DreamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul

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Editorial: Let Me Rephrase That. . . .

Like many amateur writers, I dislike revising my work. I prefer the first crush of the creative process, the sweaty passion and falling-in-love thrill of getting the words down.

By contrast, the work it takes to rethink ideas and to rewrite paragraphs feels cloddish and dreary. It's not unlike the way in which newly married folks must face the fact that toilets break and schedules conflict and people argue, and that the work of taking care of these must—at least at times—replace going out for dinner and holding hands.

In many ways, "revision" is what this issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* calls us to: the willingness to literally re-view what we thought we knew about our faith.

But mature writing—much like marriage, and much like faith—means committing to the messy margins of revision, change, and hard work. If I refuse to "re-view" or "re-read" my work or marriage or faith periodically, or if I do reflect on them but then refuse to change ideas or opinions or actions based on these new readings, the things most dear to me can grow stale and formulaic at best, irrelevant and inert at worst.

In many ways, "revision" is what this issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* calls us to: the willingness to literally re-view what we thought we knew about our faith. Mary Schertz writes of having revised her understandings of submission and *Gelassenheit* in the light of feminism, then of "re-revising" them as she moved further along in her walk as a feminist Christian. Denny Weaver reviews common understandings of the atonement and offers an alternative reading of the reason Jesus died. Michael King reimagines what dialogue between people of different faiths might look like.

Mark Wenger, meanwhile, revisits those "antiquated" rules of marriage that might salvage family life in the twenty-first century, even as Ted Grimsrud encourages us to re-read scriptural comments and churchly beliefs about homosexuality. And Laura Lehman Amstutz invites us to revise our image of the Divine for just long enough to imagine God sipping a Mocha with extra whipped cream.

These ideas about revision clash with that old adage about taking multiple-choice tests: stick with your first answer, and you'll probably get it right. Then again, sustaining a marriage, nurturing a faith—and living a life, for that matter—are less like taking a test and a lot more like writing an essay. "Re-visioning" isn't usually thrilling, it's rarely neat, and it takes a long time. At least with God there are no deadlines.

—*Valerie Weaver-Zercher*

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In This Issue

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Response: A Vision of the West

Twenty years ago, I visited a friend in Ojai, two hours north of Los Angeles. Footing the San Pedro Mountains, the Ojai valley exudes an otherworldly purity. Frank Capra's 1937 film "Lost Horizon," used a long shot of Ojai as "Shangri-la"—a place of potentially eternal life. It was in this idyllic spot that, after 53 years of indifference to nature, this urbanite was jarred into a quite different, and inconvenient, sensibility.

I was walking in Ojai before dawn. Silhouetted mountains were emerging from darkness. The world was uncannily silent. From nowhere came the sudden *conviction* that I had lived here a thousand years before! Not true, of course, but the force of the experience—like a dream that grips one after waking—meant that something had happened within me. Indeed, it had. From that moment on I was needful of living in the West!—a consequence no less absurd than its apparent cause.

Perhaps I had never been rooted. Detachment dogs the philosophic disposition. But all my life was in the East! I struggled fruitlessly to forget the awakening. Years later, as a widower married again, I drove West many times. What had awakened me to *place* in Ojai opened me to nature on those trips. Breaking out of Nebraskan farmland, the great sky and distant mountains of the western landscape overwhelmed me with a vision of the holy. Rolling southwest, the boundless space was a freeing of soul entire. And in the desert, eternity was written in the naked erosion of the peaks.

No doubt the beauty of the East is truth as well, but its truth is that of opera while the West's is of chorale.

No doubt the beauty of the East is truth as well, but its truth is that of opera while the West's is of chorale. The operatic Verdi "Requiem," like gospel, adopts the human standpoint—it is a human crying out—while Bach's "Toccatas" and "B Minor Mass" look from heaven on the human situation. In religious terms, they say, perhaps, that God, like western space, is imperturbable.

The eastern glen and hillock welcome us. What point the trackless West—the spiny plants and rocky strata? Just this, perhaps: We ask what these unsparing features are to us—but in the West, they ask what are we to them. More planetary than geographic, the western landscape speaks of what must be. There what lives a little while and what exists for eons meet as children of the sun that in time ends them. Looking West, for me, is looking home. —*Alan Soffin*

*This response expands on the appreciation for the West explored in "Dreaming into the West" (*DSM *Winter 2004). Letters to* DreamSeeker Magazine *are encouraged. We also welcome and when possible publish extended responses such as this one (max. 400 words).*

Letter: An E-mail Conversation

The conversation below between Sara Fretz-Goering and Michael A. King unfolded by e-mail in January 2004. To honor the concerns raised by Sara and several other potential writers, submission guidelines have been revised in an effort to signal space limitations yet be more welcoming. See current submission guidelines on p. 47 in this issue, or www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com/dsm/submit.htm.

Sara: Dear Editors: This is a note in response to Michael A. King's editorial in the last issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* (Winter 2004). There King asks, "So where are the women writers? Are they perhaps still less likely than men, so trained to speak up from day one, to claim their rightful public voices? Do they prefer to speak in other venues?"

On the information page regarding submissions to *DSM* is the following quote: "However, the limited space available in a quarterly magazine *does not allow us routinely to accept unsolicited material. Thus we are not actively inviting submissions and are tending to publish submissions by our regular columnists and contributors or material we solicit* (emphasis added). But we do aim to treat unsolicited submissions respectfully and are occasionally able to accept them."

I have not tried to publish my work (other than through an occasional letter to national magazines) but this particular blurb does not encourage me in any way to submit any of my work to your periodical. So, for any woman out there writing to a specific audience, one wonders how she will become a "regular columnist or contributor" unless she has the necessary contacts.

I just find it rather ironic that you ask where the women writers are, but send a rather cryptic message that really there is no space for new writers unless you know who we are. So yes, your article did spark something in me and touch a nerve.

Thanks for the thoughtful articles you are publishing. There is always a need for more venues for young and old writers with creative ideas.

Michael: Dear Sara, am I rightly understanding that you're sending this response as a letter to the editor? If so, we'll be glad to print it. I'm considering adding some such editor's note as the following beneath your letter, but glad to see what you think and to consider publishing several go-rounds of discussion, depending on how you react. Thanks for your good comments.

♣

In her insightful reply, Sara Fretz-Goering does accurately interpret our submissions wording (from our website) as discouraging new writers. This is intentional, not because we don't want new writers but because we truly can only publish a modest number of articles, thus the hope is that our cryptic message will in fact discourage all but those persistent writers who are determined to be heard, since if we encouraged a flood of submissions we'd simply have to reject most of them due to lack of space.

Our intent is certainly not to discourage a particular type of writer—such as women—from submitting

articles. And we actually work more proactively to invite submissions from women than from men, because we typically have more than enough articles in hand from men.

In light of this, does Sara's observation continue to raise the question of whether men are more prepared to insist on being heard, so that they insist on pushing past even our discouraging submissions guidelines (as a good many of them do)? If so, we need to keep thinking through how our guidelines can signal the reality of our limited space without setting up a dynamic that may end up favoring the gender more prepared to elbow its way in. Or are we now trafficking in dangerous stereotypes?!

♣

Sara: Sure, Michael, you may feel free to publish my "letter." Had I known it might be printed, I would have probably anguished over every word as I tend to do in my poetry. Ah well. I fired it off in a bit of uncharacteristic indignation for me. . . . I usually weigh things pretty heavily before speaking. I can't speak for all women, but I do know we do tend to be more cautious about what we say in public.

Observe any public forum—from Sunday school to a political caucus. The majority speaking are male voices—but this, too, is changing. We women are changing as are men like you who have the perceptiveness to ask these important questions.

Again—thanks for the efforts put into a solid publication.

Michael: Many thanks for your latest communication, Sara. If you have further thoughts on wording in light of moving toward publication as letter to editor, feel free to let me know, but otherwise I think as written it's well done. Oh but can I tempt you one step further—is it going too far to publish your reply to my reply as the final part of the interchange? I think the candor and insight of your latest thinking might also be valued by *DSM* readers.

Sara: It is fine with me to publish my original correspondence with you. It may promote more submissions—from both genders—which may or may not be what you'd like. Still, anything to provoke discussion.

Those Resurrection Women

Mary H. Schertz

Twenty years ago I was a brash young feminist riding the euphoria of being part of the first critical mass of women students at a denominational seminary. The very air we breathed was an intoxicating concoction of freedom and creativity.

During those years, I radically swept out such concepts as "servanthood," "mutual submission," the indefinable and ineffable *Gelassenheit* (meaning something along the lines of yieldedness) and even, in my most honest moments, the "cross"—at least as I had understood it growing up.

The last, I admit, gave me pause. If I swept notions of the cross out of my mind, was I still a Christian? Servanthood, mutual submission, and Gelassenheit were deconstructable. I was fairly sure these were concepts that applied differently to women than to men—and perhaps they did not really apply to women at all. At least not to women raised in the Anabaptist tradition—with its accompanying overdose of self-denial.

What we needed, again I was fairly sure, was an antidote of empowerment, self-actualization, and autonomy. So servanthood, submission of any kind, and Gelassenheit were out. And the cross? Well, maybe.

There was truth in who I was then and what I thought then. These years later, I do have my regrets—waste of the spirit though they may be. Certainly I would like to call back some actions and words. On the whole, however, what we—those other "angry" women and I—were about was true and necessary.

And part of my continuing pain is that much of that anger and clarity is still necessary. My young adult niece and her friends still talk about guys who cannot deal with smart women. My students at the same seminary where I once gave up servanthood still deal with many of the same issues. They still search for empowerment, for self-actualization, and for autonomy. They still question their own overdoses of self-denial and seek healthier, more productive self-concepts.

Even as I acknowledge the ongoing need for the prophetic feminist witness, I have come to the point of wanting to embrace, once more, some of those "dangerous" notions I once so sweepingly rejected.

But, even as I acknowledge the ongoing need for the prophetic feminist witness, I have come to the point of wanting to embrace, once more, some of those "dangerous" notions I once so sweepingly rejected. Words and concepts such as servanthood, mutual submission, and even Gelassenheit have taken on new meanings—meanings centered in new understandings of the cross. The journey of these past 20 years, the journey that made me rethink some of my earlier judgments, has been one of relationship and of the spirit.

Real Relationships Mess Up Ideology

I cannot adequately thank the feminists who have nurtured me and the feminisms that have become a vital part of my life. I cannot imagine, nor do I want to imagine, life without these women and these ideas.

