

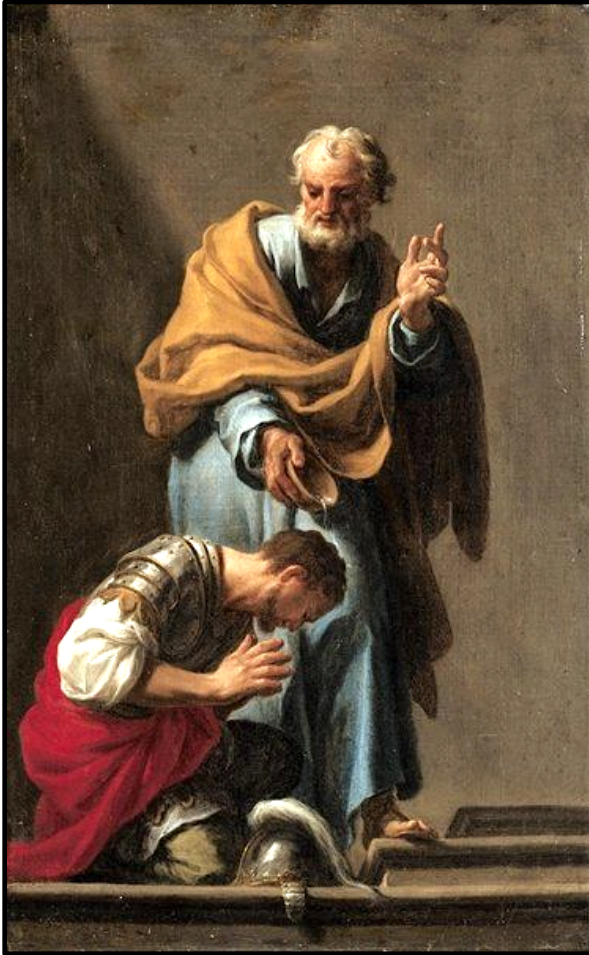
THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



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This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is *Saint Peter Baptizing the Centurion Cornelius* (February 4) by Francesco Trevisani. It is a small painting completed in 1709, oil on canvas, measuring 17"x28". It is in an unnamed private collection and is currently being held by Christie's in London. It depicts Saint Peter's first baptism of an uncircumcised Gentile after his vision, in which God told him, "What God has made clean, you must not call unclean" (Acts 10:15). Cornelius was a Roman centurion (the equivalent of a top sergeant) and what was known as a God-Fearer—a Gentile who honored God and the Jewish moral and ethical law, but did not follow the ceremonial law. The first major disagreement in the Church was whether or not a Gentile had to become a Jew and be circumcised before he could become a Christian. Peter said he must, and Paul said no. Cornelius had been told in a vision to seek Peter and be baptized, but Peter would not baptize a Gentile. After his vision he accepted Paul's position and baptized Cornelius (Acts 10:1ff).

Francesco Trevisani (1656-1746) was an Italian painter whose career spanned the late Baroque and early Rococo periods. This painting was done in 1709, at just about the time of the transition of those periods. He was born in 1756 in what is now Slovenia, but was then part of the Republic of Venice. His father was an architect, and gave Francesco his first training in design. He then studied in Venice under Antonio Zanchi, after which he moved to Rome, where he lived the rest of his life. His brother Angelo remained in Venice, where he too became a prominent painter. In Rome, Francesco was patronized first by Cardinal Pietre Ottoboni, then for many years by Cardinal Flavio (II) Chigi, who led him to many important commissions.

The Epistle is published monthly except August by Saint James' Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470-0446, the Rev. Richard R. Losch, Editor, email rlosch33@gmail.com, Phone 205-499-0968. Copr. © 2022, Richard R. Losch. Permission is granted to reproduce text items in church newsletters or bulletins (but not on the Internet or digitized) as long as they are reproduced completely and in print, and credit is given.

