

DreamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul



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Kingsview

Outreach That Fits the Message:

Two Missionary Kids Reflect

Michael A. King with Valerie Weaver-Zercher

and much more

Summer 2003

Volume 3, Number 3

Editorial: Seeing Gospel Thickness

In this issue of *DSM*, Dan Hertzler reviews Jeff Gundy's book subtitled *The World in a Mennonite Eye*. As Hertzler reports, Gundy tells of both being committed to Mennonite convictions and remaining aware of the ambiguities and complexities within which his pilgrimage unfolds.

In their own way, the writings in this *DSM* issue reenact Gundy's story. The convictions addressed are not only Mennonite ones; rather, most have to do with how we engage the Christian gospel. But if the gospel is nearly everpresent, as are aspects of his heritage in Gundy's story, equally present are complexities and ambiguities. Often these emerge within articles or become evident as articles are contrasted.

Mark Wenger proposes that North American young adults are involved, against the grain of their elders' more radical tendencies, in a renewal of theological orthodoxy. Meanwhile the article by Kris Anne Swartley, herself a young adult, does not delegitimize Wenger's case (one I find persuasive). But in calling for moving beyond comfort zones, Swartley may cut somewhat against the trends Wenger identifies, as perhaps does poet Kaitlyn Nafziger, another young adult.

Norman de Puy considers the odd tale of how denominations have become omnipresent. What to do, wonders de Puy, about Christians who simultaneously claim allegiance to the one Lord and emphasize how different (and often better) their view of the gospel is from all others?

In Valerie Weaver-Zercher's column as well as my own in response, convictions related to sharing the gospel are explored and as quickly complexified by worries and questions about how or whether to engage in outreach when so easily issues of race, power, or nationalism cloud the effort.

From a different yet ultimately related angle, Randy Klassen extends the discussion, wondering if Christians

In the end . . . the story of pilgrimage is what all the writings in this issue are thickly telling.

are ready to stand by the Jesus seen so often in the New Testament as winemaker and partygoer when they share their visions of Jesus with others. Or are Christians too ready to support only those New Testament labels for Jesus that fit their particular ideology? Next, through the prism of books about movies, David Greiser explores the ambiguities of the relationship between culture and gospel as evident in film.

Then also woven in are stories by Joanne Lehman, Douglas Noll, Noël King, and Cheryl Denise (whose poetry tells its own story). As befits stories and poems, few focus systematically on the gospel, but all show evidence of seeing life in its "thickness"—those many layers and details of experience ultimately shaped by our pilgrimage with the gospel yet so rich they cry out to be celebrated rather than analyzed. And in the end, individually and collectively, the story of pilgrimage is what all the writings in this issue are thickly telling.

—Michael A. King

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Revelation's Truth

What if you got in an accident in that torn underwear?

When the rapture occurs as they predict
in novels and pamphlets and movies,
the glorious Second Coming preceded by
us soaring to heaven leaving only
a pile of clothes where we stood,
I don't want you to worry, Grandma;
no one will see the holes in those old
Fruit of the Loom.

I will stay behind to tidy up.

—Kaitlyn Nafziger, Kitchener, Ontario, has recently graduated from high school after completing her OACs (Ontario Academic Credit). OAC is a fifth high school year acting as a preparatory year for university. Nafziger has been writing since childhood and is looking forward to pursuing a Bachelor of Art in English/Cultural Studies and a Bachelor of Education (Primary) at Trent University (Peterborough, Ont.) in autumn 2003.

Swimming Against the Current

Young Adults and Religious Orthodoxy

Mark R. Wenger

I've seen it in congregations—the ones I've pastored and others that are vital and growing. It's also apparent on many college and university campuses. The phenomenon may seem counterintuitive to some but is unmistakable for anyone willing to take an honest look.

What I'm referring to is the segment of bright and educated young adults excited about the truth claims of Christianity. Amid moral relativism and cultural pluralism, these young adults are opting for answers of faith that give coherence to life.

It will not do to label these young adults as naïve and parochial with their heads in the sand. They arrive at their radical commitments through critical reflection and widely varying experience and education. What sets them apart is their hunger for answers that make sense in today's postmodern context. They are finding these answers in faith communities—old and new—which are remarkably orthodox in theology and traditional in moral norms.

The person who put a name to what I had been observing anecdotally is Colleen Carroll, an editorial

writer for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. She did so in a book on *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy* (Loyola, 2002). She finds something similar unfolding in Roman Catholic, Jewish, Eastern Orthodox, Evangelical, and Mainline Protestant groups. Young adults are often more committed to, and idealistic about, religious truth and practice than their Baby Boomer parents.

Carroll writes: “Why are young adults who have grown up in a society saturated with relativism . . . touting the truth claims of Christianity with such confidence? Why, in a society brimming with competing belief systems and novel spiritual trends, are young adults attracted to the trappings of tradition that so many of their parents and professors have rejected?” She spends the book trying to answer those questions.

This attraction of young adults toward theological orthodoxy is a fascinating trend. But sociologists and church leaders exploring the terrain of postmodernism in North American culture often look right past it. That is easy to do because “the new faithful” are an eclectic group that defies easy definition. Carroll names several salient features:

- They are not perpetual seekers. They commit themselves to a faith tradition desiring to know the underlying reality of that tradition, and using it to transform their lives.
- Unlike their grandparents and parents, they did not inherit a religious tradition that insulated

them from the world. They live in the postmodern stream, but swim self-consciously against the flow of pluralism and relativism.

- They seek guidance and formation from legitimate and trusted sources of authority.
- They strive for personal holiness, authenticity, and integration in their spiritual lives. They can’t stand complacency, dissembling, and pandering.
- They yearn for mystery and tend to trust their intuitive sense that what they have found is true, real, and worth living to the extreme.
- They are concerned with engaging and impacting the larger culture for the common good.

Some months ago my wife and I were hosted for several days as “ministers in residence” on the campus of Bluffton College. Bluffton College is a Mennonite school of about 1,100 or more students located in Bluffton, Ohio, an hour or two northwest of Columbus. A significant number of Roman Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, and nondenominational students attend Bluffton in addition to the 19 percent of the student body that is Mennonite.

During our time on campus—talking to professors, administrators, and students, and visiting classes—we got the impression that the student body was in general more conservative and traditional in religious views than the faculty. In one particular class the students were obviously frus-

trated and upset by the nontraditional view advanced by the teacher on a select ethical issue.

I found the scene rich with irony! In the 1960s and 1970s, student radicals challenged many of the traditional beliefs and norms of their teachers. Now those one-time radicals are themselves the professors. They find themselves being challenged toward orthodoxy and faith traditions by their own children and grandchildren.

In April 2001, Peter Kreeft, Boston College philosopher, addressed an auditorium full of students during “Jesus Week” at Harvard University. Afterward, speaking to Colleen Carroll, he said, “It’s a massive turning of the tide.” Today’s young adults are rejecting “the old, tired, liberal, modern” mind-set in favor of a more orthodox one. “Even though they know less history or literature or logic” than students 20 years ago, “they’re more aware that they’ve been cheated and they need more. They don’t know that what they’re craving is the Holy Spirit.”

I am sure that the emergence of the new young adult faithful can be debated 10 different ways. Definitions of this sort are slippery; categories are soft. Some will doubt the very existence of such a trend and point to other evidence.

Nonetheless, I am persuaded that something remarkable is afoot. I see young adults turned-on to the Bible

by good teachers. I meet young adults with more conservative views than mine on abortion, homosexuality, and women in ministry. I encounter young adults eager to worship wholeheartedly with music, ritual, and clear theology. I know young adults committed to social action and ministry to the poor in response to Christ’s call.

What implications do “the new faithful” hold for parents, pastors, teachers, and more? First of all, we might squirm. The openness and tolerance we demanded from our parents may be returned to us marked “term expired.” It is both invigorating and maddening to see some young adults become more conservative and principled in their religious practice than their parents, pastors, and teachers. They are rebelling against rebellion. They want spiritual substance and become strongly committed to it.

Second, we can celebrate this trend despite its occasional excess. This is the cutting edge of the Christian faith in a postmodern epoch. The current cultural milieu is in many respects similar to the polyreligious soil in which early Christianity took root and thrived. Colleen Carroll quotes Andy Crouch, editor-in-chief of *re:generation quarterly*, a magazine for young Christians. Crouch observes participation in college campus religious groups rising over the last 15 years, with conservative groups bene-

It is both invigorating and maddening to see young adults more conservative and principled in their religious practice than their parents, pastors, and teachers. They are rebelling against rebellion.

fitting the most. “Orthodoxy,” he explains, “thrives in pluralism.”

Third, we can structure our congregations and faith-based colleges and universities to engage these young people who are searching. If spiritual formation in the classical Christian doctrines and disciplines is what helps provide mooring in our global context, congregations and colleges will need to respond in fitting ways.

Carroll writes, “Like leaven in the church, young orthodox Christians are the best hope American Christianity has for renewal. Their enthusiasm, creativity, and commitment to seeking truth make these young believers ideal reformers of mainline and evangelical faith communities that have wandered into worldliness, complacency and insularity.” If they do not find places in the church or its institutions to pursue this vision, they will set up alternatives outside the existing structures.

