiety and to create his own (what he calls political and topical, what I would call narrative and existential) musical repertoire, as an anti-dote to all the narrow partisan political agendas “laying around.”

The educational paradox can’t be bigger: in order to orientate himself, he needs to “change inner thought patterns” and “disorientate” himself (71). He needs to risk the road. This is an ongoing process. Many years later, when he is worshipped and domesticated as the “disturbed conscience of Young America” (133), he needs to reinvent himself again. One could argue that his book is the ongoing narrative of his re-defining as a public person, carefully trying to stay in tune with his vocation and his inner voice, supported by new technical means and creative friends – and this of course always as an ambiguous human enterprise. This first volume of the *Chronicles* covers the period of the late Fifties thru the late Eighties. I am waiting desperately to see how Bob Dylan will read and interpret the rest of “his-story” in *Chronicles Volume 2 and 3*.



What is the point of the story? Reading the signs of the times is not an easy thing. On a global scale we will need intellectual energy to “unmake violence” (REA 2014), to “create beauty and imagination” (REA 2015), to “generate hope” (REA 2016) and to “learn in encounter” (REA 2017) – in order to understand and to accept the challenges that are facing our communities, schools, congregations and families. We will need to listen to the Muse deep down in our societies, in our kids and young people, in our young adults becoming parents themselves. As educational leaders we will need to excavate new lyrics, tell new stories, sing new protest songs and gather new crowds. And we will need to repeat this process over and over again, with the next generations, risking to walk with them “the unbroken sea of frost” and the path of critical hope.

Bert Roebben

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## Meeting resources

Dr. Roebben mentioned a number of [our previous meetings](#) — and we would like to remind everyone that [the proceedings from those meetings](#) remain available online and are a great resource for use with students, congregations, and other communities. You can also access video recordings of past meeting plenary sessions at [our vimeo site](#) (this year’s recordings will be put up throughout the month of January). Please share them widely!

## New innovation grant announced

The Harper Wornom Committee has been hard at work for the past year, re-imagining how the Wornom funds might best serve the intentions of their donor. Given that our association has only presented a Wornom award three times in its history — to the Lilly Endowment, to Union Seminary and Will Kennedy, and to the Interfaith Youth Core — the committee has decided to focus the funds more explicitly towards innovation in religious education. Towards that end they propose — and at our business meeting in Pittsburgh the association voted to create — a new innovation grant project.

The newly instituted Wornom Innovation grant is a \$3,000 award for innovative religious education projects and initiatives that further knowledge and deepen the practice of religious education, or that expand the field of religious education to a new area that is not traditionally associated with religious education. The annual application deadline is September 15.

Any REA Member is eligible to apply for a Wornom Innovation Grant. Proposals may be submitted for entirely new projects, for innovative developments within an existing project, or for bringing practices or insights from a different sector into religious

education settings. Initiatives might include educational programs, practice-based research, or related projects. Members may submit only one proposal each year, and members are encouraged to work together on a proposal. The grant is intended as a single-year award and is non-renewable.

For more information and grant application materials, [please visit our website](#).

## Thankful acknowledgement!

Our meeting in Pittsburgh went off very well — and we are chagrined to note that we did not offer our thanks and grateful acknowledgement publicly to Tammy Wiens, our local arrangements chair. She did yeoman's work on multiple fronts, and we could not have had such a successful meeting without her. Please join us in thanking her warmly!



## Posting RE journal articles to the web

Joyce Mercer, our journal editor, notes that our journal now offers two kinds of access for authors who wish to post their publications online — “Green Access” and “Gold Access.” She shares the following details from the Taylor&Francis author contract:

“Green Access” is the standard publication route. Your paper will be published in the journal in print and online. It will be made available online in perpetuity for subscribers and licensed institutions throughout the world, including the provision of online access through developing-world initiatives. You will also receive a link via email to 50 free e-prints of your article, which you can send to your friends and colleagues, so you can easily share your article and they can download it free of charge.

You can also post your *Accepted Manuscript (AM)* on your departmental or personal website at any point after publication of your article (this includes posting to Facebook, Google groups and LinkedIn, and linking from Twitter). There is no charge to you for this option (Green Open Access). Please note that embargoes apply for posting this version to repositories or academic social networks. This is the default access option for articles in our journal.

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The APC fees for this journal are €2,150 / £1,788 / \$2,950. Please email [apc@tandf.co.uk](mailto:apc@tandf.co.uk) should you wish to publish in this way.

## REA at AAR

Continuing the theme begun at our Pittsburgh meeting, the REA at AAR session featured a panel composed of Jose R. Irizarry, of Villanova University, Boyung Lee, of the Pacific School of Religion, and Evelyn L. Parker, of Southern Methodist University, with Carmichael Crutchfield of Memphis Theological Seminary moderating.

The panel discussed the need of the educator to be both concentrated and flexible at a time when deep, complex pluralism reigns. This is a paradox, coined by the American philosopher of education David T. Hansen (2001) as “tenacious humility”: the educator concentrates on the learner, steps aside, but simultaneously needs to offer him/herself through the content so that the learner can flourish. People need a “cosmopolitan” education: the educator needs to be present and learn together with learners in “reflective openness to the world and reflective loyalty to the local” (Hansen 2009). It goes without saying that this old pedagogical paradox is now accelerated by the same cosmopolis, surrounding us and future generations. It also goes without saying that the aims of education and the normativity of the educational act need to be discussed again in that very process.



The papers presented were very strong, and we look forward to seeing them emerge in various publications shortly.

## Resources

The ICJS is the **Institute for Islamic-Christian-Jewish Studies**, based in Baltimore, MD. The Institute has a rich website full of useful resources, including suggested readings, general resources for further learning, a set of reflections on humor and religion, and a monthly radio segment available for free download (think “podcast”) that is produced in relation with WYPR.

