



For my birthday this year, on Mother's Day, my friend K sent me a few pages of a book, translated from the German, written by Martin Schleske, a master violin builder/craftsman. She translated this piece because of conversation we recently had sitting in a hotel lobby in Orlando, Florida.

A world-class young athlete friend had been paralyzed as a result of an on-camera stunt that went badly, and K was distraught. But it wasn't her friend she wanted to talk about; it was God and '...His wonderful Plan for our life.' How do we begin to talk about a 'loving and powerful God' then move to tragedy, sickness, accident, and calamity and finally make it worse by actually believing that we are honoring God in making God author of all this mess in the name of Sovereignty and Omnipotent Control? Some religious people, and Christians would be often among their ranks, believe in grim determinism. It is fatalism with personality.

There is an impassable chasm (except perhaps in our darkened imaginations) between a God who takes ownership for the Creation, along with the havoc it has produced, and One who authors the evil within it. The first you might learn to trust, the latter...twisted lip service at best.

How often we have heard well meaning and intentioned words such as, "It must be part of God's Plan." Really? Might it be that many things are simply WRONG! There is no justification for much of what we have brought to the table; what has been done to us, and what we then participate in ourselves. It is WRONG! Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, WRONG!

Even if God has the creative audacity to build purpose out of the evil we create, it will never justify what is wrong. Nothing, not even the salvation of the entire cosmos, could ever justify a horrific torture device called a 'cross'. That God would submit to our darkness and transform this dark machine into an icon and monument of grace, says more about the nature of God than it does about any blinded attempt to justify evil.

Does God have a wonderful Plan for my (your) life? Does God sit and draw up a perfect will for you and me on some cosmic disconnected drafting table, a perfect plan that requires a perfect response? Is God then left to react to our stupidity or deafness or blindness or inability, as we constantly violate perfection with our own indelible ink? What if this is about a God who has greater respect for you than for ‘the plan’? What if there is no ‘plan’ for your life but rather a relationship in which God constantly invites us to co-create, respectfully submits to the choices we bring to the table and because this God ‘is’ Love, will never be satisfied until only that which is of Love’s kind remains in us?

What follows is the article translated by K as a gift for my birthday. The first three paragraphs are her commentary on Martin’s book.



Martin Schleske on Artist/Creator vs Construction Designer

((At first Martin writes a lot of fascinating things about the wood he uses for the violin’s body. Only one sort of trees from a certain area in the mountains are formed by rough weather and winds and meager ground, which produces resilient wood that is elastic at the same time. He sometimes spends months seeking the right tree by tapping on them with a tuning fork and that in old times violin builders found their ‘singer trunks’ at the rivers where all the harvested wood was floated down to the cities. Some trunks made melodic sounds when bouncing into others; these revealed themselves as the ‘singers’.

Every hardship the tree experienced made the roots go deeper and the structural fibers stronger, but all crooked it a little this or that way. If a tree close to the chosen one, the ‘singer,’ fell, the different angle of light and wind made the whole trunk twist a little, which also shows up in every fiber. Other characteristics emerge in every millimeter or wood and each is absolutely unique.

The wood is then stored for years in the workshop under certain heat and humidity conditions until it is ready for its purpose to become a violin body. Now the violin builder starts cutting the body's bulge/curvature out of it that is uniquely crucial for giving the violin its unique voice.))

It would be cheap to force one's perception on the wood. The art is in seeing what the fiber requires. Someone fixated on the 'ideal' or 'right' shape only follows his laws. The artist, who also knows about the laws of acoustics, sees something else: he honors what is crooked and what has become in the fibers and knows that these must not be cut in the wrong places. Only then is the evolution a spiritual one, where inner wisdom and knowledge of the wood and its needs are uppermost, and not blind perception to a 'form'.

The perfectionist is content with fulfilling the law; the artist fulfills the sound.

