DreamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul

Books, Faith, World & More

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Autumn 2003
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Editorial: Living Wild Like Barkley and Madison

We need more wild living. That has turned out to be the implicit and sometimes explicit theme of this *DreamSeeker Magazine* issue.

Daniel Hertzler inaugurates the theme with a treatment of the Bible that strikes me as classic. Hertzler insightfully blends serious consideration of ways biblical scholarship can open up the Bible with accessible, down-to-earth thinking about why Scripture matters to us. The Bible that leaps from Hertzler's words wraps us in trauma, pain, violence, betrayal, life's wild dark side, then invites us again and yet again to live a different holy story.

We need more wild living. That has turned out to be the . . . theme of this . . . issue.

Next Luanne Austin wants worship wild enough to suggest it has been planned by Someone Else. C. Jack Orr tells the hauntingly honest story of how a father and son seek what is itself a wild thing: reconciliation as they each worship a wild God but in opposing ways. David Greiser reflects on "The Matrix Reloaded" and "Bruce Almighty," both films likewise pursuing the wildness of the divine as they address "some of the weightiest and thorniest theological dilemmas ever posed."

Laura Lehman, Nöel King, and yours truly report on wild events. Lehman tells of "The Wreck, destructive, terrifying, something from which you never quite recover." King tells the shocking story of the man who sees the sun for the very first time. I tell of a trip to the West with Jack Kerouac and Jesus Christ. Mark Stevick tells poetically of wild hauntings by Christ and Helen Alderfer speaks of the need to "tread carefully" on the "new ground" of aging but confesses the urge to "twirl a few dance steps while the tea water boils (but only if you are alone)."

Welcoming "Community Sense" and "Beneath the Skyline"

Still there is more. Valerie Weaver-Zercher, having made what strikes me as the wild—and wonderful—commitment to serve with her husband and family in Kentucky for the coming year, will be taking a break from writing her "Marginalia" column even as behind the scenes she continues to provide her valuable editorial services.

Meanwhile we welcome new columnists Deborah Good (*The Other Side* magazine intern) and Mark Wenger (pastor and more). Through their eloquent comments, emerging from two quite different settings, the wildness rolls on. Because Good dares to ponder the privileges and limits inherent in her white skin. And Wenger opposes North American culture's fateful decision to allow consumerism to kick God out of the Sabbath.

While pondering wild living I took our Norwegian Elkhound Barkley and Shihtzu Madison for a walk. Tiny Madison jumped up and down grabbing her leash in her mouth, then leaping with delight against large Barkley. Barkley raced ahead as if he had never seen either the sun or the world itself and couldn't believe its grandeurs. I hope reading this issue feels like that.

—Michael A. King

Editor
Michael A. King

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Editorial Council
David Graybill, Daniel Hertzler, Kristina M. King, Richard A. Kauffman, Paul M. Schrock

Columnists or Regular Contributors
David Greiser, Daniel Hertzler, Michael A. King, Valerie Weaver-Zercher

Publication, Printing, and Design
Cascadia Publishing House

Advertising
Michael A. King

Contact
126 Klingerman Road
Telford, PA 18969
1-215-723-9125
DSM@cascadiapublishinghouse.com

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In this issue

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Response

I have received the Summer 2003 *DSM*. You did it again! I sat and read straight through, which I do for very few publications. The article by Douglas Noll was probably my favorite. It makes me want to read his book.

I had some questions about the first article by Mark Wenger dealing with young adults and orthodoxy. It seems to me that orthodoxy is just a baby step away from dogmatism and what is known as fundamentalism. That happens when people are sure they have a corner on the truth and can stop looking further. The list of salient features says these people are not perpetual seekers.

Another feature Wenger identifies is that they "swim self-consciously against the flow of pluralism and relativism." The article quotes Andy Crouch as saying "Orthodoxy thrives in pluralism." Is that a contradiction? For me, there seemed to be other contradictions. I think the author is right about the trend toward orthodoxy, and the sense of relief young people feel when they find something solid. Lots of food for thought here.

The other issue that is of high interest to me is found in "One Faith, One Baptism. . . ?" There was a slight blip in information accuracy when author Norman de Puy, speaking of symbolic dress, refers to "the Mennonite beard and mustache-free upper lip." I have thought long and hard about denominationalism and am (at age 79) still thinking. After having been a Mennonite for most of my life, I now worship in a Baptist congregation where I have found much of what I need (although there are things I would change if I could).

Just as in his Summer 2003 column Michael King says he will always be Mexican, I will always be a Mennonite. After what I consider to be the disaster of the merger between the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church, I would opt for leaving denominations in place, but doing as de Puy suggests—learning more about each other. I would add that we need to let go of what is unimportant and look for common ground.

As I ponder my part in the GC-MC merger from within my current setting and the perspectives provided by de Puy, I need to own my part. When merger was first discussed, I thought it was a grand idea. Hadn't the two denominations been cooperating on many fronts for many years? Joint publishing of curriculum and worship materials, for example, had been going on for almost 50 years.

We had learned to worship together happily in the same congregations many years ago. Mennonite Central Committee has been a perfect meeting place for Mennonites of many different stripes, not to mention persons from many other denominations. So when the vote was taken on whether to make the GC-MC union complete and official, I enthusiastically cast a yes vote.

I didn't realize how anxiety about money and thirst for power would corrupt the process. The results of the merger have resembled in many ways what happens in the corporate mergers we are seeing all around us. Combining resources produced bruised egos as blame for past mistakes was freely assigned, as so many faithful long-term employees were no longer needed, as congregations had to decide whether or not to be part of this new giant denomination. The immediate result seems chaotic from this distance.

What I have learned from this is that Christians can respect, love, learn from each other, and work together for the common good even though we worship and serve under differing banners.

Thanks for listening. I love your magazine.

—Dorothy Cutrell

Response (continued) and Letter

Thank you for printing "A Spiritual Journey from Courtroom Warrior to Peacemaker by Doug Noll" (*DSM* Summer 2003). His account is, to me, a true conversion story. I would compare it to Saul Paul's, in that Noll was won over to a new understanding of power. Saul went from believing in violent, coercive power to believing in the power of love, in all its amazing forms, as the way to build God's community.

In Noll's article one of the most important, or impressive, sentences in my view is this: "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*" (emphasis added).

I believe the whole life and teaching of Jesus was predicated on such an understanding of human nature.

—John K. Stoner

Short letters to DreamSeeker Magazine *are welcome and occasionally extended responses are published.*

stick, cross, stone
three stanzas after Updike

Glancing up from a lit page
I looked out the low window
into the evening hillside—

June,
new undergrowth, dark trunks,
a stick cast across a stone.

After a while,
I stood and went to the door,
and walked out, into that place.

—Mark Stevick, Gloucester, Massachusetts, teaches creative writing at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts.

You Come and Go
as Mary Magdalene to Christ

You come and go and in your going stay,
And as you take your place you take your leave:
Away from me, return again I pray.

You visit me, and when you go your way
I wonder what you render by your leave:
You come and go and in your going stay.

The more I harbor you the more you stray
From my affection which you make and leave:
Away from me, return again I pray.

I cannot bear to have you seize and play
Me as a toy which you will take or leave:
You come and go and in your going stay.

I stumble darkly in your fully day,
Am blind and cannot know you till you leave:
Away from me return again, I pray.

I suitor you too much to hear you say
That you will never leave unless you leave:
You come and go and in your going stay
Away from me. Return again I pray.

—*Mark Stevick*

Too Much Sex and Violence?

Coming to Terms with the Bible

Daniel Hertzler

Some years ago I read a magazine article which purported to be a letter from a book editor to the author of the Bible explaining why the editor's press couldn't publish it. Too much sex and violence. The letter went on to explain how the Bible might be revised to make it publishable. It was an article I should have saved.

Many years earlier I had begun to read the Bible at age eight or nine. My Sunday school had a Bible reading program, so I began the pilgrimage of reading through the whole Bible. I seem to remember that I got bogged down somewhere about 2 Timothy. Then my father, who had not seemed to be paying attention, suddenly came forth and exhorted me to finish. I suppose I did, but that detail is not clear in my mind.

I do not recall that the sex and violence impressed me as a child. Perhaps there is a built-in naiveté which helps spare children from comprehending the gory details in such a narrative. I do recall, however, one of my own young sons chuckling at the story of Ehud who stuck a dagger into the abdomen of King Eglon, a man who was so fat that the dagger went all the way in

and was covered by the flesh (see Judg. 3: 15-30).

I grew up and came to adulthood during the period of the Sunday school movement. The Bible's prominence in our culture was symbolized by a column in our weekly Scottdale newspaper. In this column Kenneth J. Foreman commented on the Uniform Sunday school lesson for the week. Such a column has long since disappeared.

But the Bible has stayed with me as a companion, even though when I stop to look closely it seems a strange companion. Its significance has opened to me only gradually. I majored in Bible at Eastern Mennonite College, in part because I had no greater interest in any other major. I went to college off the farm for the love of learning more than to pursue any occupational concern. As a sophomore I was encouraged to change my major to biology, but at that point a major in Bible seemed to be the place to stay. I was to find later that this major in Bible had prepared me for the editorial work to which I was called at Mennonite Publishing House.

I was introduced to the inductive method of Bible study in college and comprehended it in some measure. This emphasis on careful examination of the text has stayed with me, and I aim to follow it. However, in college I did not have many occasions to consider the Bible as a body of literature or seek to understand its place in history.

A line of thought . . . claims to take the Bible as it is without the influence of historical study. I fear that refusing to face historical questions may open the way for overinfluence of personal bias in the interpretive process.

As Providence would have it, I spent some 15 years as an editor of Sunday school curriculum material. In this role I felt the need to interpret the task of the lesson writer. What I proposed was somewhat as follows: (1) What does the text say? (2) What did it mean? (3) What does it mean to us?

This sequence probably grows out of the inductive method, but a number of important questions are not raised: (1) From what historical situation does the text emerge? (2) What literary form does the text represent? These questions may be overemphasized. The *Shema* and the Sermon on the Mount call for attention by their very eloquence. Yet for some of us their significance is heightened by seeing them in their historical settings.

For this we need to step back a pace and ask what the Bible really is. How has it come to us? There seems to be a line of thought which claims to take the Bible as it is without the influence of historical study. I fear that refusing to face historical questions may open the way for overinfluence of personal bias in the interpretive process. As a printed medium, the Bible is subject to the whims of interpreters. What they bring to the process may be as important as what they find in the text.

The controversy which erupted with the publication of the Revised Standard Version in 1952 involved translation issues. A typical point of contention was the translation of Isaiah 7:14, which in the King James Version reads "a virgin shall conceive." This wording was evidently based on the Greek Old Testament, the same version cited by Matthew as a prediction for the birth of Jesus from a virgin. The new translation went back to the Hebrew and found "a young woman shall conceive and bear a son."