The lead story of the May 2003 issue of *Connections*, a publication of Virginia Mennonite Conference, featured *the exchange*, a new ministry based in downtown Winchester, Virginia. At once both a coffeehouse and a church, *the exchange* is led by young adults Doug Vogt and Heather and Chris Scott. “We are experimenting with what it means to be a Christian

community in the twenty-first century,” Chris explains. The vision reads: “To experience the first century church in a twenty-first century context.”

On Thursday to Saturday evenings, *the exchange* functions with a coffeehouse atmosphere. It seeks also to have the markers of a church, including communion, prayer, Bible study, and celebrations of marriages. The mission is to bring people into relationship with Christ.

Only time will tell whether *the exchange* develops into the faith community its founders envision. Only time will tell whether “the new faithful” embracing Christian orthodoxy will become a force for spiritual renewal in our families, churches, colleges, and society.

But the emergence of this alternative movement of young adults committed to historic theology and practice is an intriguing story. It will bear watching.

—Mark R. Wenger, Waynesboro, Virginia, is copastor of Springdale Mennonite Church and Associate Director of the Preaching Institute, Eastern Mennonite Seminary. In May 2000 he completed a Ph.D. in *Practical Theology: Preaching and Worship from Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia.*



What Have We to Fear?

Kris Anne Swartley

I am not a gymnast, nor am I a circus performer. Yet as a youth minister, I often found myself trying to walk a tightrope of sorts. On one side of me were parents of church teens, warning me of the risks of mixing “community” youth with “church” youth. On the other side were visionaries and leaders who were invested and energized by our outreach ideas, encouraging me to expand our programs.

I could see myself perched warily on the balance beam, looking at one side and then the other, afraid to make any move. I was afraid to choose between the two, afraid to make a decision.

As a leader, fear was often my biggest obstacle. I felt it was my responsibility to listen to all sides of an issue and somehow help us come to a decision, but that responsibility felt like quite a heavy weight on my shoulders. What if I made the wrong decision? What if I failed to fulfill my calling in youth ministry? What if God were disappointed in my ministry? What if someone got hurt because of my poor decision-making?

In my four years of ministry, I don’t know that I ever fully resolved my struggle with fear. However,

I was able to take some risks and experience both success and failure. I believe God was working in both.

Life after youth ministry has not brought me freedom from my struggle with fear. In my new job, which is in the social work field, I have many coworkers who do not share my faith. I feel as though I'm walking a tightrope in these relationships, also.

As I get to know my peers, I sense the differences between us, and I wonder if they can sense it too. I want to share who I am with them, but I also do not want to build walls between us because our values are different. I am afraid that if I speak too strongly or too quickly, I will break the tentative trust we have between us.

I am also afraid I am not brave enough to speak the truth. When am I called to simply listen and show that I care, and when am I called to stand for my beliefs even if it makes me unpopular?

Fear is a powerful thing. It can bind us up so tightly that instead of living out of love, out of grace, out of our faith in Jesus, we end up paralyzed. We end up doing nothing when we are presented with an opportunity to do a very great "something" and impact someone's life.

As Christians we believe that God is present and at work in all of life. The

stories of God's people in the Bible are filled with successes and failures, risks taken and not taken. Yet God is faithful to fulfill his purposes anyway, sometimes through human beings and sometimes despite them. God was at work before Abraham and Sarah. He was at work in biblical history, in ancient church history, in colonial times, in the pre-modern era, in the modern era, and even now in the postmodern era. The changes in the world and in our society can send us into a panic and paralyze us with fear, but God is still at work.

I think the answer to overcoming our fear lies in the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit. There is no formula or 10-step program that will give us the answer to how to build relationships with people who are not believers yet, or with teens struggling with their identity in Christ. Every relationship is different; every group of people is different. But the more we are in tune with the Holy Spirit inside us, the more we will be open to how he is leading us to respond in each moment.

Instead of listening to the fear—fear of failure, fear of change, fear of the unknown—we can listen to God's quiet voice calling us forward into new relationships and adventures. We can trust him to push us out of our comfort zones when we

need to be pushed, and to call us back when we are going too fast or too far.

Isn't that the mystery and the grace of God, that he uses us even when we are confused, uncertain, and lost? Even as we fumble around, wondering what to do and what to say, he is working to redeem people everywhere. As we make mistakes, God's grace is there to bring some-

thing good out of our folly. So with God working all around us and within us, what have we to fear?

—*Kris Anne Swartley, Souderton, Pennsylvania, is a musician, amateur actress, and aspiring freelance writer. She is currently working in the Wrap Around Department at Penn Foundation, Inc., after serving in youth ministry for four years.*



A Spiritual Journey from Courtroom Warrior to Peacemaker

Douglas Noll

Seven years ago, I was whitewater rafting with a group of friends in the River of No Return wilderness in central Idaho when I asked myself a simple question: How many people had I actually helped as a trial lawyer? How many clients came out of the litigation process better off than when they went in?

I pondered that all week as I floated through the beautiful Salmon River canyons and muscled my way through its big rapids. At the end, having tried dozens of complex jury trials, bench trials, arbitrations, and administrative hearings and having represented hundreds of clients over 20-plus-years as a very aggressive trial lawyer, I could only name five people. What a sad commentary on what most would consider a highly successful career in law.

This reflection occurred at the same time I was turning from Shou Shu, a particularly violent form of Chinese martial arts in which I had a second-degree black belt, to tai chi. Tai chi was challenging me with

two paradoxes. The first was “The softer you are, the stronger you are.” The second was “The more vulnerable you are, the more powerful you are.” How could this be?

Slowly, as I trained and plumbed this ancient martial art, I began to experience the paradoxes and understand them. Far from passive or weak, they released within me forces that made me immensely more powerful as a martial artist.

Finally I, like many of many my professional colleagues, was fed up with the contentiousness and hostility engendered by the legal system. The battle metaphor had lost its glow of excitement for me.

By happenstance, I heard about a new program at Fresno Pacific University called the Masters Degree in Peacemaking and Conflict Studies. I will never forget going to an orientation and watching Duane Ruth-Heffelbower’s expression when I walked in. It was as if Satan himself had walked through the doors!

Duane, a lawyer with an M.Div., and I had known each other professionally for many years; he was well aware of my reputation. We talked about the Peacemaking and Conflict Studies degree program, and I left the orientation more interested than ever. After discussions with my wife, I decided to enroll.

Little did I realize what changes lay ahead. In this degree program, the first class is a week-long intensive

called the Basic Institute in Conflict Management (offered in January and August each year to the general public). I suppose it shows that even hardcore trial lawyers, warrior attorneys, can be redeemed, because after the second day, I was hooked. I went back to my law firm, where I was a senior

I went back to my law firm, where I was a senior partner, and told my partners I was changing my business card from “Attorney at Law” to “Peacemaker.” . . . This caused great consternation and . . . led to my separation from the firm. . . .

partner, and told my partners I was changing my business card from “Attorney at Law” to “Peacemaker.” This caused great consternation and, some years later, led to my separation from the firm after 22 years. The experience was truly liberating.

As I moved from a contentious, combative lawyer to a peacemaker, another remarkable process began. I was raised in the Episcopal church in an upper-middle-class family where religion was more social than spiritual. In college, I was introduced to Eastern mysticism and learned to meditate.

Nevertheless, while I sensed a spiritual side of me, I was ungrounded. After law school, I dated a woman from a more conservative Christian faith tradition and followed her through Bible Study Fellowship for a few years. I tended to spook the others in the class with my metaphysical interpretations of the Scriptures. After that relationship, my spiritual life languished except for brief stint in a Lutheran church, where I married my wife.

In my graduate peacemaking studies, my mentors, all Mennonites, did not push their faith on me. I clearly saw, however, that their principal motivation for their work came from their faith. While I respected them immensely, the deeper nature of peacemaking had yet to dawn on me.

As I began my peacemaker practice, I awoke to the idea that the work was both pragmatic and spiritual. I experienced transformation after transformation in the conflicts I worked on. The human capacity for compassion, forgiveness, and tolerance astounded me time and again, until I realized that this is the way people are when given a chance. I saw the transcendent good in all people, which led me to a deeply spiritual life of meditation, work, healing, and faith.

Today I have a thriving professional peacemaking practice working with complex, difficult disputes in

which relationships are at issue and litigation is often not a good option. More importantly, I have helped far more people resolve their conflicts peacefully in the past five years, than I had helped as a trial lawyer in the previous 22 years.

—*Douglas E. Noll, Fresno, California, is a graduate of the University of the Pacific McGeorge School of Law (J.D. 1977) and Fresno Pacific University (M.A., Peacemaking and Conflict Studies, 2001). The author of Peacemaking: Practicing at the Intersection of Law and Conflict (Cascadia, 2003), he is admitted to practice in California, the U.S. Supreme Court, and various federal appellate and district courts. Noll now limits his practice to peacemaking and mediation. He lives with his wife Jan in the foothills of the central Sierra Nevada outside of Fresno.*



The Angels, the Hats, and the Wardrobe

Joanne Lehman

You find them everywhere—on greeting cards and candles and scatter pins. Best of all, angels are characterized in television shows and movies. Angels remind us there is an unseen force, working to bring good out of impossible, desperate situations and connecting us to all the goodness of our past.

