12th June 2020

Dear Stationers

With less than a month to go to the election of a new Master, I am on the home straight of my time and, as I prepare to shuffle off my perch and into the limbo land of being a Past Master, I am starting to look back at what we have, or have not, achieved this year.

At my installation last July, I said we must do more to improve our diversity and, through our charity, support those who are underprivileged in our community.

In one of my recent letters, I suggested that the Dominic Cummings interlude might have given our Government a welcome distraction from the, then stubbornly bad, news on the continuing rise in the spread of Covid-19. Now with an apparent slowdown in the number of new cases, the daily news, whilst important, has made for less compelling viewing. Whilst “no news is good news”, no news is not good to maintain the nation on high alert. Sadly, this past week, the tragic death of a black American in Minnesota and the subsequent international reaction has re-energised the lively public discourse, which had been an altogether positive aspect of the CoVid pestilence.

The powerful international reaction to the death of George Floyd has highlighted the huge inequalities still holding back many in that particular demographic. The conflation of institutional racism, the continuing lack of economic opportunity and the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on this community together indicate that positive action for change may have an impact this time.

Livery Companies are not generally perceived as being engines of social change through the promotion of diversity. The Livery Movement is well aware of this and I have attached to this email a copy of the October 2019 report, Communicating about the Livery, which identified the challenges most Livery companies face in the public perception of them being inward looking, secretive and self-serving.
I am sure that this does not apply to the Stationers’ Company. We are open, relevant and engage with our industries. As an organisation, charity is at the core of our purpose. As Stationers, our bursary scheme has started to attract students from less privileged backgrounds who, with our financial support, have been able to pursue a postgraduate qualification to give them an opportunity to get a job in one of our industries. When they successfully complete their courses, these young people become Freemen of the Company and anyone who has attended these ceremonies knows that the event is characterised by a very different mix of guests from what we usually have in the Hall. This is progress; but where in our membership are the young, often, ethnically diverse, entrepreneurs who are leading the UK’s charge in the creative industries?

Content creation and communications are some of the most diverse sectors in the UK and global economies. A demographic profile of our industries’ ethnicity, gender and age would not correlate with our membership. Of course, there is a lag; but we are simply not doing enough. We must do more. We need to embrace this diversity to remain relevant and purposeful. We need to kick start this process and this will not happen so long as we rely on personal introductions and ‘member get member’.

I have looked at my own business and our diversity record. Euromonitor does well on age, gender and ethnic diversity as you would expect in a global business with 1,600 employees in 15 offices. However, in our main hubs of London and Chicago, I find a different story, where there is a significant under-representation of Afro/Caribbean or Afro/American people. We are, belatedly, addressing this through positive action and targeted recruitment and skills training.

There has been a thread in my recent letters of references to the saints. From Saint Alexander, the patron saint of charcoal burners, to Saint Benedict, whose style of management is still relevant today, and the unexpected coincidence of a Search Press imprint having published the Book of Saints. This has resonated with a number of you and I am grateful for the supportive and positive feedback, which has included a virtual bottle of one of my favourite liqueurs, Benedictine, from Liveryman Clive Rodgers. There is a rich and dangerous line of enquiry to be pursued in investigating the alcoholic products of religious orders. In my review of menus in the Company archive, I noted that we used to serve a liqueur after dinner, as well as the cognac and demi-sec champagnes. I look forward to reviving that custom.

This week I wish to introduce you to Saint Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 to 1109, or, as I now know him, the Patron Saint of Data Publishers.

I only became aware of Anselm last summer when, in the course of a foraging run to Italy to pick up some essential supplies, we stopped for a rather good lunch in an unprepossessing little trattoria. If you are ever in Aosta, I recommend Antica Osteria da Nando where the food, whilst determinedly Italian, is also typical of the locality. By way of evidence I offer you this image of the salad of bitter leaves, mountain ham and cheese with a buttermilk dressing.
As we were taking our post-prandial grappe and caffe, I noticed this plaque on the building opposite.

Despite the relaxing effects of the lunch, the word ‘ontology’ caught my attention. Now, as all good data publishers know, an ontology is a description of classes and relationships in datasets. Ontologies are a way of structuring and linking data and metadata in a holistic way. They are a particular feature in creating and interrogating hierarchies within massive
datasets, especially those generated by machine-learning and the increasing use of artificial intelligence.

One of our party, the well-read and educated Julian, a friend of my son Edward, asked what on earth I was talking about. He proceeded to explain that Saint Anselm in his *Proslogium* created the concept of an ontological argument as a philosophical justification for the existence of God.

*Even a* fool, when he hears of ... a being than which nothing greater can be conceived ... understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding ... And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater ... Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.

To grossly simplify a very complex piece of philosophical reasoning: God exists because it is a contradiction to argue that there can be a greater being than God.

As you might imagine the discussion, interesting as it was, failed to reach any conclusion other than that God works in mysterious ways.

As always stay safe and behave yourselves,

Until next week

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*Trevor Fenwick, Master*