Romans 8:28-30 describes a similar process: *“And those who love God know that all things work together for good, for those who are called according to purpose. Those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. Those he predestined, he called, those he called he also justified, and those he justified he also glorified.”*

“It's really quite similar to working on the Violin's bulge/curvature. The wood is carefully chosen (called). A good violin builder respects the texture of the wood and under his fingers he feels the character, the solidity and density. This shows him both the possibilities and the limits of the wood. Each of this wood's quirks and characteristics has an influence on the sound it will bring forth.

Some trees, like people, have suffered staggering hardships and overwhelming winds in their life. The course of our fibers becomes difficult, one-sided, crooked and scarred. But like the wood, we reveal our true selves during the small and great ordeals of our lives – these knock on our life and thus make our fibers (our inner structure) audible.

If I as a violin builder, am willing to work with the kind of fiber I get, and start creating with what has already become, and what is difficult and crooked...how much more God will do so! God's Wisdom knows what is necessary to build a unique sound with our texture, our fiber and our sometimes difficult histories. That is what is meant by 'called, justified and glorified' in the above text.

I will only become a master artist/creator if I am willing to work with a 'despite'...despite this particular flaw, this odd structure, this damage...I will give this wood its voice! I will make it sing!

While I am working on a curvature/bulge, I sometimes feel the planer take a different approach. This shows me, “Here I have to leave the idea of the curve I had in mind. It may not be pretty, but necessary.” Everything that has happened to the wood requires asymmetry.

If the fibers were lines definable by Math, one could construct an ideal curve, an ideal form already defined before the work begins. But the fiber course is not perfect, not ideal, and thus the making of a Violin body is no construction site, it is an act of creation.

It's an act of creation because it is not the wood that yields to the Maker, but the Maker yielding to the wood.

The artist has to ask himself what he has on hand: "How did this wood grow? What can it become?" The intent of the process of creation allows for promised possibilities to unfold. This cannot happen through a rigid plan. Everything depends on the esteem and wisdom the Master has for his creation.

For our view of life, it is a great difference if we see the world a creation or a construction. It is not the idea of 'Evolution' that robs faith of his breath, but thinking that the world is a divine construction site. This is the difference between a Plan and a Promise, between Subordination and Dialogue, between Religion and Faith.

An Almighty Engineer subdues the material. 'Faith in God' then means to submit to God. Building violins has taught me otherwise. Creating relates to both 'what is given' and to 'what has already become'. Faith means to trust in the indwelling wisdom of the creator and the promised possibilities. This is proven in the process itself. The wood finds its own voice in being born again.

When I feel the fibers through the roughness of my planer it is like a dialogue with the wood. Only while I'm working on it do I get clarity on how the curve should be. The wood has its say in this joint creation.

A construction is a forcing of a predetermined ideal on the material. Everything has to yield to that idea. Now we are at the heart of legalism where life is coated in and subdued by unrelenting ideal conceptions. We have arrived at the curse of religion.

The 'justification' of man in the Romans verse above, first and foremost means that there is Wisdom at work that does *justice* to life. The real fibers of our life are respected and given a voice. It is an act of love that embraces the imperfect and sees its worth. Love sees all the beauty, joy, desire and hope (the possibilities of the soul), but it also sees all the weaknesses, disappointments, sadness and pain (the crooked fibers). God's Wisdom gets involved in a dialogue in which we have a natural say. Our life is not a construction; it is not done on a drawing board.

Creation means that everything that is in the making is becoming in regard to what has already grown. This is brilliant! In a construction, everything that is in the making is under the constraint of what is wanted. That is insufficient! That is pathetic!

Scriptures show me that God has the heart of an artist, not a grim construction planner. If the world were the work of a cosmic engineer, he would be in a constant state of discontentedness. We would all suffer from the constant nagging of a dogged designer

whose plans just never work out like he intended or expected. Reality could never live up to his spotless (wonderful) construction plans. But a true Creator knows he not only has to shape, but also endorse and allow. Wisdom allows things to grow and unfold.

It is fascinating to view the whole world as a composition, a painting or a sculpture or scenes from a great work of art. Works of art can be beautiful and sometimes odd.