The **Bible in the Life of the Church** is a resource tool-box produced by the Anglican Communion. It holds hundreds of free educational resources tagged by topic, audience, and type. BILC is work that has been going on across the Anglican Communion since 2009. The contents of the tool-box come from all over the Anglican Communion and are designed to help everyone from provinces, dioceses, congregations, small groups and individuals to deepen our understanding of the Bible.

**Internet Sacred Texts Archive.** This archive has been around for a long time, beginning back in 1999. The site is a freely available archive of electronic texts about religion, mythology, legends and folklore, and occult and esoteric topics. Texts are presented in English translation and, where possible, in the original language. The site has no particular agenda other than promoting religious tolerance and scholarship. Views expressed at the site are solely those of specific authors, and are not endorsed by sacred-texts.

During the 2016 annual meeting in Pittsburgh there was a lot of discussion of the polarization so evident in both the Brexit and US election cycles. At the time of our meeting, the US election was not yet concluded. Now it is, and many of our members have been actively seeking **resources that engage polarization in constructive learning**. Here are some of the resources that have been sent to us. If you have others to suggest, please email our networking coordinator and they will be added to future editions of this newsletter. Each of these sites comes recommended by one or more members of our association, and includes free, easily accessible resources.

- Art of Hosting
- Liberating Structures
- Essential Partners (formerly the Public Conversations Project)
- Healing the Heart of Democracy (Parker Palmer)
- Civil Conversations Project (Krista Tippet)

**We Who Defy Hate curriculum.** Most faith traditions speak to the idea of creating a more just and loving world. However, learning how to live toward that goal in peaceful collaboration with each other is often hard and complicated.

We Who Defy Hate is a free, downloadable curriculum designed to support people of different faith traditions who want to find places of common ground and solidarity in the

service of social justice and action. It is a companion discussion series for the PBS documentary, Defying the Nazis: The Sharps' War.

The film features an American Unitarian minister and his wife, Waitstill and Martha Sharp, who saved scores of lives across Europe during the WWII. When most Americans were turning a blind eye to the growing social injustice and totalitarian threat in Europe, the American Unitarian Association was committed to saving as many people as possible.

We Who Defy Hate curriculum was developed by Dr. Jenice View, Social Justice Educator, in a Curriculum Incubator at the Fahs Collaborative, through generous funding from Artemis Joukowsky III and the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, Manhasset, NY.

## Member News

*Conundrums in Practical Theology (Theology in Practice)* was recently published, and is edited by our journal editor, **Joyce Mercer**, in collaboration with Bonnie Miller-McLemore. Contributors include Tom Beaudoin, Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, **Faustino M. Cruz**, Jaco Dreyer, **Courtney T. Goto**, Tone Stangeland Kaufman, Phillis Isabella Sheppard, **Katherine Turpin**, Claire E. Wolfeich.

**Mario D'Souza** published *A Catholic Philosophy of Education: The Church and Two Philosophers*, McGill-Queen's University Press.

**Terri Elton**, collaborating with Rabbi Hayim Herring, published *Leading Congregations and Nonprofits in a Connected World: Platforms, People, and Purpose*, Rowman&Littlefield.

**Débora Junker** invites members to “save the date” for the next Cátedra Freire, to be held at Garrett March 23-25, 2017. More details [available online](#).

**Bert Roebben** published *Theology Made in Dignity: On the Precarious Role of Theology in Religious Education*, Peeters.

**Graham Rossiter**, a recent plenary speaker at REA, announces online availability of the [Report on Retreats publication](#), which reports on a study of the views of teachers and senior students about retreats in Australian Catholic secondary schools.

**Lynne Westfield** now blogs regularly at both [The Huffington Post](#) and the [Wabash Center Blogs](#).

## Clean up your social media

As we move into 2017, it is a good idea to take stock of your various digital media. Both Facebook and Google offer checklists to go over your privacy settings, as well as other security issues. You can access the Facebook privacy checkup under the “lock” icon in the upper right hand corner of your account. In Google you can find the privacy checkup under the “my account” pull down menu once you are logged in.

Please consider ensuring that REA posts in Facebook show up well in your news feed by choosing “see first” under the drop down menu at our page there.

If you want to dig more deeply into various security issues, the [Electronic Frontier Foundation](#) has a “[surveillance self-defense](#)” set of resources you can work through.

## Support your association!

Every year we hear from doctoral students, as well as our international members, about how difficult it is to come up with funding to travel to our annual meetings. We have a small travel fund available with which to offer partial support, and we are grateful for the generosity of a few members who contribute faithfully to that fund. However, the need is increasing, and we are always seeking additional contributions! You can donate at any time you like from our website: simply click on the “donate” button. From there you can use any regular credit or debit card, as well as other kinds of funds, to donate. We really appreciate your support and urge you to consider donating.

Our Treasurer, Kevin Sandberg, energized a number of people during the annual business meeting to donate, and we’ve raised just over \$1500 from that effort. Still, we had hoped to reach our \$5000 goal with that challenge, and have not yet done so.

If you are someone with a little bit of financial ease, perhaps you could gift us with a challenge grant for matching donations that other members give. Or maybe you’re someone with access to matching funds through your workplace or other organization — please consider us as a potential partner. Even small amounts add up, and are very helpful to our association.

One other way to support us is to designate the Religious Education Association as your “smile” partner at Amazon.com so that your purchases direct a small percentage to REA. More details at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com).

**Save the date for next year’s meeting  
in St. Louis, MO 3-5 November 2017**



## Glimpses from the 2016 meeting



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