Three Mennonite Bible scholars, H. S. Bender, C. K. Lehman and Millard Lind, were asked to evaluate the RSV and gave it a qualified endorsement. But some were not convinced. I am afraid that they were more inspired by an inflammatory tract written by "Missionary" J. J. Ray entitled "The Eye Opener," which provided a fundamentalist critique of the new version.

A later source of tension in my work was a Sunday school lesson by Clayton Beyler, who had recently graduated with a major in New Testament from Southern Baptist Seminary. In one lesson of a series on the life of Jesus, he observed that the instructions to the disciples sent out by Jesus vary among the synoptic Gospels and that some are even contradictory. Anyone who took the trouble to compare the accounts could find this, but the word *contradictory* disturbed some readers.

On reflection, I consider this to have been an unfortunate choice of term. I think sometimes we need to separate our own effort to understand the process of biblical compilation from our efforts to instruct people who are not asking the same questions.

An opportunity for me to reflect on the Bible and its place in history came in a series of lectures by W. F. Albright, a noted biblical archeologist. These were given, if I remember correctly, in autumn 1957. Two of his remarks remain in memory. For one, he suggested in regard to the creation accounts in Genesis that there is a "truer truth" than literal truth.

This provided me a place to stand when considering the six days of creation where we find light created at the beginning but the sun and the moon not created until the fourth day. When I read that some of Israel's neighbors worshiped the sun and the moon, I found it of interest to see the strictly functional purpose attributed to them in this account. Evidently the biblical writer was making a statement.

Albright also proposed that perhaps Noah's flood developed from the melting of ice following the ice age. Recently I came upon the book *Noah's Flood,* by William Ryan and Walter Pitman (Simon & Schuster, 1998). It supports and develops Albright's thesis. So it appears that there really was a flood. Is the story of Noah then true? Surely not literally so in all of its details, especially since there are two accounts. It appears that several Hebrew writers took a legend that was current in their culture and revised it to make a point many of us acknowledge yet today.

In my effort to deal responsibly with biblical interpretation, I found useful the principles of Paul Ricoeur, particularly his "second naiveté." If I understand him, to follow this principle, we first survey the interpretation scene and review the competing perspectives. Then we conclude that the biblical story is our story and that we will follow it—even though some challenge it from a variety of positions and we recognize that in certain respects it is culturally timebound.

When we take the time to consider the biblical story, we will find that it is a truly remarkable story. It represents a variety of efforts to make sense out of life with its accompanying tragedies. We have the Hebrew Bible because the Hebrews saved their stories. Two events overshadow the whole: the exodus from Egypt and the Babylonian captivity. Without the latter we might have little of the Hebrew Bible. Although the writing no doubt began before the captivity, the compilation of the whole had to come during and following that tragic experience.

Writing often grows out of trauma—and who would have saved and edited the devastating critiques by eighth-century prophets such as Amos and Isaiah had there been no need to account for the sixth-century collapse? I have said to myself that I would have some trouble cherishing the Hebrew story if the witness of the prophets had not been included. David and Solomon and most of the other kings make poor role models and get altogether too much admiration in Sunday school.

Then I came upon David Noel Freedman's book *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible*. Freedman shows that the part of the Bible ending with 2 Kings was edited to emphasize show how nine of the Ten Commandments were violated one by one, and then came the end. I myself have noticed that after the Bathsheba affair, nothing in the life of David really goes well. The biblical storytellers need careful consideration if we're to get the message.

The reconstruction under Ezra and Nehemiah and those who followed them enabled the community to continue for hundreds of years. In this community our Lord was born and his story became the basis for those additional writings Christians call the New Testament. That Testament draws heavily on the Hebrew Bible but gives it an interpretation not all were willing to follow.

The New Testament is as much at the mercy of interpreters as is the Old. In *The Politics of Jesus* (Eerdmans with Paternoster, 2nd. ed., 1994), John Howard Yoder set out to show that the teachings of Jesus are not stuck in the first century but are relevant today. He challenged H. R. Niebuhr, who held that "an ethic of the Son . . . needs to be completed or even corrected" by an ethic of the Father and an ethic of the Holy Spirit. It develops that the latter is the most influential and up-to-date. As Yoder puts it, "the ethic of Jesus is no longer of determining significance" (100, 101). Is Niebuhr's theory a sophisticated way of making the Bible say what we want to hear?

In 1995 I wrote an S.T.M. thesis at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary on

the Parable of the Sower in the Gospel of Mark. I found Mark's to be a severe Gospel laced with irony. The 12 disciples all flunk the test of faithfulness and in the end three women who have stood by Jesus at the crucifixion are frightened and run away from the empty tomb without saying anything to anyone.

Such failures are anticipated in the Parable of the Sower, in which the seed falling on three out of four soils fails to yield a harvest. Is it really this hard to follow Jesus? Most of us in our own ways manage to scale down the demands of the gospel so we can live with them.

Constantinianism . . . advocates vengeance despite the fact that . . . Deuteronomy 32:35 and . . . Romans 12:19 assign this responsibility to the Lord. Constantinianism will not wait for the Lord.

Yet I find it encouraging to see that New Testament scholarship appears to be moving in the direction of taking the Gospels as they are instead of picking them to pieces as was formerly done. Historical criticism and form criticism have been succeeded by literary and rhetorical criticisms. An example is Donald H. Juel's *The Gospel of Mark* (Abingdon, 1999), which concludes that "the testimony of believers who have read the gospel as part of the Scriptures within the context of a worshiping community is that God does continue to work beyond the confines of the story—and that the continuing work of God is the 'one thing necessary' for those who read the gospel" (192).

And yet, and yet. There are obstacles. In *The Decent of the Dove* (Meridian Books, 1956), written in the late 1930s, Charles Williams noted the effect on the church of Constantinianism. He observed that "It is at least arguable that the Christian Church will have to return to pre-Constantine state before she can properly recover the ground she too quickly won. Her victories, among other disadvantages, produced in her children a great tendency to be aware of evil rather than of sin, measuring by evil the wickedness of others, by sin the evil done by oneself" (86). How could Williams have so vividly anticipated the rhetoric of George W. Bush following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001?

Constantinianism appeals to the best and the worst in human nature. On one hand, it calls for responsibility: Everyone should help to keep order. On the other hand, it advocates vengeance despite the fact that the Hebrew Bible in Deuteronomy 32:35 and the Christian Bible in Romans 12:19 assign this responsibility to the Lord. Constantinianism will not wait for the Lord.

The Anabaptist tradition has meant to take Romans 12:19 seriously. Books such as the *Martyrs Mirror* (latest Herald Press edition 1938), which preserves stories of persecution going back five centuries and more, have documented the experiences of many who refused to resist those who

persecuted them. In North America our experience has been much more open-ended, although at times Anabaptist lives have been touched by organized violence. I myself have had no such experience.

If I were ever assaulted, I would wish for the courage shown by Sarah Corson, as described in John Howard Yoder's little book, *What Would You Do*? (Herald Press, 1983). Sarah was a missionary serving somewhere in Latin America when her household was invaded during a revolution in the country and she faced an officer who held a gun.

She showed him a Spanish Bible and opened it to the Sermon on the Mount. He did not believe it possible to love an enemy, but Sarah said, "You can prove it, Sir. I know you came here to kill us. So just kill me slowly, if you want to prove it. . . . I will die praying for you because God loves you, and we love you too" (106, 107).

I doubt if Sarah Corson had spent much time considering the progression of New Testament studies from historical criticism through form criticism to literary criticism, but I think she got the point of the Sermon on the Mount. She was coming to terms with the Bible.

—*Daniel Hertzler, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, a long-time editor and writer, contributes a monthly column to the* Daily Courier *(Connellsville, Pa.). An inveterate gardener, during growing season he organizes his life around the schedules of peas and carrots, lettuce, potatoes, and especially sweet corn. This year he is scheduled to attend Mennonite World Conference in early August and will do his best to garden around his absence.*

God Alive at Gospel Church

Luanne Austin

The sun is shining, it's 68 degrees, and the air is alive with birdsound and squirrels and green growing things. What a beautiful morning for a bicycle ride, a hike in the mountains, just sitting on the porch.

Oh. It's Sunday. I have to go to church.

So many of us churchgoers are just putting in pew time because we're supposed to. Then we feel guilty for not wanting to be in church. After all, it's the Lord's Day, is it not? These are God's people. This is worship.

Yet I'm not running off into sin. I pray. I enjoy reading my Bible. I sense God working in my life. I see him at work in others.

So what's wrong? My discontent, I've realized, is not with God. It's not even with people. It's with some of the contemporary models of the church.

"As I read the Old and New Testaments I am struck by the awareness therein of our lives being connected with cosmic powers, angels and archangels, heavenly principalities and powers, and the groaning of creation," says Madeline L'Engle (*The Irrational Season*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1977).

"It's too radical, too uncontrolled for many of us, so we build churches which are the safest possible

places to escape God. We pin him down, far more painfully than he was nailed to the cross, so that he is rational and comprehensible and like us, and even more unreal," she continues.

Happily my first church experience was not unreal. Gospel Community Church, in West Sayville, New York, made room for God at worship services.

I had never attended church before I "got saved" in 1976 at age 21 in the wee hours alone in my bedroom. Thus began my relationship with the living God. The next day, I called the only person who might understand what had happened. Thus began my relationship with Christianity.

Sherry invited me to a Bible study at her house, where I met Dennis, a former atheist who became a Christian while mountain climbing (when he began falling during a tough climb he heard himself shout "God! Help me!"); Lenny, a former junkie who was miraculously cured of his heroin addiction on meeting Christ; and Gigi, a Broadway actress who was a "completed Jew."

At Sherry's house we shared testimonies, prayed for each other, and tried to understand what the Bible meant. After a few weeks, my vast lack of understanding became awkwardly obvious and the group suggested I attend church.

Pastor Al Isaaksen had been a milkman until his mid-40s, when he "got saved" and called to the ministry while taking a shower. He claimed the Lord called him to deliver the milk of the Word to babes in Christ. So that's what he did. Slim and energetic with a white-haired crew cut, Al was always excited about God's Word and what God was doing in people's lives. He loved to pray.

I knew Gospel wasn't like other churches. During my search for the living God I had visited a few, and they were programmed and boring compared to what I found at Gospel.

Though the worship was unplanned by leaders or a committee, the services at Gospel were always orderly, as though planned by Someone Else.

The service began predictably enough with the singing of some old hymns accompanied by piano or organ. Then a lone guitarist would lead the congregation in choruses. After a few songs, during a lull, someone in the congregation would start singing. Everyone joined in.

This set the pace for the rest of the worship service. Different people spontaneously started songs, read Scripture, gave a word of exhortation or encouragement or prophecy, led in prayer, and shared brief testimonies. The testimonies of new converts, of answered prayer, of God's protection or healing or provision always inspired us to enthusiastic and grateful worship. Periods of silence were filled with awe and expectation.

Though the worship was unplanned by leaders or a committee, the services at Gospel were always orderly, as though planned by Someone Else. An elder always stood or sat up front but rarely interrupted the flow.

The service was like springs bubbling up into streams, streams flowing into tributaries, and tributaries feeding into a great river of worship.

