

**RUSSELL'S RUMINATIONS**  
**A LETTER OF ANALYSIS AND COMMENTS ON ISSUES**  
**OF INTEREST TO THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Vol. 7, No. 2  
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Dear Friends:

The middle of June is past, and I feel "right on schedule" with this second Ruminations of 1986. Early in the year I thought the theme I am developing presently (with the marvelous help of the Spirit, of course) would be the first one for this annum, but there was more to be said about eternal and everlasting life... and death... inspired by some much appreciated letters of comment.

Now comes this one, however, and the issue is teaching and learning, about which the Spirit has had much to say over these more than seven years of interaction with me. For those who are new to this reading experience, I'll say again that on a day in May of 1979 I was invited in a very unique way to an early morning meditational practice that soon turned into a listening to the Holy Spirit (that communicative aspect of the Lord God) and writing down what I heard. In 1981 I began this "publication", a letter based in comments by the Spirit, interspersed with my ruminative thoughts about what the Spirit has said.

I realize that if what I say is true about these Teachings I write down, then this letter is a frightful mixing of the divine and perfect with the imperfect human comments I generate. The Spirit says, "Worry not... just be faithful... and do what I purpose for you to do." So this is a task/opportunity that is both scary and fun. And here I go with this one!

I commenced my professional full time teaching career in the Fall of 1948, with 5 classes of 7<sup>th</sup> graders at Punahou School in Honolulu. This is essentially a college prep school, founded by Congregational missionaries, for the education of their children, in 1841. In the Spring of 1952 I considered leaving teaching, but the feeling that this was really what I should be doing was just too strong, and so I went on for that extra study that seemed desirable and necessary. During the 1952-53 year I was a full time doctoral student at Stanford (and I almost left health education, yet finally decided it was a field with a good future), but I have taught every year since... logging 6 years at Punahou, 10 years at Stanford, and finishing 21 here at S.I.U., Carbondale. I have taught church school classes, and done a variety of teaching in consultant roles, from Maine to Japan, from Alberta to Florida. So this shall be about learning and about the teaching which abets learning.

Let me lead off with two paragraphs from a Teaching that I received on the day after my birthday last year, 1985. The Spirit said...

**Yesterday was your birthday, and, in one sense, it was also Mine. It was the celebration of Pentecost, and this can be remembered as the commencement of My active role as Teacher following My ministry as Jesus. As Jesus I was a teacher in the best sense of that task/opportunity, and I wanted that to continue, even as I moved on to other realms. So, dramatically, I came to erase the barrier of language... to bring people together who would not otherwise relate.**

**That is what you were able to do in your summer class just concluded, and you were able to do it only with My help. You didn't acknowledge Me as your co-Teacher, but you must as the next opportunity comes along in July. True teaching involves conducting a class or group in a way that involves the spirits of each participant in ways that develop a spirit within the group that can be perceived by some, at least. You have the capacity to do this, and I recommission you to try to accomplish this in every group you lead. ("Spirit As Teacher," May 27, 1985)**

According to the story in Acts, on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came into action, descending upon the disciples as wind and fire, causing them to speak in other tongues, so that all who heard, understood. That's pretty dramatic teaching, I'd say. I have developed learning approaches which bring people together who would not freely choose to associate. There is reference above to a class I had in the early summer last year; in the comparable course this year a young woman confided, after a pre-organized group activity, "That was quite an experience... being with those athletes. I've had a prejudice against athletes in classes and would never associate with them... but they had some good ideas... and were genuinely nice people." What an important learning!

That's quite a challenge in that second paragraph - - involve the spirits of each so that a spirit develops within the group. I'm getting a little better at doing this, and it seems to come as much from spontaneous decisions and reactions as from planned activities... and probably always will.

But why am I doing stuff like this? Hear the Spirit again...

