

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
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This Month's Cover

In honor of the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul (June 29) our cover this month is *Apostles Peter and Paul* by El Greco. It is oil on canvas, measuring 4'x3'5". Completed in Spain in 1592, it is in the Mannerism Style of the Late Renaissance. It is in the collection of The Hermitage in Saint Petersburg, Russia. It depicts Saint Peter (on the left) and Saint Paul joining hands at the wrists. Their hands are not clasped. This may be to indicate that while they are at unity, they were also often in disagreement, especially in the early days of the Church. Paul holds a staff (a traditional symbol of authority). It is appropriately in the form of a cross, yet the top resembles the hilt of a broadsword, probably symbolizing his imagery of the Sword of the Holy Spirit. The expressions on their faces have been described both as deep and thoughtful, and as sad and wistful.

El Greco, a painter, sculptor and architect, is considered the first and greatest of the Spanish School of artists, although he himself was not Spanish, but Cretan. He was born Domenikos Theotokopoulos in Candida, Crete in 1541, and he signed all his paintings with that name in Greek (Δομενικος Θεοτοκουλος), often following it with *Kres* (Κρες), Cretan. Little is known of his early life, although in 1983 an icon painted in the Byzantine style and signed by him was discovered in a small church in Crete. In a 1556 Cretan document he is referred to as a Master Painter. Around then he moved to Venice (Crete was a Venetian possession at that time), and in 1570 he moved to Rome. There he studied under Titian, although his strongest Italian influences were from Michelangelo and Tintoretto. Sometime before 1577 he moved to Toledo, Spain, where he remained for the rest of his life. It was there that he came to be

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known as El Greco, The Greek, although he never signed any of his works as such. He executed a prodigious number of paintings and altarpieces while in Toledo, and also became quite popular as a portraitist, particularly among the ecclesiastical hierarchy. He died in Toledo in 1614.

After his death, El Greco's work was not fully appreciated, his only important disciples being Luis Tristan and his son, Jorge Manuel Theotokopoulos. With the development of French Impressionism in the latter part of the 19th century, an appreciation of his work revived, and the recognition of his true mastery arose in the 20th century.

(The information on El Greco is copied from the November 2022 Epistle.)

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

When I was a math teacher, my students would often ask, “When will I ever use this?” My answer was always the same: “If I’m doing my job right, you’ll use it every day of your life. I’m not teaching you how to solve a polynomial, I’m using that to teach you how to think.” While there may be a practical use for what we study, it is not always the primary goal. A working knowledge of geometry may help to design a sturdy building or to build one from someone else’s design. That is a valuable skill, but more importantly, geometry will teach us sequential thinking—the cause-and-effect thinking that can lead to wise decisions and enlightening innovative ideas. While a knowledge of Shakespeare may enable us to quote a dead poet to impress our friends, a vastly more valuable aspect of it is that it will greatly enrich our understanding of human motivations and relationships. So it is with our religious and spiritual education. The Bible is not given to us to supply us with clever quotable verses to support our own ideas. It is given to teach us about God and how to relate to him, and thus how to relate to each other. Like our temporal education, our spiritual education should be designed not just to teach us practical skills, but to teach us to think in godly ways so that the practical skills

will follow naturally. Jesus rebuked Peter outside Caesarea Philippi, saying, “You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things” (Mark 8:33). Peter was only beginning to learn to think in godly terms rather than just acting on a practical human plane. Learning to solve a polynomial or to quote a daily Bible verse may have some limited practical value, but learning to think, especially to think in godly terms, will open unimaginable doors in this world and the next.

Father Rick Losch+

Be Wordly Wise

Kerfuffle

This early 19th century British word is heard with increasing frequency in American informal English. Informal language is language that is usually spoken rather than written, and is casual but on a higher level than slang. A kerfuffle is a commotion or fuss, usually caused by some kind of disagreement, but without rancor or violence. Etymologists are not sure of its origin, but the consensus seems to be that it originated in Scotland as *carfuffle*, and is rooted in the Erse (Scots Gaelic) *car*, ‘twist, bend’ and *fuffle*, ‘disorder.’ It is also argued that it derived from the Irish *cior thual*, ‘confused disorder.’ Regardless of its source, it is an agreeable word to describe a not too disagreeable disagreement. We could use fewer nasty disputes and more friendly kerfuffles on our social media.