Al loved to teach about Old Testament types, so he always ended up talking about Jesus Christ and about his work on the cross. Bible scholars might have had some concerns, but as a new believer I learned that every story, passage, or topic in the Bible pointed to God's love and plan of redemption. The elders, who taught on Wednesday nights, were more topic-oriented but just as Christ-centered.

In the three years I attended Gospel Church, I learned most of the Old Testament stories, the New Testament Gospels and letters, and the basic doctrines of Christianity. I learned what happened inside of me the night I "got saved," when I embarked on my new life.

A half-hour before each service, the old white clapboard church was open for prayer around the altar. This half-hour was often a time of confrontation, confession, and/or reconciliation between members.

After the Sunday and Wednesday night services, coffee and cake were served in the fellowship hall. People sat at round tables, Bibles open, discussing Scripture. Groups of two or more stood, hands clasped or around shoulders, praying together; and others just chatted, getting to know each other. Those of us who smoked cigarettes brought our coffee out to the back porch, where we fellowshipped in the same spirit.

It was during this time once that a fellow named Harry approached and asked how I was. I said fine. Then he peered at me and said, "No, I mean, how are you?"

I looked into his face and said, "Oh Harry, I'm having a terrible time."

I was quitting smoking, and it was rough. Harry grabbed a few other people and they prayed for me. On another night, the pastor's wife, Dorothy, pulled me aside and gave me the offering money. I had not told anyone how broke my family was. It was not unusual to come away from church with a dinner invitation or to bring some folks home with you.

Gospel Church seated about 200 people comfortably, which it did at the night services. On Sunday morning extra chairs were set in the aisles. Sometimes it seemed the walls would burst. Twice in the three years I attended Gospel, elders left to start a church in another town, and people who lived in that area were encouraged to attend. So the church never lost its intimate feeling, never grew mega, never got sidetracked on a building program.

I sound sentimental about my first church experience. Yes, I do get that way, and no, the Gospel Church style of worship is not the only way God inspires. But delving deeper, it's not just Gospel Community Church, 52 Atlantic Ave., West Sayville, New York, that I yearn for, but its qualities, qualities which fit so well my particular spiritual needs and hungers:

- Because the services were centered around members' participation, each was different and

none was predictable. We went to church knowing we might be stirred to share a Scripture, a song, or a testimony, that we might offer a word of encouragement or prayer for healing. We each went to minister as well as to receive. No person or team could be attributed with the credit for putting on a "good service."

- Jesus was at the center of every sermon. He was the reason we were there. All doctrine and teaching sprang from the way he lived his life, died his death, rose in his resurrection, and blessed believers with his Holy Spirit. We were identified as followers of nobody but Jesus.
- With worship and Word fresh in our minds, we talked about the experience around the table. Our fellowship was based on what the Holy Spirit had evoked in us during the service, what he was doing in our lives, and how we could pray for each other.
- We were friends inside and outside the church. We dined in each other's homes and were involved in each other's lives (we weren't even related!) because we truly cared for each other. Even now, my favorite fellowship is around the dinner table, not in the foyer on my way to my car.

The book of Acts speaks of these things: "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (2:46).

And 1 Corinthians 2:1-5: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified . . . and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." Paul adds in 14:26, "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation."

We yearn for connection with the cosmic powers, the supernatural, and creation. We catch glimpses of that other world occasionally when we let ourselves go in worship. . . .

Thinking back, the characteristic that seemed to define Gospel was its liberty. Nobody engineered the services around a theme with carefully planned readings or songs. No leader was afraid of or threatened by the participation of members. There was a respect for the spirit of God dwelling within each one of us. He—God, the Holy Spirit—was in control.

We humans consist of body, soul, and spirit. As spiritual beings, we yearn for connection with the cosmic powers, the supernatural, and creation. We catch glimpses of that other world occasionally when we let ourselves go in worship, while gazing at the stars on a summer night, or when we first fall in love.

We are nudged by our spiritual selves when we get a "feeling" about something about to happen, have an inexplicable urge to pray for a friend, or feel a sudden awareness of God's grace.

We must pay attention to our spiritual selves, respect the spirit of Christ in others, and give the Holy Spirit lots of room in our church services.

This approach will not always lead to copies of what inspired me at Gospel Church. But if the Holy Spirit is present, something will come truly alive. The one thin I hope we never come away from church saying is that "It was a nice service."

—*Luanne Austin is an award-winning religion writer and columnist at the* Daily News-Record *in Harrisonburg, Virginia. A collection of her "Rural Pen" columns is now available in a book,* Stain the Water Clear, *available at* www.iuniverse.com.

Unless I Say I Can I Say I Can't

as Nicodemus to Christ

Unless I say I can I say I can't,
I will not have it any other way,
I'm satisfied with this and do not want.

Unless I say I do I say I don't
And don't intend to do a thing halfway,
Unless I say I can I say I can't.

And if I think I will I think I won't
Be overwhelmed or softly led astray,
I'm satisfied with this and do not want.

And you, please don't imagine that you daunt
Me even now I'm writing you away!
Unless I say I can I say I can't.

Impervious I am not that you taunt
Me with my own disdain and make me sway.
I'm satisfied with this and do not want.

But if a moment I allow you haunt
Me, hear the words I can and cannot say
Unless I say I can, I say I can't
Be satisfied with this I do not want.

—*Mark Stevick*

Reunion

A Father and a Son Travel Through Fire and Ice

C. Jack Orr

In the memorable poem "Fire and Ice," Robert Frost debates the means of the world's demise. He concludes that the world will likely end in fire, but concedes "if it had to perish twice . . . ice . . . would suffice." Our family worlds also teeter between blistering conflicts and cold detachments. This is the story of a father and son who found their way through fire and ice to dialogue and grace.

Father and Son

He was a builder of churches. His last was a country chapel beside an isolated crossroads. In the beginning, the congregation numbered only 15, but by his retirement, the membership had reached 1200. He was a church entrepreneur before the era of megachurches. Without a seminary degree, he did not preach as "books enable, as synods use, as fashion guides, and as interests demand" (Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Divinity School Address," p. 73 in D. M. Robinson, *The Spiritual Emerson: Essential Writings,* Beacon Press, 2003). He spoke from the power of his conversion and held a reputation for "soul-winning."

To most people he was a warm and likable person. He was my father. However, for 20 years there was a wall between us. Simply put, Father was a fundamentalist, whereas I was something else. In our history, all other considerations were moot. From my view, he had embraced a coercive ideology that filled my childhood with melancholy even as it caused him to see college-age questions as signs of disloyalty. Year by year we drifted apart exponentially. I kept track of his path from a distance. He had little knowledge of mine.

I had heard too many of my father's sermons on "He who is not for us is against us." Why should I break the illusion of family harmony?

The "something else" I was becoming was a communication professor and a consultant. I specialized in helping others overcome the negative effects of authoritarian cultures. In this sense, at least, the child was father to the man.

In 1980, I took a different step in my specialty to become the minister of a congregation that claimed as its motto "A church that affirms, but also questions." My sermons focused on "religion in a new key," and explored the spiritual journeys of persons such as Emerson, Einstein, Kierkegaard, and Hammarskjöld.

So it happened that during the early 1980s my father and I were both ministers but wore different stripes. As I espoused religion in a new key, he preached the old-time faith in noncompromising tones.

A confrontation seemed both inevitable and undesirable. I had heard too many of my father's sermons on "He who is not for us is against us." Why should I break the illusion of family harmony? Why go through the pain? After all, I was a communication professor; who is better equipped to prevent a truly intimate conversation?

So when Dad and I occasionally met, I sealed my opinions, talked sports, deciphered the weather, and listened without comment to his endless tales of soul-winning athleticism. It was wall work—intended to protect each from the other. Then during a family dinner in 1982, the wall took a hit.

Fire and Ice

The restaurant scene was not suited for a "heart-to-heart," but still it happened. Dad described how he had recently defended a fundamentalist celebrity against a liberal, Commie-loving attorney. I argued that it was fruitless to seek change from "people like that" and he countered that even a liberal lawyer could be overcome by the joy of the gospel.

With that I was overcome. I announced that "the gospel" had been less than joyful for me, since it was used to legitimize "senseless restrictions and unexamined ideas." The battle was enjoined. Heat conquered light, decibels rose, and diners were embarrassed as they pretended not to hear.

Mercifully, the check arrived and we stood to part. "Well, Dad," I said in a proper liberal voice, "we can at

least agree to disagree. Let's shake hands like congresspersons that battle on the House floor, then embrace."

I will never forget his response: "Then you would win."

Dad proposed that we close with prayer. I declined. It was a declaration of independence. No one sang "Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult."

Several months later I made a bid to heal the breach. Returning from a consulting trip in Colorado, I told Father that my clients were initially remote but had eventually cooperated to make the workshop a success. This set the stage for a carefully prepared compliment. "Dad, I could not handle difficult audiences apart from the speaking skills I gained from you. I want you to know that."

He responded with a blank stare, mumbled an "Ah" or "Huh," averted his eyes, shifted the subject, and started talking about someone he had recently "won to Christ." I had been dismissed I thought. Without asking for an interpretation of his response, I decided that thereafter our meetings would be benign but cool. No more fire; ice would suffice.

Dialogue

Three years had passed before the ice began to thaw. In 1985, I considered leaving the church for a return to teaching. I sought the advice of Dr. Barbara Krasner, an advocate for Martin Buber's vision of dialogue (see I. Boszomenyi-Nagy and B. Krasner, *Between Give and Take,* Brunner-Routledge, 1986).

Barbara teaches that direct address between adults and their parents is the key to the well-being of both. That is, as children we cannot imagine the complex motives behind our parents' actions. We lack an adequate sense of context. As adults, we often continue to view parents through childhood eyes; indeed, we may dangerously project these views on parental substitutes such as bosses or spouses. Good relationships require a revision of how we thought as a child.

Such revision, however, is not gained by insight alone. It requires a respectful turning toward our parents—directly asking for their views on the family's past—even as we create with them terms for engagement in the here and now. In dialogue we walk the narrow ridge between self-affirmation and consideration for the other. Barbara urged me to begin a dialogue with my father.

Back then I saw her views as wacky in general and especially off-target for me. "Barbara, you don't know my dad," I insisted. "He doesn't listen."

"Ask for his attention," she said. I usually impress the average counselor but this one was unyielding. "Ask for your father's perspective on your early years. You don't need to agree with him, but hear him. Ask him how he made vocational decisions. Ask him to listen to your story. Ethically and spiritually, it's the right thing to do."

At last Barbara prevailed. I initiated the recommended conversation. "Dad, you watched me grow up. I am interested in your view. What kind of a child was I?"

To my surprise he answered, "You were an adult before you were a child. I depended on you to be a model parishioner. You shouldered burdens beyond your years." He even noticed the pew time I clocked as a kid. I never suspected that my interests registered on the radar screen of his ministry.

The dialogue continued as Dad explained his fear that my Ph.D. had created an insurmountable barrier between us. He felt silenced by my education as I felt silenced by his religion. Apparently he believed that within the realm of "advanced learning" his contributions counted as nothing.