We don't get much background on angels. In Scripture angels seem to have masculine names like Michael, but contemporary angels are often female, like Tess in "Touched by an Angel." I think of my angels as that "cloud of witnesses." They are my departed kin who remain connected to me in some cosmic way. And although they might not sit on my shoulder exactly, they are nearby, urging me to live my life with humor, grace, and compassion.

One of my angels is surely Rhoda Myers. My Grandma Martin's older sister was an unseen force even when she was alive—a shadowy figure that I knew only from hushed conversations and an unnatural collection of belongings that gathered dust in a

large bedroom on the second floor of my grandparents' farmhouse in Columbiana County, Ohio.

In a photo album, there is a picture of my grandma and her three sisters when they were young. They are beautiful, dressed in lovely Victorian-era clothing—lace collars, softly draped long skirts, and fancy hats.

In the bedroom where Grandma had stored all of Rhoda's things, there were a lot of old hats—Rhoda's hats, castoffs of her wealthy employers in Youngstown. Not content to wear them as they were, she took them apart and trimmed them to her liking.

Jammed into this one room of my grandparents' home were the entire contents of Rhoda's house. Chairs and tables and pictures in gilded frames. There were bureaus and mirrors and china dishes and boxes of kitchen utensils. Everything in this storage room seemed exotic to a young curiosity seeker like me. A hatbox on one table held several hats and another held jewelry and fancy hat pins.

We weren't supposed to go into the room where Rhoda's things were, but that didn't stop us. I can't remember who went with me—I was the ring leader but I didn't want to go alone. Every time we opened the door to that cold storage room I felt a twinge of guilt, but it was never enough to keep me out. Just enough to make me quiet and quick. Not far inside the door, an old wardrobe held Rhoda's fine

dresses and there were more hats on the top shelf.

Snooping in that wardrobe sent shivers up my spine. Because way in the back, behind the beautiful silk, lace, and crepe dresses, were the wooden legs with their leather straps and metal buckles. Rhoda was an amputee who had lost her "limb," as they always called it, in a terrible farm accident when she was only three. My curiosity about the contents of the wardrobe always stopped just short of its pile of shoes.

After trying on a hat or two, I'd stand on tip-toe to look in the mirror, then hurriedly stuff the hats back where I'd found them and dash out the door, closing it softly behind me. It was a relief to re-

turn to the normal world. Soon I'd creep down the steps with a book in my hands—hastily collected from the "library" in the small room adjoining the storage room. If Grandma knew I'd been snooping, she never mentioned it.

Every once in awhile, Grandma went to visit Great-Aunt Rhoda. She usually took something for Aunt Rhoda. One thing she took was a certain kind of cotton stockings—flesh-colored and opaque—to cover the "limbs." Back in those days women almost never wore slacks.

I knew so little about my great-

I knew so little about my great-aunt—the mystery woman of my childhood. The person no one talked about in front of the children. The woman shut away in "Massillon," those towering gothic buildings. . . .

childhood. The person no one talked about in front of the children. The woman shut away in "Massillon," those towering gothic buildings we passed on the way to visit my other grandparents who lived two hours west, near Dalton. As far as I can remember, we never stopped en route to visit Rhoda.

There was something wrong with Rhoda—something besides her loss of a "limb." I never knew exactly what. I don't think I asked, curious person that I am, because it seemed I shouldn't. I've ventured a question now and then as an adult and still don't know much. Someone told me she was crocheting a lace tablecloth when she "cracked up." Someone said she married a man with three children and "sewed like a maniac" when he left her. They said she left the bathroom door open when she was in there, and that she could work circles around anyone.

My mother once showed me a letter Rhoda wrote to my grandma. This was before she was "committed." It is hard to conceive that a sister living in Salem would write a letter to a relative living less than 10 miles away, but things were so different then. In the letter Rhoda asked about "that sweet little Joanne." She wanted Grandma to give me a hug and a kiss.

They said Rhoda was "man crazy." And when my grandma got engaged, Rhoda was so jealous she threw her sister's wedding dishes out an upstairs window. Some thought she was "spoiled" because everyone had fussed over her so much after her accident.

For my part, I wonder how my great grandparents managed to save Rhoda's life when a doctor and hospital were so far away. How much blood did she lose? Did she suffer brain impairment because of the trauma? It would be interesting to know what diagnosis my great-aunt Rhoda was given at Massillon. Maybe they didn't diagnose back then. You were just "nuts." Did she have post-traumatic stress disorder? Bipolar disorder? Obsessive-compulsive disorder?

I remember someone brought Aunt Rhoda to a reunion once. I remember how she chattered away, moving her legs restlessly—perhaps a side effect of some medication. They said she was always first in line at the hospital to get her medicine. I remember her black lace-up oxfords with chunky heels and the wrinkled flesh-colored cotton hose.

Mostly, I remember her neat stuff. I wish I knew more about her. Wish I'd really known her. Wish I'd asked to keep a hat and a couple of the foot-long jeweled hat pins in her memory. Wish they'd brought her home to visit more.

When Rhoda lived at Massillon during the 1940s and 1950s, over three thousand "different" people lived there in the "cottages." There were dances and fine dining and beautiful gardens. People lived in these asylums—which may have been just that. They spent their days rocking in the brightly lit day rooms. Community services and rehabilitation programs didn't exist. Medications and treatments were as crude as the prosthesis hidden in the old wardrobe.

Mental patients were locked away, separated from their belongings and their families, but it seemed best for them at the time.

My grandma, whose name was Olive, was aptly named after the olive branch—symbol of peace and hope. She was caught in the web of her times and used what help was available to her and Rhoda. I admire my grandma for caring for Rhoda's things all those years. She cared for them even when she didn't know how to care for her violent sister who threw the contents of her hope chest out the window.

Grandma could have disposed of Rhoda's things—or used them. But she didn't. She could have allowed us to dress up in Rhoda's clothes and parade around in her hats, but she didn't. In the end, that roomful of stuff was sold at my grandparents' estate auction. Maybe keeping Rhoda's things all those years was Grandma's way of keeping hope alive. Maybe she

was waiting for a miracle. Maybe keeping these things was, in the end, all she was able to do for Rhoda.

Sometimes now, I fancy Rhoda my angel, flying alongside me. Instead of a halo, she's wearing a hat trimmed with elaborate, brightly colored plumes and secured with a jeweled pin. She urges me to choose a particular path.

And my grandma, Olive, she is here too, reminding me to have hope and wait for miracles. I thought I caught a glimpse of both of them the other day when I was trying on hats in a department store. They were smiling back at me from the mirror.

—*Joanne Lehman is a writer and poet living in Apple Creek, Ohio. She is a community relations specialist for the Mental Health & Recovery Board in Wooster, Ohio. Her book, Traces of Treasure: Quest for God in the Commonplace (Herald Press, 1994) won a Silver Angel Award.*

Sometimes now, I fancy Rhoda my angel, flying alongside me. Instead of a halo, she's wearing a hat trimmed with elaborate, brightly colored plumes and secured with a jeweled pin.



One Faith, One Baptism. . . ?

Norman R. de Puy

The last time I counted, Protestants were up to more than 300 denominations including, for the sake of argument, the Episcopal church.

For me, the question has become, “How seriously do most of us take Paul’s claim, ‘So we being many, are one body in Christ. . .’ (Rom. 12:15)?” It would be difficult to find a biblical text “more honored in the breach than the observance.”

Thus the related questions: Why do people choose one church or denomination over others? Do we choose, or are we simply swept along? Is there an erosion of denominational loyalty? Why do people remain in one church or denomination, or, as ever more evident, leave for another?

After a cursory investigation we can conclude that there is both a settled condition in many denominations but also a marked and intriguing traffic to and fro between traditions.

A Growing Preoccupation

Whether due to the freedom in retirement from institutional responsibilities, or to offering supply preaching in a variety of denominational churches, I

have developed a preoccupation with the surprisingly little attention paid to Paul and his definition of the church amid today's rupturing of the one body into countless fragments and the many attempts at justifying this condition.

During the 40 years before my retirement as minister in five American Baptist churches, challenged by the responsibilities in my local church, I experienced relatively little temptation to become agitated about other denominations. From the beginning of my parish ministry, however, I was intrigued by denominational differences, particularly in matters of liturgy.

I had interesting and close friendships, several long-lasting, with fellow ministers of other churches in town: Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, and Quaker. However, Paul's mandate and biblical injunctions about one body did not seem to play a part except in a vague marginal way.

The Travelers

Meanwhile the travel between traditions has proceeded apace, leaving me now wondering this: If there is moving from one tradition to another, is it simply a matter of dissolution? Or could it also be a sign of coming together as the One Body? Could the increased knowledge of one another's traditions, and awareness of strengths and weaknesses,

bring some new sense of the one body of Christ?