But I would be less than honest if I pretended these friendships and studies have been painless. Ideologues and ideologies of any stripe often lack an ability to deal with people as whole, conflicted, and conflicting beings. In the end, I needed to be grounded in the tension between the ideals of feminism and something more traditional and encompassing—for me, that was Christian faith and the church, difficult as that was for many of my closest feminist friends to understand.

At the other end of the issue, there is little doubt that life would be a lot simpler if men really were the problem. Or even if patriarchy really were the problem. Unfortunately, the problem is more complex—our socialization as men and women, power and our human propensity to own it and use it against other people, privilege and our human difficulty in even acknowledging it let alone relinquishing it.

When it comes right down to it, the people who have nurtured me, challenged me, loved me are both men and women, feminists and not feminists. Conversely, the people who have failed me are also men and women, feminists and not feminists.

The Women (and the Men) of the Resurrection

The biblical story that calls me most powerfully to feminism and, paradoxically, beyond feminism to the cross of Jesus Christ, is Luke's story of the women at the tomb. In that story, some of the women who have faithfully followed Jesus from Nazareth, only to abandon him in his hour of greatest need along with all the rest of the disciples, finally come to their senses. They try to do the right thing by him. They return to being good, practical, pious women—observing the Sabbath, preparing the appropriate spices and ointments for the body, returning to the tomb.

But they are surprised by a rebuke for which I will always be grateful. Instead of affirming their proclivities as good, religious women, the angel at the empty tomb challenges them to remember what Jesus told them in Galilee and to become the first evangelists of the resurrection. And they do. They allow that transformation to happen in their lives.

Despite the less-than-appreciative reception they receive from their male counterparts, we all know the end of the story. They get the message out—and the world has never been the same.

Servanthood, mutual submission, Gelassenheit—the first people we think of in relation to these words may not be the resurrection women. I suggest, however, that they are among our finest examples. Because the point is that our surrender is not ultimately to another's will or desire but to the very gospel itself, as we have received it. That good news includes both the cross and the resurrection.

That good news calls us beyond our socialization, beyond convention, beyond any expectation put upon us by any human being. In that sense it calls us to a more radical feminism than any we have known. Surrender to the gospel is hardly surrender to patriarchal ideals.

The Art of the Gospel

A while back I asked one of our students with an artistic bent to make a banner for my office. The conversation was a casual one over lunch at a friend's house after church on Sunday. We were talking about sewing, of all things, something she was just learning to do. We talked a little that day and she came in the next week to look at the space I wanted to use. I suggested the resurrection women of Luke 24 as a theme; we set a price and talked in general about arrangements.

Years have gone by—and I still do not have a banner in my office. And I never will, at least not anything like what I envisioned. What I will have someday is a work of art. Tanya has in these years attended fabric fairs, read books, studied quilt exhibits, found one of the finest liturgical artists to be her mentor, and generally taken the project to realms I would never have imagined.

One day she spread out her dozens and dozens of fabric swatches and showed me the design. The richness of the colors, textures, and concepts

took my breath away and brought tears to my eyes.

Partly my response was to the sheer beauty spread out before me. Partly I was responding to the birth of an artist—especially poignant because I now knew that tendonitis had forced Tanya to lay aside becoming a pianist. Partly I was responding to the integration of cross and resurrection, biblical text and life, suffering and joy, not only in Tanya's art but also in her spirit and our interaction.

The moment assured me that surrender to the God who is the Father of Jesus and of us all is a surrender to life, not death, and a surrender to joy, not despair—even as we all experience enough of both. Surely in that moment, the resurrection women of Luke 24, gone on to their heavenly reward, must have been grinning along with us over the still-to-be-stitched fabric scraps.

—Mary H. Schertz, Elkhart, Indiana, teaches New Testament at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and directs the Institute of Mennonite Studies there.

The Dry Leaf

The dry leaf trembles on the branch
With a rhythm of its own;
Looking frail and all alone
Unaware of its part in the dance.

The dry leaf trembles on the branch.
Is it, like I, afraid of falling,
Or does it hear the calling,
and, falling too, join in the dance?

—Deb Logan

Take, This Is My Body

Sharing in a Different Kind of Power (Mark 14:22-25)

J. Denny Weaver

Death and food go together. After a funeral, congregational participants often prepare a meal for the family and friends of the one who has died. Around this food are shared tears of remembrance for the deceased as well as laughter and celebration, as people enjoy visiting with friends or relatives not seen for a while.

Both death and food are common elements of our lives. Every human experiences death, and food is integral to all our lives as well.

Easter is the season of the church year in which Christians remember the death of Jesus and celebrate his resurrection from the dead. And it is our tradition that worship on Maundy Thursday before Easter Sunday includes food and drink—the bread and wine—along with remembrance of Jesus' death.

As Jesus was contemplating what was going to happen and sharing the Last Supper with his disciples, "He took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.'

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God'" (Mark 14:22-26).

It is important to remember the death of Jesus with wine and food, as he taught. But I want to remember in light of Jesus' entire mission and especially his resurrection.

Jesus' mission was to make the reign of God visible and present in the world. Through this mission, Jesus was carrying on the long tradition of the people of God as witness to God's presence in history. God called Abraham and said his descendants would become a people through whom all peoples of the earth would be blessed. Israel's mission was to be that people who witnessed to the presence of God's rule in history. The prophets gave specific expression to the mission. They performed the mission themselves and also chastised Israel for failing to live up to it.

Jesus continued that prophetic mission of witness—but with a difference. In Jesus, God was actually present. Jesus' teaching pointed to the reign of God, and his life displayed the reign of God in history.

Jesus' mission threatened the forces that did not and still do not acknowledge the reign of God. At the end of his life, Jesus' action in the temple was a vivid demonstration that the reign of God posed a challenge to some conventional practices. Scholars do not understand exactly what the problem in the temple was. But even without knowing the specifics, we can know that the temple confrontation concerned a proper orientation toward God and God's reign.

When Jesus' witness to the reign of God posed a challenge to the forces that opposed God, the temple act brought that opposition to a head. These forces were so threatened that they started plotting how to have Jesus killed. And soon after Jesus was in fact killed by the highest political authority of the day, the Roman Empire.

Killing is an ultimate act—it deprives a being of existence that cannot be restored. In killing Jesus and thus challenging the very reign of God, the powers of evil sought to deprive Jesus of existence.

But we have heard the story too often to be able to feel suspense. We know what happened next. We know that three days later God raised Jesus from the dead. In that resurrection, the reign of God overcame the ultimate evil, the denial of existence.

Here we see the true nature of the power of God. The divine power is not a bigger version of human power, as in human beings can lift only a little weight but God can lift a great big weight. That approach is to envision God in our image. Rather the character of God's power is seen in the capacity of God's reign to restore existence—to resurrect life—where it had ceased to exist. The resurrection of Jesus is the triumph of the reign of God over death. That is what we celebrate on Easter.

Jesus' death is part of the story that leads to Easter. But when we look at that death in terms of his life and resurrection, it seems clear that his death was not the story's purpose. His life was not a long-running plot whose purpose was to get him killed because God needed a death. Jesus' death did not fulfill a requirement of God who needed blood or death to restore order in the universe or repay the offended honor of God.

Think about it. If Jesus' death paid a debt owed to God or was needed to restore God's order or honor, then those who killed Jesus were the ones actually doing the will of God.

If Jesus' death paid a debt owed to God or was needed to restore God's order or honor, then those who killed Jesus were the ones actually doing the will of God.

But if Jesus did not die because God needed his death, what meaning of the death is an inescapable part of his story? Jesus' death—the killing of Jesus—makes painfully clear the difference between the rule of Satan and the reign of God: One attempts to control through violence and death; the other rules through nonviolence and resurrection.

In one sense it *is* possible to say Jesus needed to die. That need came from the nature of his mission, which was to witness to and make present the rule of God in our world. The parameters of his divine mission made Jesus' death necessary. But his purpose was not dying, as though dying were the culmination of his reason for being.

It took courage for Jesus to face death. In Gethsemane, he prayed, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (Mark 14:36). But Jesus could not avoid dying without abandoning his mission.

Martyrs Mirror (Herald Press, 1938) tells the story of Maeyken Wens, burned to ashes on October 6, 1573, with a screw holding her tongue to the roof of her mouth. A haunting woodcut accompanies her story (980). It pictures her oldest son, 15-year-old Adriaen, as he bends over, stirring through the ashes that were his mother, searching for the screw that held her tongue to the roof of her mouth, while his three-year-old brother Hans looks on.

To her husband she had written that the torture after her arrest was hard but parting from him was "hardest of all" (981). It took courage for Maeyken Wens to face that death. She could have escaped it by recanting, but her faith compelled her to persevere for a higher calling.

Many years ago my fellow Hesston College student Daniel Gerber went to Vietnam with Mennonite Central Committee. Taken captive by the Viet Cong, he was never heard from again. Daniel's purpose for going to Vietnam was not to die. Had he not gone, Daniel might still be alive. But his faith and a desire to witness to God's peaceable rule compelled him to go, and to face death.

On March 16, 2003, Rachel Corrie was at Rafah refugee camp in south Gaza, witnessing against the destruction of another Palestinian home by an Israeli bulldozer. The bulldozer knocked her under a pile of dirt, then ran over her, crushing her.

Rachel Corrie was a college student from Olympia, Washington. Her purpose was to witness against the injustice perpetrated daily against Palestinians and to try to prevent the destruction of a Palestinian home. She did not want to die, but she gave her life carrying out that mission.

Jesus could have bypassed death—but only at the cost of abandoning his divine calling to make present in his person the reign of God. Death was not the purpose of his life; death was the result of the faithful fulfillment of his mission.

Most of us in North America do not face death for our faith. However, hard choices and risks still present themselves as we witness to the reign of God.

- A high school band member risks a lower grade or even expulsion for refusing to march in the Memorial Day parade.
- A public school teacher risks censure when she turns the principal's requirement for a patriotic bulletin board display that supports the war into a show of red, white, and blue hands working for peace around the world.
- An office worker risks disapproval by presenting a peace display where other cubicles all proudly and prominently feature American flags.

Being a follower of Jesus means to take risks, some mortal, most only uncomfortable. But those risks come with sharing in and carrying on Jesus' mission to witness to the rule of God in the world.

Calling the communion elements Jesus' body and blood should also remind us that the mission to witness to the reign of God can be costly.