**You are an educator in a secular institution. Your professional field is perceived as secular by most of your colleagues... even as I have given you the continuing task of introducing and emphasizing a spiritual dimension to this quality you call health. You are to be a Christian, one in a born again relationship with Me, the Holy Spirit, and you are to be ready to offer a Christian interpretation of any life event at any time (even if it is not complete "orthodox").**

**Yet the important relationship is that I guide you in whatever you are doing, not that you are constantly defending and preaching Me. This is the role that I give to some, and I expect them to carry it out, even in the midst of persecution and scorn. Your role is equally important to Me, because it is part of a larger tapestry of service and of influence of which you are only scarcely aware. I call upon you to feel and seek My influence in your life, and then lead that life under this influence, even though you may make few ringing testimonies to the desirability of everyone coming to Me in open, well-known ways.**

**... In philosophical terms it is your role, particularly in this last portion of your active career, to be an essentially idealist educator, touching the minds and spirits of these it is your privilege to help educate. With a few you will share actual testimonies about Me and My influence in your lives; with all you will share My Christ spirit in the way you live, work, and teach. Keep a balance in your life, but know this secular education role is My top priority for you.**

**In this time of communion your spirit is full of the appreciation of your life opportunities. The fact that you will lose some of this appreciation as you move into the hustle of the day is unfortunate, though expected. You are not yet developed enough spiritually to carry this "appreciation" (that is just the best word) on beyond this time. But much that you do moves**

**you along... and you are aware of the path. Keep your hand in Mine. (“Education and Christ”, October 5, 1984)**

The health field became essentially secular when science “overpowered” religion (as being too dogmatic) and became the dominant force in medical practice... and health has been pretty closely related to medicine. Because “spirit” seemed to belong to religion it was rejected as a factor in health. But now the paradigm seems to be changing, and, as a health educator, I am to help restore this more holistic view of functioning and adapting, with spirit as not only a legitimate dimension, but perhaps the best integrating and unifying dimension. Though I function as a born again Christian my role is one of service in teaching, not in preaching or other overt forms of evangelism. Some learners do feel free enough to share stories of their faith with me, but I am equally committed to those who doubt. It’s a big enough task just being who I am, without trying to be someone else, even a “better” self.

Now, seven years is not really a long time, but I have been fairly faithful in this relationship, so it is interesting to go back to the Teaching entitled “anniversary”, which came on the completion of one month of these meditations. It said, in part...

**I have much to say to you. But always remember that the process can be as important as the content. Listen not just for the words. Be aware also of the symbols in what We do together. Worry not that some things are repeated. Worry not that new ideas burst forth unheralded. Be aware that as I each so can you teach. Some of the methods are transferable. Some will be obvious to you. Others... I’ll nudge you.**

**Remember that I suggested that you try to write some each day, in addition to this. (In this you are the penman only. I want you to practice the actual writing.) It can be a letter. It can be part of a paper. Do it not so much as a discipline, as a commandment... do it as a glad and thankful response. “And the Lord, the Spirit gave forth... and the servant gave in return, in gratitude.” Most days you do this anyway, but I want you to become more aware of the opportunities. That is why I frame it as I do.**

**... There are congratulations, but you now know that Now is the Time. Be both a learner and a teacher. Be both in learning and in teaching. You shall be more effective (though not necessarily more popular), and you shall realize purposes you saw not before. (“Anniversary”, June 10, 1979)**

So, I have learned about teaching from the Spirit. Repetition and reinforcement are crucial to learning. Awareness of the process is another essential, and there have been comments all through these years on approaches I have used, some successfully and some not-so. I love to write, and I try to do some each day, remembering, as well as I can, that it is not a chore, but a glad and thankful response to a capacity that I have been given... as well as developed.

Would you like to experience one of these critiques of processes and learning activities I used in a class? Assuming I hear a few Yeses, I share...

