



*Arthur O. Roberts*

My wife, Fern, and I live at Friendsview Retirement Community, Newberg, Oregon. I became a professor at George Fox College (now University) in 1953, following a decade of pastoral ministry. For many years Fern taught in the Portland public schools. Upon retirement in 1988 we moved to a home at the Oregon Coast, where this picture was taken. I served two terms as mayor of Yachats. We have three children, eight grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. We cherish family visits and correspondence, grateful for their love.

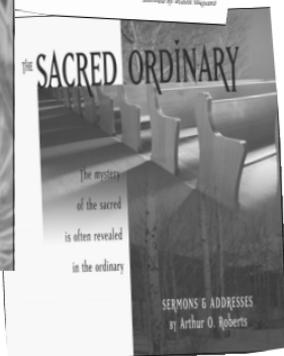
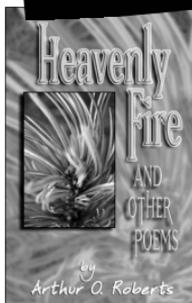
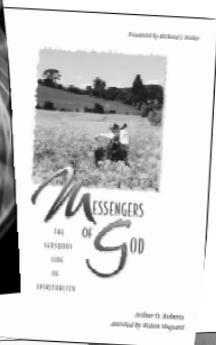
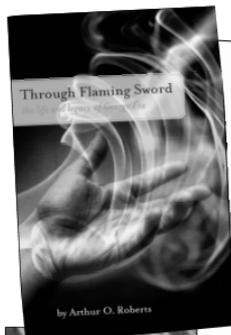
During retirement, both at the Oregon Coast and now, since 2003, in Newberg, I have continued writing books and journal articles.

Recently released books (through Barclay Press) include a new, 50th-anniversary edition of *Through Flaming Sword: The Life and Legacy of George Fox*;

a second edition of *Messengers of God: the Sensuous Side of Spirituality*; *The Sacred Ordinary*, a collection of sermons; and another book of poems, *Heavenly Fire*.

For a hobby, I work with wood—crafting clocks, walking sticks, talking sticks, and decorative plaques. Fern makes baby quilts that she donates to Providence Hospital birth center and to newborns elsewhere in the world through a Mennonite service agency. We cherish the spiritual nurture we find in our local church, North Valley Friends, as well the rich fellowship we enjoy with other residents at Friendsview.

As professor-at-large at George Fox University I lecture occasionally, mentor students now and then, but mostly enjoy retirement status, grateful for the continued Christian faithfulness of the school that we attended as students—and found each other—many years ago. (We have been married 66 years.) We enjoy concerts, ball games, and other university activities. We thank the Lord for having given us good bonus years!



*BIBLE READING: Romans 5:12-15*

This series ponders lessons from animal stories in the Bible. We start with a scary one—the snake. In Genesis (chapter 3), Satan, as a crafty serpent, beguiles Adam and Eve into questioning whether God really forbids what in Eden seems so “good for food and pleasing to the eye.” Theologians call this defiance of God “original sin,” or “the Fall.”

Behind prideful ego lurks Satan, the Deceiver, whether coiled in snakeskin or cloaked in culture. “Systemic evil” infects our common life—families, organizations, countries—leaving in history a legacy of chaos and suffering. Early in life we experience what Adam and Eve felt in shame before God: a jolt of divine electricity that says, “what you smugly thought was okay was really ugly, wasn’t it?”

Acknowledging such deception opens us to God’s saving grace. “As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive!” (1 Corinthians 15:22). We can, in George Fox’s words, be brought back to God’s garden “through the flaming sword.” Christ is victor over sin and death. His kingdom of truth and love will prevail. It is both here now and coming in power and glory.

Heed the voice of Christ: “I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you” (Luke 10:19). This commitment brings a joy nothing can destroy. Praise the Lord!