Jesus gave us the Lord's Supper to remind us about that witnessing mission and to strengthen us in it. We take bread and call it Jesus' body and juice or wine and call it Jesus' blood. We eat and drink in memory of how he faced death in faithfully carrying out his mission to make God's reign visible.

When we eat and drink, then, we are also committing ourselves to carry on that mission in the physical absence of Jesus. This ceremony nourishes us for witness to God's rule.

Calling the communion elements Jesus' body and blood should also remind us that the mission to witness to the reign of God can be costly. That witnessing mission cost Jesus his life. It cost Maeyken Wens, Daniel Gerber, and Rachel Corrie their lives. We should take seriously that the bread and wine represent Jesus' body and blood. They remind us of the seriousness, commitment, and consequences that accompany following Jesus.

Food builds and sustains community. We know that just about any social occasion requires food and beverage, whether in our homes or going out together with friends.

We should not lightly partake of the food and drink of communion on Maundy Thursday at communion. They nourish our social interaction, our fellowship together, as followers of Jesus and as the body of Christ. In eating and drinking together and remembering what Jesus did, we experiencing fellowship as God's people.

As we eat together and remember what Jesus did, we as God's people, and our witness to the reign of God, become visible and present. That tiny piece of bread and sip of juice have nourished us as God's people; we become what they symbolize.

We eat and drink as followers of Jesus. We eat remembering his witness unto death, and we recommit ourselves to that witness, whatever it might mean. We do this in remembrance of Jesus our Lord.

—J. Denny Weaver is Professor of Religion and the Harry and Jean Yoder Scholar in Bible and Religion at Bluffton (Ohio) College. This article is based on a sermon presented in a Maundy Thursday communion service at Grace Mennonite Church, Pandora, Ohio.

Good Friday

Tonight will be a sobering night.
I have not been there yet
but I've had Good Fridays before:
the gray faces eyeing me like fish on a plate
the robed priest dripping water
the light squeezed too quickly behind the door
the darkness
the hell of black and alone
and the silence in the sleepless night.

—Christine R. Wiebe, Hillsboro, Kansas, was born in 1954 and died in 2002 after battling lupus much of her life.

Why Barabbas?

Kenneth L. Gibble

Barabbas. What is known about him? Very little. We know of him in connection with only one event in the Gospels: the appearance of Jesus before Pontius Pilate. The name *Barabbas* is on the lips of Pilate himself and on the lips of the crowd shouting for his release. Barabbas *is* released, and with that he disappears from the gospel accounts.

Yet despite this bare mention of his name, I have always been intrigued by his appearance in the gospel story. Maybe my interest in Barabbas is nothing more than the curiosity people generally have about notorious people. Newspaper headlines feature crimes, not acts of kindness. The public thirst for stories of wrongdoing seems all but unquenchable.

So perhaps I've been fascinated by Barabbas simply because he was one of the "bad guys" in the Bible, designated by John's Gospel as a "robber," by Matthew as "a notorious prisoner," by Mark as one "who had committed murder." Yet Barabbas was not simply one more bad guy. He was the man who would have been crucified had not Pilate offered the crowd a choice between him and Jesus. Barabbas was the first person for whom Jesus died.

In my imagination I look back on that scene of Pilate as he stands before the crowd and asks, "Which

one do you want me to set free for you? Barabbas or Jesus called the messiah?" (Matt. 27:17 TEV). It makes no sense to me when I hear the crowd roar: "Barabbas!" How could they choose a criminal over the Jesus I know: Jesus the innocent one, Jesus the healer of unlimited compassion, Jesus who went about doing good? What possessed the crowd to make such a foolish and terrible choice? Even when Mark's Gospel says the chief priests incited the crowd to demand the release of Barabbas, it still doesn't add up. Why not ask for Jesus to be set free? Why Barabbas?

The crowd chose Barabbas because he represented what they longed for. . . . Jesus . . . was a big disappointment.

Actually the Gospels do provide an answer. But it's one you and I may not like to hear. Mark identifies Barabbas as "a rebel who had committed murder in the insurrection," taking for granted that the reader will know what insurrection it was. Luke describes Barabbas as a man "who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder" (Luke 23:25 NRSV). This means Barabbas was no common criminal; he was a political activist seeking to overthrow the hated Romans.

Jerusalem, in Jesus' day, was an occupied city. Like all occupying armies, the Romans were constantly on the alert for acts of violence by those who hoped to incite a rebellion that would overthrow the oppressor.

Think, in United States history, of the Boston Tea Party, of Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty, or give me death!" of the farmers ambush of British soldiers at Lexington and Concord. To many Americans, these deeds were acts of heroism; to the British, they were acts of terrorism.

To the Romans, Barabbas was a terrorist murderer; to the Jews, a hero. The crowd chose Barabbas because he represented what they longed for: freedom from oppression, an overthrow—violent if need be—of hated Roman rule.

Jesus, by contrast, was a big disappointment. True, the people had hoped he might be the messiah they were seeking. When he entered Jerusalem, they hailed him as the "son of David." David had been the warrior king. The people desperately wanted another warrior king. But the way of Jesus was not the way of the warrior. In John's Gospel Jesus says to Pilate: "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews" (John 18:36 NRSV).

The temptation of worldly kingship was a real one for Jesus. But when shown all of the world's kingdoms "in a moment of time," as Luke tells us, which implies that Jesus could see even the powerful nations of our day, even our own, our Lord rejected each one. He would not succumb to the temptation to be what others wanted him to be. He knew what his mission was, and he was true to it.

And Barabbas? Perhaps now I can understand why the crowd chose him. Like the people of every age, they

wanted a political hero. Like you and me, they wanted the kind of messiah who would give them what they wanted. Call him Barabbas or Yasser Arafat or Nelson Mandela or Fidel Castro or George Washington or, yes, Osama bin Laden—political heroes to some people, terrorists to others.

So the choice is made—Jesus will go to the cross, Barabbas will go free.

I have often wondered what happened to Barabbas. Was his life changed forever? After his release, did he join the crowd that watched Jesus make the lonely trek up Calvary's hill? Did he stand there at the foot of the cross, his heart torn by the sight of the one dying in his place? Did that day turn his life around, make him a man of peace instead of a man of violence, a man committed to life rather than death? I'd like to think so.

But I believe it is more likely Barabbas went back to terrorism, that he never gave more than a passing thought to the innocent man crucified on the cross intended for him. Like the crowds who had shouted for his release, Barabbas had to choose. What road did he choose to follow?

We can't know. But we do know this: If Jesus had been able to choose to spare either his own life or the life of Barabbas, Jesus would have made the same choice the crowd made—to spare the terrorist's life. We know that because he chose to go to the cross for the worst of people . . . and the best.

Where do I—and perhaps you—fit into all this? I am little different from those who cast their vote for Barabbas. Like them, I so often find myself supporting any person or cause that promises to deliver whatever will serve my own interests. I prefer not to let my mind dwell on the "collateral damage" to others that may result.

If my car's gas consumption hurts the atmosphere . . . that's just the way it is. If a school board candidate opposes raising taxes, why should I care if the education of children is shortchanged? If my nation's international policies are grounded in the willingness to unleash devastating destruction, why should I protest as long as the economy keeps rolling and I remain personally untouched?

Such examples are not as dramatic as the Jesus-or-Barabbas choice. But they bear more than a negligible similarity to that decision. How often I make my decision for a person or a policy that promises to get me what I want at as little cost to me as possible, regardless of the cost to others.

What I must force myself to remember is something that, though it seems incredible, is undeniably true: Even though you and I time and again foolishly choose Barabbas, it is Jesus the Christ who chooses us. It is Jesus, not Pilate, who sets Barabbas free. As Paul Wilks has pointed out (*The Other Side,* March/April, 1991), it is Jesus, not Pilate, who sets us free.

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Atheist and Believer Walking as Mystery, Together

Michael A. King

This article has been long brewing. It finally burst forth the day I received a package from my friend Alan Soffin. In it were a poem, "Atheist in a Believer's Graveyard," and photos he had taken in a graveyard in Tucson, Arizona, to go with the poem.

As I experienced the words and images, the skin prickled along my arms and then up into my cheeks before the chill, a holy chill, spread finally into my soul itself. Rarely has a Christian writer touched me more than Alan, unbelieving soul-brother Alan, writing of the howling each of us does in the dark, and of the listening each of us at times fruitlessly engages in, then observing that "Here Jesus stands and there, / As if to speak, / And Mary, gently, everywhere, / In stone. . . ."

In stone. Only in stone. But at least in stone. The words are paired with photos of Jesus and Mary dwelling, literally carved in stone, there in the graveyard backgrounded by the sere beauty of the Arizona desert. From within his poignant awareness, at least as I read him, of what for him is not there, Alan nevertheless acknowledges and celebrates that there it is, at

least in stone for him, and as even more for those who believe.

When have I heard a Christian so ready to honor the belief of the other if it is not one the Christian shares? So quick we are, we Christians, to witness, as we like to put it, to our Lord, to speak of Jesus standing there, and Mary, and not in stone, but alive. So quick to want the other to honor what we understand to be truth, so slow to honor what the other sees as truth.

Imagine if Christians treated atheists like Alan treats us. Imagine if, instead of we who are right against you who are not only wrong but damned, we walked with each human being first as a human being. Imagine if we were able to conclude as Alan does, the atheist there in the believer's graveyard—risking his own viewpoint to let the other's soak into him—"For it is true and not / Belief / That we are mystery / Together."

Imagine if we were able to conclude as Alan does, the atheist there in the believer's graveyard . . . "For it is true and not / Belief / That we are mystery / Together."

But how imagining ourselves as mystery, together, frightens and angers. In his own way, in the January 12, 2004 issue of *Mennonite Weekly Review*, John A. Lapp imagined this. Reviewing a book on *Journeys of the Muslim Nation and Christian Church*, Lapp dared to imagine Christians and Muslims learning from each other. By February 12 one letter writer suggested Lapp risked turning Jesus into a liar and that "Lapp's conclusion may be politically correct, but it also strips Christianity of its essence and power."

Another writer was "shocked and chagrined. . . . There is no way that Christians can conscientiously perceive the Muslim and Christian journeys as complementary. . . . There is only one true biblical way. To view Islam from this perspective is a compromise of our faith and borders on being apostate."

All of us draw lines, whether we are Christians rejecting the Muslin journey's validity, Christians who want to be other than those who reject the Muslim journey, Muslims who reject (or not) the Christian journey's validity, or atheists who see these stones as symbolizing only what is longed for, not what actually is. But I hope we can honor each other's line-drawing callings; otherwise, how alienated we each will be, hunkered down behind our particular line.