In addressing the implications of such questions, of course we need to be concerned with why people leave the church altogether, given the overall attrition and the across-the-board shrinkage in all our so-called mainline churches. Yet my experience with the "leavers," or those who abandon the faith, indicate factors different from negotiating variations across denominations. "People who leave the church are not necessarily abandoning God or faith," according to Alan Jamieson, author of *A Churchless Faith*. "In fact, some people leave the church to save their faith. . . ."

Jamieson found that many of what he calls "postcongregational" Christians had been leaders in the church—deacons, elders, Sunday school teachers, even pastors. He believes congregations should listen to people who opt out of the church, and that those who leave may be in the best position to reach postmodern folk. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the former churchgoers he interviewed claimed no one from their church ever talked to them about why they left. He urges churches to be "leaver sensitive," because "the leavers need the church and the church needs the leavers. . . ." (*Christian Century*, Jan. 11, 2003).

Obviously the defection of people who consider themselves religious—Christian, in many cases—but who

If there is moving from one tradition to another, is it simply a matter of dissolution? Or could it also be a sign of coming together as the One Body?

do not worship in any church congregation is important to the decline of any tradition losing numbers. But this departure from one denomination to none is in the end a matter somewhat tangential to my concern here, since my focus is on the traffic between liturgical traditions.

Nor am I thinking primarily of those who leave the church because "nobody spoke" to them. Or because some deranged deacon snarled at them or they were passed over as flower committee chair. My great-grandfather quit his church, Episcopal, because he claimed he was falsely chastised for leaving peanut shells on the floor of the pew. Sometimes people leave because the minister is not friendly enough, though this is hard to imagine, given the work-related cramps ministers get from repetitious smiling, enduring a carpal tunnel syndrome of the cheeks. Such reasons can be important, but the focus here is on deeper motivations.

There are other aspects of movement more closely related to my concerns. Yale theologian Miroslav Volf, who comes from ministry in the Pentecostal church in Eastern Europe, a denomination in which his father was also a prominent minister, exemplifies movement undertaken for the sake of growth.

In an interview about worship and liturgy, Volf tells why he left the Pentecostal movement. He was "in flight from bad preaching. My sense was I just wasn't getting the gospel in the church I was visiting. I think preachers want to mediate between faith and the contemporary situation, but I felt

the substance of faith was dribbling away. I didn't need to go to church to be psychologized or given second-rate social theories. I can chill out on my deck with a cup of coffee and the *New York Times* for that. So I sought comfort in the Book of Common Prayer seven years ago" (*Christian Century*, Jan. 11, 2003).

Here is a striking example of movement: from Pentecostal to Canterbury. Although Volf focuses on negative reasons for the travel, the fact that his aim is spiritual growth begins to point toward the possibility that there are positive reasons for changing traditions. Such travel can be rooted in deep motives and earnest needs.

Thus we should insist at this point that liturgical travel between traditions does not disparage the tradition left behind. It is more likely that coming or going, leaving or staying, is a matter of growth in faith. And we must realize that faith changes could lead to the "low" as well as to the "high" liturgies. There is no suggestion that one or the other is superior. We are looking for understanding and a sense of commonality in Christ wherever it surfaces.

What Are Key Areas of Denominational Difference?

As a backdrop to the quest for commonality, we might want to ponder the various ingredients of liturgical worship through such discussion and study starters as these:

- Why the *Book of Common Prayer*? Why so different its use from the so-called "service books" of the free churches?

- Why symbolic dress: the Anglican priest with medieval garments; the robes and collars of Reformed and some free church clergy; the Amish and Quaker “dress”; the Mennonite beard and moustache-free upper lip?
- Why four scriptural readings in high churches, one or two in the free churches where Bible and preaching are more central?
- The ordination tradition of the “Apostolic Succession” or the “call” of Protestant ministers?
- The tone of the call to worship: “good morning,” or, as I experienced just last Sunday in a Congregational church, “Good morning; thanks for coming”? Or the scriptural greetings of the more formal traditions?
- What forms of what Gordon Lathrop (*Holy Things*) calls the “Book,” “Bath,” and “Meal”—the Bible, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper? The Bath practices: total immersion, pouring, sprinkling, none; the differences in age at baptism and the implications of God’s inexorable grace?
- The Meal: celebrated annually, quarterly, monthly, not at all? Is it a memorial, akin to Memorial Day in the nation, or is it a Spirit-generated mystery? Is it a trip forward to the “Table” by the entire congregation, or is it taken in the pew; self-served? Grape juice or wine?
- What is the place of symbolic actions and rituals in general?
- What is the place and role of the

state? Total separation? Some connections of “faith-based” efforts with government support? None? Interpretation of Romans 13?

- What is the position on war? Pacifism, just war theory, full and uncritical patriotic support?
- What is the place of symbols? Prominent place of cross, stained glass, clear windows, architecture? Or the absence of these?

The Travel as Incentive to Seek Commonality?

Why do some Christians feel more blessed when closer to one end or the other of the liturgical spectrum, enticing them to move from where they are to a different place in the flow of denominations? Perhaps more importantly, is this good or bad? If it includes good aspects, one possibility this article has been exploring, how can we further such movement? If movement among traditions need not necessarily lead to outright shifting of traditions, how might we at least encourage visits between them?

An example of cross-tradition visitation is found in our local ministerium, which is a fine one: Each month we have open and free discussion among the various traditions represented, among them Episcopal, Baptist, Unitarian, UCC, Methodist, Lutheran, Quaker, and several independents of collegial and gentle nature. Almost fifty percent of us are retired but still reasonably alert.

Not only do we visit across traditions in our ministerium, however;

we have also learned more about the travel to and fro, since in our discussions of traditions, we have learned that several clergy members left backgrounds in “higher” (Lutheran and Catholic) liturgical churches of their upbringing, choosing instead the “free” or “lower” liturgical churches. The Quaker is an ex-Episcopalian, as is the Unitarian minister. Another is leaving the free church for the priesthood of the Episcopal church. So the traffic truly is going both ways.

Is the travel a historical matter, a theological matter, or a case of personal psychological preference? In the end I don’t fully know how to answer the question, since any number of reasons shape each decision to travel from one tradition to another. But if the why of the travel can use more investigation, the fact that it is happening is inescapable and invites continued pondering of how, amid such ongoing cross-fertilization, we might take serious the One Faith in the One Body, regardless of which branch of it we currently call home.

How Can We Take Seriously the One Faith in the One Body?

Now obviously every tradition has its strong points, and perhaps, viewed from an emphasis on the unity of the body, its weak or unacceptable points. My question is not who is correct, or more correct than the other. Rather, it is how we can find that one faith in

one body amid our denominational fragmentations.

The very naming of such a quest underscores how seldom it is seriously undertaken. I have not heard of any local church study program which devoted itself seriously to the major points of a tradition other than its own. In light of this, I have little confidence that we will ever see much by the way of physical denominational unions, though there have been some: Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Lutheran/Episcopal at the national level come readily to mind.

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Nevertheless, I am convinced of this: If we in different traditions can think about or share in the experience of one another’s worship liturgies at the local level, accompanied by a serious study of each other’s liturgical histories, we can come to a new experience of oneness in Christ.

One key resource for such study can be the many who, as I have been discussing, have themselves traveled from one tradition to another. As persons who have experienced several different heritages, they are in a good position to identify strengths and weaknesses of each as well as of the travel itself. The more travel represented in a given group, as in my ministerium, the richer the experience can be.

Another remarkably fair and lucid resource, manageable and useful for study group purposes, is Richard Losch’s *The Many Faces of Faith* (Eerd-

mans, 2001). Losch provides a brief but edgy description of major denominational traditions. He finds *Faith, yes. Many Faces*, indeed. In our church lives we can hope, then, for a deep sense of the many faces of one Lord.

I realize it's a long way from Amish and Mennonite Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to Canterbury, England; from modern Pentecostal churches to the Pentecostal Flame of that first baptized company. Still there may be more love and acceptance between us than we imagine, and a shared knowledge which indeed reflects the apostle's mandate.

I hasten to add that in any comparative study of the one body we must realize that all worship is and ends in mystery, in a gift of intimate union with God and his creation through the Holy Spirit.

—Norman de Puy, Peterborough, New Hampshire, was for many years an American Baptist minister, denominational leader, and prolific writer. He currently publishes a journal-type newsletter for lay and professional leaders, *The CyberWalrus: An E-Mail Commonplace Book*, free subscriptions to which can be requested from ndepuy@adelphia.net.



Privileged White Girls in Africa

Valerie Weaver-Zercher

*In a field
I am the absence / offield.
This is / always the case.
Wherever I am / I am what is missing.*
—Mark Strand, from “Keeping Things Whole”

My parents own an old, dog-eared edition of *Tenzi Za Rohoni*, the hymnal of the Tanzania Mennonite Church. Inside its ripped green cover, the pages are slathered with the large swirls and zigzags of my one-year-old hand. My markings cover the texts of North American hymns, translated into the straightforward vowels and forceful consonant blends of Swahili: *Mungu Ni Pendo, Baba Mwana Robo*. Later, back in the Mennonite churches of Pennsylvania, I will learn them as *For God So Loved Us* and *Holy, Holy, Holy*.