Richard R. Losch+

Pontius Pilate’s Ring Revisited

In a 1969 excavation in Herodium, a site eight miles east of Jerusalem, a copper ring was discovered. It gained very little attention. Such artifacts are common, and it was corroded to the degree that its inscription could not be read. Since then, however, technology has made huge advances. In 2018, more out of curiosity than expectation of anything important, scientists subjected the ring to new digital analysis. The news exploded in headlines across the world. The inscription bore one

word in Greek: PILATO (ΠΙΛΑΤΟ), the genitive of the clan cognomen of Pontius Pilate. The letters surrounded the image of a *krater*, a handle-less wine vessel. Although many experts were doubtful, the world seemed to accept that this ring had belonged to Pontius Pilate or to someone in his family.

There were several reasons that the experts were doubtful. In the first place, the inscription was in Greek, not Latin. A century earlier Greek was the language used by most Roman aristocrats,¹ but by Pilate's time this was no longer the case. Also, the quality of the ring would have been unacceptable to Pilate. While the Pontii were not among Rome's super-rich families, they were certainly wealthy enough to have worn gold and silver jewelry. This ring is made of low-grade copper, and was crudely manufactured and engraved. Thirdly, a *krater* of that style was a Jewish vessel. Although he was the Prefect of Judea, Pilate hated the Jews, and held them in contempt. It is unlikely that he would have had a Jewish symbol on his ring.

It is now generally accepted that this ring did not belong to Pontius Pilate. It may have belonged to a low-level member of his administration who could not afford more than a relatively cheap copper ring. He was also probably a Hellenized Jew (one who had at least to some degree adopted Greek culture), as is indicated by the *krater* and the Greek rather than Latin inscription. Many scholars dispute whether the inscription even is Pilate's name. The ring is so badly corroded that even with modern digital techniques it is not 100% clear what the letters are.

Regardless of whether the ring was Pilate's or even bears his name, there is no question that Pilate was a real person and was the Prefect of Judea at the time of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. While we do not know a great deal about him or the *Pilatus*

¹ In the 2nd and 1st centuries BC, upper-class Romans had a love affair with Greek culture, and spoke Attic Greek among themselves. They used Latin only for speaking to menials and for official documents. By the 1st century AD this affectation had died out, and they took more pride in their Roman heritage. A similar thing happened in late 17th and 18th century Europe, when almost all the royal courts, even in Russia, spoke French.

branch of the family of *Pontii*, there is sufficient extra-biblical evidence not only to confirm his existence, but also to show that far from being the reasonable judge portrayed by the Gospels, he was in fact a vindictive, ruthless and cruel man.¹

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Left is Right

In most ancient cultures (and many modern ones), left-handedness was considered to be not only a disadvantage, but often a bad omen. Even today, our English word ‘sinister’ is simply the Latin word for ‘left.’ This does not seem to be the case with the Israelites, for whom, especially for warriors, it was sometimes deemed an advantage. A graphic tale in the Book of Judges (3:12-30) illustrates this. The Moabites, under the rule of the morbidly obese King Eglon, were severely oppressing the Israelites. The Judge Ehud, a Benjaminite, went to Eglon to present the required tribute. Ehud, being left-handed, wore his dagger on his right hip instead of the customary left. When the Moabite guards checked to see that he was unarmed, they checked only his left hip. When Ehud approached Eglon to give him the customary kiss on the cheek and present the tribute, he pulled him toward himself and buried his dagger in his belly so that “the fat closed over the blade.” The death of Eglon encouraged the Israelites, who drove out the Moabites.