The calling I hope others will honor was brewing in me already when, as a boy, I'd ponder the passion of my missionary parents to witness to others. They did so in ways charitable enough that I see myself as learning from them still, not opposing them.

But I could never make my own peace with witnessing as a one-way street—I witness to you, not you to me—because I could never get my mind to ignore this possibility: I thought like I did because I had been raised like I had been. The people my parents witnessed to thought like they did because that was how they had been raised.

So I would imagine my way around the world, into all the places I knew other missionaries were trying to convince people to become Christians. And I could never shake the suspicion that what from within a way of life and thought looked so one-true-path appeared the opposite when seen by those on another one-true-path. Then I would wonder what it would be like if we would all talk with and not just at each other.

Still today I wonder that, as the one-true-path battles of Christendom and Islam and so many other my-way-or-the-highway clashes unfold, as ceaselessly we expect the other to honor our way rather than begin by honoring each other's ways.

I don't mean we should stop believing in or sharing what we believe. I am intending right here to share and stand for what I believe. I am a Christian. A committed Christian. A passionate Christian. This means that I am not, like Alan, an atheist. It means I am not, like so many millions, a Muslim.

But does that mean my only option is to say to Alan that he must believe like I believe and to say to the Muslim that you must believe like I believe? And if that were my only option, why should not Alan then see his only option as to convince me to believe as he does? And the Muslim to convert me? If I would fiercely oppose having the other do this unto me, why should I so easily do it unto the other?

There must be a better way. I think Alan points the way: It's to honor the other's truth even as I expect the other to honor what I hold true. Then it's to walk as brothers or as sisters discovering what gifts we offer to and receive from the other—together.

Interestingly enough, this approach seems to invite me to take more seriously beliefs affirmed in my own faith heritage. For example, if God is anything like the God beyond human limitations Christians say God is, isn't this God inevitably beyond my and our ways? Doesn't Jesus himself, claiming to speak for and in some sense even to be God, constantly shatter the too-small views of God held in his day? Isn't he suggesting some one-true-way-fans will be shocked when he teaches in Matthew 7:21 that "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven"?

So imagine if the Muslim had something to teach me, and not just I something to impose on her. Imagine if Alan had something to teach me, and not just I something to which to convert him. Imagine if we were mystery, together.

There is no need just to imagine, however, because I have been privileged actually to experience how much those who do not share my faith but are mystery with me have to offer. To this let me witness.

I think, above all, of my friend struck with cancer. At the time I knew him only as the father of one of my daughter's friends. But in the months following his diagnosis, we began to be drawn together, at first by our shared love of Indian food. Then over time the journey went deeper. And

deeper. He was traveling to the very edge, we knew. We hoped it would be only to the edge. But walk by the very edge we did, for over a year, looking across to what neither of us could fully see yet knew he would likely face, as in the end he did.

And we walked as what we were—I as a Christian and a pastor, unapologetic, but convinced I know only in part, as if through a mirror dimly, as the apostle Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 13, not in full. And he first as an agnostic, because he too believed he knew only in part, so he couldn't be sure there was no God, though he doubted.

Then some Christians committed to the one true way told him he was going to hell unless he got right with God. So he did get right with God. His way. He decided a God who would have made creatures like that was not one he wanted any part of. So he became an atheist—ready now to affirm full faith in no God to keep his integrity and not be dragged into heaven wriggling on some know-it-all Christian's fishing hook.

Still he granted me, also a Christian, at a time I wouldn't have blamed him for declaring a pox on all our houses, one of the greatest honors anyone has offered me. He asked me to preside over his funeral. And he asked if I could do it in a way that told the truth of who he was while still allowing the many in his circle of friends and family who believed in God to draw strength from their faith.

So he became an atheist—ready now to affirm full faith in no God to keep his integrity and not be dragged into heaven wriggling on some know-it-all Christian's fishing hook.

Meanwhile I consulted with several Christians regarding how I should handle my pastoral role in this situation. To their great credit, they had big enough hearts that, even as they could not fully support my approach, they gave me the space to minister out of my promise to my friend to honor him as he was: a person of great courage and insight who had found no way with integrity to affirm more than that he walked into mystery—and whose ultimate home (our worry, not his) only God could know.

I needed to respect that it was hard for them, however, to offer this space. Their key worry was this: He must have gone to hell, so how could I with integrity say anything other than that? Should I not be witnessing to Christian faith in God as the one true path at this time of great opportunity to spread the gospel?

They were troubled by my conviction that God had placed me in my friend's life to be mystery, together, not to know all and convince him of it. They struggled to come to terms with the reality that if I had related to my friend as they thought I should have, he would have cast me, outraged, out of house and heart—just as I would be tempted to cast out anyone who used friendship to worm his way in before admitting his motive was to sell me something, even if the product was God.

Let this be clear: I appreciated their holding me accountable to their and my mutual commitment to Jesus. Indeed Jesus says in John 14:6 that he is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to God but by him.

Yet I hoped we could also learn from a story Jesus tells (Matt. 13:25-30) of the kingdom of heaven being like a field of wheat mixed with weeds. Only God, Jesus says, knows precisely what plants (meaning people) in that field are wheat to be harvested and which are weeds to be burned.

And only God, I believe, knows precisely what happens to any of us when we die or how God addresses the faith of the one who cries "Lord, Lord" yet doesn't really walk the path versus the one who walks it without being able to say "Lord, Lord."

So I was prepared to travel with my friend not as the one who would show him the way but as one who would walk with him within a mystery neither of us could fully solve. As we discussed, I hope I'm right enough about my way that within the depths of God's existence and love he and I will somehow meet again. I also know there are times, when I hear the rap-tap-tappings of my death at the door (faint but drawing closer), that I think of the courage with which he faced his death, determined to be an atheist rather than a fake, yet ready to honor the beliefs even of those by whom he had felt so savaged.

Then I am reminded of how much I learned from him about how to be brave, how to be honest, how to be a man, how to honor the beliefs of others—even about how to be a Christian walking as mystery with another.

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Working Too Much

Deborah Good

The cold was eating through my five layers of clothing as I stood on the train platform, cursing an inadequate public transportation system—as though my anger would either make the train come sooner or, at least, coax my cells into an irascible fury of warmth.

It had been another long day at the office of the nonprofit where I work, a magazine that, in its own small way, is transforming the world. Now I was headed home to stuff envelopes with a group of volunteers, preparing a fundraising mailing for that same organization. *I work too much*, I thought to myself as I rooted in my bag for a pack of gum that turned out to be empty. *And it's miserably cold out here.*

Sigh. Here I am, just another self-proclaimed martyr for another worthy cause. Everyone I work with at *The Other Side* magazine believes in creating spaces of retreat and sabbath in our lives. We believe God lives in those spaces and calls us to them. While the surrounding culture hums with increased productivity and values hard work above relationships, we cry out that a 50- or 60-hour work week (and debatably, even a 40-hour week) kills the soul, the family, the fabric of community that cloaks our lives with meaning.

Yet we have found no way to keep our small operation running except through sweat and tired tears—

and many, many of those overtime hours.

It's not just us. People across the country work overtime hours or two jobs just to (barely) make ends meet, others because employers found it cheaper to lay off some workers to avoid paying benefits while working the remaining employees overtime. Still others in highly competitive office environments work more hours to better their chances of promotion.

Whatever our reasons, statistics show that the average American works nine weeks more per year than the average European. Who decided *40* was the magic number—that working fewer than 40 hours a week, without an excuse like kids or sickness, must mean laziness? I know of a French couple who were exhausted trying to keep up with our pace of life.

Forty years ago, sociologists predicted technological advances would lead to more leisure time in the U.S., so much that filling our leisure time would become a societal problem. Instead, the amount we work has increased steadily since the 1960s.

It is a puzzle to me. We aren't *all* workaholics by nature. What kind of world—what kind of economic system—would let enough be enough? Some companies, competing in a capitalist marketplace, work their employees to unhealthy extremes, whether in *maquilas* across the border or in polished, professional office buildings in the States.

The nonprofit world is no less harried. Vision-driven organizations are commonly underfunded, understaffed, and overworked. The situation is made harder by an ethic of self-sacrifice and a martyr complex. When do we say that an organization—no matter how crucial the mission—is doing more harm than good as it slowly eats the lives of those who work there, their families, their friends? A hard question. And while it has come up at *The Other Side*, no one likes to raise it.

We aren't *all* workaholics by nature. What kind of world . . . would let enough be enough?

I am 23 and some days fear I have joined the masses of overworked Americans. I have no aspirations to a workaholic lifestyle. While I have absorbed a "Protestant work ethic" from somewhere, personal experience has taught me life is most meaningful when I slow down; when I have time to stay at the table long after supper is over, talking until the food is cold; when I take time to sit on my bed and stare at the wall; when I am not too hurried to talk with the man asking me for money on my way to the bus stop.

Working less would free me up to be a better friend and neighbor, to explore other passions and interests, to actually vacuum my bedroom, and to write columns like this one without wondering when I'll ever find the time. We as a culture have forgotten that rest is perhaps the most basic medicine for treating any ailment. We need to give ourselves permission to stop *doing* and start *being*. Even our vacation time often involves busy itineraries and lots of planning.

For several months during my senior year of college, I made a commitment to myself. Every Friday, I rushed out of Macroeconomics at the end of the period and home to my apartment. Sometimes I stashed Jane Kenyon, Mary Oliver, a notebook, and water in the bag I had bought six months earlier from a farmer in Chiapas, Mexico, threw the leather strap around my shoulders, and bicycled to solitary destinations undetermined. Other times I simply found a quiet library corner.

The only requirements were that I be alone for one hour, with a pen and notebook, and that—if creativity ran its course—I attempt to write a poem. Those fall afternoons provided a sacred space for me to step outside academia and spill onto paper the world I saw through a poet's eyes. They kept me grounded during a hectic time of life.

For all my talk of sabbath, I know the work must still get done. Farmers probably understand this as much as anyone. My grandfather, 85, has a small vineyard and orchard. Family members tell him to slow down, stop working so hard. But he knows pruning vines and picking peaches keeps him healthy and energized. He tells his worried children, "I rest while I work."

Rest while I work? Perhaps I need a new way of thinking that doesn't draw such a clear line between work and leisure. The Incas didn't make such a distinction. Today intentional communities in the States, committed to creating a more just world, live and work and play without ever being "on" or "off." Their life is their work. Their work is their life.