He recalled the day of my Colorado compliment. "Do you remember the time when you returned from Boulder and you said something about public speaking and dealing with hostile clients?"

"Yes," I replied, "I'm surprised that you remembered."

He continued, "When you left that day, I said to your mother, 'I think that was a compliment.' We weren't sure, so we prayed and agreed that it was. We've told everyone how wonderful it was to be complimented by you!"

With the help of prayer, Dad had eked out a compliment that I had believed was clearly sent and immaculately received but casually brushed aside. Three years had passed before this misperception was put into words. During that time, Dad had not told me about the prayerful epiphany he shared with "everyone" nor had I asked him for his thoughts on an incident I read as final proof of our perpetual alienation. I was learning that in family life, as elsewhere, "we have not because we ask not, or because we ask amiss."

After the door to dialogue opened, Dad and I visited more often and enjoyed a new vitality in our talks. In his words, we were becoming "a family again." One barrier remained. It took three more years to risk a discussion of religion. Would bringing religious opposition into our reunion destroy it, or take us to deeper levels of trust?

Grace

Finally I approached the subject that was central to years of anger and isolation. "Dad, we've become much closer. Yet there is one barrier that stands between us—religion." He nodded as I continued. "I do not want to argue with your faith. It has served you well and you have made it a blessing for others. But I would like you to hear about my spiritual journey." He gestured a willingness to listen.

What followed was a candid description of my childhood religious regrets as well as the Emerson-like resolutions I embrace as an adult. Much that I said was difficult for Father to hear, but he listened. Ironically, (and I want to emphasize this to parents who may now worry about their children's religion) my father was never a more effective witness for his faith than on the day he listened to my story.

After he listened, we talked. We looked at disagreements and past disappointments. We spoke from the "I" that describes experience and avoided the "you" that precedes accusations.

This conversation was not about affixing blame, or vindication, or winning, or giving in, or compromising. We searched for the positive intentions that almost always rested

behind our mutually confusing behavior. Piece by piece we worked our way through two spiritual histories—his and mine—asking questions, gaining insights and being surprised. In the end, we composed from fire and ice a legacy of reconciliation.

In time, Dad would share with me not only his faith but also the questions that made it vital. Gone was my passé fear of being named prodigal son of the year. I was free to recall the fuller range of family life. It had not only been indoctrination but stories told, games played, songs sung, affections expressed, and the day-to-day maintenance of responsibility without which a child's house does not become a home.

Paradoxically, the preaching that pushed me out the door to become "something else" also led me to seek new creation, abundant life, and the truth that sets us free. Today, as a parent, I trust that when my children and grandchildren bring to me the defining questions of their lives I will hear them as well as my father at last heard me. I also hope to exemplify for them a strength of conviction that they can move against or move toward in their quest for newness of life.

All relationships are fragmented and flawed. Perfection is not possible; blame does not help; family detachment is an illusion. But here and there, between I and Thou, we are given grace to discern the "Something that does not love a wall" (Robert Frost in "The Mending Wall").

Father wanted to preach until the day that he died. He did. On April 9, 1993, he delivered the Good Friday sermon, "Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise." He joined in singing a congregational hymn and slipped into eternity.

Over a thousand people attended his memorial. Many spoke of life transformations experienced through his preaching. I remembered most the moments when he listened.

—C. Jack Orr, West Chester, Pennsylvania, is Professor of Communication Studies at West Chester University. He wishes to acknowledge the friendship and wisdom of Dr. Barbara Krasner, who made reunion possible.

Growing Up White

Deborah Good

"Hey, y'all. Did you see Deborah crossing them up out there?" We were in the women's locker room of Wilson Senior High School, and Six—who earned her name because of her intimidating 6'2" frame—was talking about me. "I think she needs a ghetto name," she said. "From now on, we're going to call you Big D."

Whenever I turn on the radio at home in Washington, D.C., and hear "Go Go," a breed of music similar to hip-hop and birthed in our nation's capital, it takes me back to the Wilson gymnasium where I played on our school basketball team with Six, Ursula, Kamina, and others. As we warmed up, the rhythm and groove made the air vibrate and made the stands feel a little less empty. (For some reason most fans started showing up after our games were almost over, in time for the boys' opening.)

I was in tenth grade that year and played guard. A yellow school bus took us all around the city for games against other D.C. public schools. And though the talk on the basketball court was sometimes hostile, the locker room after the games was usually a place of laughter and acceptance.

Big D. The name stuck for the rest of the season. We all loved the name, but we also knew it was mostly

a joke. Big D was, after all, a small, shy, *white* girl.

I grew up white in a predominantly African-American city. Playing basketball my tenth-grade year, I occasionally found myself in a crowded gym where, except for my dad who often watched from the bleachers, my skin was far lighter than that of anyone else in the place.

Today, as I walk around the city of Philadelphia, shop for groceries, catch the bus—my pale skin still glowing white—I find I carry the burden of history on my conscience and try not to deteriorate under its weight.

I grew up white in a predominantly African-American city. . . . My white skin has painful and complicated meaning.

In a color-blind society, the color of my skin would be irrelevant. I would blend in with the coffee-like, rich-earth-like colors of the rest of the world. But in a society fraught with racial inequality, my white skin has painful and complicated meaning. For me, it means shame. It means benefits. It means things like "oppressor" and "yuppie" and "naïve." It means a tangle of privileges and challenges that I feel I must name and then try to live with responsibly. How am I to live conscientiously with white skin in a society scarred by racism?

Over the years, I have been taught that having white skin has privileged me while having darker skin has made life unjustly difficult for three quarters of the world, including my D.C. public school classmates. In many ways, I have seen this to be true. In her book *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, Peggy McIntosh lists a number of these privileges. I can go shopping without being followed. I can buy Band-Aids and assume they will be close to the color of my skin. I can look for an apartment without worrying that my skin color will cause the landlords to question my financial reliability. Whereas most people of color in this country are forced to think daily about their race, I could go entire months, if I wanted to, without thinking once about the fact that I am white.

But white privilege is only half the story. At a conference I recently attended, a young white woman stood and asked, "Is it a privilege that my descendants were slaveholders and murderers? Is it a privilege to belong to a race that has historically found its meaning in power and wealth?"

I had a history teacher in high school who believed whites were evil by nature. I remember sitting in her class, feeling small and pale, fighting the idea that I was a racist merely because I had white skin. In the end, Ms. Green's class taught me more about racial consciousness than any class before or since. I discovered that having white skin is not only a list of privileges. It is also an immense burden.

I want to talk about this burden. I want to talk about the ways in which growing up white is hard—disadvantageous even. I realize this sounds backward in a society that privileges my skin color. I am certainly not asking for sympathy. I am merely asking myself and many others to face the gnarled meaning of our white skin. I believe it is essential for those of us who are white to examine the wounds we carry because of our skin color, to face our guilt, and to heal as best we can. This needs to happen before a more racially just society is possible.

What could possibly be difficult about belonging to the most privileged race in the world? In short, the shame of it. While my African-American classmates found pieces of themselves in Alex Haley's *Roots* and in the U.S. Civil Rights movement, I knew I couldn't claim such a proud history. I descended instead from a race of conquerors, slayers of Native Americans, slave traders, and plantation owners. I live knowing that people of my race hold most of the world's power and wealth—and are not being very good stewards of them. I am the "blue-eyed devil" Malcolm X speaks of in his autobiography. This is a heavy skin to wear.

As a white American, I also don't have a deep sense of belonging to a "people." In school, I locked arms with my classmates and teachers and sang "We Shall Overcome" with all my heart, but I was always, at some level, an outsider. When I go to a local coffee shop for an evening of spoken word poetry, an art form that has become a powerful outlet for African-American voices, I am mostly an observer. Sincere as I may be, I can't share in the common experience of being black in America.

With the possible exception of my Mennonite people-web, whose members build community by singing hymns and telling stories of a persecuted past, white folks just don't do identity in the same way as I have observed our African-American brothers and sisters experiencing it. My skin color gives me no proud heritage on which to build my life, and it has no cultural community tied to it.

Finally, I find that one of my greatest challenges as a white person of privilege is my desire to share the causes of the oppressed. "I choose to identify with the underprivileged," writes Martin Luther King Jr. "I choose to identify with the poor. . . . I choose to give my life for those who have been left out of the sunlight of opportunity." I want to say the same thing, but how can I ever identify with the underprivileged when I have so little sense of being oppressed myself?

I worry that my life of choosing to identify with the underprivileged will be misunderstood, that it might be disempowering to those for whom I want the opposite. I worry that my good intentions might in the end cause greater harm. And I worry that my white skin is, in part, to blame.

A few days ago, I was crossing the street and noticed the bumper sticker on a parked car to my left: "F—— Racism," it shouted at passersby. *If only it were that easy*, I thought to myself. If only sporting bumper stickers and T-shirts were enough to make us antiracist, our history innocent, and our world a better place. Instead, the issues are complex. Injustices and misunderstandings continue. White folks stumble and tiptoe, African-

Americans wait, organize, or yell out in anger, and all who don't consider themselves "black" or "white" struggle to find their place in the dialogue.

I know I have greatly simplified the story. We live tangled in a complicated social structure which is not composed of powerful whites and oppressed "minorities." People of all colors are found scattered throughout our hierarchies of power. More Latinos live in the United States than African-Americans, yet too often we talk about race as a black and white issue. Arabs face perhaps the most blatant racism in North America in the post-9-11 era. And powerful currents of economic injustice and globalization run beneath it all.

In the end, the world is composed of people of all colors, each seeking survival and identity in small and big ways. May we all keep on walking, healing, and, wherever possible, locking arms to sing, "We shall overcome. We shall overcome some day."

—*Deborah Good was born and raised in Washington, D.C., graduated from Eastern Mennonite University in 2002, and currently works as an intern at* The Other Side *magazine (www.theotherside.org) in Philadelphia . She can be reached at deborahagood@hotmail.com. She sees her column's name, "Beneath the Skyline," as "sayingsomething about me: I'm a city girl. And I see the city beneath the skyline, where real people are just trying to pay the rent, where real people are hurting and homeless and imprisoned, and where folks like me are stumbling around, trying to make sense of it all."*

We Won't Plant Corn Today

Mark R. Wenger

The Martins have been farming the land here in Augusta County, Virginia, for generations. This past spring they had it especially rough. The weather is often quite dry, but not this year. It rained and rained. For weeks on end the ground was too wet to work. "I can't ever remember having trouble getting the corn planted," one Martin remarked.

Late one week, finally, the sun came out for a couple days. By Sunday things looked promising. Some suggested, "Why not plant on Sunday? They're calling for rain on Monday."

The reported reply from the senior Martin: "No, we won't do that."

Sunday was for worship and rest, for doing only essential work. And that didn't include planting corn, even though the sun was shining and rain was once more approaching.