*SONG: In the Cross of Christ I Glory*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Reflect on those times you got conned into justifying behavior you knew later was sinful. Ask God to teach you how to listen more carefully to the voice of Christ.*

—Arthur O. Roberts

*BIBLE READING: Joel 2:2-3, 12-13*

Last year locusts hit Utah—"the worst ever"—destroying everything green in their path! Only the seagulls were happy. This scourge happens in cycles. I remember "Mormon crickets" (also called grasshoppers) in Idaho as a youth. The prophet Joel used a locust invasion to depict the "day of the Lord." The eighth plague against Pharaoh (Exodus 10), ironically, now threatened Israel! The biblical term "the day of the Lord" has this symbolic meaning: In the course of life individually and corporately some times are especially momentous. The Greek term *kairos* signifies divine visitation—a crucial testing time, when God says "listen up, find the right path!" Our current recession has been a wake-up call for Americans generally, and some more acutely. Whether we've been directly or indirectly afflicted, an important part of recovery from misfortune is penitence. With every trying circumstance, every reversal of fortune, every stroke of bad luck, every occasion of poor judgment by ourselves or by others; whether we have sinned knowingly, or are simply snared by the sins of others, we can hear, and should heed, the prophetic voice:

"Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing" (vv. 12-13 NRSV).

*SONG: Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Reflect upon crucial times in your life. How did God strengthen your faith? Is this an especially testing time for you now? If so, trusting in the steadfast love of the Lord, penitently—and faithfully—seek a right path through the troubling times.*

—Arthur O. Roberts

*BIBLE READING: Proverbs 6:6-9*

“Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!” (v. 6). Who are the lazybones this writer is yelling at? Lazy loafers lolling on a sofa sopping up cruddy TV shows? Maybe. Could it be you? Or me?

Reformers Luther and Calvin reinforced the creation mandate: work hard, spend wisely, save for the future—“the Protestant work ethic.” Puritans insisted on prudent living, eschewing “superfluities”—like ruffles and powdered wigs. Early Quakers practiced what Luther had preached: “vocation” isn’t just church leadership, but a calling to be “priest to others” through ordinary work. They got a bit carried away—assuming that exterior drabness (e.g., gray cloth) reinforced interior holiness—or that prose was more spiritual than poetry and music.

But at least they believed work focused on necessities (however defined) serves one’s neighbor better than one focused on extravagance. How an economy over-dependent upon “conspicuous waste” can recover stability is a challenge. We pray our leaders find solutions. One thing we can do: help younger folks consider jobs as “vocation,” a calling from God. Then they’ll find social and technological answers; they’ll find a golden mean between parsimoniousness and opulence. They’ll heed Paul’s admonition: “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth...but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Timothy 6:17).

*SONG: Work for the Night Is Coming*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Talk to God about your daily tasks, whether paid or volunteered, and ask how through them you can rightly serve your neighbor.*

—Arthur O. Roberts

*BIBLE READING: Amos 4:1-2*

Amos was a sheep and fig farmer in Israel. Like sheepherders in my childhood Idaho, he had a bias against cattle! In a tirade against Israel's smug sinfulness, he drew upon knowledge of cattle in the prime range land of Bashan. And now this rancher-prophet lashes out against the women of his time, who, he says, oppress the poor by their indulgent, egocentric life style.

Nobody likes to be called a "fat cow," so I expect Amos got attention! Sometimes the smog of smugness requires a strong blast of truth! It isn't polite to blast the fair sex this way! But, face it: beautiful females have lots of power, and sometimes they use it in sinful ways, more deviously, perhaps, than their blustering male companions, but just as devastating. Now, as an "equal opportunity" society, women must accept prophetic "bashing" against egocentric sinfulness. Otherwise they, like bullish mates, face divine judgment; or, in Amos' farmer lingo, they'll be led away with nose hooks! Ouch!

Amos preaches hard truth. Sin is sin, whether committed by stupid oafs or refined folks—male or female. Better to heed blunt truth than to be lulled into sin against God and neighbor by the ease we enjoy and the power we possess. Like Israel of old, we should heed Amos! I like cows, they seem so placid; and I relish yogurt and cheese. But, yes, contentment often masks hidden dangers like those pitfalls crusty old sheepherder Amos warns me about.