I imagine myself in those Shirati days, perched on my mother's lap during hot services inside the white adobe church, scribbling intently on top of those songs while listening to Luo voices sing them. It seems that I am determined to make a mark on each page of the book—even if only a dot or short line—as if to say, *I have been here, and here, and here, too.*

It is as if I am adding my voice to the chorus of other *wazungu* [white people], who have brought medicines and motorcycles and coverings and hymnals to this Dark Continent: *We have been here, and here, and here, too.*

In Africa, I am the absence of Africa.

Several countries to the south, during those same troubled years of the 1970s, another white girl was leaving her race's mark. Alexandra Fuller's recent memoir, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood*, recounts her bitter childhood as the daughter of colonial farmers with motives far more complex—and far less admirable—than my parents'.

Fuller's British family moved from ranch to ranch in Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi. They lived at least the façade of colonial dominance, complete with uniformed "house-boys," swimming pools, and all-white boarding schools. Although their colonial lives crumble in the face of her mother's alcoholism, the death of three of her siblings, and African nation-building, Fuller's parents persist.

A conversation early in the book tells much about her parents' blinded loyalties to their race, their refusal to acknowledge any Other.

While entertaining a visitor from England and discussing politics, Mum pours herself more wine, finishing the bottle, then she says fiercely to our guest, "Thirteen thousand Kenyans and a hundred white settlers died in the

struggle for Kenya's independence."

I can tell the visitor doesn't know if he should look impressed or distressed. He settles for a look of vague surprise. "I had no idea."

"Of course you bloody people had no idea," says Mum. "A hundred . . . of us."

I am reticent to lay these stories beside each other. The characters in them—my parents and their missionary colleagues, Fuller's parents and their colonial cronies—could hardly be more different. The first were motivated by concern for the souls and bodies of others, the second by a strong brew of racism and profit and adventure. And even though many early missionaries are learning how culture-bound and racist their message often was, I remain confident that most carried generous motives and compassionate hearts.

Yet I am disturbed by the strange sonority of these scenes, the strings of Whiteness, resources, and power that connect them. As Tanzanian Mennonite bishop Zedekiah Kisare, now deceased, put it in his memoir (*Kisare: A Mennonite of Kiseru*, 1984), missionaries (and certainly colonialists, even struggling ranchers like the Fullers) have a "long tether rope": "Their rope is so long that they can hardly carry it," he writes. "These resources give the people from the West the ability to come here in the first place. Their resources make it possible for them to do their work and for them to enjoy Africa."

With these words, Kisare implicates some of my favorite memories: Land Rover trips past the acacia trees and elephant tribes of the Serengeti, afternoon teas in the bougainvillea-lined guesthouse of Nairobi, hippo-watching at lush Lake Naivasha. My missionary-kid life certainly wasn't all game-park vacation, but my life looked more like Fuller's than like the malaria-ridden and water-carrying existences of my African peers.

I would love to return to Africa. I would love to show my husband and children the frangipani trees I climbed, to taste the ugali and mandazis that I learned to love, to meet the people who were so hospitable to my family.

But how do I salvage these happy memories when Whiteness and the privilege of a long-tether rope made them possible? How do I appreciate another culture without consuming it? How do I observe or interact with the Other, whether person, culture, or landscape, without altering—or at least negatively altering—It?

On the other hand, how do I, as a person of relative privilege and power, not feel guilty for my very existence? Alexandra Fuller and I take little stabs at apology and reparation: She takes some of her few clothes to one of her family's African laborers; I choose to live in a diverse neighborhood with at least a few less things than my culture tells me I deserve.

But how do we not simply act ashamed of our privilege, which is a convenient liberal façade, while continuing to benefit from it?

As Albert Memmi writes in his over-40-year-old but timeless book, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, any attempt by a colonizer to disengage

from colonial ideology is ultimately futile and mostly a mental exercise: "It is not easy to escape mentally from a concrete situation, to refuse its ideology while continuing to live with its actual relationships."

We can be, in Memmi's terminology, "colonizers who accept" the structures

of inequality or "colonizers who refuse," who agitate against the system. We can be hard-driving ranchers or compassionate missionaries. Either way, in Africa, we are the absence of Africa.

It would be disingenuous to assume that my privilege is visible only there, of course. I benefit from my race and class privilege every day, here at home, most of the time without even being aware of it. But that's a topic for another, much longer, much more confessional column.

So I won't travel to Tanzania right now, or any time soon. Instead I'll read Swahili counting books to my sons and enjoy the ugali that my father and sister whip up on occasion. I'll remember with fondness the

I would love to return to Africa. . . . to show my husband and children the frangipani trees I climbed But how do I salvage these happy memories when Whiteness and the privilege of a long-tether rope made them possible?

hyena's cackle and the bitterness of wood-smoke, but I'll try to keep my tether rope coiled, at least a little. It's not about a guilt trip for a privileged life, as Barbara Kingsolver puts it in an essay about simple living, but just "an adventure in bearable lightness."

And fortunately, when we human beings with power use it wrongly, nature—and culture—can sometimes bounce back to their original forms. Fortunately, Luo Mennonites now sing Luo songs in church, not only

Swiss-German melodies, and North American missionaries are leaving their requirements for coverings and "modesty" at home. Fortunately, God can take all the absences we create and turn them into signposts of the true Presence.

—*Valerie Weaver-Zercher, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, is the mother of two young sons as well as assistant editor and columnist for DreamSeeker Magazine.*



Outreach That Fits the Message

Two Missionary Kids Reflect

Michael A. King
with Valerie Weaver-Zercher

Led by a Christian who at minimum implies God has told him to do it, the most powerful country in the history of the world launches war against a largely Islamic country. Soon after, a variety of Christian denominational leaders and missionaries declare that Islam is evil and that it is their task to save the Islamic citizens of this conquered country from misguided allegiance to a bad religion.

Interfaith considerations such as this example raises are endlessly complex; I don't want to claim to do more here than comment on small aspects of a much larger picture. But I do think the aftermath of the United States invasion of Iraq is an appropriate time to at least to ask how forms of Christian outreach to persons of other faiths will fit the message being shared.

Two aspects of the Jesus I see in the New Testament particularly catch my attention in relation to this. First, "the Word became flesh and lived among us," as John 1:14 puts it. Jesus, as many Scriptures emphasize, was more than a man; he uniquely made flesh the

divine itself. But in becoming flesh he did not conquer those among whom he lived. Rather, becoming like a slave, to echo Pau's classic hymn in Philippians 2, he dwelled among them as one of them, in all the particularity and richness of their culture.

Second, his message fit the form of his incarnation. Blessed are the conquerors? The strong? The mighty? The leaders of the great nations? Far from it. Blessed are the poor, the enslaved, the captive, the hurting. Kill the enemy? Return evil for evil and vanquish it with arsenals of smart bombs? No. Love the enemy. Return good for evil. Refuse to play the game the world's way and play it God's way.

What these aspects of Jesus' teaching suggest to me is this: Too many American Christian leaders and missionaries are now too eager to follow the smart bombs of the military with spiritual smart bombs—which is what I see them doing when they launch outreach from the high ramparts of their belief that they, like their government, represent the one true Truth before which those of other faiths had better bow low lest the spiritual missiles of the missionaries or of God himself destroy them. Such missionaries are tempted to live out the American tale of redemptive violence far sooner than the gospel story of redemptive suffering on behalf of and amid the captives and enemies.

In times like these, then, it seems particularly appropriate for someone like Valerie Weaver-Zercher, a missionary kid, to ponder in personal and intimate yet sophisticated ways the pitfalls of reaching out to those of an-

other culture. But that isn't quite the end of the story. Originally my own column was going to be on a different topic entirely, and the conversation below was intended to be precisely what it reads like: a personal e-mail exchange. But as the conversation unfolded, for reasons that end up explained in the exchange itself, I concluded a column had emerged without my realizing it at the time.

So here it is, my initial response to Valerie Weaver-Zercher's preceding column on her life as a missionary kid, then another e-mail turn or two before my concluding comments.

Michael to Valerie

Just a bit of personal reaction yet to your latest Marginalia. I had never really focused on the fact that you were an MK and would have memories of the experience. As an MK myself, I found your column fascinating, provocative, quite well done. I think I largely end up where you do; I often thought of that agenda when taking a course at Temple University on post-colonialism and remembering the many ways missionaries in my background worked at colonizing, if with the best of intentions.

My one difference in nuance, perhaps, in putting things together for myself—more a personal position than a well-thought-through theoretical one—is this: I do see my majority identity as White and implicating me inevitably in the colonizing dynamics. But I also was raised, at depths that go far beyond what I can consciously assess, in non-White cultures (first Cuba, then Mexico), so much so

that I spoke and thought in Spanish before English.

Last year my family and I spent a day in Tijuana, Mexico, 15 miles south of San Diego. My children and spouse Joan were in near-awe of what they saw happen: They said I became a different person, member of a culture that looked to them beautiful yet alien to their own, and that it was amazing to watch the faces of the Mexicans as they shifted from thinking they were talking to a Gringo to realizing that in some odd way I was also one of them.

Please hear me: I don't think this changes the power/race dynamics you insightfully discuss. Just because in a certain sense I can enter Mexican culture doesn't change the power and privilege accompanying my Whiteness.