There are two other references to left-handedness in the Bible, and it is interesting to note that all three references are to members of the Tribe of Benjamin. Judges 20:16 refers to 700 amazingly accurate Benjaminite slingers, all of whom were left-handed. Scholars have long wondered whether left-handedness

¹ Pilate is often incorrectly identified as the Procurator or Governor of Judea. He was the Prefect. A governor ruled a province, but Judea was a subsection of the Province of Syria. A procurator was almost equivalent to a governor. Pilate was the Prefect of Judea, which was a civilian office that had authority over the military of a district, and had a limited amount of governing authority. In later centuries there was little distinction drawn between the *imperium* (ruling authority) of a prefect and a procurator, which is probably what led to the confusion in Pilate’s title.

was a genetic trait of the Benjaminites, or the slingers were trained to sling left-handed. In baseball, a “southpaw” (a left-handed pitcher or batter) can be confusing to his opponent, giving him a distinct advantage. It could be the same with a left-handed slinger or swordsman. The third reference is in 1 Chronicles 12:2, which states that when David was in Ziklag, among the Israelites who came to help him were 26 archers who “could shoot arrows and sling stones with either the right hand or the left; they were Benjaminites.”

Studies over many years have not given a clear answer as to the causes of handedness, but the indications are strong that it is influenced only 25% by genetics, and the rest by environmental and social pressures, such as the cultural stigma against left-handedness. Until relatively recently it was a common practice in most American public schools to teach left-handed children to write and function with their right hands.

This raises a further question as to why it appears that left-handedness was more common among Benjaminites than among others. It has been proposed that there was a genetic tendency towards left-handedness that was interpreted as being a good omen, and thus they encouraged it. The Hebrew that is translated as ‘left-handed’ is literally ‘bound (*itter*, אִטֵּר) in the right hand,” which might indicate that the Benjaminites restricted the right hands of their children to encourage left-handedness. There is no archaeological evidence of this, but such practices are found in many cultures even today. The Benjaminites were warriors, so they may have recognized the advantage of left-handedness against right-handed foes

It has also been suggested that the authors of the Bible may have noted the left-handedness of so many Benjaminites simply because of the irony of it. In Hebrew, the name Benjamin, *Ben-Jamin*, means “Son of [My] Right Hand.”¹

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¹ When Benjamin was born, his mother, Rachel, was dying. She wanted to name him Ben-Oni, “Son of My Sorrow.” but Jacob said that his name was to be Ben-Jamin, “Son of [My] Right Hand” (Gen. 35:18).

The Meaning of El Shaddai

One of the many epithets ascribed to God in the Old Testament is *El Shaddai* (אֱלֹהֵי שָׁדַי). It appears several times in the Pentateuch, Job and the Psalms, and is usually translated either God Almighty or God the Provider, and sometimes God of the Mountain. It is frequently used in the context of a blessing or of divine providence. There are several theories as to its etymology and meaning, but no one is really sure. Some translators take the easy way out and render it simply as God.

One theory is that it is rooted in the Hebrew *shadad* (שָׁדַד), to destroy or pillage, but to describe God as God the Destroyer when you are talking about blessings does not seem consistent. It might seem reasonable in the context of his omnipotence, but even then only if it refers to the destruction of enemies. Another theory is that it derives from the Accadian *shadai*, mountain, thus the translation God of the Mountain. This is reasonable when we consider that most ancient religions associated their gods with mountaintops, and God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. The most widely accepted theory is that it derives from the Hebrew *shad* (שָׁד), breast. The female breast is one of the most ancient symbols of the provision of nourishment and sustenance of life. This would certainly justify the translation God the Provider. Another justification for that translation is that in Hebrew, prefixing a word with the letter *shin* (שׁ, sh-) means “then.” The word *dai* (דַּי) means enough, so *shaddai* could mean literally “then enough,” implying sufficiency.

The fact remains, however, that we just do not know. It clearly means God, the context indicates his power and providence, and that in its own right should be sufficient.

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The Epistle is Online

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Richard R. Losch+

Synagogues in Biblical Times

A problem that we frequently run into in reading the Bible is associating ancient places or customs with those of modern times. For example, when we read about Jesus going into the synagogue, we picture a synagogue much as we know it today, particularly in America. Most modern American synagogues are not all that different from American churches. They are both houses of worship, usually with a congregation led by a trained, ordained and salaried leader such as a priest, minister or rabbi. Larger ones may have a staff of leaders. The main building consists of a room with pews or seats, with an area in the front from which the worship is conducted. There is often an annex or separate building used for social events. This is a standard arrangement with which any Christian or Jew would be familiar today. If a 1st century Christian or Jew were to walk intone of our modern houses of worship, he would probably realize what it is, but his familiarity with it would stop there.