I am certain that God, having the heart of an artist, has no intention to force reality to obey Him at all costs. Wisdom does not know grim determination.

The thought of seeing every person as a work of art in progress, an ever-changing and unique expression of God, changes our whole view of others and ourselves. Suddenly you can see the odd, authentic, fascination, enjoyable, staggering interplay of what is created and what has become of it. What was put into this person and what has grown out of it? What is in the making?

We could see people as forms of expression of a great Artist, expressions that yearn to be seen, read and heard.”

For more about Martin Schleske go to:

<http://www.schleske.de/en/master-luthier/martin-schleske.html>

A friend, Rob Parsons, is about to publish (Hodder) a book called *Wisdom House*. Here is an excerpt that bears on this conversation:

It isn't just seeming physical disadvantages that can turn into a strength, but life experiences too – even ones that others would naturally run from. Some years ago, a friend of mine attended a lecture on stem cell research in Oxford given by a world famous geneticist. During the question time, the scientist was asked whether, in the future, it would be possible to clone Beethoven. His answer was a brilliant 'yes' and 'no'. 'Yes' if you could extract the DNA from the bones in his coffin –you could create a human being who would be an identical twin of Beethoven. 'Yes,' you could probably teach the 'twin' to play the piano to a reasonably high level. But 'no', because Beethoven's father, who was also his music tutor, was a violent alcoholic. The young Beethoven was very close to his mother who died when he was a teenager, and he became responsible for raising his two brothers as his father lapsed deeper into his alcoholism. He lost his first and only true love, he lived in poverty weighed down with debts, he suffered from manic-depression and, like his father, turned to alcohol. Then, just as Beethoven began to have some interest in his compositions, he began to lose his hearing.

The culmination of all these experiences – the tumultuous feelings of rage, love, despair, passion - were poured into his most famously pounding six symphonies (Numbers Three to Eight) which are what we now revere as 'classic' Beethoven. More accomplished musicians may now play or conduct his works, but they can never capture his greatness

because that quality was born out of his expression of his own life experience, of being true to himself.

And finally, from George MacDonald, writing in 1868:

The Scene: Robert Falconer's "righteous" grandmother had burned his fiddle, the one that had been his father's and grandfather's, lest it also lead Robert astray.....

"But though the loss of Miss St. John and the piano was the last blow, his sorrow did not rest there, but returned to brood over his bonny lady (leddy). She was scattered to the winds. Would any of her ashes ever rise in the corn, and moan in the ripening wind of autumn? Might not some atoms of the bonny leddy creep into the pines on the hill, whose 'soft and soul-like sounds' had taught him to play the Flowers of the Forest on those strings which, like the nerves of an amputated limb, yet thrilled through his being? Or might not some particle find its way by winds and waters to sycamore forest of Italy, there creep up through the channels of its life to some finely-rounded curve of noble tree, on the side that ever looks sunwards, and be chosen once again by the violin-hunter, to be wrought into a new and fame-gathering-instrument?"

"Could it be that his bonny leddy had learned her wondrous music in those forests, from the shine of the sun, and the sighing of the winds through the sycamores and pines? For Robert knew that the broad-leaved sycamore, and the sharp, needle-leaved pine, had each its share in the violin. Only as the wild innocence of human nature, uncorrupted by wrong, untaught by suffering, is to that nature struggling out of darkness into light, such and so different is the living wood, with its sweetest tones of obedient impulse, answering only to the wind which bloweth where it listeth, to that wood, chosen, separated, individualized, tortured into strange, almost vital shape, after a law to us nearly unknown, strung with the strings from animal organizations, and put into the hands of man to utter the feelings of a soul that has passed through a like history. This Robert could not yet think, and had to grow able to think it by being himself made an instrument of God's music."

I am today a unique sound that I will not be tomorrow and tomorrow could not be but for today. What if...what if there is a God who could gather up all the broken bits of the two fish and five loaves of my life, create purpose out of what was stolen from me and what I then broke, and make certain that nothing is lost? That would change everything!