



Stewardship

I remember many years ago being very impressed with essayists such as Hilaire Belloc and E. V. Lucas. I am just as impressed today! It is nearly fifty years ago that I first encountered the writing of these worthies in a volume entitled *Essays by Modern Masters*. Imagine my pleasure when a second volume appeared called *More Essays by Modern Masters*. Many of the essayists of the first half of this century were good friends and colleagues. G. K. Chesterton, no mean writer himself, did the illustrations for Belloc's satirical novels. I recall reading once that Lucas was not renowned as a great writer but had "clarity, charm, and good taste."

Editors, particularly editors who insist on and persist in writing editorials, are perhaps frustrated essayists. In any event, I will claim that as my reason. So this month's essay (sorry, editorial!) is on stewardship. Stewardship is described in my Webster's dictionary as "the individual's responsibility to manage his or her life with regard to the rights of others." Not to be "preachy," but that is a great message for us all as we live our lives. From the narrow viewpoint of the journal and the discipline it represents, it is an excellent message about our own stewardship of our discipline of optical science and engineering. The word stewardship has some special meaning to those of us involved in organized religion. I know that the announcement of our annual stewardship campaign at my church always at least awakens the conscience of us all and may even strike some fear into the hearts of wayward members. Since I am writing this on Easter Sunday (after church, I assure you), I may be excused for sermonizing.

How can we be stewardly about optical science and engineering? In a variety of ways: by creating new knowledge; by sharing with our community the results of that creative process and by communicating and expounding on the existing body of knowledge; and by applying that knowledge, and the technology it spawns, to help solve today's problems and create new devices and systems to serve the peoples of the world. Your journal *Optical Engineering* plays a role in that stewardship, at least as a forum for the sharing of knowledge. Your editor is the steward of the journal.

So my message is simply stated as "go and be stewardly." Unfortunately, stewardly has some shades of meaning as revealed by consulting my thesaurus, which had the following entry:

Stewardly, adj. Syn. Sparing, canny, chary, economical, frugal, provident, saving, Scotch, thrifty, unwasteful.

Is being "frugal" a positive attribute or a vice? Is the synonym Scotch a racial slur or a positive racial attribute? [I have always thought that scotch should be reserved for the drink that the Scottish (or the Scots) invented.]

Many cultures have proverbs related to the topic. First, two related English proverbs:

"Frugality is an income."
"Sparing is a rich purse."

And one from the Philippines:

"Even if you are wealthy it still pays to be thrifty."

A Danish proverb takes a different point of view:

"Always to be sparing is always to be in want."

Here endeth my editorial (essay, sermon). Go and be stewards of optical science and engineering.

Epilogue

From Webster's dictionary:

Essay—an analytic or interpretative literary composition usually dealing with its subject from a limited or personal point of view.

Editor's Anecdote

In keeping with the theme of the preceding essay, I share with you a recent letter from one of our colleagues.

Dear Professor Thompson,

Following publication in *Optical Engineering* I received a letter regarding my recent research which suggested that I consider application of the work in a different domain. The technique, as published, could not be applied directly, but the suggestion prompted a fresh look at the approach and provided a “cognitive jump” which has led to a new—albeit straightforward—development of _____ which is providing better results than I could have wished for. Without publication in *Optical Engineering*, I would never have been subjected to this critical stimulus and I would not be embarking on what I anticipate will be a very fruitful research avenue.

I wish to record my thanks to you and the SPIE for your part in this.

Yours sincerely,

Brian J. Thompson
Editor