Until a different world is possible—or my circumstances change—I will have to find ways to cope. Where can I create those sacred, solitary spaces in an otherwise busy life? I can start by being fully present at my job, understanding it to be integrated with the rest of my life, instead of imagining all the other ways I could be spending my time. I also think about working part-time in the future and choosing a lifestyle that would require only a part-time income.

I look for small pauses in a day's rush. Sometimes I take a short break from work to walk around the neighborhood. And I take public transportation rather than buy a car. While this means it usually takes me longer to get where I am going, it forces me to plan for enough time to get there. The hour I spend getting home from work by train and trolley gives me time to read, write, stare out the window, and clear my head. That hour is sabbath.

I live in a paradox. I work too much—for an organization that believes in wholesome, slow-paced living. My head knows staying healthy means resting more, but my heart doesn't see how to cut corners. And now I write about slowing down in a column due yesterday, instead of talking to my housemates or going to bed. Entangled in the irony of it all, I commit myself to creating spaces in my everyday life for pause, for relationship, for a new awareness of the world around me. I commit myself to finding sabbath.

—Deborah Good, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, hopes her life is not always so busy. See www.timeday.org to learn of the "Take-Back-Your-Time" movement.

Where Do We Learn Marriage?

Mark R. Wenger

The day my wife and I were married about 20 years ago, we were naïve. It's amazing, though, how smart we thought we were. Ours was going to be the best marriage ever. Better than our parents', which were "so yesterday." We wrote our own marriage vows—you know, creative, unique and personal, not those tired old traditional words. We had a lot to learn.

Thankfully, in addition to our bright-eyed bravado that day, we carried something else buried in our heads—a few basic "rules" for marriage. We had absorbed them from somewhere; they were embedded. To name a few:

- Sexual intercourse is off-limits until marriage.
- Marriage will last until one of us dies.
- Marriage is one-to-one fidelity; there will be no other competitors or lovers.
- Marriage is partnership and mutuality—equal love, power, and respect for the other.
- Marriage is for fathering and mothering children—for building family.
- God has a profound interest in marriage: "From the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his

father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'" (Mark 10:6-8 NRSV).

Kathy and I are still together and happy. Not because we developed a new and improved model. Not at all. We're together because these rules for marriage from culture, family, and church gave us a steady and good foundation. By grace, perseverance, work, and play—and a supportive community—our marriage is lasting.

Sociologist Tony Campolo writes that the Western middle class—and its religiosity—has produced "one of the most wholesome, egalitarian, and loving family systems in human history. . . . Its family lifestyle may be the best form alive in the world today. . . . There is less oppression of women in our familial lifestyles. There is less 'machismo' employed to prove masculinity among our young men. There is more planning for the welfare of children. I know that among my colleagues in the field of sociology, it is heresy to make such assertions, but I believe them to be true, nevertheless" (*Partly Right*, Jarrell/Word Books, 1985, 17).

In like fashion I believe the community rules that helped my wife and me to get on our feet and find our way in marriage offer practical wisdom hard to improve on. Many will disagree, but I am convinced.

I shudder to think, however, how this broadly shared consensus about what constitutes marriage and procreation has eroded, perhaps even corroded, in recent decades. The sanctity of American marriage is an endangered species; the traditional definition of marriage may be crumbling.

As I write, the Massachusetts legislature is meeting in special session. The judiciary has ordered that legal provision be made for gay marriage. By judicial fiat the courts are telling elected representatives to write laws authorizing social and moral policy that has not been achievable through democratic persuasion. The newspapers have carried stories about gay couples in San Francisco getting "married" though there is no legal provision for it. Is marriage grounded in anything beyond personal preference and individual rights?

A glance at the record of heterosexual couples, however, doesn't provide much more reassurance. A December 2003 column by George Will (accessed at www.townhall.com) contained the following sobering statistics: Cohabitation of unmarried couples has increased almost 1,000 percent in the last 30 years (523,000 in 1970, almost 5 million today). Forty percent of first marriages end in divorce—with mothers and children usually suffering the most losses financially and emotionally. Birthing centers record that 33 percent of newborns have parents who aren't married. For women under age 25, the percentage rises to 60 percent of births to unmarried parents.

Is marriage seen as a barrier to achieving personal fulfillment and self-realization and often too risky to undertake?

The pungent irony in these snapshots is hard to miss: Gay couples clamoring for the right to get married, while more and more heterosexual couples are avoiding marriage and having babies anyway.

I view these peculiar phenomena, however, as two disparate consequences of a larger slow-moving train wreck—the decline of marriage as a social institution in America. When a community's sense of what marriage is gets lost and is replaced by the supremacy of individual rights, the ground itself shifts.

Faith communities are the alternative extended family with the most potential for maintaining and nurturing marriage and family . . . today.

Can anyone say with a straight face that the current state of marriage in America is better than it was 40 years ago? Does anyone claim that children today are healthier, happier, and more socially well-adjusted than in 1970? Would that our culture applied the same attention and marshaled similar resources to combat broken marriages and families as is done to contain the SARS virus or build smart bombs!

But I have little faith that government, science, or culture will take the problem seriously until something cataclysmic takes places, jarring the land from its individualistic neurosis. Community consensus supporting marriages and families will need to be nurtured and modeled in smaller, alternative networks of meaningful relationships.

Years ago I remember anthropologist Donald Jacobs talking about the important role of the extended family in East African culture. (Hillary Clinton said something similar: "It takes a village to raise a child.") Jacobs described how livestock was exchanged among families at the sealing of a marriage. If the marriage fell apart, all the livestock—and the offspring of the livestock—had to be returned. Divorce after a year or two was painful and messy, but doable. But 10 years down the road, the extended families had a vested interest in helping the couple make the marriage work.

In North America, except within some subcultural groups, the role of the extended family has weakened dramatically. Where can young adults find the kind of wise community counsel that will help them grow to adulthood? And if they get married, where can they learn to do marriage well? What they pick up from Dr. Phil and Oprah will not cut it. It takes a network of relationships to build a good marriage.

I believe faith communities are the alternative extended family with the most potential for maintaining and nurturing marriage and family in North America today. I'm talking about mosques, synagogues, congregations in which relationships of trust and mutuality are fostered.

Congregations with face-to-face relationships over time—from babies being born to grandparents tottering about—is where children, youth, and adults have the best chance of learning what a marriage is and what it takes to make it work.

If young adults want to know the secret to building a good marriage, I tell them to get involved in a small or medium-sized congregation and to make friends. If young parents want to raise sane and stable children in a crazy culture, their chances are much better if they join a faith community that will support them in passing on the truths and behaviors they value.

As a pastor of a 200-member rural congregation, I know there is no such thing as a problem-free marriage or family. But over the years I have been impressed with how a strong network of loving and honest relationships helps people young and old cope with the inevitable adjustments, disappointments, and joys of life. Divorces are rare, as are delinquent children.

If American culture, with its fixation on individual rights, is in danger of forgetting what marriage is all about, there are still communities around who haven't forgotten. They remain deeply committed to putting what they consider wise rules for marriage into practice. They are eager to share the benefits with their children and with anyone who will listen. My only regret is that these faith communities are often so ineffective in sharing this good news winsomely and persuasively with the broader culture.

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A Resource for Discernment

A Review of Homosexuality: Biblical Interpretation and Moral Discernment

Ted Grimsrud

Homosexuality: Biblical Interpretation and Moral Discernment, by Willard M. Swartley. Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2003.

If you are interested in discussions among Christians concerning the issue of homosexuality, read the new book *Homosexuality: Biblical Interpretation and Moral Discernment,* by Willard Swartley of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

Swartley offers this book as "a resource for ongoing discernment." I believe we should receive the book as a gift, an invitation from a church leader to needed conversation. Swartley especially aims this book at a Mennonite audience (and it is by far the most extensive published discussion of theological issues related to the "homosexuality issue" that any Mennonite scholar has produced), but Swartley's treatment is well worth the attention of all Christians.

Swartley states that unlike the case in relation to issues he has previously addressed (war, male/female relationships, slavery), the biblical witness addresses

homosexuality with clarity and uniformity. Thus Scripture does not allow for movement from a "status quo" view toward a "liberative" view.

In three chapters focused on biblical materials, Swartley provides a thorough introduction to many of the scholarly currents swirling around interpretations of the Bible's teaching on sexuality. He firmly sides with those who see a clear and uncompromising stance in the Bible "against same-sex genital practices."

Swartley then sketches an "analysis of contemporary Western culture." He sees "the sexual revolution of the 1960s" as the crucial event that has created pressure on the church to weaken its long-term rejection of the legitimacy of same-sex intimate relationships. Swartley next develops a strategy for applying the Bible to our contemporary context and reflects on "The Church's Belief and Response" and "A Model for Congregational Discernment."

Swartley seeks to combine compassion with clarity about sexual boundaries and our call to holy living. He admits this is a big challenge but calls the churches to seek to meet it by putting resources and energy into spiritual discernment and redemptive discipline.

Swartley seeks to combine compassion with clarity about sexual boundaries and our call to holy living.

Swartley deserves admiration for his courage. In laying out his thinking, he makes himself vulnerable to challenges from various points of view; but this is what is needed for Christians to make genuine progress in responding to the issues related to homosexuality. These matters are hard ones to work through, and many questions need serious reflection.

In the spirit of Swartley's assertion that "on these matters we need to respectfully engage each other in ongoing discussion," I want to highlight a few of the questions that seem important to me after reading this book.

(1) How do we best understand, in their broader literary and cultural contexts, biblical texts usually understood to speak to the issue of homosexuality?

Disappointingly, though Swartley devotes three full chapters (49 pages) to biblical matters, he does not delve deeply into exposition of the texts themselves. Instead he mostly settles for citing numerous scholarly opinions.

Swartley treats 1 Corinthians 6:9, for example, as if its context is Paul's discussion of sexual morality in 1 Corinthians 5. He ignores the direct context in 1 Corinthians 6 of Paul's critique of (probably rich) church people taking other (probably poor) church people to secular courts. The list of vices in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, then, is used to illustrate why those running secular courts are not to be trusted. This is the kind of unjust people they are—for the sake of justice you in the church need to work things out among yourselves.

When we recognize the context of the vice lists in 1 Corinthian 6 as concerned primarily with justice, not sexuality, our understanding of the two ambiguous, undefined terms in that list, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* (often translated "homosexuals"), and similar terms might need to be revised.

(2) Is it appropriate to make generalizations about homosexuality per se based on proscriptions and on problems that apply only to some expressions?

