



## Compost, or Land-fill?

One of the chores I had growing up was taking the lawn clippings and other garden waste to the compost pile in the back yard. My mother was an avid gardener, and Dad and I were enlisted to help engage that passion. So composting was a regular part of our spring-through-fall yardwork. As I remember it, we had a double bin (much like the one to the right), and the raw materials (like those in the upper right) over the course of time would turn into rich organic good stuff that could be mulched into the soil, providing nutrients for the next season's flowers and

vegetables. Truth to tell, pushing the wheelbarrow to the compost pile was never one of my favorite chores. Not only was it hard work, but the compost pile (also containing kitchen scraps and other "interesting" things) didn't always smell very nice. It was clear, however, that the end product--the compost soil--was worth the work and the wait.

I've been musing on this for a while, after reading and talking about Wendell Berry's poem "A Purification" (a copy of which can be found [here](#)). In the poem, Berry speaks of a spring cleaning ritual in which things of the past are put into a trench and covered over -- new life potentiality. He doesn't specifically mention compost, nor does he really connect what he "buried" with anything useful in the future. But that is one of the beauties of poems . . . they take you someplace you might not expect.

I began to think of things from my past, both distant and recent, that I might want to discard or forget, and the two images of "compost" and "land-fill" came to mind. I think a lot of times, I treat things from my past as destined for the land-fill, a holding area for non-degradable things, toxic things, things I'm too lazy to deal with. Land fills are lined, and then covered over, and then often made artificially beautiful (with the exception of those wonderful black venting tubes). In short, things go to the land-fill wholesale, as garbage -- to be gotten out of sight, out of mind. Or, as the website "[HowStuffWorks](#)" puts it: *"You- have just finished your meal at a fast food restaurant and you throw your uneaten food, food wrappers, drink cup, utensils and napkins into the trash can. You don't think about that waste again. On trash pickup day in your neighborhood, you push your can out to the curb, and workers dump the contents into a big truck and haul it away. You don't have to think about that waste again, either."*

But I began to wonder whether I might re-imagine these past issues or events to be 'compostable' materials--that is we would have to think of them again. What from this or that event holds promise for the future, even if it seemed entirely negative at the time? And how, then, do I let the "clippings" go, trusting that eventually something new and different--and nutrient-rich--will arise? Am I willing to do the hard work, dealing with the less pleasant aspects of composting, in the hope that the "change will do me good", that God will do a new thing in, with and through me? I'm impatient, so it's hard for me to live through the process, but it may worth be the wait. Reflection, rumination, renewal, redemption.

Blessings,

Gary

PS I was reminded, too, in this regard of a favorite poem/letter by the famous Jesuit scientist and theologian, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: "[Above all, trust in the slow work of God](#)"