The synagogue was an innovation from the 6th century BC, when the Judahites were in exile in Babylon.¹ Before that, all Jewish worship took place in the Temple, in local shrines, and in the home. The Babylonians forbade the worship of God, but they were strong supporters of education. The exiles established schools with the blessing of the Babylonians, but while they did serve an educational function, they also offered an opportunity to worship and teach the faith secretly. The “school” was called a *beit k'nesset* (בֵּית כְּנֶסֶת), house of assembly. The word synagogue comes from the Greek *sunagogē* (συναγωγή), meaning a gathering together.² After their return to Judah and the reformation of their faith, the Jews maintained these “schools,” although thereafter the religious teaching and worship were practiced openly. The Yiddish word for synagogue

¹ The exiles are frequently called Jews, but technically that term should not apply to them until after they returned to Judah and their religion was restructured and reformed by the priest/scribe Ezra.

² The word congregation derives from the Latin *congregatio*, which also means a gathering together as a unified group.

is *shul* (שול), school, reflecting the origins of the institution.

The primary structure of synagogue worship was prayer, the singing of psalms, the reading of scripture, and a communal discussion of the interpretation of the scripture reading. Only men participated in the actual worship. In many synagogues women could be present, but they usually sat together apart from the men, often screened off from them, and they remained silent. There was no rabbi or clergyman of any kind, although in the larger urban synagogues there might be recognized teachers (not ordained clergy) to whom they could turn for guidance. These were not paid clergymen, however, but were simply honored members of the congregation. Because of the respect for them they might be addressed as *Rabbi*, which means “My Teacher.” A man from the congregation would be handed a scroll of Scripture. He would read a passage from it and then comment on it, after which there would be a discussion of its meaning among all the men present (Lk. 4:14ff). The reason that traditional Judaism requires ten men (a *minyan*) to be present in order to have a service is to ensure that there will be enough to have a productive discussion of the Scripture.¹ The general operations of the synagogue were overseen by what the Bible calls the “Ruler of the Synagogue” (Mark 5:35). This was a layman from the congregation who was elected as a rough equivalent to the “president” of the congregation. He had no religious or teaching function. He arranged both the religious and the civil activities of the congregation, and supervised the use, care and maintenance of the properties.

Synagogues in the early Roman period were physically different from modern ones. The main assembly hall was similar to a Roman basilica, being a plain, rectangular room, in which were two rows of columns running lengthwise, dividing the room into three sections. These columns supported a clerestory ceiling whose windows provided most of the light during daytime. There were tiered benches along the walls, so the congregation faced the center, each side facing the other. The columns

¹ This was, of course, the origin of the sermon in modern worship.

often blocked the view of the participants, indicating that there was more interest in what was being said than in who was saying it. They were designed not only for worship, but also as discussion areas for community assemblies, focusing more on hearing than on seeing what was going on. The synagogue was the heart of the Jewish community, serving as the town hall, the courthouse, the school, the community social center, and even as a guesthouse for important out-of-town visitors. It was as much a political as a religious place. There were synagogues dedicated to solely religious functions, but they were quite rare. Most were what scholars call “public” synagogues. An example was the synagogue in Nazareth in which Jesus was raised (Luke 4:16-30. Mark 6:1-6). There were also “association” or “private” synagogues. These were owned by the groups that established them, and were not open to public functions. An example is the Synagogue of the Freedmen in Acts 6:9.

In all the incidents in the gospels when Jesus visited a synagogue, it would have been a public one, which was by far the most common type. If we understand this and the functions of public synagogues, it is easier to understand the kinds of discussions and disputes that are recounted in the four gospels. In Acts and the epistles, there are several references to Jesus' followers being “cast out of the synagogues.” This was no light matter, and was far more serious than a simple “shut up and get out” ousting. To be cast out of the synagogue meant to be permanently expelled from it and from all its activities. This made one effectively a social outcast in the communality, and was like being “shunned” in the Amish sect. A rough equivalent would be medieval excommunication, when an excommunicant would be shunned and treated as if he were dead. Being cast out of the synagogue was a very serious punishment.

When we consider the important role played by the synagogue in every village, town and city in Judea and Galilee, we can more appreciate the Gospel accounts of Jesus' interaction with the synagogues and their leaders.