But what it does make me think is that there are aspects of who I am that, like it or not, are Mexican, because they are bred into my bones almost as deeply—and possibly in some cases more deeply—than my American characteristics. This seems to me to add one complicating dynamic: When I went to Tijuana I was indeed going as a powerful White Yankee male; no question about it. But I was also in some modest sense going back to my own country. And it is often as a "Mexican," I've come to realize, that I have the eyes to see some of the more troubling aspects of my country's (U.S.) social, political, and economic

decisions and directions. For what it's worth!

Thanks again for some powerful reflections, Valerie.

Valerie to Michael

Thanks for your reflection on the whole MK/colonialism thing: Your thinking makes complete sense, and I imagine it grows in part out of your more intimate connection to Mexico. I really spent very little time in Tanzania—my first year (of course, without memories) and then half a year when I was in sixth grade. So most of my experience comes simply through family lore.

I am concerned that this column is too harsh, too clear-cut-sounding; your reflections point to the other side I'm afraid is lost in it. So thanks—maybe you could do an "On the Other Hand" response in the next issue? (I started out suggesting that in jest, but maybe it's an idea you should mull over. . . .)

Michael to Valerie

I had at one point a year or two ago been planning to write along the above lines but never got around to it. Not sure if this time I'll find the right words, but your half-jest, half-serious invitation may tempt me.

Let me stress I'm not seeing what I already wrote or might write as rebuttal—I think yours is one of the most insightful MK ponderings in this area I've seen. I'm more thinking that each

There are aspects of who I am that, like it or not, are Mexican, because they are bred into my bones almost as deeply—and possibly in some cases more deeply—than my American characteristics.

MK experience will interface with the agenda you raise in unique ways, so my comments were testimony to that, not disagreement with the conclusions your experience brought you to.

It *is* interesting that part of our variation may be that you were a very young MK (I wasn't aware of that). In contrast, I was an MK except for two one-year furloughs in Virginia and Pennsylvania from age three months to nearly age 18.

Concluding Reflections

As I reflect on the conversation just reported, it seems to me that Valerie and I, both with considerable schooling in forms of thought that tend to view the West harshly as a colonizing power, focus one way or another on that agenda. A different though still related agenda involves the question of where the intent of the missionaries, which was to spread the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, fits in the story.

As suggested through my introductory comments, I do believe the problem of the West as colonizing power has long been a real one. Now it is more chillingly urgent as U.S. President George W. Bush and many of his advisers, supported by millions of Christians, have made explicit their belief that the mightiest Western power, the United States, should intentionally aim to remain forever the most powerful country on earth.

In pondering Valerie's column amid such developments, I see her as rightly highlighting the dangers of treating mission work as a colonizing enterprise. That is why I hope my re-

sponse makes clear that largely I support her perspectives.

Still, in the "on the other hand" aspect of my response invited by Valerie, I am suggesting this: Sometimes those of us brought up in other cultures receive the gift of a bicultural perspective through which we can view the world partly from within the beauties and wisdoms of our adoptive culture even as we can then stand partly outside our own Western culture and see its dangers (and beauties also, but danger comes first when a nation declares itself preeminent).

This makes me suspect that as critical as it is, now more than ever, to ponder how missionary outreach can be a way we violate cultures of others, it is also important to open ourselves to those aspects of the missionary experience that can be enriching.

My parents plus their missionary colleagues, and those Cubans and Mexicans who became their friends, can speak more directly than I to the question of whether the outreach of their generation was a conquering or a servant one. Some of both, I suspect. But whichever side of the line those efforts fell on, I at least want to testify to my own conviction that how I now see the world is a gift from Cuban and Mexican cultures I can never fully claim as my own—but whose depths have forever shaped my vision.

—*Michael A. King, Telford, Pennsylvania, is pastor, Spring Mount (Pa.) Mennonite Church; and editor, DreamSeeker Magazine. He lived in Cuba 1955-1960 and Mexico 1961-1972.*

Winemaker and Partygoer

Randy Klassen

When Christians are asked to recall the names, titles, or labels Scripture assigns to Jesus, we are likely to hear Savior, Lord, Good Shepherd, Man of Sorrows, King of kings, Teacher, and so forth. Winemaker and Partygoer rarely come up. Yet these labels are as biblical as the others, and our understanding of Jesus may be off-balance if we ignore them.

I certainly never heard those wilder titles while attending the Mennonite Brethren church in Winnipeg, Canada. Of course worship was all in German, so I could have missed it, but I doubt it. The taboos were translated into English for those of us in our teens. We were not to go to movies, dances, or card parties, to name a few of the worldly ways we were to avoid. The impression I received was that the church was anti-intellectual, anti-cultural, and anti-fun.

However, in the Gospels alone there are at least 24 references to Jesus eating and drinking, often with folks the religious leaders of the day considered the wrong crowd. So upset were they with Jesus' partying that they called him "a drunkard and a glutton." (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34). Jesus' first miracle, as reported in the second chapter of John's Gospel, was to

turn the water in six stone jars into about 175 gallons of the best wine the wedding guests had ever tasted. We can be sure this act brought many a smile to the family and friends at this marriage feast in Cana of Galilee.

What led Jesus to participate in all of these communal meals? Is there a lesson for us from observing all of his eating and drinking?

Two customs in Jesus' day are involved in the answer. The first has to do with the carpentry business. On completion of a significant job that had taken several days, such as a large piece of furniture, a wall, or a house repair, the recipient family would prepare a feast to enjoy with the carpenter and his family. This was in part payment for the work and also an occasion to celebrate a job well done. No doubt Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth, would have shared in many such gatherings.

The second custom relates to who was considered eligible to participate in festive meals. Since communal eating and drinking were special events, the religious elite felt that only the "pure" could partake. That would rule out tax collectors, beggars, Gentiles, prostitutes, any persons of questionable moral character, or "sinners" as such were usually called.

These are two of the customs or traditions of which Jesus was aware when he shared meals with others. How did he respond to these traditions?

The first custom Jesus seems to have gladly affirmed and enlarged. To eat and drink in celebration of a job

successfully completed was appropriate. Might this not be one reason he instituted Holy Communion for all who wish to celebrate the work of redemption finished on Calvary? This is the joyful "eucharist," or thanksgiving, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet (Luke 22:30), the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9).

Weep, as you may when you bite into the bread, remembering your part in his death. But when you take the cup (glass or chalice), raise it up. And if you dare not say "Cheers" at least say "Hallelujah" or "Thank you, Jesus" and rejoice! You are proclaiming your risen Lord, who blesses our tables now and is preparing the banquet of all banquets still to come.

The second custom Jesus shattered completely. "Only special people allowed," it said. Jesus replied that all people are special. All are loved by God and infinitely precious. That included tax collectors, harlots, beggars, Gentiles, and all sinners—even, in our day, gays and lesbians, one would think. All of us. All are invited and welcome to eat and drink with Jesus.

Bruce Chilton, in his somewhat controversial book *Rabbi Jesus*, believes Jesus replaced the practice of John's baptism with "communal meals as the ritual symbol of the coming kingdom of God" (Doubleday Publishers, 2000, p. 60). Jesus would lift the cup and pray, "Sanctified are you, Lord, Eternal King: creating the fruit of the earth." Then before breaking the bread he would say, "Sanctified are you, Lord, Eternal King: bringing forth bread from the earth." At these meals Jesus conveyed to all an

inspiring sense of the real presence of God, even in Levi's home.

Levi (or Matthew) was so thrilled Jesus included him that he gave "a great banquet" in his honor (Luke 5:29). That Jesus and his disciples were eating, drinking, laughing, sharing stories with tax collectors and his tainted friends scandalized the religious leaders. They asked, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" To which Jesus replied, "I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners."

Eugene Peterson paraphrases Luke 5:31 like this: "Who needs a doctor, the healthy or the sick? I am here inviting outsiders, not insiders—an invitation to a changed life, changed inside and out." I guess if we don't believe we are sinners, we will feel no need of a Savior. What a tragedy, to miss out on the bread and wine of Christ's banquet. Both Karl Olsson in his *Come to the Party* (Word, 1972), and Tony Campolo in *The Kingdom of God is a Party* (Word, 1990) provide eloquent endorsement of this often forgotten New Testament theme

In Matthew 22:2-4, Jesus uses the wedding feast as the appropriate metaphor for the kingdom of God. What could inspire more joy than to celebrate life by eating and drinking with Jesus? His miracle of providing the best wine at the wedding feast in Cana must have thrilled the family of the wedding party. They would have been terribly embarrassed to run out

of wine on the first day, since wedding parties at that time could last up to a week.

Besides involving an act of generosity for the family, there is more to this story. Those stone jars were there for the Jewish rite of purification. Does the Gospel writer see Jesus as here signaling a replacing of the waters of legalism of the Old Covenant with the wine of grace in the New Covenant? And when the steward exclaimed, "You have kept the good wine until now" (John 2:10), is this not a message to us that the best is yet to come? Then the writer adds, "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his

glory; and his disciples believed in him."

They believed in him as Lord, Master, Teacher, Healer, and more, yes. But they believed in him also as the Winemaker, the one who brings joy and fulfillment to all who invite his presence.