In 1712 he was appointed a member of the Pontifical Academy of Arcadia, where he trained a number of students who would go on to become important painters. He died in Rome in 1746, at what was in those days the remarkable age of 90.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

The call to return prayer to our schools is continuous on social media, usually with the implication that this will help to reverse the moral decay of our society. I only wish that it were that easy. In the first place, the removal of prayer from the schools was not the cause of the decay. It was a symptom of a decay that was already well along in rotting our society. Any organization, from a garden club to the culture of a nation or group of nations, is based on a set of principles and values that the members have in common. Occasionally an organization will find that over time it must alter or change those foundational principles, and that is fine. As long as the principles are heeded, even if they have changed, the organization has a supporting structure and is thus basically healthy. It is when those principles are ignored or are no longer valued that the organization becomes weak and without direction, and is usually doomed to failure. Whether or not by our standards we regard certain principles to be good or even reasonable, what is important for the survival of an organization is that there be principles, and that they be valued and honored. We can see an example of this in ancient Rome. The early Roman Republic was founded on three basic principles: personal honor and virtue trump everything else; the individual must always be prepared to sacrifice himself for the welfare of the state; and both the individual and the state must always be reverent, obedient to, and dependent upon the gods. By the end of the first century BC the first two principles had been all but forgotten by the people and their leaders, and the third was often ignored when it was expedient to do so. The result was that by the end of that century the Republic had collapsed and Rome became an

absolute monarchy often ruled by despotic tyrants. It survived for another 500 years, thriving and prospering during the few times that the monarch tried to restore the ancient principles. Nonetheless, it continued careening on a downward spiral until the inevitable fall of the Western half of Empire into the hands of barbarians¹ in AD 476.

Regardless of whether or not anyone likes it, the fact remains that one of the strongest foundational principles of Western civilization, of which the American culture is a significant part, is reverence, obedience to, and dependence upon deity. This was a founding principle of ancient Rome and Greece, and although that focus moved from the pagan gods to the Judeo-Christian God, the principle has remained primary to Western Civilization until quite recent times. Even those who were not particularly religious, such as Thomas Jefferson, thought in term such as that we are “endowed by our Creator” with our rights, and he sprinkled his writings liberally with biblical references. Today we are losing that not only in our leadership, but in much of the populace. As a Christian I believe that this is treading on dangerously unsteady ground. As an observer of history, I fear that it is dangerous because we are ignoring a basic structural principle without replacing it with anything else. History should have taught us to fear doing that.

Father Rick Losch+

The Epistle is Online

The last nine years of *The Epistle* are online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the “Epistle” tab at the top. On a mobile device, click on the blue menu at the top right and select the “Epistle” page. You can read it online or download it as a .pdf file. This is an easy way to share articles with others.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Those “barbarians,” under the leadership of Odoacer, were in most respects more civilized and more committed to the ancient Roman principles than were most of the 5th century Romans from whom they seized power.

Be Wordly Wise

Vestry

When most Episcopalians hear the word Vestry, about the only thing that comes to mind is the board of parish leaders who make many many of the business decisions of the parish. The word, however, has a breadth of meaning and a rich etymology. Technically, the Vestry is the room where the ecclesiastical vestments are stored, and in which the priest dons them in preparation for public worship. The leaders are called vestrymen (first used in about 1610) because traditionally they met in the vestry, the priest's dressing-room. Collectively they came to be called the Vestry sometime thereafter.

The word comes from the Anglo-French *vesterie*, from the Old French *vestiaire*, dressing-room. That in turn derives from the Latin *vestrium*, wardrobe, from *vestis*, garment. That came from the Indo-European *wes*, to clothe. Some other words deriving from the same root are divest, invest, travesty, revetment, transvestite, vestment, vest and wear.

Richard R. Losch+

Covid Variants

The various mutations of the Covid-19 virus have been named after the letters of the Greek alphabet. You never heard of most of them because they never amounted to much. Probably the best known are the Delta, Lambda and Omicron variants. Between Lambda and Omicron are the letters Mu (M, μ), Nu (N, ν) and Xi (Ξ , ξ , pronounced *ksee*). The Mu variant fizzled, and when the next variant emerged the World Health Organization announced that they would skip the letters Nu and Xi and call it Omicron. They skipped Nu because they did not want people thinking of it as the "New" variant. They skipped Xi because even though it is not pronounced the same, it is the family name of the President of China, Xi (She) Jinping, and they did not want to offend him.

Richard R. Losch+

East and West: A Follow-up

Last month we discussed the Great Schism, the AD 1054 split between the Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) branches of the Church.¹ Since that time the supreme prelate in the Roman Catholic Church has been the Pope, who is the Bishop of Rome. In the Eastern Church there is no supreme prelate. The Eastern Orthodox Church is made up of a number of relatively independent bodies, each governed by a chief prelate known as a Patriarch. They are independent in that none has authority over any of the others. They vary in their official languages and to some degree in their practices,² and although there are some differences in liturgy, their forms of worship are essentially the same. All the major Orthodox bodies are in full communion with each other, meaning that they recognize the validity of each other's sacraments and clergy. In other words, they are in full harmony with one another.