**... So, I say again, increasingly put your attention to this important goal - - increasing the flow of spirit through the teaching/learning process. You are a fairly well developed spirit, so it is relatively easy for you to do this, so I continue to urge you to be what you can be. The class last evening was a good one in that regard. Let’s review the reasons why.**

**You began by sharing the best of the comments written about John Baker. This is a wonderful way of letting the group know the quality and variety of thought - - and spirit - - that was generated by those around them. It doesn't allow them to identify individual writers, but it says, in effect, "There are strong spirits here. I don't know who they are... but they could be... anyone." These expressions can be a spur to further expressions of spirit by those who can, but are reluctant.**

**... From Maggie you received some confirmation that your lectures in Survival (of Man) communicated that you cared about what you are doing. Accept that both as a compliment and as an urging to continue this caring and to improve your ways of showing it. The contribution to this large class is a small one, but I want you to continue to make it. In these large classes young people need to be assured that someone cares about them.**

**Of course I say again... have your students come to the Farm and have them share food, in all seasons. Keep the balance between your providing the food and their contributing. The group idea is a good one. The preparation of food together can be a real exercise in spirit. Continue to devise ways to include food and drink in the midst of class learning.**

**Spirit is the essence of life, and the teaching/learning process is one of the most important in human life... and in life eternal. To be a good teacher you must be a good learner. Let students know you are learning from them, and let students see that you are continuing to be interested in what your colleagues teach. Tell stories. Listen to, read, and comment more on stories students tell. You shall never be able to remember them all, but continue to reproduce some of the best, and keep better track of these and use them in subsequent classes.**

**Soon you shall rest from this process in its active form, but use that rest for a recharging of yourself, for introspection, and for planning that shall encourage even more spirit in your next groups of learners. Also use the rest time for writing, which is another way of encouraging the growth of spirit. All of your writings (and I know that I push you firmly in many ways as a writer) have value, but you must include more professional pieces, particularly in relation to teaching and learning.**

**You are doing well in this regard, but this means that you have capacities for more. I make you aware of what you have done, in order that you might continue and develop ever new approaches... even studies. ("I Say Again, Spirit in Teaching", November 15, 1985)**

**"Increasing the flow of spirit through the teaching/learning process" - - that isn't one of the more publicized goals of our profession (and it probably won't be in the foreseeable future), but it seems more and more appropriate for me, in the classes I have.**

**I'm frustrated in this writing process, for there's so much I'd like to say about each comment above, but that would fill the letter... and what the Spirit says is really more important than my reactions. Virtually every class I have meets at least once a term out at our Farm. In the summertime it's outside around the picnic table under the trees... in the winter its around the big dining table or around the fireplace. Eating together becomes part of the class, and even the preparation of the food can be done in interactive groups. This Farm has a special spirit inherent in it, which has been increased by student groups meeting here. This may sound unChristian to some, but I have been reminded that there are many references in the Holy Scriptures to certain places being special for God's action. Our Farm is no "mountain of the Lord", certainly, but it does follow in that tradition.**

Some other highlights for me... care about what you're doing... care about young people... the teaching/learning process is one of the most important spiritual experiences in life... "to be a good teacher, you must be a good learner"... tell stories, and listen carefully to stories learners offer...

The Spirit does like stories...

**... From my perspective it was a good day, for there is no better use of earth time than in telling stories in a shared way...**

**As I have told you repeatedly, stories are one of My best ways of expressing truth. The kernel of truth is given a setting by the story. It is not so stark and blatant, but becomes evident in a natural, more lasting way as the story is told. And because a person is telling the story there is more relevance than if it had been read or heard without the personalization. ("Sharing Stories", Sept. 14, 1985.)**

And not only should I, the teacher, be a continuing learner, but the learners can also be teachers (and I did venture this toward the end of my first year of teaching, with 9<sup>th</sup> graders... a memorable experience, which the Spirit observed, as well).

**Still another reason for success is sharing the teaching role with those who are designated "learners". This teaching role is an important one, but it is a spiritual truth that it is in giving up something of value that greater good can be achieved. You, as teacher, can bring about more important learning by allowing, even encouraging, members of the group to lead, to teach. And this can apply to any setting in which you presently function (... that is, it may not apply as well to all fields of study... but it does to yours... and, remembering 9<sup>th</sup> grade Algebra, know that it is just an important spiritual tenet). It is not just for the class, but for you as well. Carl's contribution yesterday was as important as any made in the whole three weeks. Your spirit was open enough to forgive his previous deficiencies and offer him this opportunity. Learning can come out of unlikely circumstances. Continue to let your spirit guide in making such decisions. ("A Class Completed", July 28, 1984)**

Some years ago I had a conversation with Jerry Grossman, a health educator in the School of Public Health at the University of Hawaii. I was surprised to discover how strongly he felt that the central focus of "professional preparation" should be the development of the person. We're still more comfortable, as a profession, talking about "role delineation" or "certification", seeing our job as increasing what learners know and can do, rather than what they know about others and about self... what they are as persons. The Spirit seems to feel that the content is not as important as the process...