Swartley argues that what matters in the Bible is behavior. He states that biblically (and for contemporary Christians), the issue is what people do. And the Bible always condemns "homosexual acts."

However, this argument requires generalizing for all same-sex intimacy based on references that focus only on males. That is, Genesis 19 and Judges 19 tell of men wanting to rape other men; Leviticus 19 and 21 forbid men lying with men; Romans 1 describes men being consumed with lust for other men; and the key word employed in 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 is a compound of the words "men" and "lying with."

Romans 1 does include a reference to women involved in "unnatural intercourse" (1:26), but the text is irresolvably ambiguous as to whether the link with the following reference to men is that both were enslaved to "unnatural passions" per se (which could have several different expressions) or both were involved in same-sex "lust."

Why do these few texts portray male-male sex as problematic? Do they do so for reasons that would also encompass female-female intimacy? Or is the behavior questionable for gender-specific reasons? If the latter is true, then the applicability of these texts to the "homosexuality issue" itself is lessened.

(3) What is the sin inherent to homosexuality?

The evidence Swartley gives for homosexuality's being problematic does not necessarily apply to same-sex intimate relationships in themselves (that is, not to all such relationships).

Swartley appropriately argues that the churches must resist cultural dynamics that foster unhealthy sexual behavior, such as promiscuity, obsessive self-gratification, and sexually transmitted diseases. However, as he acknowledges, these problems are present among heterosexual people too. And, many would argue, there are same-sex intimate relationships that are committed, monogamous, and mutually respectful.

If some same-sex relationships do not manifest the problems Swartley cites, what is sinful about them? If the Bible is focused on male-male behavior, what is the moral violation that occurs in relationships between women? It would seem that if one is to offer the kinds of generalizations Swartley makes concerning same-sex intimate relationships as an entire class, one should be using evidence that applies to all possible members of that class.

(4) What might we learn from the lives of Christians who are in same-sex intimate relationships?

Swartley makes strong assertions concerning problematic dynamics among gay people, but he gives no evidence of considering counter-testi-

monies. His bibliography does not include two important books edited by Roberta Showalter Kreider, *From Wounded Hearts: Faith Stories of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People and Those Who Love Them* (Gaithersburg, Md.: Chi Rho Press, 1998) and *Together in Love: Faith Stories of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Couples* (Kulpsville, Pa.: Strategic Press, 2002), that gather testimonies from Christians in same-sex intimate relationships.

According to the writers in Kreider's books, the issue of sexual gratification is not at the center of what draws them to their partnerships. They present their motivations in ways similar to those expressed by most Christians in opposite-sex intimate relationships—finding in their shared lives with intimate partners a sense of wholeness and completeness that provides empowerment for living faithfully as children of God.

Though these, and many more, questions arose for me in reading this provocative book, I finished it with strong appreciation for how it stimulated me to think and to pray. I hope *Homosexuality: Biblical Interpretation and Moral Discernment* gains a wide readership in Mennonite circles and beyond. Swartley writes clearly and manifests throughout a gentleness of spirit that fostered in me a desire for ongoing discussion of these important issues.

—*Ted Grimsrud, Harrisonburg, Virginia, is author,* God's Healing Strategy: An Introduction to the Bible's Main Themes *(Pandora Press U.S., 2000), and Associate Professor of Theology and Peace Studies, Eastern Mennonite University.*

A Conversation with God About Coffee

Laura Lehman Amstutz

In my mind I'm sitting next to God in an overstuffed armchair in a coffee shop. I'm drinking a Caramel Macchiato and God has a Mocha with extra whipped cream. This is our conversation.

♣

Me: Wow that's good.
God: I know. When I created it I said it was good.
M: Well you were right. But if it's good how come it keeps me up at night sometimes?
G: Just because it's good doesn't mean it can't be misused.
M: Is it misused when we put milk and caramel in it?
G: What do you think?
M: I think it's good.
G: Then you're right.
M: If you were on Earth again, would you buy coffee at Starbucks?
G: If I were on Earth today, do you think I could afford to buy coffee at Starbucks?
M: Good point. Would you buy Equal Exchange?
G: What do you think?
M: Is it bad to drink it out of styrofoam?

G: That depends on how important you think my earth is.
M: Is coffee anything like nectar in heaven?
G: You're confusing me with the Greeks.
M: Oh right, sorry. Is there coffee in heaven?
G: I'm not at liberty to say.
M: What are you, Secret Service?
(God laughs)
M: If Jesus had communion today, would he serve coffee instead of wine?
G: That might be less complicated.
M: Would he serve regular or decaf?
G: Wine or grape juice?
M: Would Jesus hang out at coffee shops?
G: Maybe. I think it might depend on if the band was good.
M: Does Jesus like contemporary Christian music?
G: I'm not at liberty to say.
(I laugh)
M: Could Jesus cure a caffeine headache?
G: I think that might be a waste of Jesus' gift, don't you?
M: Did Adam and Eve have coffee in the Garden?
G: Where do you think the knowledge of good and evil comes from? Apples?
M: But you said it was good.
G: And it was. You said it could be used for evil.
M: Actually you said that.
G: Oh, of course. (At this point God gets flustered and takes another sip of his Mocha and gets whipped cream on God's nose. We both laugh.)
M: Did you invent whipped cream?
G: Oh come on.
M: What? Should I be asking you deep questions about life and stuff?
G: Isn't that usually what you do at coffee shops?
M: Sometimes. Would you answer them?
G: Probably not.
M: Would Jesus use coffee in parables?
G: Maybe.
M: The kingdom of God is like a cup of coffee. . . . Now you have to fill in the rest.
G: What do you mean?
M: I don't know what the kingdom of God is like; you tell me.
G: Take a guess.
M: Okay, the kingdom of God is like a cup of coffee, sweet and warm and . . . full of energy?
G: Not bad, could use a little work though.
M: Well it's better than the kingdom of God is like a Starbucks, ritzy and overpriced.
(God laughs)

We're silent for a while. I pick up *Newsweek*. I could ask God about the news and why there is suffering and politics, but when you're sitting in an overstuffed armchair next to God in a coffee shop that smells like caramel and God has whipped cream on God's nose, it just doesn't feel like the right time.

—Laura Lehman Amstutz from Kidron, Ohio, recently graduated from Bluffton College with a B.A. in Communication and a minor in writing. She is married to Brandon Amstutz and living in Harrisonburg, Virginia, where she is pursuing an M.Div. from Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

Seeing God in All the Wrong Places

A Review of A Matrix of Meanings

David Greiser

A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture, by Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.

Readers of this column know by now that I am a student not only of films but also of contemporary culture and the worldviews films portray. I'm ever on the prowl, not only for films that explore the culture's search for God and the real, but also for tools to deepen my ability to appreciate links between culture and theology.

In *A Matrix of Meanings*, Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor have produced such a tool. Detweiler and Taylor come to their task uniquely qualified to comment on both theology and popular culture. Both are Ph.D. students at Fuller Seminary and teach in the School's program in theology and film. Taylor is the leader of New Ground, a postmodern worship gathering in the Los Angeles area. Detweiler has contributed scripts for several commercial films, while Taylor wrote an original song for the film "The Green Mile." The two are truly participant-observers in the world of pop culture.

In one sense, *Matrix* is an exercise in what classical theology once called "general revelation"—the belief that God speaks not only through the words of Scripture and of sacrament but also through Creation and the human quest for meaning and transcendence. People cannot help but demonstrate God's existence, even when their actions suggest indifference to God's presence.

The thesis of *A Matrix of Meaning* is simply stated: *For those with eyes to see, pop culture reveals a generation fascinated with the divine.* On several levels, movies lead the way in revealing this. On the most obvious level are films focused on God or the supernatural, including "Signs," "Contact," "Ghost," "The Blair Witch Project," "Bruce Almighty," the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, "Waking Life," "Dogma," and the "Matrix" trilogy, to name a few.

For those with eyes to see, pop culture reveals a generation fascinated with the divine. On several levels, movies lead the way in revealing this.

Less obvious are the countless films with moral or spiritual subtexts. For example, the trailer to "American Beauty" exhorts us to "look closer," to see the divine in the inexplicable beauty permeating everyday life. Meanwhile "Fight Club," "Being John Malkovich," and "Memento" challenge linear concepts of time and even question death's finality.

But movies do not stand alone among God-obsessed media. The book's real strength is the loving and thoughtful attention given to the spiritual side of maligned mediums, such as television, advertising, art, sports, fashion, and the cult of celebrity and music.

Take the last two. Why do we need celebrities? Detweiler sees roots of our celebrity cult in the ancient Greeks, who celebrated the human form and potential. Gods were simply humans on a superhuman scale. The Greeks added a twist in the form of mythology, which, Detweiler believes, introduced larger-than-life stories about larger-than-life humans as entertainment. In our day, then, celebrities provide ideals of beauty, intelligence, and talent mixed with Achilles heel-behaviors, giving them a Greek-god-like role in American life.

What about pop music moves us to tears or ecstasy? The relationship between Christianity and popular music has been rocky, says Taylor. Though seldom acknowledged by conservative Christians, the roots of rock owe much to the church and gospel music, as the work of Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Elvis Presley attests.

Artists whose songs express yearning for God populate today's pop charts. U2 remains one of the world's most popular bands. If their connections to organized Christianity are ambivalent, their preoccupation with God and divine justice in a broken world borders on obsession.

Such younger singers as Beyonce and the Beastie Boys manage simultaneously to convey interest in Jesus and to offer a sexualized visual performance. Even Madonna, now proclaiming her attachment to Kabbalah mysticism, is making music of a spiritual nature.

Critics of *A Matrix of Meanings* may accuse Detweiler and Taylor of a believer's over-eagerness to find God in every pop culture crevice. They do admit to admiration. But they have amassed formidable evidence to back their case. For those with eyes to see it, virtually every aspect of pop culture suggests we live in a generation at once drawn to, and repelled by, the divine. If "the heavens are telling the glory of God," then the earth and its wayward creatures are no less revelatory sources for those ready to "look closer."

—Between watching movies and reading books about them, David Greiser, Souderton, Pennsylvania, is a pastor at Souderton Mennonite Church.

Cling Free

I will offer you
Wrinkle-free friendship.
Permanent-press;
No need for ironing or
other tiresome demands.
Ready to wear.
I will mold myself around you
and put all my effort
into hanging neatly
on your body;
curving where I should,
draping neatly where expected.