The Patriarch of Constantinople plays a special role in this system. He is recognized as the Ecumenical Patriarch, and as such is seen as the symbol of unity between all the other Patriarchates. He could be thought of as a President of the Patriarchs. He is described as “the first among equals,” and he is the only one who has the authority to call a synod (official meeting) of the other Patriarchs, and to preside over it.³ Other than that he has no more authority than any other Patriarch. Nonetheless, this position gives him great influence and responsibility, because when he speaks the world generally sees him as speaking for the entire Eastern Church. The Anglican Communion works much the same way. Each national Anglican body is autonomous, yet they all have a common doctrine and

¹ “East Is East and West Is West,” January 2022 *Epistle*, pp. 6ff.

² Their liturgies are all rooted in the liturgy of the ancient Greek-speaking Church of Constantinople, so they are called the Greek Church even though many of the bodies officially speak other languages. For this reason they are often mis-called the “Greek Orthodox Churches.”

³ He can delegate that authority if he wishes, however.

worship very similarly. The Archbishop of Canterbury, like the Ecumenical Patriarch, has authority only over his own archdiocese, yet he is the symbol of the unity of the Anglican Communion. He presides over the decennial Lambeth Conference, a synod of worldwide Anglican bishops, and like the Patriarch, when he speaks people think he speaks for all of Anglicanism.

The 1054 split was exacerbated by treacherous and barbarous acts by both the East and the West during the Crusades. This resulted in a bitterness between the two that lasted for centuries, and may well have been a major factor in the ultimate loss of the Holy Land to Islam. In 1438 at the Council of Florence there was a meeting between Pope Eugene IV and the Ecumenical Patriarch Joseph II in the hope of a reconciliation, but it was a disaster. The two did not get along at all, and Joseph died shortly before the end of the council. All it accomplished was to firm up the division.

It took another five centuries, but finally things began to turn around in 1964, when two level-headed leaders sought to heal the rift. On January 6 of that year, on the Feast of the Epiphany, Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras met in Jerusalem. On the Mount of Olives, where Jesus had prayed “that they may be one” (John 17:21), Pope Paul and Patriarch Athenagoras embraced each other and exchanged the Kiss of Peace. When a reporter asked Athenagoras his purpose in coming there, he said, “I came here to say ‘good morning’ to my beloved brother, the Pope. You must remember that it has been 525 years since we have spoken to one another!” It is reminiscent of Maya Angelou’s poem,

“Here, on the pulse of this new day
You may have the grace to look up and out
. . . And into your brother's face
. . . And say simply
Very simply
With hope –
Good morning.”

There is still a long way to go, but the ice has been at least cracked if not broken. The anathemas (ecclesiastical curses) of

1054 have been lifted by both sides, and in 2016 Pope Francis met with Archbishop Kirill, the Patriarch of Moscow, in an airport in Havana. He plans to meet with him again this year. It has taken a long time, but God is patient. Longfellow wrote, “Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small; Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all.”¹ Slow though they may be, the mills of God are grinding toward the reunification of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Pray that we stay on that path.

Richard R. Losch+

In the Beginning Was the Word

John begins his gospel with this powerful phrase, in which he uses *Logos* (Λογος), “Word,” to mean God the Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. The question often arises as to why John chose to use the word “Word” to refer to Christ. If we reflect on it, however, it was the perfect choice. A word is much more than just a sound that represents a thing or concept. It is the means by which two minds can exchange thoughts and concepts. Lower animals can communicate on a basic level with physical signs and sounds, but it takes language—words—to communicate abstracts, conjecture future events, and extrapolate new ideas from current ones. The Word, Christ, is the perfect communication between God and mankind. He is the living, breathing bond between the divine nature of God and the human nature of man, enabling full communication between the two. We also often refer to the Bible as the Word of God. It is not so called because God dictated its words, but because through its language the Bible is a primary means of communication between God and mankind. The ultimate Word, however, is the Son of God: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

To the ancient Greeks, the word *Logos* meant much more

¹ While this is generally attributed to Longfellow, he was actually quoting the third century AD Greek poet Sextus Empiricus, who wrote, “The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind small.”

than our word “word” generally means to us. They recognized the power of words. Philosophers and rhetoricians spent years learning to choose just the right words to use in their writings and orations, studying the fine nuances and subtle implications of specific words and phrases. This is one of the reasons that so much is lost in the translations of their works.