If you go to the mall on a typical Sunday afternoon, you are liable to get run over. It's one of the busiest shopping days of the week. Companies and factories run 24/7, and employees need to be scheduled for Sunday work. The motor of modern life races along without pause. All of which might make the

Martins' decision seem quaint and foolish.

But not for me. Not planting Sunday corn reflects a seasoned community wisdom. While not rational in strictly material terms, wisdom understands the meaning of work, activity, and commerce as discovered and enhanced only in a regular life rhythm that sets time aside for something completely different: rest and worship. If you don't get rest and worship right, work and busyness aren't right either.

I'm not arguing for a return of the "blue laws" . . . . Let the marketplace rule; just don't let it rule us!

Maybe this is the time to show my hand and explain the perspective I'll try to drawn on as I contribute to *DreamSeeker Magazine*'s collection of "voices from the soul." Ever since I encountered it in graduate school, Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* has intrigued me. Variously translated as "practical wisdom," "shared knowledge," or *"sensus communis"* (the community's "sense" or wisdom), it refers to the gathered, seasoned knowledge gained by a people through actual life experience.

Phronesis is different from theoretical, technical, or intuitive knowledge; it is the sediment of shared knowledge laid down over time in a community. These strata accumulate as fertile soil for the better life.

Phronesis is not bedrock, rigid and immovable; it can change with the times. Nonetheless, it represents the underlying structures, values, habits, and ideas that have demonstrated human benefit. You could call it "common sense" in the truest sense. And that's where the column title "Community Sense" comes from.

Which brings me back to the Martins' not planting corn on Sunday—and the ancient wisdom of the Sabbath. No, I'm not arguing for a return of the "blue laws" and legislated Sabbath-keeping. Let the marketplace rule; just don't let it rule us! A great gift Jews bestowed on the world is their one-day-in-seven set aside for rest, relationships, and worshipping God. Jewish folks have kept the Sabbath for millennia, but not, they claim, so much as the Sabbath has kept them.

Jesus affirmed the Sabbath was made to bless humanity. Many Christians call the first day of the week—the day of Christ's resurrection—their Sabbath. But for busy people, the Sabbath as a sanctuary in time is becoming an inheritance lost. It is being squandered in the frenzy of perpetual movement, prowling the stores, surfing the Net, accomplishing one more task. And we are thus spiritually poorer and enslaved.

Tim McGuire, former editor of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, quoted an unnamed pastor in his June 2003 newspaper column. "Practicing Sabbath is proof that the world does not own us." McGuire mused, "That statement stopped me cold. The world does own me. Even on Sunday, I feel compelled to stay on the move. I owe my son a movie, or I want to watch that ballgame, or I need to catch up on some work I've put off."

I know what McGuire is talking about. Too many of us recognize the symptoms but don't make the choices to break the tyranny of productivity and activity. Why? Because practicing the Sabbath can be hard. We are restless people, easily bored. We don't want to waste time. And we'd like to think we're smarter than our parents who put silly restrictions on us.

Meanwhile the payoff (a word money-driven folks love) of regular worship, meditation, and rest is not immediate—not like finishing a PowerPoint presentation. Plus everyone else is treating Sunday as just another day. Why *not* plant corn!

Because the best things in life are received, not achieved. Practicing the Sabbath is an ancient wisdom—a way of remembering God's love and reveling in life's sheer wonder and beauty.

Sabbath-keeping is akin to engaging in informal play in its suspension of pursuing fortune, power, and fame. Sabbath-keeping is lovemaking, conversing, hiking, reading, laughing with friends. Sabbath-keeping is much deeper than being entertained; it relishes time not captive to production pressure. Sabbath-keeping is slowing down to be expectantly available to God and neighbor.

In *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (Bantam/Doubleday, 2000), Wayne Muller tells this story: "Rabbi Levy saw a man running on the street and asked him, 'Why do you run?' The man replied, 'I am running after my good fortune.' Rabbi Levy tells him, 'Silly man, your good fortune has been trying to chase you, but you are running too fast.'"

Many of us are running too hard, too long. We feel it in our bones and gnawing at our souls. Still, discovering the long-proven benefits of the Sabbath will take more than nodding our heads. Getting to know the Sabbath will require making decisions, drawing boundaries, and changing habits.

Some folks like to say the Sabbath is more than a day of the week; it's an attitude and a way of life. I agree. But I hasten to add: Unless we take specific steps to set aside a Sabbath day as a sacred rhythm, each day tends to become like the rest—a generic brand of relentlessness. And the bloom of Sabbath is choked and forgotten.

But tended as a flower garden, gently and regularly, the Sabbath adds its beauty to the whole landscape of life. Sabbath doesn't need to be Sunday, but it needs to be *Some*day!

In the short term it made no sense for the Martins to refrain from Sunday corn. Viewed across a lifetime, however, blessings beyond price flow from keeping the Sabbath. We call them spiritual values, relationship fruits, health benefits. Practitioners of Sabbath have preserved a key clue to the secret of attaining a priceless treasure. I am trying to learn from them.

—Mark R. Wenger, Waynesboro, Virginia, is copastor of Springdale Mennonite Church and Associate Director of the Preaching Institute, Eastern Mennonite Seminary. This is the first of his "Community Sense" columns, slated to be a semiregular feature of DreamSeeker Magazine.

Two Blockbusters Address God, Providence, and Free Will

David Greiser

Two of summer 2003's biggest blockbusters were theological at their core. The last time I checked the box office totals, "The Matrix Reloaded" and "Bruce Almighty" had grossed about half a billion dollars between them. Not a bad take, considering that the themes of these films involve some of the weightiest and thorniest theological dilemmas ever posed.

On the surface, there seems to be little commonality between the two films. One is a slickly produced sci-fi cyber -adventure, while the other is a heartwarming date film blending physical and relational comedy. "Reloaded," like its predecessor "The Matrix," has already spawned several hundred websites on which its philosophy and theology are discussed in detail.

The film is talky, didactic, not a little pretentious. Amateur philosophers, as well as professionals, have been drawn to the film in droves. In the words of Roger Ebert, "Reloaded" plays "like a collaboration involving a geek, a comic book, and the smartest kid in

Philosophy 101." Just for starters, the film's official website contains three pages of parallels between Neo and Jesus Christ.

"Bruce Almighty" poses its questions with a lighter touch, through Jim Carrey's physical and conversational humor. Mishaps drive Bruce Nolan, Carrey's character, to question the Almighty's competence and caring. "The only one not doing his job around here is you," he tells God. God gives Bruce his supernatural powers for a week to see if he can do the job any better.

In "The Matrix Reloaded" and "Bruce Almighty," we have a film that reaches for the cathedral, a cinematic meatball, and two above average attempts to explore the meaning of being human.

Only two limits will be placed on Bruce during this experiment: He cannot tell anyone about it, and he is not allowed to "mess with free will." Therein lies a dilemma explored by both films. What, indeed, is the nature of free will? Does it even exist?

"Reloaded" explores the mystery from the human standpoint. The Matrix itself, as the first film explains, is a virtual reality dream world in which human beings live. It produces the illusion that people are active, happy and productive when, all the while, they are being used as a nutrient source for the machines that actually run the world. The plots of both the original "Matrix" and the sequel are driven by the desire of the main characters to awaken a colony of people to the true nature of their existence and thus to become truly free. To what extent do humans live in a dream world, and to what extent are they free?

"Bruce Almighty" approaches the mystery from God's perspective. How can Bruce, as God, exert his will without violating other people's wills? How can he answer the prayers of some without changing answers already given to others?

God declines to solve the puzzle. Instead he simply asserts that "I have to deal with that all the time."

Neither film offers profound theological exploration. At its best, "Reloaded" is a beginner's guide to philosophy; "Bruce Almighty" is more mirth than metaphysics. But both films display a persistent earnestness about the kinds of questions that have possessed philosophers, farmers, and those of us in between, since the beginning.

In the words of Asa Berger, "What pop culturists recognize . . . is that when you can read all things not only in a cathedral or a grain of sand, but also in a meatball, you are on the path to understanding humanity and society." In "The Matrix Reloaded" and "Bruce Almighty," we have a film that reaches for the cathedral, a cinematic meatball, and two above average attempts to explore the meaning of being human.

—David Greiser, Souderton, Pennsylvania, a pastor and a prof, likes cathedrals and meatballs. He has been asking profound philosophical questions since the day he first heard Bill Cosby ask, "Why is there air?"

The Wreck

Collision and Memory

Laura Lehman Amstutz

For my mother it will always be a Wreck, not an accident or a collision, but The Wreck, destructive, terrifying, something from which you never quite recover. The rest of us don't see it this way. It was just a thing that happened. An event, quite different from a Wreck, but it still shapes our lives.

This year January 13 was a Monday. On that day I left home for college early in the morning, when my mother warned me to drive carefully (not an uncommon experience) but I was momentarily confused when she added, "It's January 13."

For a moment my mind jumped to the "Friday the thirteenth" warning. I said, without thinking, "But it's Monday; I'll be fine."

My mother looked confused (more confused than the early morning, pre-coffee hour called for) and I remembered why January 13 was important.

The original January 13 was a Sunday in 1983. We were leaving church and on our way to pick up a Sunday paper before the pious members of my community would make someone work on a Sunday to deliver it. A truck missed the stop sign. Such a simple act, but suddenly the Jaws of Life were cutting us out

of the car and the paramedics were rushing us to the hospital. We had a memory and story.

It's a short story; even with the details the story would only take a minute or two to tell. When people ask about the scar on my face I give them the five-second version: "My family was in a car accident when I was little." But the story is more than 11 words. It has lived on in our memories, even when we don't talk about it, even when we don't think about.

When people ask about the scar on my face I give the five-second version: "My family was in a car accident when I was little." But the story is more than 11 words.

My mother probably thinks about it the most. Admittedly, she is a bit obsessed with the date. She usually gets sick around that time of year, suffers from what she calls PTSD, or post-traumatic stress disorder. I always thought it was just Seasonal Affective Disorder, a likely guess, since we live in Ohio, where the sun shines for a total of 10 minutes in January. I don't share her obsession and have almost no memory of the Wreck. It took almost 22 years for me to recognize the real reason my mother hates winter.

Although the rest of my family doesn't appear to be bothered by the date or the event, fragments of it still rise to the surface, like the glass in my brother's hand.

My father took pictures of everyone's injuries for insurance purposes. He sustained the least amount of injury, despite being the only person not wearing a seatbelt. When I turned 18, he finally showed me the photos of my injured, bruised family. We looked like crime victims from television, except we were still alive. The only thing my father says, beyond the pictures, is that the worst part was hearing me cry in the emergency room and being unable to comfort me. He keeps the insurance file in his alphabetical filing cabinet. I wonder if it's filed under *W* for *Wreck*, or *H* for *Helpless.*

My brother is similarly silent about the Wreck, at least on most occasions. Once, a few years ago, he called my mother in a panic. He said he'd just seen a terrible car accident with a car that looked just like Dad's. He watched them pry it open with the Jaws of Life. He called to make sure everyone was okay.