**Teaching, of course, is just enhancing learning. Learning about health issues is important, but learning about others and about self is the more important for those who will, themselves, become educators. Continue to develop approaches whereby learners can interact with and develop a "feel" for others in the learning group. What you did in this class just finished was excellent, but include a song or story next time. Give each learner an opportunity to teach, so that others can learn from him or her. That was a strong feature of this class just completed. Know that this is to be developed. ("Reflections on Teaching", Aug. 4, 1980)**

Yes, I do still include some songs (as particular kinds of stories) in my teaching. I am still reluctant to do this, because I am aware of how relatively unskilled I am as a musician and that the songs I do are

not the popular ones of the day. Nevertheless, the Spirit continues to push me to continue this, as a unique addition to the teaching/learning process. It's the spirit with which I do it that counts... more than the competence. (More about this later.)

Last Fall I had a Teaching on a Sunday morning that was entitled "Contemplation". I have an adult study class at the Presbyterian Church, based on these Teachings that I receive, and I was urged to contemplate "what a good class will be like." I do this increasingly, for this class and for my regular university ones, creating an "image" of the class, which often helps in determining what I actually do, or have the learners do. I share with you the part of the first and last paragraphs...

**Contemplation. This is a word, o son, that represents a very important human activity. To contemplate is to use your mind, your emotions, and your spirit in the most favorable "combination". To contemplate is to seek meaning. To contemplate is to have a good grasp of meaning and to apply it in some variety of ways... even new ways. So as a warm Sunday dawns hear My thoughts on contemplation... Contemplate, this morning what a good class will be like, and see if you can help create a reality to match this contemplation. And then reflect upon that experience. And always contemplate. ("Contemplation", Sept. 8, 1985)**

As I contemplate a good class what do I envision myself doing... being? Beyond the methods used, how should I "be" with learners? As the teacher I am a model, in ways largely defined by individual learners. Yet I may want to model some things and not others. How successful can I be? What about forgiveness? Hear the Spirit...

**... "Spirit in teaching" means involving the spirits of those who come to learn as well as their minds. As you organized them yesterday to interview one another, to work in small groups, and to read one another's writing you were opening up the possibility of spirits interacting.**

**You as the teacher present the model. As you give examples include the spirit as one of the natural dimensions... The main aspect of the model, however, is your own spirit as it reaches out to these kids, considers them as honorable and responsible and seeks interaction at a very human/spiritual level. There may be disappointments, but the spirit always is in favor of another chance. Give Ray Smith another chance. Everybody needs a Barnabas. When your spirit reflects My Spirit it is full of grace for others. It never lets the learner's mistakes and shortcomings from the past stand in the way of opportunities to do better. Whatever has been done is forgiven. Each session is a new opportunity.**

**Oh, yes, this must be balanced, in practice, with the justice that comes from the mental and social aspects of being. If a person acts irresponsibly he or she must bear the consequences, but often these consequences become ends in themselves and retard the learning process. For learning, there must always be the feeling that there is "another chance." ("Spirit in Teaching", June 14, 1981)**

Forgiveness is not a strong part of the ethic of "solid teaching." If a student messes up in some way she must bear the consequences. The grade must reflect the mistakes as well as the successes. Yet it is easy to let these "consequences" become the end, causing learning to be discouraged. And if learning is discouraged, the teaching must be ineffective. The standards may be high, but only a few learn. This doesn't seem very spiritual. But how to achieve the right balance...?