*SONG: Jesus Calls Us [O'er the Tumult]*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Make this prayer your own: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).*

—Arthur O. Roberts

*BIBLE READING: Revelation 19:11-16*

The horse was the battle vehicle in biblical times and most of the centuries following until replaced by motorized equipment such as the armored tank. The book of Job depicts the warhorse as a symbol of strength (39:19-25). As a farm boy I was impressed by the strength of our horses that moved the heavy derrick and did other hard jobs. But the psalmist knew that despite its strength, “A horse is a vain hope for deliverance” (33:17). Isaiah warned Israel against relying upon military strength instead of seeking help from the Lord (31:1)—a lesson nations need to heed.

Horses dramatize the end-times scenario in Revelation 6. The white horse symbolizes conquest, the red one war, the black one famine, the pale horse death—the all too familiar cycle of devastation caused by sin. But note the contrast in our Scripture text: here the conquering white horse is Jesus, the Word of God, whose strength embodies justice and truth. (Cowboy movies borrowed the image—at least the hero wears a white hat.) The heaven-blessed armies joyfully and triumphantly proclaim Jesus *King of kings and Lord of lords!*

In my youth I had a riding horse named “Eagle.” He wasn’t as sturdy as the draft horses that did the heavy work, but how he loved it when I got out the bridle and saddle. Together we rode across the desert, wind in our faces, our rhythmic motions praising the good earth and its Creator. I like this picture better than one about the horse as a war vehicle bringing conquest, war, famine, and death. I like seeing Jesus on a white horse leading us to the peaceable kingdom.

*SONG: All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Reflect upon the witness of the church universal, proclaiming the gospel by word and deed to “every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”*

—Arthur O. Roberts

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 21:1-11*

In Bible times the donkey served as a main form of transport like autos do now. The donkey symbolized servant-hood. A donkey transported Isaac to a sacrificial test that Abraham, fortunately for Isaac—and for us—passed. A donkey that carried the prophet Baalam had a better ear for God’s voice than did his bullheaded master (Numbers 22). Abigail rode a donkey sidesaddle down the aisle for her wedding to David. A donkey conveyed Mary to Bethlehem and watched baby Jesus in the next stall. Then he traipsed after faithful Joseph to tote mother and child to safety in Egypt. Some months later he carried his precious cargo back to Jerusalem—a five hundred mile round trip. I bet he was tired and glad to get home. (You can read my poem about him in *Look Closely at the Child*). A Samaritan’s donkey served as an ambulance to haul a mugged and beaten guy to the hospital. Another donkey carried Jesus on triumphal entry into Jerusalem, carefully not stepping on celebratory palm branches. This parade rejected a warhorse.

Surely here’s a lesson we Quakers should re-emphasize. A pickup hauling firewood for a needy neighbor is a better symbol of Christian servant-hood than an armored vehicle lugging grenades. As the writer of Hebrews states, we’re called to “follow peace with everyone and holiness” (12:1), a difficult assignment in a world primed for warhorses and glamorized (“fat cow”) sin! A Christian donkey ride may lead to suffering and death, as church history and contemporary persecutions remind us. But in Christ crucifixion is overcome by resurrection, in this life and in the next.

*SONG: Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone?*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Meditate about Jesus as both example and Lord. Pray for grace to be a faithful servant, and, if necessary, to suffer for what is right and true.*

—Arthur O. Roberts

*BIBLE READING: Romans 13:1-7; Acts 5:25-32, 40-41*

Folklore abounds in sea monster stories. Are they fact or fiction? Who knows? Let's just say the biblical "Leviathan" may have been a whale (Psalm 104:26), a sea crocodile—or a "Nessie." More importantly, what does the creature signify spiritually? A 17th century philosopher helps us. Thomas Hobbes, in a book *Leviathan*, applied the term to the state—an "artificial man" created to achieve the common good. The prophets warned against tyrannous nations. The conquering empire of their times, Babylon, epitomized evil. Isaiah forecasts Israel's deliverance when the Lord slays the "dragon in the sea" (27:1). Revelation depicts Babylon as a seductive woman. John forecasts the triumph of Christ's kingdom over it. Early Christians were slain by their Babylon—Rome.