My mother and brother broke seven bones each. My brother had a pin in his leg and was in traction for several months. He claims his one act of selfless brotherly love was in those moments when the truck hit our car. He threw himself across the car on top of me to protect me from flying glass. It makes me wish I remembered it.

My mother was in the hospital for three weeks afterward. I remember this only because when I got home from my short stay in the hospital there were Oreos in the bread drawer, a snack my mother would never allow. There are pictures of her in a wheelchair, but I don't remember that either.

For some reason, all my post-accident memories have to do with food, but I was only two years old, so I suppose food was memorable. I remember the red Jello in a red wagon in the children's wing of the hospital, and I remember the Oreos and the pink cake we served in the hospital next to my brother's bed for my birthday. My parents say that some day it may all come flooding back, but I think I'll keep my food memories for now.

When I think of all the ways we live differently because of the Wreck, it is astounding. I am now in the habit of putting on my seatbelt, every time I get in the car; even when we're just driving down the block, even if I'm just moving my car in a parking lot. Usually I don't think about it, but when I don't do it, it feels wrong.

We now live a half mile from where the accident happened. We drive through the intersection daily. I always stop and look both ways longer than necessary. My husband's grandmother used to live at that intersection. She was the first to reach the scene when we wrecked. Really, our lives have changed in ways that we can't even name.

"Muscles have memory," says my mother when she gets a massage to ease her muscles, which still ache from the injuries. But I want to add that people have memory, carry stories, and live. I wonder what it means that we tell this odd, terrible story, with so many disparate details. What does this story tell about us? It tells us of our obsessions and fears, our desire to protect one another and the knowledge that we can't, it tells us of love and action and most of all it tells us about life.

—Laura Lehman Amstutz from Kidron, Ohio, has 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.

Man Sees Sunrise for the First Time

Nöel R. King

"Oh my God!"

Matthew Sprinker, a 24-year-old San Diego native, was obviously overwhelmed when he stepped outside his front door for the first time last Tuesday. The first time ever, that is, before 9:00 in the morning. He staggered slightly as he grabbed the doorframe, said a passerby who was walking her dog in front of his house at about 6:24 that morning, and he reached blindly toward the rising sun.

"It alarmed me," Mrs. Anna Wisler said later. "I thought he was having a heart attack or something. I had no idea he was, like, seeing the sun rise for the first time." Mrs. Wisler said she hurried on past Sprinker's house at that point because she did not have a cell phone with her and she did not want to see a dead man so early in the morning.

"I hadn't even had my coffee yet," she elaborated. "I wasn't about to expose myself to a tragedy so early in the morning."

Sprinker, not surprisingly, says he himself has not drunk coffee since that morning. Instead, he says, he has spent most of his time dealing with this newly discovered reality.

"I just never thought of getting up earlier," he explains, when questioned about his continuing amazement. "I can't believe nobody told me about this."

He gestures toward the sun rising over the distant mountains, only the sixth time in his life now that he has seen this sight.

"Why didn't anybody *make* me get up before?" he wonders aloud as he continues to stare into the ever-brightening light. "Why the heck have I been trapped under my covers all these years when *this* was going on every day?"

When reminded that his life in general hasn't been worth getting out of bed for, Sprinker quiets down quickly.

"Oh yeah," he says.

—As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Reston, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful things, including the shock of first seeing the sun rise.

Dreaming into the West

On the Road with Jack Kerouac and Jesus Christ

Michael A. King

This is a story about dreaming into the West in body and spirit, accompanied on the road by Jack Kerouac and Jesus Christ.

Dreaming into the West

When I first began to dream into the West I don't know. I just know that despite my sorrow and anger over the ways Manifest Destiny impelled Americans to drive relentlessly West even over the bodies of Native Americans and wild beings beyond the counting, I too am yet another American drawn by their dream.

Until my late 30s I knew the West only from photos and the vistas I had created in my mind's eye. In some ways I had made a myth of a land that in spots is as ordinary as any. But in other ways the myth wasn't even as large as the reality, I concluded when in the early 1990s I first explored those mountains that rise into forever from the deserts and vast forests and even, so much more often than in the quieter East, from the base of that Pacific sea itself.

After that first trip, every excuse I could find to return I took. I no longer remember how many times I've wandered those still-fabled lands between Colorado and New Mexico on the eastern edge (that's where it begins for me) of the West; or California, Oregon, and Washington in the western West, not to mention the glories of Utah, Arizona, Nevada, Idaho, plus the states yet to be explored.

My need for ever more West only deepened the day I was myself on the road to Virginia and heard National Public Radio profile Jack Kerouac and his most famous book, *On the Road* (Penguin Books, 1991; first published Viking Books, 1957). Kerouac helped start what became the Beat Generation in the 1950s and evolved into the hippies of the 1960s (though hippies Kerouac disliked). Between commenting on the role the book has played in American literature, NPR played excerpts of Kerouac himself reading from it. I had never read Kerouac, but as soon as I heard him start reading in his own voice, I knew I would have to go straight to a bookstore.

I'm not sure precisely what passage I heard him read. But if it wasn't the one I'm about to quote it was one like it, mixing as often in Kerouac the past tense of narrative and the present tense of immediate experience. Here through Sal, who stands for Kerouac in this book labeled a novel but in reality largely autobiographical, Kerouac says of the California town of Tracy that it is "a railroad town; brakemen eat surly meals in cinders by the tracks. Trains howl across the valley. The sun goes down long and red. All the magic names of the valley unrolled—Manteca, Madera, all the rest. Soon it got dusk, a grapy dusk, a purple dusk over tangerine groves and long melon fields; the sun the color of pressed grapes, slashed with burgundy red, the fields the color of love and Spanish mysteries. I stuck my head out the window and took deep breaths of the fragrant air. It was the most beautiful of all moments" (80-81).

Listening . . . I felt a surge of almost unbearable longing for the West and its kicks. Kerouac's words set aflame my own similar reasons for loving the West.

And on the way West toward that most beautiful of moments, Sal/Kerouac tells of how under a tarpaulin in the back of a truck he watched as "The stars seemed to get brighter the more we climbed the High Plains. We were in Wyoming now. Flat on my back, I stared straight up at the magnificent firmament, glorying in the time I was making, in how far I had come from Bear Mountain after all, and tingling with kicks at the thought of what lay ahead of me in Denver—whatever, whatever it would be" (29-30).

Listening to and later reading these words and others telling of Kerouac's reckless, rollicking, beauty-and-joy-seeking trip with his friend Nick Cassady (named Dean Moriarty in the book), I felt a surge of almost unbearable longing for the West and its kicks. Kerouac's words set aflame my own reasons for loving the West: Because I was stricken with hunger for the journey itself, for the process of getting from East to West.

Because the West always seemed to have space in it for everything a soul could need, including two-lane roads stretching on in desolate but wonderful emptiness far beyond the horizon established by the last light from the West-setting sun, stars sprayed across a sky big enough and dark enough to see them in.

And because of the air, oh air so dry and soft and sweet and fresh that, as my daughter Katie said on first feeling it, it seems to carry all by itself the very glory and purpose of being alive.

On the Road West with Jack

Even as I felt Kerouac's road to the West burning in me, I was pondering taking a sabbatical from pastoring. Soon Kerouac and sabbatical were interweaving into a wild vision of my taking a month of sabbatical time to go on the road myself, from Pennsylvania to the West Coast, roaming wherever I felt led along the way.

It took long months of planning, discussions with church and family, strategizing how to keep my affairs going while away. But soon enough what had seemed only wild dreaming gave way to that redletter Wednesday evening. On April 30, 2003, at 6:10 p.m., having determined that my sabbatical officially began at 5:00, I waved my first good-bye to spouse and daughters.

There were tears on their faces and some threatening on mine, because now the dream seemed as terrifying as it did exciting. It seemed doubtful that I would ever again see my family; surely more than enough dangers lurked in the thousands of miles I intended to drive to do me in well before I could ever return home.

But like the first pioneers, I found my courage. I turned the ignition key of my 1991 Honda Civic, a trusty car but not likely, at 159,200 miles, to make it across the burning deserts. I waved my last good-bye . I steered toward the sun setting quickly now in the west and West.

Because WEST, west in all its true westerness was what I so craved, I wanted no dawdling in mundane Eastern haunts. Within two days beyond that first evening, my Honda and I had gulped down nearly 2,000 miles. Finally the edge of the true West drew near, I felt, shortly after Amarillo, Texas, as the land dried out, the sagebrush appeared, and the sky seemed to double in size.

Then as once more the sun faded west, the unmistakable West itself was there, yes, right there. The interstate curved around a bend near the Texas-New Mexico state line and what had been plains became rough gullies and washes interspersed with mesas.

I stopped soon after at the first New Mexico rest area. Reality and dream merged as at the edge of the parking lot I gazed out at that classically Western landscape, listened to the constant twitter of hordes of unfamiliar Western birds, and felt the caresses of breezes such as the East, humidity-ridden, knows only on rare air-from-Canada days. Some part of me was home as it is never home anywhere else.

On the Road with Jack and Jesus

The joy of that first encounter with the land itself was to be repeated in the weeks thereafter, and indeed love for the land remains a primary aspect of my dreaming into the West. But I was not only on a generic trip; I was also specifically on the road with both Jack Kerouac and Jesus Christ.

As much as Kerouac's own celebration of the land is evident in *On the Road*, there is more. Kerouac is also on the road toward a type of living beyond the cramped, guilt-ridden constraints he thought post-World War II conventional American culture and his Catholic heritage had inflicted on him and his generation.

I wanted to learn two things from being on the road with this Jack and with Christ. I wanted to explore what he could teach me about living a wilder life than I sometimes do as a Christian shaped by my own many guilts and conventions. And I wanted to learn how not to do so as Kerouac finally did.

As he himself chronicles in such novelized autobiographies as *Desolation Angels, Big Sur*, and more, he lived with such undisciplined abandon, such inability to place boundaries around following joy and feeling wherever they led, that he died in 1969 at age 47. He was a dissolute shadow of his former self, killed by the alcoholism which finally sent his stomach into uncontrollable bleeding.

Kerouac followed the call of the blood fizzing in his veins, then was killed when all the blood fled him. I wanted my own blood to fizz like his but not for it to bleed back out. That too became a vital aspect of dreaming into the West.

As part of setting that part of the trip in motion, long months before I left on sabbatical I told my congregation in a sermon that I was moved by the example of Katie Funk Wiebe, who in *Border Crossing* (DreamSeeker Books, rev. ed. 2003) says that if she has any regrets, as she thinks back over her nearly 80 years, it's that she didn't live wildly enough.

I reported how inspired I was by this white-haired woman who says that "I recognize now, as I look back over my many experiences, that I have known too much fear. I have been too hesitant at times to move ahead. I have seen a ferocious lion behind every blade of grass. . . .

"I wish now that I had had more courage to move forward decisively and been less concerned about what the church community would think of some of the vision I felt entrusted with. . . .

"If I have learned anything about myself as I look back, it is how little I have galloped at breakneck speed. . ." (46-47).