Here's a comment on one of my Sunday morning classes, where the Teaching concerned the Gospel of John. I was accepting of their lack of knowledge and this helped the discussion.

**The class was not a howling success, but you must know by now that periods of silence are not necessarily reflections of diminished interest. One conclusion could be that a lesson based on a frank Biblical theme makes more people uneasy, particularly when they haven't read the passage lately... or ever. You were ready and able to fill in information about John's Gospel that helped. You were accepting of their lack of knowledge and uneasiness, and this allowed many to open up a bit, adding to the discussion. The final result was average... even a bit above... for a class.**

**I liked the reaffirmation from some in your class that it was your functioning as a whole person that was drawing them to consider the truth of these Teachings. This, of course, is what I want from you. You cannot be a teacher of holistic health, with a strong spiritual dimension, without being a model of this in your personal and professional life. Don't try harder. Just be... aware and appreciative. ("An 'Update' on John", December 15, 1985)**

Thus came the affirmation that I must be a model, and I'm not comfortable with this. When people expect me to be better than I can be, I am uneasy. So the Spirit says, "Don't try harder." So I don't (most of the time).

The Spirit went from the Sunday role back to my professional one in commenting on modeling. So, if I have these insights on the teaching/learning process, shouldn't I be wanting all of my colleagues to emulate me? The Spirit says, "Have little concern..."

**Have little concern that all do not follow your way and ways. Your profession has and will have a fragmented quality. Appreciate the diversity. Listen to others... even those whom you seem to have passed. I still listen to the observations and perceptions of many strange folk. So much more so should you. Be as much a listener as a professor. As you listen to others they become more willing to hear you. ("Your Profession", April 10, 1980)**

In the spirit of "the last shall be first" (a strange spiritual principle), if I want to have influence I am obliged to listen to others... even those who hold to other premises of teaching. HmMMM.

My area is health, and listen to how the Spirit describes it, along with education...

**But health has to be seen in a wider context than the strictly personal. Health is in relationships and in interaction. Health is a means to better relationships with other people and with the earth... and also is a product therefrom. And education is, fundamentally, telling stories... learning and teaching by the stories of life. Everything important can be a parable, a poem, a song. (You have at least two songs to write. Know this.) Hear the stories of others. Share your own. Translate principles to stories. This can be part of your profession. ("Your Profession", April 10, 1980)**

Not very many of my colleagues will go for this, I'd opine. Where's the content? Where's the rigor?

Teaching is my job... my work. On a Labor Day morning two years ago the Teaching was "... It's The Spirit With Which You Do It", and it commenced...

**This, o son, is a spinoff from the sermon of yesterday morn, and a small contribution to the appreciation of this holiday. I just want to be sure that you hear this message about work in relation to spirit. Spirit is that which is continuous in eternal life, and there are many possible reactions to the almost infinite variety of work which is possible here in the earth.**

**So the full title would be, “It’s not what you do that matters, but it’s the spirit with which you do it that does.” In a strictly spiritual sense there is no division of work into important and unimportant. There certainly is no evaluation of work by the pay that is awarded for doing it. And there is no distinction that I recognize between work that involves the mind and that which requires the body. (September 3, 1984)**

Happily, I love what I do as work. I feel that it is important, even though it is not a high paying profession (a point that our union organizers accent, o so continuously). The work is fundamentally sedentary, and thus I revel in the balance I get with working this small Farm... digging, mowing, cutting wood... So though these last segments were addressed to me, an educator, they also could apply to those readers whose jobs are “other”. The Spirit concludes...