The danger,
the caution is,
This makes me angry—at
you and at
myself.

I carry little
straight pins.

—Tina Burkholder, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is Director of Foster Care and Adoption at Bethanna. She enjoys reading, gardening, music, and drama. Tina and husband Jay are raising three children.

The Search for a Better Way

Daniel Hertzler

Anabaptist Ways of Knowing: A Conversation About Tradition-Based Critical Education, by Sara Wenger Shenk. Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House, 2003.

Anabaptist Preaching: A Conversation Between Pulpit, Pew, and Bible, edited by David B. Greiser and Michael A. King. Telford, Pa.: Cascadia Publishing House, 2003.

In a broad sense we might say that these are two books on how to do better what churches agree should be done: teach and preach the faith. They seem to recognize what we all know when we stop to think about it. Such activities tend to become routinized and are in danger of becoming deadly.

As the titles indicate, both books suggest that there is a special Anabaptist need to consider these matters because Anabaptism, with its countercultural perspective, needs to give extra attention to the proclamation and transmission of its message. For most persons these are not books for bedtime reading, but rather for study and discussion. Indeed, the second one provides a study guide.

Wenger Shenk subtitles her book *A Conversation About Tradition-Based Critical Education.* As for "knowing," she opens with a personal memory about how she would address her children as they left for school: "Remember who you are" (13). This calls to mind two memories of my own. When at the age of 20 I left home for a cattle-boat trip to Europe, my father laid the same burden on me. Also, some years ago D. Campbell Wyckoff, a Christian education professor at Princeton Seminary, proposed a single objective for religious education, that persons "might know who they are."

Shenk perceives knowing as something more than the accumulation of facts. It is to have a perspective on one's own identity.

As becomes clear in her book, Shenk perceives knowing as something more than the accumulation of facts. It is to have a perspective on one's own identity. She describes her book as a round-table discussion among authorities in the field with herself as moderator. It is a high-level discussion that not everyone will be prepared to join. But if we listen carefully, we will observe that something important is going on.

In the introduction she describes her strategy: a review of distinctives from the Anabaptist tradition "in conversation with early Greek notions of *paideia* and recent philosophical thinking that will guide my construction of a tradition-based and critical approach to education for postmodern, particular Christian communities" (18). This seems a challenging task. How will she hold all of these diversities together, or to use her model, keep them in conversation? As we will see, she will be looking for common elements.

But before this she reports the results of a survey she did in a local Mennonite congregation of family-based and congregation-based religious practices. She wanted to assess their prevalence over several generations. She polled two groups in the congregation: 68-85 years of age and 30-50 years of age regarding their practice of activities such as family worship, mealtime prayers, and telling Bible stories at home. Church practices she studied included Sunday school, baptism, communion, and footwashing.

She found a significant drop in the number of family religious practices, but less decline and some increase in church-related practices. Shenk wonders "What faith-based daily and regular practices will replenish the wellspring of tacit, tradition-based knowledge out of which can flow a quality of life that will honor God and equip us and our children to be truthful, courageous, just and loving?" (35-36).

She then turns to a description of the Anabaptist perspective, to the classical Greek paideia, and to three philosophers regarding the question of how we know. On Anabaptism she concludes, after surveying the work of a number of scholars, that "The convergence of discipleship represented by 'the following of Jesus in life' joined with the question about how we come

to know God will form the core contents of a constructive educational theory" (59). This is where she begins and where she will end. But she consults authorities along the way.

First she addresses the classical Greek concept of paideia, which the Greeks began to use "to describe all the artistic forms and the intellectual and aesthetic achievements of their race, in fact the whole content of their tradition" (61). She views this perspective as important but "insufficiently capable of critiquing its own idolatries and is very susceptible to ideological distortions" (76).

Then she moves to the three philosophers: "What does it mean to 'know' and how do the ways we come to know relate to our educational priorities?" (78). From Michael Polanyi, a philosopher of science, she obtains the sense that "all knowing of any kind involves personal commitment and the acceptance of personal responsibility for one's beliefs" (82).

Polanyi, she observes, suggests "that there is a spiritual reality embodied in tradition that both sustains it and transcends it" and this, she proposes, "invites both a rootedness in tradition and a critical, creative dissent from it which calls the tradition to become more of what it ought to be" (94).

I am interested to see her using Michael Polanyi. When I read his book *Personal Knowledge* 30 years ago, I was impressed by the same aspects of his thinking. I seem to remember that he illustrated the importance of tradition by observing that no one today knows how to make a Stradivarius violin. That tradition has been lost.

Rebecca S. Chopp, a feminist theologian, is seen to provide a useful perspective because she asserts that "theology as saving grace . . . brings together ethics and knowing within both its communal and personal dimensions.

"Truth isn't understood to be a disembodied concept but rather is derived out of communal discernment about how we are to live and about what our present and future activity should entail" (103). But Shenk is concerned that with Chopp's approach "an individual or group can readily come to identify their own preferences with justice, or their own culture with the will of God" (105).

A third conversationalist is Nancey Murphy, identified as both a doctor of science and a theologian. Shenk finds Murphy's position so amenable that Murphy has written the book's foreword. Shenk sees Murphy as asserting that "the teachings of Jesus and the Anabaptist tradition provide the most potent resource for the social embodiment of the good" (116). Each of these three persons, says Shenk, "articulates a community centered approach to knowledge making and discernment" (130).

Finally, the author sets out to weave "a theory of education from the conversational strands" (133). She proposes the vine and the branches of John 15 as an educational metaphor, but "the strategies and methodologies suggested below grow out of the ways of knowing we've articulated above" (152). Among these is the strategy for children: "To enhance the abilities of our children to understand their world primarily in light of the Scriptures, from the day they are born we will surround them with poetry, songs, images, symbols and stories of the Scriptures on a daily basis" (155).

As she has indicated throughout, knowing is much broader than the cognitive dimension. In line with this, on pages 157-164, Shenk lists "practices" she proposes are "vital for sustaining ourselves and our community of faith" (159). She begins with "Keeping Sabbath." Why begin here? It "is at the top of the list intentionally because our ability to revitalize life-giving practices is all about our relationship to time and the purported lack of it that is at the root of so many of our current ills" (159). Is that not so, in fact?

There is no definitive chapter on Anabaptism. . . . Instead David B. Greiser provides a historical review of Anabaptist preaching.

As an old traditionalist I find it reassuring that Shenk, who now teaches at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, has wrestled with these theories but in the end concludes that what we really need to do is clear our schedules and spend more time with the children. Any who put their minds to it can do these things.

Anabaptist Preaching is also described as a conversation. But whereas Shenk directs the conversation by personally bringing up evidence from the authorities, this book is a forum of 14 authorities, one after the other. Some dialogue is encouraged by a study guide "to help the reader grasp the meaning and significance of each essay" (214). This suggests that the book may be intended for group study. But of course a preacher could read a chapter a week and ponder its significance for the sermon of the week. The subtitle of the book is *A Conversation Between Pulpit, Pew and Bible*, but the talking seems to be principally from the pulpit, since all 14 writers are preachers.

I have some difficulty perceiving how to do a responsible review of a book with 14 different topics. The study guide tries to be helpful. Question 1 of the General Questions asks, "What thematic threads run through all of the essays in the book? How do these threads give insight regarding Anabaptist preaching?" (227). Question 10 is possibly more discerning: "In what ways, if any, will your preaching be changed by your experience of reading this book? In what new ways do you view a sermon?" (228).

As for thematic threads, I do believe that Anabaptism is assumed by all writers, although in some chapters the references are more subtle than others. There is no definitive chapter on Anabaptism as in *Anabaptist Ways of Knowing*. Instead, David B. Greiser provides a historical review of Anabaptist preaching. At the beginning of this review he asks what is distinctive enough about Anabaptist preaching to justify a book on the subject. He responds by recounting his own experience as a boy with Anabaptist

preaching in its Mennonite form, then follows with a review of it through three phases.

He reports contrasting experiences with Mennonite preaching. He grew up in a congregation of the General Conference Mennonite Church, where the preaching was polished although not strongly Anabaptist. Then he went to Christopher Dock Mennonite School, where preachers from the Franconia Mennonite Conference lacked this polish and publicly confessed it. "For awhile I found chapel a daily exercise in culture shock" (18). These contrasting experiences eventually led him to write a dissertation on preaching in the Franconia Mennonite Conference.

After reviewing in brief the history of Anabaptist-Mennonite preaching, Greiser summarizes what he has found as significant aspects of Anabaptist preaching. (1) It has been congregationally based with a preacher often selected from within the congregation. (2) It has been part of a congregational conversation. (3) It has been considered important even though a lot of it has been poorly done. (4) Sermon delivery has not been seen as a high priority although numbers of preachers apologize for their sermons. Recently, however, younger preachers have taken delivery more seriously. (5) It has been preaching from the Bible.

If this summary seems hardly enough as a rationale for 13 more chapters on Anabaptist preaching, we might turn to the foreword by Brian McLaren, a friend of Anabaptism from another church group. He takes note of the ongoing life of a movement and the need for it to truly understand its gifts. He proposes "that each heritage, including the Anabaptist heritage, has special treasures that it is often unaware of" (8).

What I take him to mean is that the Anabaptist vision, with its emphasis on following Jesus, is worth stressing. But how to relate the tradition to the winds of doctrine abroad in the land is an ongoing challenge. It calls for all the excellence preachers can find. If Anabaptism is worth preaching, we ought to preach it well.

Another theme that seems to pervade these essays is postmodernism. That theme is addressed directly by Michael A. King, in the second chapter, in where he observes that "a common feature of postmodernity" is a "breakdown of authority and the pluralism which flows from and helps to reinforce that breakdown" (33). So, he says, authority must be earned by the preacher rather than assumed.

We live, King asserts, "in corrosively postmodern settings in which renewed humility bred by realizing we cannot after all know all truth becomes a rejection of any quest for truth or right living" (44-45). But this is not necessary, he affirms. We can earn a right to be heard by coming to the Bible as seekers rather than as authoritarian clerics. We can offer an alternative vision rather than rational argument and can provide a context for authority in word and conduct.

And so follow another dozen essays, each of them addressing one important aspect of the topic. If I may allow myself one favoritism, I take the liberty to comment on chapter 10 by Lynn Jost, a student of David J. Buttrick, author of a big book on preaching, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*. I labored over that book when it first came out some years ago, and if I understood Buttrick's "moves" then, I soon forgot them.