I wanted to learn from Katie, I told my congregation, and I might want to symbolize that with an earring: "A price of being a pastor is the feeling, sometimes, that my wild side must be suppressed. Always I know that, like it or not, someone may be watching, pondering what I do, wondering about my perfections and imperfections, whether I'm a model to be followed or avoided. That can put a damper on adventure.

"So one reason I may wear a ring on sabbatical is to symbolize that for those brief months I'm at play, still in the fields of the Lord, but at play, taking a break from 20 years of carrying the role. In our culture, men who wear an earring are at least a little wild or maybe, when viewed from within this congregation, a lot wild and too wild. I don't want to be too wild. I don't want to do anything that goes against my understanding of Scripture and of Jesus' teachings or what God calls me to do with the next part of my life. But I'd like to be a little wild."

I could learn from those aspects of Kerouac's vision rooted in the word underlying the Beat Generation label: *beatific*. . . . As Kerouac put it, "I was waiting for God to show his face."

So a little wild I became, and the day before heading West I set out with advisers—wife and daughters who know far more about these things than I—for Montgomeryville Mall. There, at Pagoda Piercing, family consensus settled on the tiniest, least wild stud to be found, my ear was pierced, and for weeks after I'd find it hard to believe it was my own face staring back out of the mirror when I'd spy that gleam in my left ear.

It's due to come out shortly; it was mainly a statement suited to that wild Western dreaming and the sabbatical break from pastoring. But it did what I hoped it would: reminded me to aim to do more of the wild living Wiebe wished she had and Kerouac actually had. Still that didn't mean simply copying Kerouac's wildness but learning from it while remaining true to my Christian values. How?

This is not the type of thing for which you get a software quick-install guide; it's a lifelong project. Yet I did stumble across what seemed two principles. First, I concluded I could learn from those aspects of Kerouac's vision rooted in the word underlying the Beat Generation label: *beatific*. As his biographer Ann Charters explains, *Beat* had emerged as slang for "a state of creative exhaustion" but "was also linked in Jack's mind to a Catholic beatific vision, the direct knowledge of God enjoyed by the blessed" (Introduction, *On the Road*, viii).

As Kerouac himself put it, "I was asked to explain beatness on TV, on radio, by people everywhere. They were all under the impression that being beat was just a lot of frantic nowhere hysteria. What are you searching for, they asked me? I answered that I was waiting for God to show his face" (*Good Blond & Others*, rev. ed., Grey Fox Press, 1998, 51).

Kerouac's search in turn became linked in my mind with Jesus' own beatific vision in Luke 12 of life shaped by ability truly to see the lilies lovelier than "Solomon in all his glory," and to trust that if we live toward such beauty we will experience the God who nurtures it likewise blessing us. Is not Kerouac offering a beatific view of our world's lilies when he tells of the grapy California dusk within which he breathes the fragrant air?

My second principle was this: to seek to experience the grapy dusk and

lilies not outside of but within the teachings of Jesus. Kerouac helped me see afresh the wild ability of Jesus to feel the fizz of the world in his blood. But then seeing Kerouac through Jesus once again reminded me that Kerouac's experience of his culture and Catholic heritage largely as impediments to the fizz blocked his finding in them guides for keeping the quest in bounds or managing the intensities of joy and suffering, fame and censure, trigged by publication of *On the Road.*

So in addition to nonstop drinking he lurched from drug to drug, woman to woman, friend to friend, country to country. Ever he sought the fizz, the beatific direct experience of the divine, and offered haunting descriptions of it when he did find it. But also ever he was forced to experience, as he flirted several times even with madness, that fizz with too few rules can go as flat as soda lacking a sealed bottle.

So on the road West I sought with Jack the fizz but also with Jesus the boundaries within which to keep the fizz fizzy. Thus I didn't lurch from woman to woman or drug to drug. But I did awake each day of the trip not, as so often in ordinary life, pondering the tasks and weights of the day, but as both Jack and Jesus mean to invite, I believe: Each hour's task was simply the search for the beatific gifts, the holy hints, each wild day might hold.

Some people hate it, but for me there is something homey and comforting about the experience, thus one of my dreams for my trip was for a server to call me "dear" or a variant. So one day the beatific gift came in the form of the waitress who in Farmington, New Mexico, asked while I ate my country breakfast, "Do you need anything else, Sir?"

Just for you to call me honey, I bleakly thought.

So on the road West I sought with Jack the fizz but also with Jesus the boundaries within which to keep the fizz fizzy.

But oh there is a God, oh the fizz does fizz, the world does after all offer its doorways into the divine. Did she see that earring, sparkling on in the morning sun? Did she see the glow of my soul radiating toward her? Or was it unearned grace? I know only this: About halfway through my breakfast, as she stood some 20 feet away, she said, "Are you doing okay . . . Sweetie?"

"Are you talking to me?" I asked in some disbelief. Maybe she was addressing someone at the cash register just behind me. But no. No and no and no. The Sweetie was me.

Another day the gift arrived as my friend Don and I drove to a restaurant he wanted to share with me after we learned we would be in Arizona at the same time. While yet another grapy dusk fell on the West, this time on the desert outskirts of Phoenix, we listened to the haunting chords of Ry Cooder's guitar as Don told of what happened one night: Across the sleeping landscape they had sped, he and his son, hour after hour, talking and listening raptly to their mutually beloved Grateful Dead, to arrive at a

hushed and holy Grand Canyon during the still-dark morning hours.

Then there was the drive from Utah to Arizona's Monument Valley. In the area called Valley of the Gods, in late afternoon sweet light, I saw this: The soil all turned red, mountains rising and falling with their seams sometimes at cross-grain with the awesome spires, mesas, bluffs woven in among them; miles-stretching vistas across desert plains and down into valleys thousands of feet below covered with the faint green of sage and spindly juniper and other growths I knew not what they were, and that time of year often complemented by purple flowers—which I pray, since I so loved them in my minds' eye when as a boy I rode with Zane Grey across the purple sagelands covered with them—were columbines.

Ruts on the Road

Not all was beatific; the search for it also highlights how often it is missing and how woven into all earthly life is so much that is wrong, as Kerouac also had to learn. There were also the ordinary boring times, too boring to report here. And perhaps particularly two almost clashing sets of experiences highlight the wrongness.

On the one hand, I nearly despair as I think back to some of the most amazing landscapes I'd guess this earth holds and remember how often at their edges and sometimes even creeping into their centers are deserts of commercial strips virtually the same across the entire country. These are the true barren deserts, in contrast to the God-shaped loveliness of the literal deserts Americans have so often treated as disposably barren.

On the other hand, I'll not soon forget this: It's evening. In a dust storm I drive as fast as I dare through the blinding brown wind in search of a motel before I am trapped for the night in what now seems fearsomely desolate—not beatific—wilderness.

Finally the outlines of the Anazasi Inn can be spied through the dust, but lo, every single person in the adjoining restaurant and check-in counter appears to be Native American. The clerk tells me there are no singles left. I can't tell if that is true for everybody or just for palefaces.

So onward, onward, onward I am forced to race. The sun sets on mile after mile of wasteland, darkness grows, and this becomes unsettlingly clear: There are still large stretches of undeveloped land in America. *No lights at all* for miles! My car sputters a bit—a habit it seems to develop when in high country—and I wonder what the Native Americans will do if they find me stranded in the dark.

I say this not against Native Americans. It's just that I'm now in their land, sort of, land my people took from them, then gave back to them in the form of what they deemed the worst of it (watch for the most barren Western lands and there you'll see a reservation), and who knows if they would like to even the score with me late at night with my car sputtered to nothing, its engine choked with desert dust.

I do survive by arriving at last in Flagstaff. This time the neon glow seems a heavenly one indeed.

I felt that night, I think, the urge to impose order on a land and peoples the European settlers of the West considered too wild to be other than in need of taming. But if the urge is understandable, its consequences are only gathering force. What a terrible thing we did when we took the free peoples of the West (not to mention East), and tried to herd them into people zoos so they wouldn't impede our craving to build the neon strips. What a terrible thing we do every day, as the moment the human herds discern the next beautiful spot in the West we all race to trample it down in our millions.

So I love the West, which lived up to my dreams and more. And I mourn the West, since we have already turned so much of it into nightmare.

But I know only to keep looking for the fizz and also for the bottle that will keep it bubbly in awareness that doing both at once will never be an easy task. I followed Kerouac onto the road in a car, seeking the open highway while also joining the hordes of us who take the open road away from each other by wanting it in such numbers we destroy what we ache for.

We need boundaries around the consumerist capitalism so quickly destroying the lilies, or around the dissolution that finally ruined Kerouac. Still I wouldn't want not to have roamed the West for one glorious month, glimpsing enough to chew on for years to come of what life can be like on the road with both Jack Kerouac and Jesus Christ.

Home Again

My Honda did return me home, along with an odometer now reading 167,950. Except for the motel in Ogden, Utah, where maybe I was nearly shot (a tale for another day), I had nary the narrowest of scrapes. I *was* literally scared of seeing my wife Joan and daughters again—would we even recognize each other's changed selves? In the end we did. And soon many of the humdrum routines were back.

Still there is in me, and in various ways in all our family, some extra fizz. It's a joy to be back safe within the boundaries of home and community, the walls of church and faith—but also to feel blood surging, as still I dream into the West but often as well find versions of its grapy dusks and grandest of lilies right here in old East.

—Michael A. King, Telford, Pennsylvania, is pastor, Spring Mount (Pa.) Mennonite Church; and editor, DreamSeeker Magazine. *He is not sure why he does not live in the West.*

In Memoriam

Evelyn King Mumaw

Michael A. King

Evelyn King Mumaw's writings in the Winter and Spring 2003 issues of *DreamSeeker Magazine* were popular enough that after it became clear she would be writing no more, a few subscribers called to cancel, noting that her writing was their main reason for subscribing. Hopefully, however, there remain enough Mumaw fans among *DSM* readers to justify passing on this word: Finally on July 30, 2003, she did, as she had feared but hoped nevertheless to avoid, lose her battle with cancer.

Readers of her two articles describing her journey as death drew close, "When Death Announces Its Nearness" (Winter 2003) and "Through Turmoil, Chamber, and Love" (Spring 2003), know how eloquently and honestly she shared her fears and hopes. It seemed appropriate, then, and moving, to hear Nate Yoder, one of her former pastors, quote from those articles at the memorial service where hundreds gathered at Dayton (Va.) Mennonite Church on August 3, 2003 to remember and love her.

I wish there had been even more writings. When this loved aunt of mine (for such she was) completed her second article for *DSM*, I asked her, as both her nephew and editor, to consider writing yet another.

She declined, partly because her strength was ebbing, partly because she wanted to be able, if she wrote more, to end on a ringing note of faith, but amid discouragement she was struggling to feel positive. I suggested that for the countless people who face their own similar dark times during their final journey, it would be powerful for her to testify to the negative in addition to the positive. But that didn't feel right to her, and I respected that.