**But the dimension that interests Me is: what is the amount and quality of spirit that goes into this job? You generally perform it with a fully participating spirit, but you just could be more aware of this unifying power of spirit. Spirit can unify the appropriate dimensions and can transform an ordinary piece of work, enjoyable or less so, into an extraordinary experience, with Me actively involved. This is more difficult when the work is emotionally draining or unpleasant, or other combinations that make it difficult, but the application of spirit to any unit of work will make it an enriching personal experience, no matter what the objective results may seem to be.**

**This means that as you consciously bring your spirit to bear in a work situation, the result of doing the work, with spirit unifying and empowering, shall be a means of further spiritual growth. And as spirit develops in this way it becomes, even unconsciously, part of all that you do, so that virtually everything involves spirit and thus brings more growth of that spirit.**

**So you see that in My economy the nature of the work or how your culture values it is of no consequence. I love to see you teach a class with full spirit, or write a good academic paper, or send out Our Ruminations, or feed your animals, or clean your desk. You can do planned work, or that which arises... or what someone else would have you do. Any condition or circumstance can be greatly improved if the spirit, which is your link with Me and your link with all of life and with all of creation, material and without physical form, is a vital element in that work opportunity.**

**You still do not apply this as well as you should, given your knowledge of its reality. I guess I shall just have to keep teaching you. With spirit. (“It’s the Spirit With Which you Do It”, Sept. 3, 1984)**

No, I don’t do this very well, but I’m becoming more aware and more appreciative of this application of spirit. It’s hard not to try harder.

One of my problems in life is NOT having too little to do. The Spirit puts it positively...



... I have blessed you with opportunities galore. Remember always that as you are giving yourself in one task or one area of life you are missing other opportunities. Do not fret over this. I also give you permission to do, mainly, those things that you do well and are called to do rather than those that you do poorly and that distress you. You have limitations, as John Baker had. But pay these little heed, as did he. Utilize your strengths, your developed capacities, My guidance, and My continuing influence in living life fully... for others and for Me. (Yes, I do repeat, don't I!?) And lo, you shall experience greater satisfaction than if you tried to achieve such directly. Such is My spiritual economy. Continue in the path I have set for you. ("John Baker", October 7, 1983)

Some years ago I decided to try to fill my time with worthwhile, necessary tasks that I can do relatively well, rather than take on, or be given, ones that I don't do well. One of my goals in life, since 1957, has been to never be an administrator (which, for me would be the Peter Principle, in neon lights), and it looks like I shall continue to succeed with this. I also eschew chairmanships, because no one seems to benefit from my chairing, even though it seems as though it should be otherwise. I have limitations, and I try to keep these from being evident... by busily doing what I do better, even well. It's nice to know that this is what the Spirit recommends, also.

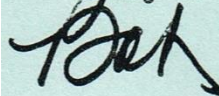
I'm not sure exactly what the path I'm on will be, this year and on into the future. I feel fairly sure that I'll keep seeking the counsel of the Holy Spirit... and sharing it in ways in which I'm directed. And, as you see, in this late quote, time is not a "big thing" to the Lord. So whatever I continue to do should just be "timeless moments".

**Is it important that this is your 37<sup>th</sup> year of teaching? In some ways you have improved over these years, and in other ways you were better your first year than you are now. Each year, each class, each moment in teaching is an opportunity in which you can display spirit, knowledge, and skill. These can improve, but, as you know, you didn't start "from scratch" at this teaching/learning game. You have done it "before", and you shall do it "again". Increasingly see your teaching as "timeless moments".**

**When you first commenced teaching you had young learners. All through these years you have had essentially young learners. And tonight's class is made up mostly of young learners. The opportunities repeat themselves, and the important question is... in this current moment, how much can you give? How well can you abet the learning process with these young learners? ("Time", Nov. 20, 1985)**

I finish this on, officially, the first day of summer. May this be a fine season for you.

In love for what we're  
doing in this life,



Bob Russell  
Christian, Professor, Health Educator,  
Writer, Songsinger, Farmer,  
Philosopher, Storyteller, Lover of Life

ADDENDUM: I said, back on page 8, that I'll keep sharing... and this Ruminations is one important way. It is something I want to do, and am led to do. The expense is mine to bear, and I don't want to get into the hassle of subscriptions. (I did get a \$10 donation this year... just in appreciation... and I did appreciate that. Thanks, Andrea)

However, some of you may have tired of these pages and are just too nice to say, "Please don't send any more." So... if you would like to keep receiving these, probably four a year, tear off the bottom of this page and send it back to me. If you don't, you'll get one more chance, and then ALOHA.

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Any comments or suggestions?