We know from history how nations have slaughtered thousands of citizens, and neighbors, ostensibly for political good. Is the answer anarchy? No, our text tells us governance is God's gift, a way to love neighbor as oneself. Sin beguiles nations to spurn God's way. Babel's towers arise; they also fall. Our country is not immune. Sometimes, as the story of Jonah tells us, God uses a leviathan to correct disobedient believers, who prefer God's wrath rather than God's mercy upon people they don't like. Consider how secular nations leavened by biblical truth, have ended executions for heresy, reduced bigotry, and exposed religious fraud. Can't you just hear that whale praying: "Lord Creator, that man is not my dish; he sours all my food, and I'm too sick to swish or swim; I'm not much good at prophet-bearing. I'm just a fish!"

*SONG: God of Our Fathers*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray for those who govern—the president, the congress, state and local officials—that they will sustain our common life, and not weaken it.*

—Arthur O. Roberts

*BIBLE READING: 1 Kings 17:1-7*

“Power corrupts” is an insightful maxim. One of the reasons we pray for authorities is so they won’t get lured into sin and as a result endanger the common good. In ancient Israel God used the prophet Elijah to call king Ahab to account. Ahab didn’t take kindly to this rebuke. (“Speaking truth to power” often puts God’s messengers in jeopardy: dictators don’t like to be dictated to). To avoid losing his head, Elijah fled to a secret spot by a desert stream where God instructed a raven to bring him daily meals. My interest in ravens came when, as a youth, I discovered Poe’s alliterative, scary, but powerful poem, “The Raven.” Tribal myths demonized the raven, but the Bible depicts this smart bird as an exemplary servant creature. Noah used a raven to monitor conditions after the flood. In the Song of Solomon the gal gushes over her guy’s beautiful hair—“black as a raven.” Jesus used them as examples of trust: “Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable are you than birds!” (Luke 12:24).

When we lived at the coast we made friends with the raven’s cousins—the crows. Mornings Fern regularly put feed under a pine tree in our yard. If she was tardy in her task one would perch above the kitchen window, peer in and caw softly. Crows work together. They cawed softly so the bigger seagulls didn’t barge in and gobble up the grub. If a hawk invaded, however, the crows cawed a loud alarm and their friends swooped in from miles around to hassle the intruder out of town. A good example of cooperation.

*SONG: Trust and Obey*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Ask the Lord to know when to be discreet and when to be bold in proclaiming, and standing up for, gospel truth. Trust the Lord in hard times.*

—Arthur O. Roberts

*BIBLE READING: Isaiah 53:4-6*

When we go to county or state fairs we enjoy visiting the goat pens. They're sociable creatures. Unlike the nearby pigs, they relish our company. Goats put their front hooves on the fence to get their heads scratched. So how come the goat is singled out to designate a fall guy who gets blamed instead of actual culprits, or a poor sucker who gets stuck with the fine?

In modern times "scape-goating" came to mean vicious propaganda; for example, Hitler blaming Jews and the Klan blaming blacks for whatever seemed amiss in society. Paranoid folks often act this way, too. The term grew out of ritual practices of ancient Israel, but it conveyed a different message then. During the annual Day of Atonement ceremony a priest symbolically heaped the sins of the people upon a goat and it was driven away, to perish in the wilderness. It served ritually to cleanse the community of evil. Leviticus 16 describes the ceremony. That practice seems weird to us today! But the prophet Isaiah understood that old ritual and adapted the symbol to depict the redeeming grace of the Messiah.

Yes, Jesus was a scape-goat—jeered at, spit upon, beaten, and crucified by political and religious powers! Using this ancient ritual as a symbol Isaiah perceptively forecast Jesus' redemptive role: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray...and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (v. 6).

As an animal the goat is adept at survival techniques in difficult terrain, eats almost anything, and enjoys life, cheerfully ignorant of the ritual, or of the stereotypical abuse of its name. Can we, as disciples of Jesus Christ be as adept in hard circumstances, and as full of joy?