The Galilean Diet in Jesus' Time

As we study the life of Jesus and his retinue, especially during his three years of public ministry, we rarely stop to think of what their day-to-day routine activities were like. As well as observing spectacular miracles, hearing profound teachings, and having conflicts with the Jewish leaders, they also had to take care of the normal necessities of life. These included such mundane matters as traveling, making camp, digging latrines, finding water, and preparing and eating meals. There is no evidence that their diet was any different from that of any other lower- or middle-class Galilean of the time, but it was different in many ways from what we normally eat today.

Judea was a Jewish state in which there also resided many Gentiles, most of whom were Romans, slaves, and other Middle Easterners such as merchants. In Galilee, on the other hand, while it was the remnant of the ancient northern Kingdom of Israel, the Jewish portion of the population was much smaller. There was a very large part of Galilee that was populated by Samaritans, Romans, and pagans who were descendants of the people the Assyrians had moved in centuries earlier to repopulate after they had exiled the Israelites. Most of the Jews were concentrated in a few regions around the Sea of Galilee, but it was more difficult for them to observe the Jewish dietary laws, although the faithful still made the effort to do so. For example, pork was a favorite meat of the Gentiles there, so herds of pigs were common (Matt. 8:28ff). Jews strove to have as little contact with Gentiles as possible, but this was much harder to do in Galilee than it was in mostly Jewish Judea.

Except for the rich, the Galilean diet consisted mainly of vegetables, although fish was an important part of it for those close to the Sea of Galilee. Dried and salted fish were available elsewhere, but were expensive. While sheep-herding was an important industry, its primary end product was not meat, but wool, the main fiber for clothing. Goats were herded mainly for their milk (for cheese and yogurt), although for those who could afford it, the meat was also popular. Beef and cow's milk

were very uncommon, since cattle do not thrive in that climate or terrain. Again, roasted meats were a luxury for the rich. When the poor had meat, which was rarely, it was usually the cheapest parts prepared as stews or soups. Grain was a staple for Galileans. The main grain was barley, although wheat, which was somewhat more expensive, was also common. These were eaten primarily as bread or other baked goods. Grain porridges were common in many parts of the world, including Rome, but they were not popular in the Middle East. Vegetables such as onions, garlic, cucumbers, lentils, chickpeas and olives were also an important part of their diet. Grapes, figs, pomegranates, dates and nuts were common in the area, and were eaten regularly. Cheese and yogurt (both from goat's milk) were expensive, but not prohibitively, and were an occasional source of protein, generally only at festive occasions because of their cost. Milk was used for these and in cooking, but was rarely drunk as a beverage except by small children and the very elderly. If a healthy adult drank milk he would have been scorned as a weakling. Eggs were also popular, depending on their availability. Butter was almost never eaten in the warmer regions, including in Rome. It was used as a medicinal salve, but not as food. This is understandable, because it does not keep well in that climate.¹ The main source of dietary and cooking fat in southern Europe and the Middle East was olive oil, although the Gentiles also used animal fats, especially lard from hogs. In all, the Galilean diet would have been simple, plain and mainly plant-based, with some fish and dairy products added as occasional sources of protein. Wine was the common beverage of choice, although it was usually diluted, sometimes generously. Ancient wines were stronger than modern ones, and it was considered vulgar to drink it straight. Wine was relatively expensive, however, so the poor

¹ The Indians rendered butter into ghee, which keeps much better. This process was either unknown or ignored in the west. Butter was popular in the northern Germanic regions of Gaul, where it keeps well in that cooler climate. The Romans scoffingly called the Germans "butter-eaters."

often drank beer instead. The beers of those days were very potent, so one had to be careful not to drink too much.¹

The diet of Judea would not have differed greatly from that of Galilee. The Hellenized Jews (those who were influenced by Greek culture) tended more toward a Roman diet, although it was strongly influenced by how assiduously they observed the Jewish dietary laws. The Romans ate considerably more meat than the average Jew. Even the poor Romans frequently had meat, although the poorest cuts. It was usually served in stews or soups, even though the main ingredients of these would have been grains and vegetables. However, ancient cookbooks show that many foods that the Romans considered delicacies would often turn the stomach of any modern American even to think about.² They would have horrified any Jew who observed the Mosaic dietary laws.