However, Jost restores my memory by describing Buttrick's sermon structure. A "move" begins with (1) a theological statement repeated several times to make it clear, followed by (2) an image or metaphor with only one of them per move. This is followed by (3) an illustration from experience. The move is then finished with a definite statement and leads into the next one, linked—as Buttrick would say—as we link statements in conversation. The sermon is seen as a conversation with the congregation. Jost includes a move of his own from a sermon he preached.

So now I understand Buttrick's technique better and am considering whether I may use it in my own preaching, though I am not convinced to follow it exclusively. As one who listens to more sermons than I preach, I have concluded that a preacher generally does better to make only one point in a sermon, an impression which can remain in the minds of the hearers for reflection during the week.

I have written that *Anabaptist Preaching* is adaptable on one hand for group study and on the other for use by an individual preacher. What about *Anabaptist Ways of Knowing*? Surely Christian education committees would do well to ponder it. If the theoretical material in the center is too daunting for them, at least they can read the first and last chapters.

If our congregations are to teach and to preach—and most of us agree that they must—such activities should be done with all the finesse we can muster.

—Daniel Hertzler, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, studied preaching at Eastern Mennonite college with John R. Mumaw and religious education at the University of Pittsburgh with Lawrence C. Little and others. He has been teaching Sunday school since about age 16.

Friend of Mine Finds Martian

Nöel R. King

My friend Joanne discovered a little Martian in her bathroom a few days ago. At least that's what she thinks it is.

"It's hard to say," she told me over the phone last night. "I mean, it could just be something prehistoric, that's hidden out in the caves and stuff deep down underground until this point in time."

"But something makes you think this thingy is a Martian?" I asked.

"Well, yes," she answered. "I do have reason to believe that."

"Please tell me more," I invited her. So she did.

"Well, it's got little tentacles on the top of its head," she said, "and, of course, it's got a green tinge to its body, all over. But its tongue is nice and pink. I was kinda relieved about that," she told me. "Something with a little pink tongue can hardly be bad, can it?"

"No," I said. "No, it can't be very bad if it's got a little pink tongue."

"Good, that's what I thought," she said. "But what you wouldn't expect is how nice it is," she enthused.

"It gets my oatmeal for me in the morning, it turns my TV off for me when I tell it to, and it puts the toothpaste on my toothbrush just before I leave for work in the mornings. Also, it is very quiet at night when I am trying to fall asleep. I think it likes me."

I said yes it sounded like it.

"The other thing is that it eats weird stuff, like old paint chips in my laundry room. It kinda burbles when it eats," my friend said.

"It really makes that crud sound yummy. I bet paint tastes kinda chalky, like a good vanilla rice pudding," my friend said.

"I should go feed it some more from Duron Paint."

"Listen. I gotta go," I told my friend who would not stop talking over the phone to me about her Martian she found in the bathroom.

"You'd believe anything I told you, wouldn't you? You mean you thought I really had a Martian living at my house! Wheeeeeeeee!"

That Joanne. Why did I ever let her be my friend?

—As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Reston, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful things, including friends who find Martians.

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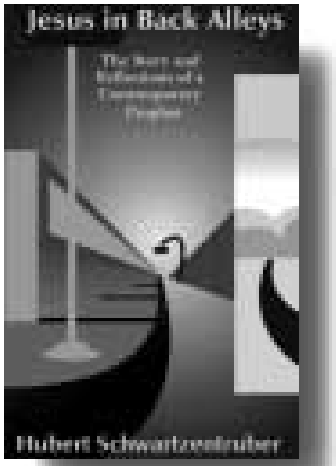

Jesus in Back Alleys: The Story and Reflections of a Contemporary Prophet, Hubert Swartzentruber. "This gentle pastor who loves John Deere tractors, polishes pieces of colorful stone as gifts, listens long and hard, writes love poems to his wife Mary—this man offers few pat answers. He simply invites us to join the walk, in the company of Jesus and of the wounded ones in this world," says *Mary Lou Cummings*. "This is a dangerous book," warns *John K. Stoner*. "If you are comfortable in your prejudices and unshakable in your dogmas, you might be well advised to avoid reading it. It could change you . . . and then what?"
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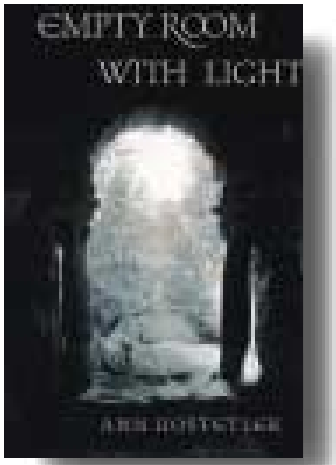

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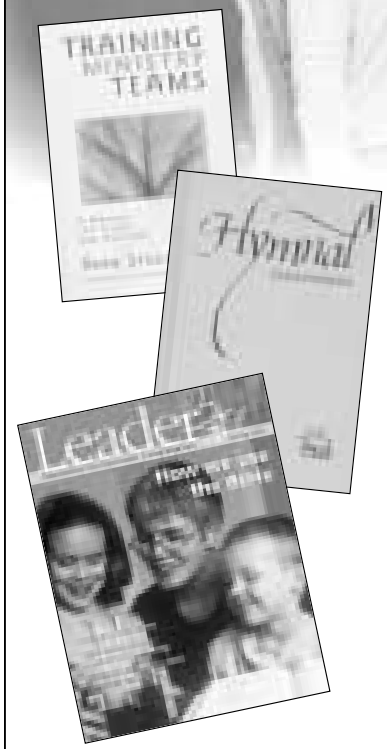

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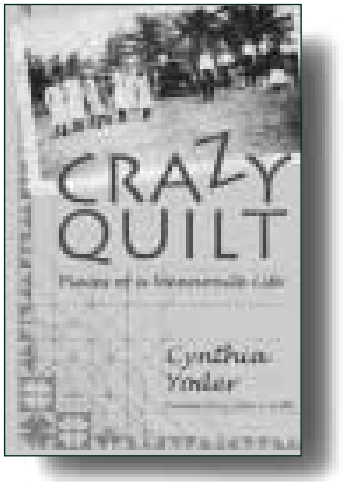

Crazy Quilt: Pieces of a Mennonite Life
by Cynthia Yoder, who was a graduate student at Columbia University when she began to suffer from a serious depression. *Crazy Quilt* follows her quest for meaning, which takes Yoder to her Pennsylvania Dutch grandparents. There she finds keys to recovery—and hope for her broken marriage. "Yoder's memoir is witty, whimsical, and a great read," says *Lee Eshleman*, Actor/Writer/Co-Owner, Ted & Lee TheaterWorks

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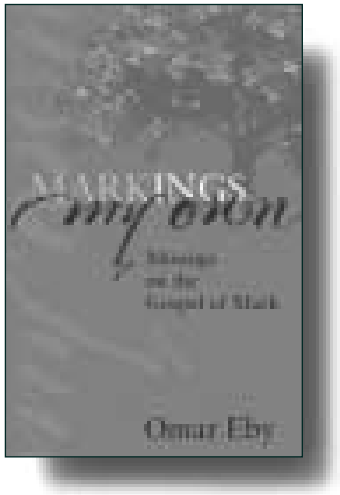

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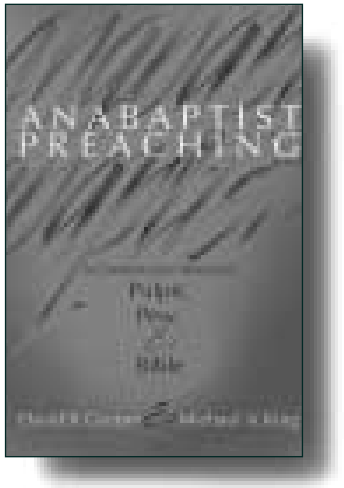

Anabaptist Preaching: A Conversation Between Pulpit, Pew, and Bible, edited by David B. Greiser and Michael A. King. "This book will raise many important questions for preachers," notes Beryl H. Brubaker, Graduate Dean, Eastern Mennonite University. "Listen closely, and you will discover how your own preaching can be transformed into a communal, grace-filled form of biblical, theological, and prophetic witness," says *John S. McClure*, Charles G. Finney Professor of Homiletics, The Divinity School, Vanderbilt University.

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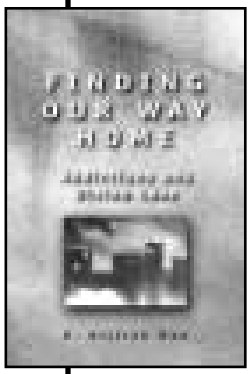

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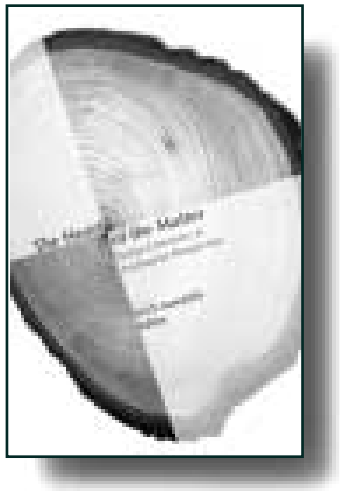

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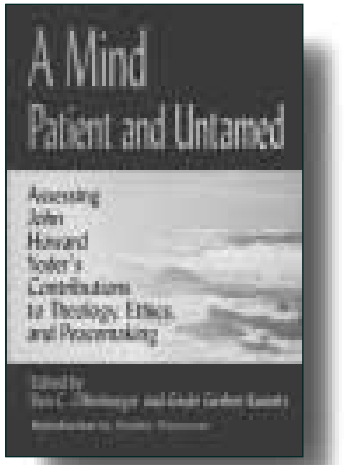

A Mind Patient and Untamed:
Assessing John Howard Yoder's Contributions to Theology, Ethics, and Peacemaking,
edited by Ben C. Ollenburger and Gayle Gerber Koontz. "Yoder cannot be understood without the background of the faithful witness of his Anabaptist forebears. It is, therefore, appropriate that these essays representing the beginning of the hard work of receiving Yoder are by 'his people.' Only a beginning—but what a wonderful one," affirms *Stanley Hauerwas*, Duke University.
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Easter

I know, midnight is hours away
but I've seen
the darkness
the first light
the many lights
the lilies, like trumpets
the girls in white dresses.
and I've heard the Exultet:
"Rejoice, heavenly powers!
Sing, choirs of angels!
Rejoice, O earth,
In shining splendor!"
The door opens forever.

—*Christine R. Wiebe*