

What's the buzz? Trees, bees and religiosities



Highland Views
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Guest columnist

On a warm spring afternoon, following a day of light snow, I stood silent in the sun. Hearing a distinct hum nearby, I looked toward the spreading Japanese maple and noticed movement. Walking slowly under the branches I looked up to see scores of bees grazing on hundreds of blossoms. Pleased to see many honeybees, I also spotted smaller bees, and maybe wasps, in the same rhythm of movement, slowly circling the branches. It wasn't the sight of the insects that drew me so much as the sound. The hum, the buzz — the harmony?

I had just watched a remarkable video of Italy's Mount Etna blowing smoke rings. Yes, smoke rings. Mesmerizing images made me wonder if it was real or fake (these are the times we live in). Nature never ceases to create endlessly wondrous artwork, amazing us while simply doing what is natural. Ancient creation stories are passed down through the centuries, but as I see it, none comes close to the continual creation all around us, and in us, every moment of every day. The

buzz is constant, if we hear it, see it, feel it.

In youthful evangelical days, we were both humored and horrified by "Jesus Christ Superstar" (we preferred the more relatable, less heretical, though clownish, Jesus of "Godspell"). In one scene in "Superstar," the apostles sing at the Last Supper after imbibing the wine: "What's the buzz,? tell me what's a-happening." Getting a "buzz" from "holy wine" may sound blasphemous to some, but the drama emphasized the humanity of the setting. As a Passover meal, the Last Supper wasn't a quick sip-and-bite ritual but a meal shared among friends. Perhaps it's unfortunate that nibbling a dry cracker and a quick shot of grape juice replaced the humming hive of a humble meal. The original buzz is transformed into a theological play; a celebration of life and living, the gifts of the earth, a common story, all become a somber sacrament for insiders.

These reflections directed me to the concept of religiosity: "strong religious feeling or belief." What does it mean to have a "strong" belief? Confident and firm in your views? So convinced your opinions are right and your views are righteous that you won't really listen to anyone else's perspectives? It's all just buzzing. Was any religious teacher of the past calling followers to religiosity, instructing their student-disciples

to have "strong" faith, and if so, faith in what or whom? Faith as "strong" as a mustard seed? Faith to believe they could be healed? Faith "strong" enough to keep them out of eternal punishment? Or, was the point not about strength, power, authority, but about gentleness, compassion, a sense of justice and inclusion — a faith strong enough to love?

Is each bee a model of strength? Certainly on one, very small level, every buzzer shows fortitude. Instinctually, a bee seeks nectar while pollinating, which helps keep a larger interdependent ecosystem in balance. I would say the sweetness comes long before the honeycomb. The bee has no "strong feeling or belief," yet carries with it an innate "mission" to serve the hive, to benefit the sticky web of the whole environment. Can faith do that? Does it? Maybe, if the religiosity of unnatural religion is dropped from the wings with a sense of something greater — a Greater Buzz — that may be calling us to help our world flower and flourish.

I read of a soccer team in Turkey that kept playing even when the other team walked off the field. Knowing that many in the crowd had traveled hundreds of miles, they chose to play one squad against the other as an exhibition. Teams and fans came to the stadium expecting one thing — two

strong teams facing off — and another thing happened, the unexpected gift, not of competition but of comradeship — true sportsmanship. Something similar occurs in nature, when we are doing something else, or searching for something else, and what we find is not what we expected, a different game, a serious game of lessons to learn.

I've had many experiences when walking or hiking — looking down, I miss something interesting above; looking up, I literally "overlook" something at my feet. I either stumble over a root or rock, or tumble into a branch or brook. The trick is to balance the movement, stay awake and aware to what is all around. This seems the wisest path forward for anyone who wishes to practice a relevant religious faith, or a full-sense and sensible trail of freethought.

What's buzzing nearby? Are those birds in the trees, or bees, or a breeze? What is Life teaching? Are we in class? Are we paying attention? Where is the sweetness to savor?

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