How does the world see Jesus? Do its citizens see him as a Winemaker and Partygoer who could be sitting on the barstool beside them sharing a good joke? If not, does not the responsibility for this failure lie with church folk, those called to be the visible body of Christ? Are we not usually seen as a more pious, exclusive, and judgmental group?

This problem is not new. Back in 1582 Saint Teresa of Avila prayed,

How does the world see Jesus? Do its citizens see him as a Winemaker and Partygoer who could be sitting on the barstool beside them sharing a good joke?

“From somber, serious, sullen saints, save us, O Lord.” Amen! The New Testament refers to “joy” over 280 times. Maybe it is time to reflect this “joy of the Lord” as we befriend the tax collectors and sinners in our neighborhoods. Jesus called us to be “salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13). But obviously the salt does the world no good as long as it remains cozily clustered in its comfortable container. We need to be shaken!

Like John, I want my world “to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing, have life in his name” (John 20-31). John *begins* by telling me Jesus is God’s Word to us, that Word who “became flesh and lived among us and we have seen his glory . . . full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Such glory could only be seen when “lived among us.” To identify with all sinners, Jesus begins by going to the Jordan for baptism, then he goes to Cana for a wedding party before moving on

to Levi’s place for a banquet. Indeed he is among us!

I yearn for my world to see God’s grace and truth in me. For this to happen, two things are necessary. First, I must yield to the direction of Christ’s love, so what I reveal is really his grace and truth. Second, I must be in this world, eating and drinking, weeping and working, laughing and rejoicing, with all of my sisters and brothers, whoever they are. Only thus can I be God’s Word of gracious invitation to the divine party planned for all.

—*Randy Klassen, San Andreas, California, served as pastor in Covenant Church congregations for 34 year and developed two new churches. For four years he was Covenant Church Executive Secretary of Evangelism, and he did art work professionally for six years. He has written many books and articles, most recently What Does the Bible Really Say About Hell? (Pandora Press U.S., 2001).*



The Vision of Jeff Gundy

Daniel Hertzler

Scattering Point: The World in a Mennonite Eye. State University of New York Press, 2003.

The first time through this book I found myself wondering about its organization. Instead of beginning at a point and proceeding steadily to an end, it seems to go round and round. Then I noticed several things. An acknowledgment of sources shows that much of the book is compiled from material published elsewhere and now brought together in a single volume. So we may be prepared for some backtracking.

Also, in looking again at the introduction, I saw that Gundy has been on a search for his identity. In this book he reflects on that pilgrimage. “Here I am, a farmboy turned academic, a high school jock turned poet, a rebel turned family man, a skeptic turned churchgoer, a Mennonite by Birthright and—give or take my qualms and quibbles—by conviction” (3).

So this search provides a unifying theme for the book. What then are the issues which concern him? If we apply the grid proposed by Richard Foster in his book *Money, Sex and Power*, Gundy is most interested in power. There is an occasional overture to sex and some references to money, but what concerns Gundy

is power, particularly the power of survival. To what extent has the radical Anabaptist vision been able to survive modernity and how will it function in a time of postmodern prosperity?

Gundy's first and last chapters address a trip to Europe. In the first he reflects on worship: in cave, church, or cathedral, and aims to tie them together. The last chapter is based on a visit to distant relatives, descendants of Amish who stayed in Europe when Gundy's ancestors came to America and found their way to the Illinois prairie where he grew up.

He writes of his ancestors on both his father's and his mother's sides as far back as great-grandparents. The families and the faith survived, but each has been subject to the pressures of passing time. He was raised as the oldest of six children in the Waldo Mennonite Church, an Amish congregation which became Amish Mennonite, then Mennonite as it adjusted to the pressures of modernity.

The piety was strong, and Gundy generally cooperated with the church program, but at one point he resisted. He declined response to the altar calls. But he eventually joined the congregation in his own way, for he writes that he was "baptized in the same congregation as my mother and her mother, and her mother's mother and father, and that father's father, though the church building burned down in 1933 and had to be rebuilt" (191).

Gundy . . . wishes to practice the authentic Anabaptist faith, but wonders how this may be done in a society where . . . he himself is . . . quite comfortable.

Gundy is impressed by the ambiguities in life. He is interested in and wishes to practice the authentic Anabaptist faith, but wonders how this may be done in a society in which it is no longer illegal and he himself is wellpaid and quite comfortable.

Among the ambiguities is having lived on land from which Native Americans were separated against their will and where the farmers insisted that nature accede to their demands. All of the six children in his family went away to college, then one returned to farm with his father. "In some ways, though not in all, it [the modern North American system] is the most efficient food production system the world has ever known. The abandoned farmsteads, the decaying barns and torn down houses that illuminate the entire Midwest with their picturesque decay, remind us of the price of that efficiency" (85).

He is concerned about what this sort of farming does to the land, yet his life depends on it. "How shall we live in the world?" he asks. "Carefully, I might say. Gracefully. Mindful of our privileges and our blunders and the sacrifices we require of the world just that we may exist. Going as lightly as we can without falling into a joyless lifestyle Puritanism" (86).

Chapter 4 is subtitled "Depression, Silence and Mennonite Margins." I found myself wondering how a chapter on depression would fit into the book. I noticed eventually that he

thinks his grandmother may have suffered from depression. This fits with what I have observed regularly: Persons who take an interest in mental illness are often close to someone who has suffered from it. He reports that his grandmother died in her early 60s. "Let her rest in peace now. But let her also not be forgotten. Let us remember that she needed a kind of help that even those who knew and loved her, who were close by and tried their best, could not figure out how to give her. Let us not blame them or her. But let us learn to do better" (114).

The Mennonite system has provided reasonably well for Gundy. He evidently found a wife in college and he has spent his professional life teaching in Mennonite colleges, first at Hesston and then at Bluffton.

In chapter 5 Gundy contrasts "the stance of the scholar, the theologian, the historian, the literary critic: a stance that claims objective knowledge, that analyzes and interprets, instructs and corrects" with "the stance of the artist, the poet: it testifies to inner experience, speaks without apparent concern for consequences, and insists that the personal cannot be ignored; in fact, it suggests that the personal is in some way the measure of the truth." He claims to believe in both. "I want to be a poet and an American and a teacher and an intellectual and a Mennonite" (117, 118).

So now it is out. Gundy wants to have it all these ways even though they may at times conflict with each other. In the end, he is still troubled by the ambiguities which confront Anabap-

tism, indeed any effort to practice a consistent faith. How is it possible "to discern what it might mean to pursue perfection without being driven mad by our inability to achieve it? The old Anabaptist answer is still the best one I can offer: that the struggle is bound to fail if taken up by a single isolated human agent." We need God, the Spirit and "a host of our fellow human beings who will support and critique us, who will both help and be in need of help" (189).

This calls to mind the late Guy F. Hershberger, whose brainchild, the Mennonite Community Association, was reaching floodtide at the time I entered churchwide activities. A sociologist and historian instead of a poet, Hershberger may not have been as free to acknowledge life's ambiguities as Gundy, but I'm sure he sensed them. His solution was to gather academics, professionals, farmers, and small business types to reflect on ethical issues which surface in the activities of making a living.

Interest in this association declined as its groups focused on their own occupational concerns. But I can imagine that Hershberger might have recommended Gundy as a speaker at one of the association's annual meetings. And surely he would be pleased to know that two generations farther on there is an advocate for the practice of clarifying and testing the faith within "community."

—*Daniel Hertzler, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, a long-time editor and writer, contributes a monthly column to the Daily Courier (Connellsville, Pa.).*

Some Books About the Movies

David Greiser

Over the years I have been an avid reader of movie reviews—from the acerbic criticisms of the late Pauline Kael, to the more commercially friendly viewpoints of Roger Ebert, to the occasional moralizing of Michael Medved. The reviews of others have helped me to do my own thinking and evaluating about questions of quality, taste, style, morality, and worldview in film watching and criticism.

In recent years several excellent books have appeared, written by Christian scholars and film critics, dealing with the question of how Christians might watch and evaluate movies. Are there Christian “canons” of film criticism? By what categories can we watch and judge the merit of a film? Bottom line: How may I as a Christian and a movie junkie redeem the hours I spend in darkened theaters? Voila! Others are asking and answering your questions.

For those who watch movies and desire to place the film viewing experience in dialogue with their Christian values and worldview, I suggest the following books out of many that could be chosen and deserve attention.

Robert K. Johnston. *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000. 236 pp.

I lifted (and altered) my column title from this book. If I were to teach a course on “Theology and the Movies,” this is the book I would use as a text. Johnston, professor of theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary in California, supervises students earning Ph.D.’s in theology and film and mentors the work of several filmmakers who are Christian.

Johnston summarizes the history of the church’s attitude toward movies (from a posture of avoidance at one extreme, to a belief that even secular films can be, in some sense, revelatory, at the other). He builds a good case for his belief that movies qualify as serious art and, as such, deserve the same kind of reflective response from Christians that the visual and musical arts have received.