In Greek philosophy the word *Logos* was also used to mean a mystical divine force that kept the world from devolving back to chaos. It was the stabilizer of creation in that it enabled communication throughout creation.¹ Any of John’s Greek readers would have recognized that immediately, as would his educated Jewish readers. Philo of Alexandria (20 BC-AD 50), a Greek Jew, often used *Logos* to refer to God’s role in creation.

In Geek philosophy, the feminine equivalent to Logos is Sophia (Σοφία), Wisdom. In Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) and the Song of Songs, the word Wisdom usually means God. Constantine’s great basilica in Constantinople (now Istanbul) is dedicated to Hagia Sophia (Ἁγία Σοφία), Holy Wisdom.²

Richard R. Losch+

Live Like a Billionaire

If you would like to live like a billionaire, you can. Warren Buffett’s net worth is estimated at \$109.5 billion, making him one of the richest men in the world. In 1954 he bought a 5-bedroom house in Omaha, Nebraska for \$31,800, and he still lives there. He has done nothing significant to the house other than to maintain it in good condition. Covid has restricted his activities a bit recently, but at age 91 he still does what he has done all his adult life—he drives himself to work every morning, stopping at McDonald’s for a McMuffin for breakfast.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ This may have been the inspiration for George Lucas’s idea of the Force in his Star Wars films.

² Sad to say, when Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, Hagia Sophia was converted to a Mosque. In 1935 it was made a museum.

Patriarchy, Women and the Bible

With very few exceptions, until relatively modern times almost every society in history has been patriarchal, treating women on a scale from second-class citizens to virtual slaves. Although they do not justify it, the reasons for this are understandable. In the first place, on the average women are smaller and have less physical strength than men.¹ In many cultures this led to the idea that women are therefore mentally and emotionally inferior to men. This in turn led to limiting the education of women to only household chores and “women’s duties,” and that lack of education appeared to confirm their mental inferiority. This haunts us to this day, as phrases such as “the weaker sex” are still common in modern language.

Another factor leading to the suppression of women was ignorance of biology. For thousands of years until the advent of modern science it was believed that the male implants the child, his “seed,” into the female’s womb. Her role was nurturing it and bringing it to delivery. The strength and health of her womb determined everything. If she failed to get pregnant, the fetus died, or the newborn failed to thrive, it was because her womb was deficient. A truly healthy and strong womb would produce a boy, and a weaker one would produce a girl.

A third factor was childbirth itself. Before modern medicine this was an extremely risky business, and the primary cause of women’s death was childbirth. This was mainly due to frequent physical damage in the delivery, and complete ignorance of the hygiene necessary to prevent fatal disease or infection. It was customary in the past that as soon as a woman discovered that she was pregnant, she wrote her will and prepared for death. Infant mortality was also extreme. A number of studies have shown that a fourth of all babies born died within their first year of life, and of the survivors, only about half survived past puberty. It was not at all rare for a woman to

¹ It is interesting that in the pre-pubescent years of later childhood, girls are usually taller and stronger than boys. Boys’ final growth period usually comes on later than that of girls, but lasts longer.

have 15 pregnancies, of which 10 produced live babies, of whom 3 survived to adulthood. Because of this, most women were too sick both during pregnancy and for long periods after maternity to accomplish much else. It is not surprising that the attitude of men and women alike was that men should be dealing with the affairs of the world while women dealt only with childbirth and the affairs of the home. With modern understanding it has become obvious that women are not only capable of all the same intellectual, social, business and practical pursuits as men, but also with modern medicine they can do so with only a very brief interruption by pregnancy and maternity.

For millennia the Bible, particularly the story of Adam and Eve, has been used as a justification for the suppression of women. If we look carefully at the original language, however, the Bible says no such thing. God saw that it was not good for the man to be alone, so he said he would make a helper suitable for him (Gen 2:18).¹ People have interpreted this to imply that Eve was created as Adam's assistant—his second-in-command—and was therefore secondary and subservient to him, and therefore all women thereafter should be subservient to men. The problem is that this is not at all what the word we translate helper means. The word is *ezer* (עֲזָרָה), and it has no implication whatever of subservience or inferiority. It means helper, with no implication of rank or authority. It is used often in the Old Testament to refer to everything from God to a stone (1 Sam. 7:12). In the Garden of Eden the animals are called helpers, but the Bible also calls the angels and even God himself *ezer*, so it obviously does not imply inferiority.