In summary, as they travelled through Galilee and Judea, what Jesus and his disciples ate would generally have been simple fare: breads, pottages of vegetables, and occasionally some broiled fish when it was available. They would have had fruit, which often would be eaten as a snack between meals as well. They would have drunk diluted wine and sometimes a little beer. On special occasions, such as the observance of Passover, they might have a bit of roasted lamb, but because of the expense of it this would not be common fare. The only times they would have eaten sumptuously would have been when they were guests at the homes of the rich, such as the meals at Lazarus' house or with the tax-collector Zacchaeus. Even there, however, they would have been very careful about observing the dietary laws.

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¹ Ancient beers were similar in strength to the strongest modern ales (like Guinness Stout). Distilled beverages were unknown in those days. When the Bible refers to "strong drink" it means beer, not distilled drinks, which were a discovered by medieval alchemists.

² For example, there was *garum*, a sauce made from the fermented entrails of fish. It was a standard condiment on every respectable Roman table.

Fruit in the Bible

Although fruit was a major element of the Middle Eastern diet in biblical times, it also played an important symbolic role. In the Old Testament there are six fruits that are mentioned dozens of times, in many different contexts. They are the grape ('*enav*, עֵנָב) and grapevine (*gephen*, גֵּפֶן), the fig (*te'edah*, תְּאֵנָה), the olive (*zayit*, זַיִת), the pomegranate (*rimmon*, רִמּוֹן), the date (*tamar*, תְּמָר), and the apple (*tappuach*, תַּפּוּחַ).

Several people and places were named for fruit, including Tamar (Gen. 38:6), Rimmon (2 Sam. 4:2) and Tappuach (Josh. 12:17). Pomegranates, a symbol of plenty, were used as decorations on Aaron's priestly vestment (Ex. 28:33f) and in King Solomon's Temple (1 Kg. 6:29). Fruits were also frequently mentioned in the Law, such as the law forbidding Nazirites from eating or drinking any grape products (Num. 6:3). The olive is mentioned in the law that forbids beating the olive tree more than once, so that what remains may be gleaned by the poor (Deut. 24:20). Fruits are also used as similes, such as, "Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel." (Hos. 9:10); "The scent of your breath [is] like apples" (Song 7:8b). Fruit is also used as a symbol both of blessings, such as, "[Israel shall be a land] of vines, figs and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey" (Deut. 8:8); and of curses, such as "Your olives shall drop off [the tree]" (Deut. 28:40). We also frequently find fruits used metaphorically in proverbs, as, "He who tends to a fig tree will enjoy its fruit" (Prov. 27:18) and "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18:2). Finally, we find fruits as signs of plenty and prosperity, as when Moses' spies reported that the Land of Canaan was rich with grapes, pomegranates and figs (Num. 13:23).

Even today, ancient fruits tell us much. A priceless find in any archaeological dig is the remains of fruit, because by radio-carbon dating researchers can date a layer accurately.

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(Thanks to David Moster, Biblical Archaeological Review, 4/23/2023)

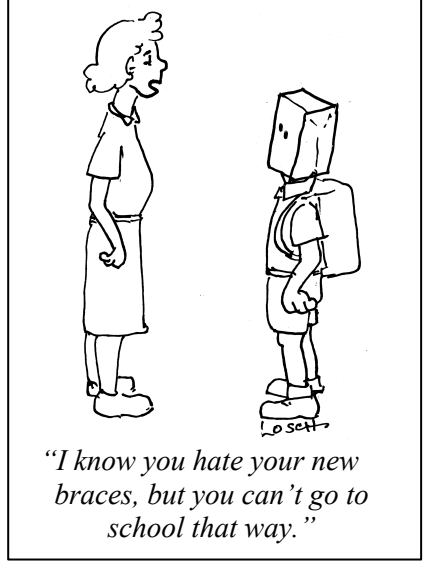
A Touch of Trivia

The mascot for the McDonald's fast-food chain in Japan is Donald McDonald, not Ronald. There is no sound in Japanese that is equivalent to the sound of R in English, so it is difficult for the Japanese to pronounce Ronald. He is also Donald in China for the same reason. Chinese children, being taught to respect adults, are never allowed to call them by their given names. They call him *Màidāngláo Shūshu*, Uncle McDonald.

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