*SONG: What a Friend We Have in Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Rejoice in sins removed "as far as east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12).*

—Arthur O. Roberts

*BIBLE READING: Luke 18:18-26*

The camel, “ship of the desert,” is an ancient ATV, a vehicle able to transport people and goods across desert terrain. A Biblical romance sprang up when a pretty girl from Nahor, watering family camels, was asked by a weary traveler from Hebron, hundreds of miles away, for a drink from her water jar. She graciously complied, and watered his camels, too. Impressed by the gold bracelets and a nose ring (yes!) he gave her, Rebekah invited him to be guest at her family house. This traveler was a servant sent by widowed old Abraham to find a wife for son Isaac among home-country kinfolks. It’s an answer to prayer, both families agreed. So marriage was arranged, and the bride and groom came to love each other (Genesis 24). Watering holes can be romantic places, especially if God arranges them.

Camels also figured in the romance of Solomon and the queen of Sheba—a duller story (1 Kings 10). As a boy I associated camels with cigarettes. The pack picture looked exotic. I recall the ad: “I’d walk a mile for a camel.”

To heed the message in Jesus’ talk to the rich young ruler, forget theories about undersized gates. The hyperbole gives a powerful message: it’s as ridiculous to think wealth and status bring salvation as it is to think a camel can thread through a sewing needle. (As impossible as trying to remove a speck in another’s eye with a log jammed in your own!) Obvious absurdity scores a clean dunk shot: salvation can’t be earned. It can only be received as God’s gift. Let’s heed the message better than the young ruler did.

*SONG: Marvelous Grace*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Talk to God about how your possessions can demonstrate faithful stewardship and not become a barrier to your salvation.*

—Arthur O. Roberts

*BIBLE READING: 1 Corinthians 9:9-10;  
1 Timothy 5:17-18*

If the donkey was the auto in biblical times the ox was the tractor. For thousands of years these bovine draft animals have served humanity. Often oxen were yoked in pairs for the hard, plodding work of wresting sustenance from the earth for human masters. In ancient Israel this included “treading out the grain.” Owners were required to treat oxen fairly, allow them (un-muzzled) to eat their share of the corn they threshed by trampling or dragging stuff over it (Deuteronomy 25:4). The Mosaic law mandated Sabbath rest for these animals.

In our Scripture texts the apostle Paul likens Christian leaders—elders and ministers—to oxen, and urges churches to provide adequately for their sustenance. What a powerful illustration of the servant role Christ calls us to. The analogy to oxen highlights the arduous task of providing gospel nourishment for the spirit. How conscientious the church should be to sustain the material and spiritual needs of our servant leaders! “Dumb ox” is an unfortunate put down for all faithful, hard workers—tractor drivers or preachers. God’s work in the human community requires hard labor, to plow the soil for the Sower, to separate grain from chaff. In the Chinese calendar, the year of the ox portends steadfastness and a stubborn standing for truth. May this remind us to honor ministers of the gospel, remembering how our Lord hallowed the servant role by washing the disciples’ dirty feet.

*SONG: Work, for the Night Is Coming*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: “I saw the field white unto harvest and no one to gather it in,” lamented George Fox. How sad then! How sad now! Pray for the elders and ministers in your church for their difficult ministry in a culture of indifference.*

—Arthur O. Roberts

*BIBLE READING: Isaiah 40:30-31*

Whenever pride threatens to swamp good judgment, and we need to be humbled, watching an eagle soar will do the trick. What dexterity! How effortlessly it flies: a few strong wing flaps followed by long glides in beautiful arcs across the sky. Maybe the eagle's keen eyes spot an unwary rabbit nibbling grass. Then a swooping dive, a graceful touch-down, talons on the take, and dinner is served.