Another argument is that since God created Adam first, and Eve almost as an afterthought, that she is only secondary to him. Again, this argument carries no weight, since in the first

¹ The KJV translates this a “help meet for him.” In Jacobean English, “meet” means suitable (as in “It is meet and right so to do”). Corruption of that phrase has led to the creation of the word “helpmate,” meaning a helpful partner such as a spouse. The word helpmate did not exist until the corruption of a “help meet for him.”

story of creation (Gen 1:6) God says, “Let us make mankind in our image ... and let *them* have dominion over [the animals]; ... *male and female* he created *them*” (italics mine). This says that both were created at the same time, so neither has priority over the other. Also, to quell the argument even further, that story comes a chapter before the rib story, so if coming first gives priority, then ... well, that speaks for itself.

The third argument is that Eve, having been made from a piece of Adam’s body, was subservient and indebted to him. All this hangs on what may be a questionable translation. The Hebrew word that we translate rib is *tsela* (צלע). When Saint Jerome in about AD 385 translated the Hebrew into Latin (the Vulgate), he translated this *costa*, which does mean rib as we think of the word. When John Wycliffe translated the Latin translation into English he wrote, “God took oon of hise ribbis, and fillide fleisch for it.” From there on the translation “rib” was sealed. The only problem is that this is only one possible translation of *tsela*, and not the preferred one. Everywhere else in the Old Testament that *tsela* is used, it clearly means side, not rib. Sometimes it is as in the side of a house, and in others it is the side of a being, as we would use the expression “a side of beef.” God has no body, so when Genesis tells us that he made the human “in his image,” this must refer to his spirit or nature rather than his body. God embodies all the attributes that we think of as masculine, and also all those that we think of as feminine. If he made the human in his image, then, the human also must have had all these attributes. An ancient rabbinic interpretation of this passage is that God put Adam to sleep and split him right down the middle. He took a *side* (*tsela*) from Adam, not a *rib*. One side became the male, with all the masculine attributes, and the other became the female with all the feminine attributes.¹ When Genesis says that he “closed up the place with flesh” it means that he fleshed out each side into a

¹ This answers the question often posed in the Middle Ages as to why males and females have the same number of ribs. It seemed to them that the male should have one less than the female.

complete human being, one male and the other female.

Without even considering modern scientific studies, the arguments are overwhelming that men and women are equal in the eyes of God and should be in the eyes of society. There are many reasons, a few of which are reviewed above, that so many cultures in history have not understood this. That explains millennia of suppression, but it does not justify it. As we have come to realize this, there are two things that we must guard against. One is the vindictive overreaction that we see today in a small fringe of extremists who in retribution want to subjugate men just as men subjugated women in the past. Punishing a sin with an equal sin does not balance the account, it simply throws it as badly out of balance as it was before. The second thing we must guard against is forgetting that just because two things are equal that does not mean that they are the same. Whether we take Genesis allegorically or literally, God did not make two identical humans. As was his intention, they were equal but quite different. Each has his or her own contribution to make. It is the bringing together of the very different (but equally valuable) attributes of the male and female that makes for a healthy family, community and world. The earthy symbol of this is the basic family unit, the “nuclear family,” so called because it is the nucleus of all human society. The allegory of the Genesis story emphasizes this when it tells us that God’s very next command was that they shall join together and become one flesh (Gen. 2:24).¹ It is his command that we reunite that which has become separated, and restore the totality of the Image of God in our humanity.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ This is why Judaism and Christianity have traditionally condemned all forms of sexual interaction except between adult males and females. Any other form (such as sodomy, pedophilia, bestiality etc.) thwarts the command to reunify the masculine and the feminine, and is therefore contrary to God’s will. In modern times our society, including many religious groups, have preferred to turn their backs on this rather than offend anyone or hurt their feelings. This could be risky business.

When Was Jesus Born?

Christmas may be behind us, but the question that has been asked for centuries is still very much alive: when was Jesus really born? Luke ties his birth to Caesar Augustus and Quirinius. Matthew ties it to King Herod the Great, who according to his account was still alive after Jesus' birth. It has long been accepted that Herod died in 4 BC. His encounter with the Magi and the massacre of the infants in Bethlehem could have taken up to as much as two years, so it had generally been believed that Jesus was born sometime between 6 and 4 BC.

