

## THE REPUTATION

By John H. Hall

The definition of a reputation is the beliefs and opinions that are generally held about someone.

Dr. Alfred Nobel was a 19th-century Swedish chemist. He made his fortune from 90 explosive and armament factories that made dynamite, which he invented; blasting gelatin and other explosives. He told Countess Bertha Kinsky that he hoped to invent a material so explosive that it would end war itself. The Countess worked for Dr. Noble as his secretary and house keeper. That employment lasted for less than two months. She received a telegram from Count Arthur Suttner asking her to marry him. The two knew each other, but his parents did not want them to marry. They met in Vienna and were secretly married. His parents eventually accepted the marriage.



Dr. Alfred Noble liked to experiment with Nitroglycerin. In September 1864, a cabin which he was using for the preparation of Nitroglycerin exploded, killing five people, including Nobel's younger brother Emil. His reputation was trashed in the French newspapers. Noble was living in Paris, France in 1891. He was accused of “high treason against France” for selling ballistite to Italy. Ballistite is a smokeless propellant developed and patented by Noble. When his brother, Ludvic died in Paris, two French newspapers mistakenly believed that Alfred Noble had died. One newspaper publish this epitaph: “The Merchant of Death is dead.” Another French newspaper wrote: “Dr. Alfred Noble, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever, died yesterday.”



Dr. Alfred Noble and his former secretary, Countess Bertha Kinsky Suttner remained close friends and corresponded with each other for decades until he died. Dr. Noble was horrified at how he would be remembered in history. In a bid to salvage his reputation, and one year before he died, he decided to donate 94% of his fortune to create a fund. This foundation would use the interest and income from more than \$250 million dollars in investments, once a year, in prizes for intellectual achievement in economics, chemistry, physics, literature, peace, physiology or medicine.

Bob Dylan's real name is Robert Allen Zimmerman. Raised in the Jewish religion, in the late 1970s, he became a born-again Christian and he released a series of albums of contemporary gospel music before returning to his more familiar rock-based idiom in the early 1980s. He's been quoted in Supreme Court decisions, and St. John Paul II once built an entire homily on Dylan's classic song “Blowing in the Wind.” These are Dylan's lyrics to that song: “How many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man? How many seas must a white dove sail before she sleeps in the sand? Yes, and how many times must a cannonball fly before they are forever banned? The answer is blowing in the

wind. Yes, and how many years must a mountain exist before it is washed to the sea? And how many years can some people exist before they are alloy? to be free? Yes, and how many times can a man turn his head and pretend that he just doesn't see?..."

"The answer my friend is blowing in the wind. The answer is blowing in the wind. Yes, and how many times must a man look up before he can see the sky? And how many ears must one man have before he can hear people cry? Yes, and how many deaths will it take 'til he knows that too many people have died? The answer my friend is blowing in the wind. The answer is blowing in the wind."

Bob Dylan was 21 when he wrote "Blowing in the Wind." He was my age, 75, when he



received the Noble Prize for literature. The one book he co-authored with Andy Gill was about the making of a record album called "A Simple Twist of Fate: Bob Dylan and the Making of Blood on the Tracks." The Noble Foundation committee decided that song lyrics are poetry and can be classified as literature. I like the honesty in comments made by Bob Dylan. He said: "Not once have I had the time to ask myself, 'Are my songs literature?' If someone had ever told me that I had the slightest chance of winning the Noble Prize, I would have had to think that I'd have about the same odds as standing on the moon." The Noble committee stated that Bob Dylan was honored "For having created new poetic expression within the great American song tradition."

The committee later said that Dylan was being arrogant in delaying the acceptance of the prize money of \$923,000.

Bob Dylan said this about song writing: "You want to say something about strange things that happened to you, strange things that you have seen." Most of the stories that I write contain those "two elements. When the song "Blowing in the Wind" was released in July 1962, I was 17 years old and in Army basic training. My only claim to any kind of fame, at that time, was being an expert marksman firing the M-1 rifle. Bob Dylan is being compared to William Shakespeare. Bob Dylan and I share one thing in common, we are both story tellers. In my case, all of my stories are non-fiction. They are based on things, strange or not, that I have experienced or observed. Recently, Bob Dylan sold the rights to his 600 songs for about \$400 million dollars.

In 1979, the Noble Foundation committee gave Mother Theresa the Noble Peace Prize. She refused to go to the award dinner and stated that the money could be better used elsewhere. The \$7,000 that the award dinner cost was donated to a charity in her name and the dinner was canceled. She also requested that the \$1,092,000 Noble Peace Prize money be used to help the poor in India. Dr. Alfred Noble apparently believed that by creating a foundation, and awarding six prizes a year, to people who made a significant contribution to mankind, that his reputation as "The Merchant of Death," would be forgotten. In many respects, he accomplished that goal. I found no record that he sought forgiveness and redemption from the victims of his explosives. Sadly, he became an

atheist and he rejected Jesus Christ, the only person that could grant him eternal forgiveness.

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