In a pointed rhetorical question, God asked Job, and us, "Does the eagle soar at your command?" (39:27). Many things in God's creation teach us to acknowledge our limitations; the eagle is one of them. What child has not envied birds their power to soar? Feeling physically awkward, in comparison to eagles or to gymnasts (or, for us old folks, frolicking school children) can either make us fret over our limitations or rejoice in the rhythmic agility of others. Watching an eagle soar helps us trust in God's strength (not our own) in time of trouble. In Revelation, the church, pictured as a woman, is given eagle wings to fly to the wilderness (12:14). The eagle is one of the four symbolic creatures in Revelation singing glory to God (chapter 4). The eagle symbolizes excellence—the good, the true, the beautiful. Beauty isn't just in the eye of the beholder. God's creation models beauty, from flower petals to soaring eagles to swirling galaxies. All good artistry and craft-work, whatever the medium, honors this reality. It's good to know that when we wait upon the Lord, whether young or old, even in trying circumstances, we can soar in our spirits.

*SONG: For the Beauty of the Earth*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Praise the Lord for the wonders of creation that keep you humble, for strength renewed, and for occasional flights of ecstasy. And ponder whether in heaven it might just be possible to soar like the eagle.*

—Arthur O. Roberts

*BIBLE READING: Revelation 5:1-5*

The lion is a symbol of power. Sometimes in the Bible this “king of the beasts” signifies evil. The wicked “hunt down the weak” like a lion lurking at the edge of town to “murder the innocent” (Psalm 10). Ezekiel lamented that Egypt’s Pharaoh was “like a lion among the nations” (32:2), and the prophet Zephaniah calls corrupt officials “roaring lions” (3:3). Proverb 28:15 lambasts a wicked ruler as “a roaring lion” terrorizing helpless people, a symbolic reversal from the first verse, which commends righteous people for being “bold as a lion.”

God demonstrated redemptive strength. He shut the mouths of the lions for Daniel. At the beginning of the church era God stood by the side of the apostle Paul, gave him strength to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles, and delivered him “from the lion’s mouth” (2 Timothy 4:17). When the sovereign Lord speaks, declares the prophet Amos, it’s like the roar of a lion—who will not fear? (3:8). Edward Hick’s famous and evocative painting, “The Peaceable Kingdom” (based upon Isaiah 11) pictures a young lion sitting placidly by a calf.

The lion is one of four symbolic creatures depicted in Revelation 4. Power, purged of evil, also sings “Holy, holy, holy to the Lord God Almighty,” joined by the ox, representing work; a human face, representing intelligence; and an eagle, representing aesthetic excellence. Messiah Jesus, “The Lion of the tribe of Judah,” gives meaning to existence—he “opens the scrolls.” In a striking metaphoric juxtaposition, the Lion is also the Lamb!

*SONG: All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray about those who influence your life, and for persons subject to your strength—physical, intellectual, or cultural. Pray for political, social, and religious leaders, that a vision of God’s kingdom might motivate them.*

—Arthur O. Roberts

*BIBLE READING: Revelation 5:6-10*

“The lion is also the lamb” we noted yesterday. Supreme strength through supreme sacrifice: such is the message of the cross. As our text reads, in the exultant throne song, the atoning death of Messiah Jesus “purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (v. 9).

In Israel’s history lambs were a favored animal sacrifice. A lamb took the place of son Isaac, in God’s test of Abraham’s faith. The practice of ritual human sacrifice in ancient civilizations in this episode was firmly rejected—and by implication more subtle modern cultural temptations to sacrifice children for personal or social gain. (Fern’s father, a WWI vet, once said to me, “If old men had to fight a war they would find another solution.”) The prophets offered a resounding “no” to the question: “shall I sacrifice the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” (Micah 6: 7).

God provides the sacrifice, Jesus; and the Lion-Lamb offers strength to live as people of one blood in human community. Jesus gathered little children into his loving arms in graphic testimony to this truth.

I recall from childhood a wall painting in our home of Jesus holding children in his arms; and in Sunday school we sang “Jesus loves the little children...red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in his sight...” It’s taken the human community a long time to acknowledge this. The dragon of evil is overcome, as the Scripture says: “By the blood of the Lamb and the word of their [our] testimony” (Revelation 12:11).

*SONG: There’s Power in the Blood*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Consider prayerfully your “word of testimony,” and how it might more fully lead others to find the redeeming power of Christ in their lives.*

—Arthur O. Roberts