He discusses how movies have portrayed specifically religious and spiritual themes, and he analyzes the work of several important directors and how they wrestle with matters of meaning, morality, and God. Finally, he ponders the parameters of film criticism from a Christian perspective. How do we engage in the critique of movies in such a way as to maintain our integrity as Christians while going deeper in our evaluation than counting cuss words and sex scenes?

Ken Gire. *Reflections on the Movies: Hearing God in the Unlikeliest of Places*. Colorado Springs, Col. Cook Communications, 2000. 215 pp.

Gire’s book is more popularly written than Johnston’s and covers some of the same territory. He discusses the influence of movies on our culture, truth in the movies, and criticism from a Christian perspective.

Even better, Gire offers reviews of 14 classic films through history, from *Bambi* to *Schindler’s List*.

For Christians who have been uneasy about movie watching (and enjoying) and still feel like the experience is one of the forbidden fruits, Gire, an evangelical minister and writer, offers encouragement and the perspective of one who

has been there.

K. L. Billingsley. *The Seductive Image: A Christian Critique of the World of Film*. Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1989. 236 pp.

As the title suggests, Billingsley views Hollywood and its creations more cautiously and negatively than Gire or Johnston. *Seductive Image* asks, Are we being manipulated by movies? Why do films often reflect the worst in our culture? How does political ideology affect filmmaking—both the perspective of the film and the decisions as to which films get financed and produced?

For me, watching movies. . . is an exercise in worldview evaluation, art appreciation, and cultural observation. Here are some books that will enhance the viewing experience at multiple levels.

The book reflects a perspective that is politically and culturally conservative, but whether you agree with the author's point of view or not, his questions and criticisms are intelligently framed and significant. Billingsley himself, interestingly enough, is a script-writer for television and film.

Thomas S. Hibbs. *Shows About Nothing: Nihilism in Popular Culture from The Exorcist to Seinfeld*. Dallas: Spence Publishing, 1999.

Hibbs teaches philosophy at the Roman Catholic Boston College. His book is really about television more than film, but the thesis he advances is significant for both mediums. Hibbs believes that while conservative Christians have often castigated Hollywood for a product that attacks "family values" and promotes violence, the real culprit is a deepening cultural malaise in which both filmmakers and film viewers are complicit.

Hibbs documents a growing belief in nihilism (the philosophical conclusion that life itself has no meaning beyond that which we assign

it) throughout American culture. In television and film, nihilism is seen in the growing number of "shows about nothing" ("Seinfeld," for example) and films in which characters do not grow or gain insight, because ultimately nothing is to be gained from such growth.

I find Hibbs's thesis disturbing because I want to disagree, but I see strong evidence in some quarters for what he observes. His analysis is specific and deep, and like it or not I have to recommend this book to thoughtful film watchers.

For me, watching movies is far more than an escape (though at times it is that, too). It is an exercise in worldview evaluation, art appreciation, and cultural observation. Here are some books that will enhance the viewing experience at multiple levels.

—*Dave Greiser is reading books, watching movies, and going to baseball games this summer on his sabbatical leave from Souderton (Pa.) Mennonite Church. He serves as a pastor there and also as an adjunct professor at several local seminaries.*



Large Water Jugs Banned from Office

Noël R. King

Sally Reynolds used to carry a 96-ounce water jug with her to work every morning, filled with fresh, filtered water, straight from her Brita jug that she keeps religiously in her refrigerator at home in her kitchen.

That was then. This is now.

"I can't believe it," Reynolds says, when asked why her once ubiquitous jug is no longer anywhere to be seen in her office where she goes to work every morning in Takoma Park. "They banned them. They banned them just like that."

She sits there, shaking her head numbly. A reporter has to repeat his questions. It is clear that she is lost in her own thoughts. Or perhaps her thoughts have no water on which to travel through her brain.

The story of why Reynolds may no longer drag her large jug with her to work is a long, involved one. Mostly, though, her employer asserts that Reynolds was spending far too much time away from her desk and in the restroom.

Reynolds does not deny that she spent an average of five to 10 minutes per hour traveling to and from

her office to the restroom 100 feet down the hall. But she contends that her employer has refused to see the benefits of her water consumption.

“Sure I was spending a lot of time in the bathroom peeing,” she agrees. “But heck! Look what kind of penetrating concentration I was able to give them when I was NOT in the bathroom! I’m telling you—have you ever consistently drunk 96 ounces of water a day? Your mind revs up to warp speed! Now I can barely think, having drunk just that one puny cup full of water over there.”

She gestures listlessly to a bedraggled, 8-ounce paper cup sitting crumpled on the edge of her desk. She says she has not drunk more than that today because she has not had the energy to go fill it up. Also, she worries about getting stopped in the hallway and questioned by the Director of Personnel if she is seen sneaking more water to her desk than she is allowed.

When a reporter surreptitiously

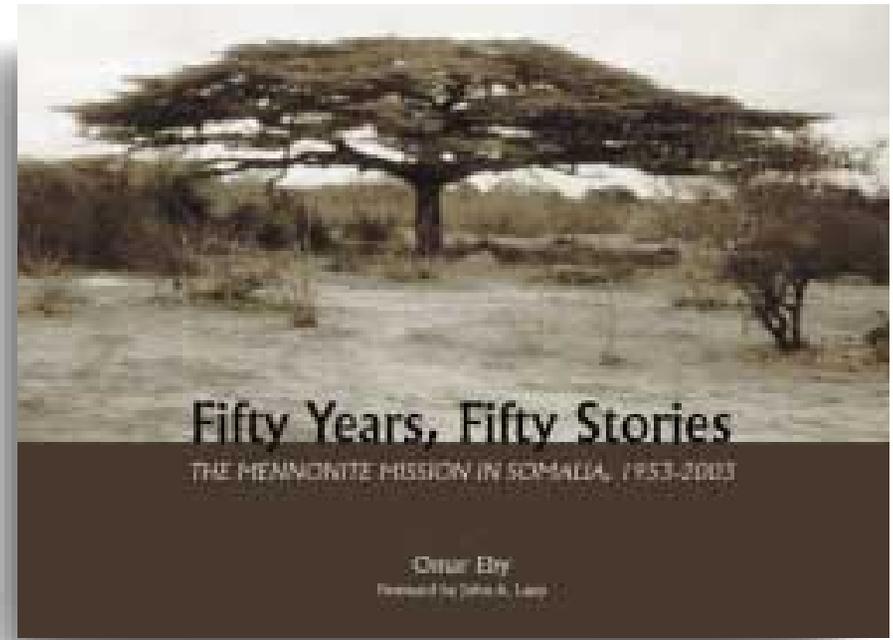
hands her a glass flask of water, after checking both ways down the hall for nosy passersby, Reynolds starts tearing up. But her tears are only half size.

When asked if she’s ever considered quitting her job, Reynolds eyes widen. “Wow! I never thought of that!” she responds, a look of relief crossing her dried-up face. “I never really liked the bathrooms here anyway.”

Reynolds was last seen driving a water truck to local businesses. She carries her 96-ounce jug of water in a special compartment she’s had constructed for it right next to the driver’s seat. And she is known to frequently ask to use her patrons’ restrooms.

—As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Reston, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful things, including issues of employment and water usage.





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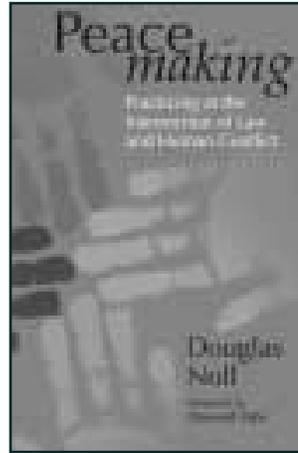
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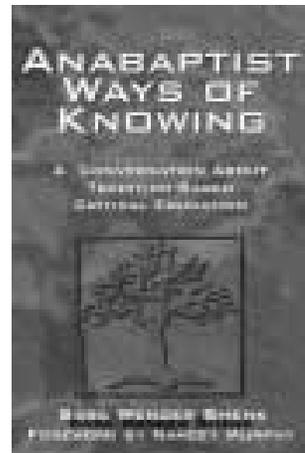
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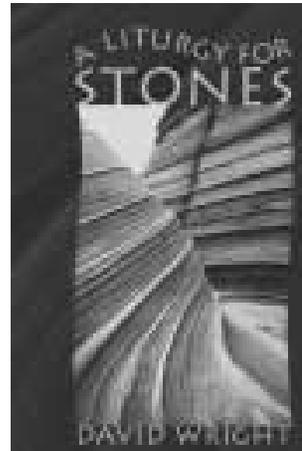
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the hillside crowded
with open magnolias,
green scents drenching the air.
Caught in cool dizzying circles
we gasp for breath.
White foam floats round my elbows
while the distant noise of average people
drifts away.
They won't climb down
and discover this forbidden passion
married people aren't supposed to have,
and I remember my old English Prof.
saying sex is the closest
we ever get to God.

Emerald water seeps in
all my hidden places
around our entangled legs
your long brown hair loose
hands swimming over me.

Downstream we clamber onto
a smooth grey rock
to sun dry.

At dusk finding our stump
of heaped clothes,
we follow the path back
believing ourselves
the two most beautiful people
anywhere

—*Cheryl Denise, Philippi, West Virginia, is author of I Saw
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