Bottles, Boom Towns, and In Between

By Marcus Miller

I have traveled far into forests to dig about gently in old trash, part of my habit, situated through boxes at estate sales and scoured abandoned houses. Through such ambition many have amassed green ones, brown ones, and my favorite elite blue ones. I am a collector of bottles. Soda bottles, medicine bottle, bars of soap, and various bottles of which I do not know their origin have found their way to my bookshelves or packed in boxes in the part of the barn that was once the smokehouse. I am an archeologist of my childhood, and I’ve been given tousing such bottles as a means to answer the questions that were supposed to cure what- ever ailment a person had. Somewhere in the 19th century my bottle’s contents were hawked by a traveling salesman or at a town general store as a potion that would aid the ability to fix a person in health no matter what the problem.

When not collecting bottles, baseball cards, or scrapbooks, the truth is that I spent my childhood spent at the Light in the Valley Chapel. What I remember the most about those church-going days – even more so than being told that Sunday School class was not a good place to question whether God was really all-knowing – bottles and various that revolved around the premise that religious beliefs are without a doubt true. While I took this advice quite seriously and thus by my teen years, when I wasn’t the favorite of all these religious in prayer. I remember praying quite visibly in the midst of a key game at a chess tournament. I lost.

One day while doodling through yet another church ser- mon or prayer it occurred to me how similar prayer was to the liquid my favorite bottle once held. Prayer, like the elixir, is a cure- all: a magic potion to take care of all the drudge of the mind. Because of this revelation and through other revelations, I stopped praying. However, throughout these past two weeks of the war, the most common advice I have heard on campus is that I should be responding to all the tragic vio- lence with prayer. Therefore this week I attempted to pray for sol- diers and Iraqis. My first prayer felt arrogant. Worse yet, it felt like an excuse. I thought this might just be because I had grown out of praying, have prayed again. This time I prayed in the most humble of manners but to little avail. People kept dying. My prayer, I realized, had the elixir has value equal to hungry. I knew that prayer did not cause any soldiers to stop shooting or dying. Once again I stopped praying but that didn’t stop the war.

Now, I am not against pray- ing. Prayer seems to be valuable in helping one to reflect and remember. Prayer is a good man- ner to convince or to allow our- selves to let go or realize own personal limits. Prayer is seem- ingly good at saving one’s own soul. Yet prayer is horrible at saving the world.

This realization persuaded me to give the idea of praying, so I When I think of elixirs I picture a dusty, booming town on the Calico from a gold rush. The town, the party place from across America and across the globe have arrived for a gold rush. In the town center, just beside the lively, stands a man on horseback. He conjures and invites the crowd of immigrants and settlers about the elixir he is selling. “Drink this elixir and you will be cured,” he yells. This creates a real mess and not only to leave the moment at that would be a mistake. The sales- man, with his wild promises and showmanship, has gathered a crowd of people together that would not usually be associated with one another. Somewhere in the laughter and observation of the salesman’s show people have crossed the borders of their usual social interaction. When people cross over the borders of their social networks in a peaceful manner, a process of understanding one another has begun. Being ever an amateur sociologist (Durkheim the social order) I imagine that if we plan to get people praying toge- ther we’d probably then find a reason to take care of each other.

And finally, prayer can and must be considered a modern day tent revival without the hell fire or brimstone. I imagine that idea. The idea alone, without imple- mentation, does nothing to win the war. What reason to peacefully assemble we’d probably then find a reason to take care of each other.

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The Weather Vane

The Weather Vane is printed weekly by undergraduate students of Eastern Mennonite University. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the universi- ty or its affiliates. Letters to the editors are welcomed; the editors reserve the right to edit for the sake of clarity. Letters are published at x-high graphic arts, Ellicott, Virginia. The Weather Vane, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, VA 22802 Phone: (540) 432-4338 Fax: (540) 432-4130 http://weathervane.emnu.edu email: voicer@emnu.edu

Iraqi Civilian Body Count

Iraq Civilian Body Count min: 990 max: 174

Iraq Body Count Project is an effort to build an independent and comprehensive public database of media- reported civilian deaths in Iraq as verified by the U.S. government and by the U.N. and its allies in 2003.