

LYNITA'S PONDERINGS

CONNECTING THE DOTS

September 2024 marks the 200th anniversary of the invention of Braille. At that time, blind people were taught to read raised print letters but they had no means of writing and the books were bulky. A French army officer, Charles Barbier, had come up with a 12-dot system for blind people. But while this was a start, it was not practical. Louis Braille was the son of a harness maker who had been blinded at age three, when a sharp tool in his father's workshop, slipped from his hand and pierced his eye. By 1824, Louis, aged 15, had worked out that a system of 6 dots, arranged like the 6 on a dice, was more practical. Being a gifted organist, he also devised a system of Braille music notation. There was opposition in some quarters because it was believed that blind people should read ordinary print in raised form. But having been exposed to Braille, blind people continued to use it and it was eventually adopted as a system for reading and writing.

“He also invented a concept he called decapoint. Decapoint was a system of 100 dots on a 10 by 10 grid. You could write it right to left with a stylus, then flip the page over and read what you'd written, but Louis didn't stop there. He enlisted the help of a friend to design a machine called the raphigraphe, or needle writer. Blind people were able to write in print and verify what they'd written. This could also be used by sighted people to communicate with blind people in writing. decapoint was the first time that print letters were represented as dots on a page. A blind man had given the world the concept that would later be used in dot matrix printers, cameras, computer screens and other technology.” (I acknowledge Jonathan Mosen, a blind New Zealander, for this information)

Louis was reburied in the Pantheon in 1952, but his hands remain in Coupvray, France, the place of his birth. It was those hands that changed the world for millions of people. The original code and music notation have altered little. However, with the advance of technology, many electronic devices now enable blind people to connect them to computers or use them as a standalone device to read anything in braille. Each Braille dot represents a sign, depending on whether it is language, maths or music. But it is in their combination or connection, that they make the most sense; they represent words and sentences.

As followers of Christ, our message is also largely unaltered, despite scholarship which has clarified and enhanced the message. But the way in which we proclaim that message has changed. Those who wrote the Bible could never have imagined the power of social media, the possibility of worshipping remotely, to name a few examples.

As churches, we are like dots on a page. Each individual church is significant in its own right but they become significant in a different way, if we all connect with one another. I cannot imagine how different my life and the lives of millions of others, would have been had Louis Braille not had his accident. The same hand that lost control of the tool was used to invent and perfect his code and to make music on the organ.

I pray that in the coming connexional year, we will use our hands and our minds in a way that is life-giving and transforming. And I pray, that as a circuit, we will work together more closely and gain a greater appreciation of the importance of connecting the dots.

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