Yes, BC means Before Christ, so how could Christ be born before Christ? The terms BC and AD (*Anno Domini*, in the Year of the Lord) did not come into common use until relatively modern times except in official Church use. In AD 525 a scholarly monk named Dionysius Exiguus (Dennis the Little) scoured the Bible for dating references of every kind, and calculated the date of Christ's birth. He determined his current year as 525 years after Jesus' birth. Not long afterward the Church started using dates based on that, and our current system of dating things before and after Jesus' birth came into use. In more recent times historians came to believe that Dionysius had made an error of about four years, thus making Jesus' birth sometime between 6 and 4 BC. One explanation of this was that he had neglected to count the four years that Octavian rules as the Roman Emperor before being given the title Augustus by the Senate (31-27 BC). This is, however, a weak argument. Dionysius was a very able historian, and certainly would have been aware of that period. The primary reason for the discrepancy, which is still accepted by most historians today, is that Herod the Great died in 4 BC. However, according to the Bible he was still alive at the time of Jesus' birth. This is all based on a statement by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus that there was a lunar eclipse shortly before Herod's death (*Antiquities* 17.6.4). There was a lunar eclipse visible in Jerusalem on March 13, 4 BC, and it is on that that the dating of Herod's death has hung for almost two centuries.

The problem with all this is twofold. First, Josephus has been shown to have been very inaccurate in many of his details throughout his writings. While the overall picture of what he tells has proven reliable, he is also frequently careless with details, and he is often very self-serving. The second problem is much more important. While the eclipse of 4 BC was the first in many years, in Jerusalem it was very late at night and was a minor partial eclipse. The reason this one is selected is that Josephus elsewhere mentions the length of Herod's reign as 37 years, which would also tie it to the 4 BC date. On the other hand, several other references by Josephus contradict this, casting doubt on the actual length of Herod's reign. Many such inconsistencies lead scholars to question his dates.

After the eclipse in 4 BC there were no more lunar eclipses for four years. In 1 BC there were two. The second took place on December 29, just two days before the change in eras as we now count them. It was early, nearly total, and clearly visible, and was mentioned in several contemporary sources. In those days people took note of any unusual celestial phenomena, because they believed them to be divine omens or warnings. If that was the one referred to by Josephus, that would place Jesus' birth and Herod's death in the year AD 1. Dr. John Cramer, a physics professor at Atlanta's Oglethorpe University, has argued for this date, and has brought many scholars to agree with him. As he said, "Perhaps the much-maligned monk who calculated the change of eras was not quite so far off as has been supposed."

Richard R. Losch+

A Touch of Trivia

The names Theodore, Dorothea, Jonathan and Nathaniel all mean the same thing: Gift of God. The first two are Greek, and the latter two Hebrew. In Late Antiquity Adeodatus and Deodatus, Latin names meaning the same thing, were also popular.

Richard R. Losch+

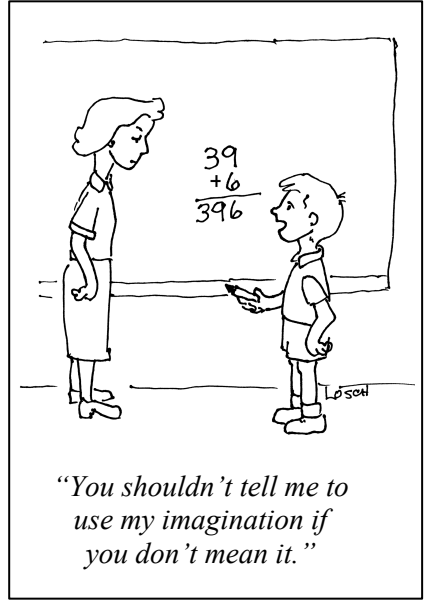
A Touch of Trivia

Duct tape is essential in any workshop, and it is one of the most versatile of all adhesive tapes. It is often called “Duck Tape” for good reason—that was its original name. It was invented by a female defense worker during World War II. It was made of cotton duck, and water ran off it “like water off a duck’s back.” It was originally made for the army, and came only in olive drab. It was found to be superb for sealing ventilation ducts, and was eventually marketed in silver as Duct Tape.

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