



# WABASH CENTER

For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



## **Dare to Be an Amateur at Something**

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My editor is one of my most ardent supporters and a beloved friend. We are working, together, on my next book. He has not, in many months, received any pages from me. At a recent gathering, he asked me if I had been writing.

My editor's question was not intended as chastisement nor judgement. His tone of voice was casual, even pleasant. Immediately upon hearing his question, I felt a pang of shame or guilt or embarrassment—one of those kinds of stomach feelings that confirms that you are doing something irresponsible or questionable or inappropriate. Thankfully, my stomach relaxed as quickly as it had tightened. I told him I had not been writing. My editor waited for the explanation or the details. I told him that in the last few months, the time I had previously devoted to writing is now being used for coloring. I expected him to be surprised, but instead he was quizzical.

He asked me what I liked about coloring. I really didn't have an answer—I had not reflected on "why" I liked it. Again, my stomach flinched as if I was childish/shy—pointlessly confessional. I realized that while I am greatly enjoying my new-found hobby, I question my time being spent in this way—especially if it means that I am not writing. Then he said (knowing me and my ways)—it's probably meditative. I accepted his speculation, then I told him I wanted him to look through my coloring books, select the best pieces. I wanted to display my best pieces in my house. He agreed.

Coloring has become my new jam! But I am cautious, hesitant...

The impulse to color was strong during the quarantine, but I resisted it. At that time, the activity seemed frivolous and lacking in enough “productive merit” to warrant pursuit. Then in January of this year, a roundtable participant gifted me with a coloring book and colored pencils. During that meeting I began to color. Since that meeting, coloring has become a major past-time. My hesitancy is that I still question my use of time for this enjoyable activity.

When I color, I lose myself. It is a way to relax, enjoy the moment. I focus without concern or worry. When I color there is no cynicism or irony. There is no pursuit. I am not prey. The worries, sorrows, and nameless fears dissipate. While I know these merits and I need these moments, I still question my time being used in this way.

In recent months, I have explored varieties of implements: pencils, pens, gels, glitters and markers. I now have opinions about fine lines, thick lines and double-sided utensils. Last week, while grocery shopping, I swung past the back-to-school display to see if there were any markers or colored pencils I was unacquainted with or any refills I might make use of. I made a purchase.

My fascination with this newfound hobby is multi-faceted. I am captured by learning to work with color (itself). I am intrigued by the many tints, tones, hues, and shades of any one color, while also being annoyed that for our limited eyesight there are only a few colors in our spectrum. Yes, white and black provide a bit more variability, but not much. I have a very wide lexicon for the color green. I am getting more acquainted with red.

I have learned that the more acquainted I am with a particular subject or object, the more detailed is my coloring of it. This is why I know green. I am a long-time gardener. I have deep knowledge of trees, flowers, vegetables, bees, birds, soils, rocks and weather. I noticed that when I color a forest scene or landscape a kind of intimate knowing comes into play. I have clarity for the colors I select and the mood I create. When realistic precision is not the aim, I enjoy coloring geometric shapes and patterns. In these pages there are no preconceived ideas of how things “should” look. The freedom of coloring without rules or prescriptions is refreshing.

So many of my administrative duties are managing, planning, supporting, and caring. We set goals, know our aims, and reflect upon our experiences. The hours I spend coloring are hours devoted to creating beauty without the incumbrance of metrics or the obligation of accomplishment. Surely, this is, indeed, time well spent?

Several years ago, I was a participant in a mid-career workshop which provided us the opportunity to develop an art or a craft. During conversation about which art or craft each participant might pursue the discussions grew tense. As colleagues considered their project options, they became stressed and felt pressed upon. There were tears. After too much discussion, consternation, and push-back, our wise leader said,

*“Everything you put your mind to does not have to be at the highest echelon. You can do something on an amateur level. You can engage in something for the simple pleasure of*

*enjoying it. You can learn something or relearn learn something without pressuring yourself to be the best at it. You can play at something without becoming an expert at it. Pick an artistic expression that will bring you joy.”*

This lesson stays with me. This is why I color.

I have not stopped writing. I have started coloring. Right now, expressing ideas in colors feels better than expressing myself in words. I suspect the words will soon return. I hope the colors never depart.

<https://wabash.center/2024/10/dare-to-be-an-amateur-at-something/>