Evelyn King Mumaw
November 28, 1919- July 30, 2003

Sadly, her fears did prove at least as reliable a guide to her future as her hopes. The miracle she prayed for and wistfully yearned for didn't arrive. And when it became clear the cancer would kill her, her body insisted on lingering long weeks past her spirit's wishes. But finally the time came, and there are those who report that near the end she had meaningful visions of what lay ahead, but, ever judicious in what she chose to share, she declined to detail precisely what she was seeing.

So now she is gone, but she lives on in the hands of the one who, as she quoted from Psalm 18 in one of her articles, "is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my strength in whom I will trust: my buckler and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."

And she lives on in memory, very much including mine. I will never forget that 1990s night she sat on our living room couch, sharing who she now was with my wife Joan and me, as she said that now, a widow and a woman in her 70s who had completed her career goals, she had nothing left to prove. She was free simply to respond day by day to God's promptings.

I shivered at the newfound majesty of her bearing. I had rarely experienced a person as regal, as commanding, as filled with authority. Yet as I said the week later in a sermon inspired by who she had been that night, I was seeing in her "not the secular authority of the earthly ruler but the humble and awe-inspiring authority of one whose soul overflows with God."

You will be missed, Evelyn King Mumaw.

—Michael A. King

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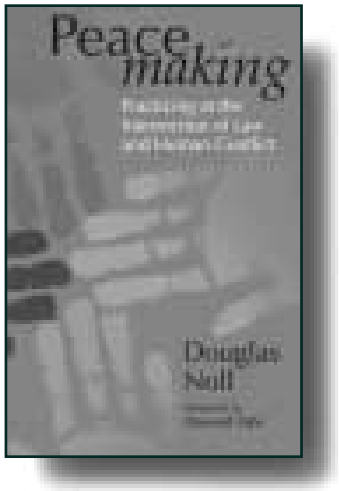

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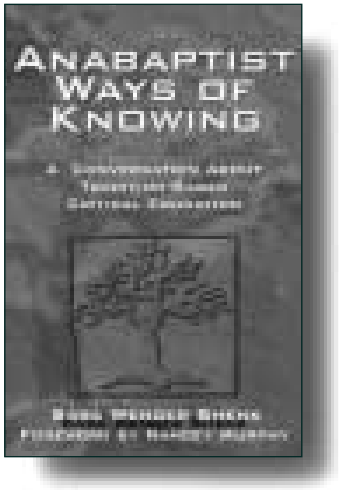

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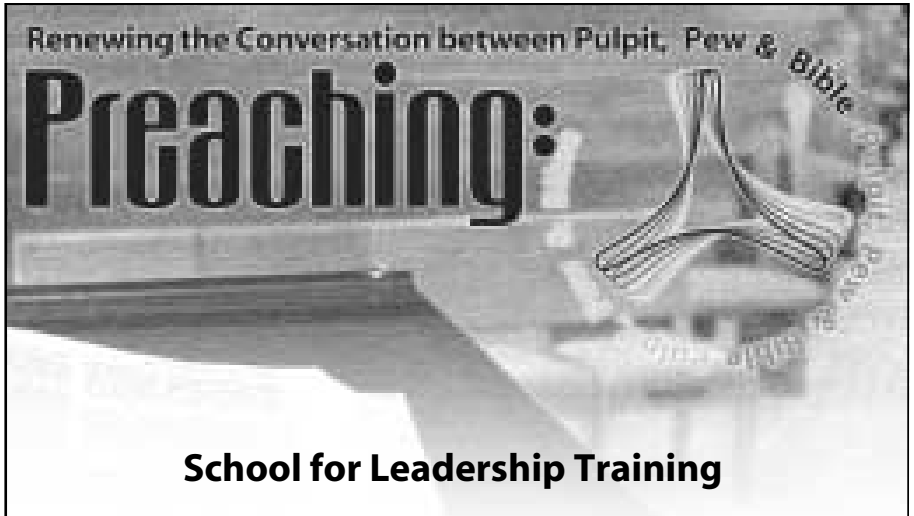
Or perhaps you already subscribe to *DreamSeeker Magazine* and are an author interested in being published in *DSM*, as a growing number of writers are. Then what? Indeed a key part of the *DSM* vision is to support the work of gifted writers—without whose inspired contributions the magazine of course could not exist. 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 primarily publishing articles by our regular columnists and contributors or material we solicit. Nevertheless, we aim to treat unsolicited submissions respectfully and are happy that we *are* occasionally able to accept them, preferably by e-mail to *mking@CascadiaPublishingHouse.com* or to the Telford address above. (Note that unsolicited articles submitted by mail without SASE are unlikely to be returned.)

Although we are not actively soliciting articles, we do very much welcome feedback, including short letters for publication and occasional longer responses to articles.



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This year's School for Leadership Training is planned in conjunction with the release of the new book, *Anabaptist Preaching: A Conversation Between Pulpit, Pew and Bible*, published by Cascadia. Six of the book's authors will speak and teach at this year's School for Leadership Training.

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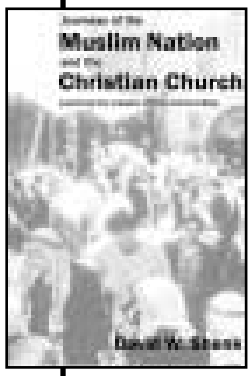

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This invaluable resource by **David W. Shank** examines Islam and Christianity at their deepest spiritual, cultural, and communal levels. It explores the similarities, and yet unavoidable differences found in Isaac and Ishmael, Jesus and Muhammad, the Bible and the Qur'an, Jerusalem and Medina, the Eucharist and the Hajj, the Church and the Ummah. This is narrative theology, full of anecdote and personal experience that bridges the poles and builds understanding.
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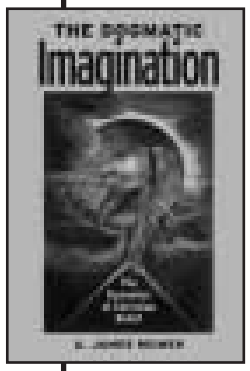

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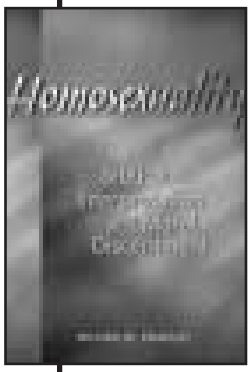

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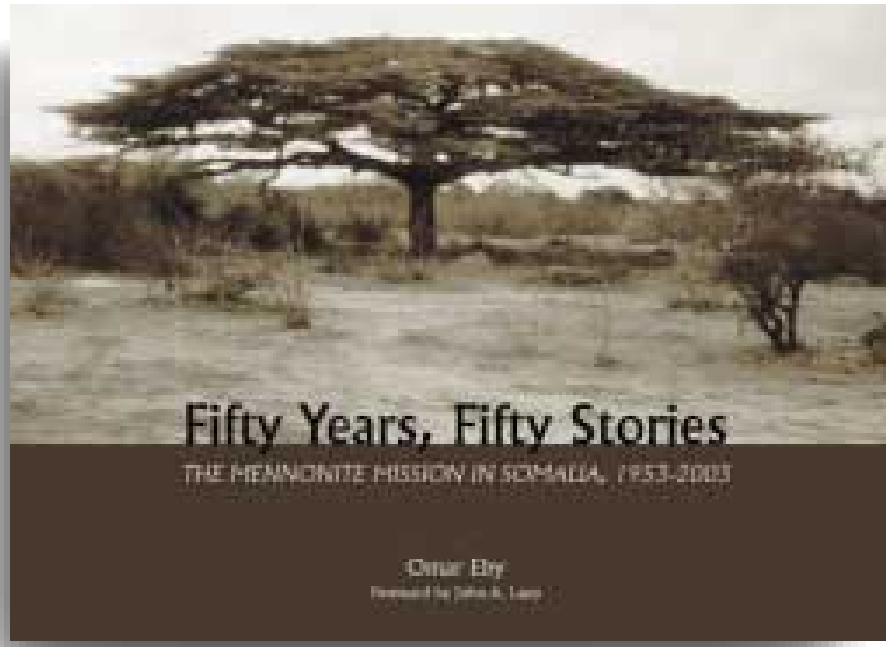

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Reaching Beyond the Mennonite Comfort Zone: Exploring from the Inside Out,
by Will Schirmer, "In clear and forthright language—enlivened with numerous examples—Schirmer challenges Mennonite congregations to reach beyond their 'comfort zones' in welcoming newcomers into the church," explains John D. Roth, Professor of History, Goshen College, in the Foreword.

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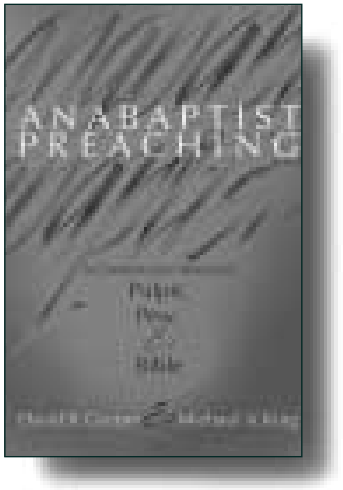

Anabaptist Preaching: A Conversation Between Pulpit, Pew, and Bible,
edited by David B. Greiser and Michael A. King. "This book will raise many important questions for preachers," notes Beryl H. Brubaker, Graduate Dean, Eastern Mennonite University. "Listen closely, and you will discover how your own 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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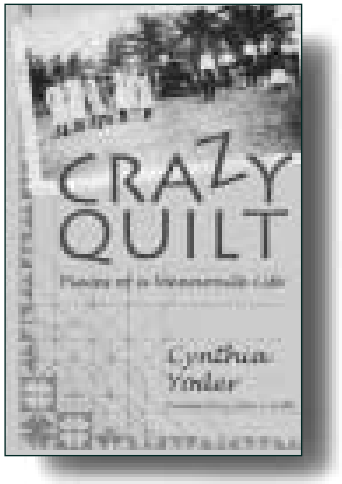

Crazy Quilt: Pieces of a Mennonite Life
by Cynthia Yoder, who was a graduate student at Columbia University when she began to suffer from a serious depression. *Crazy Quilt* follows her quest for meaning, which takes Yoder to her Pennsylvania Dutch grandparents. There she finds keys to recovery—and hope 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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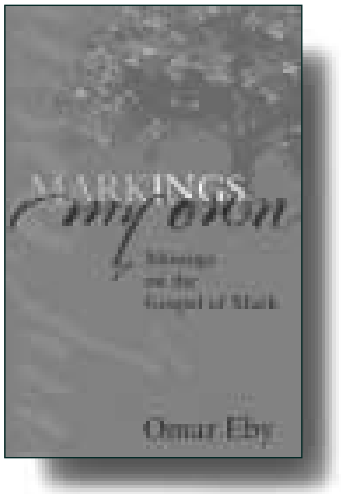

Markings/My Own Musings on the Gospel of Mark
by Omar Eby
"Imagine overhearing an honest exchange between a middle-aged man and the biblical book of Mark. Many details of Eby's life—the literature he has taught, hymns he loves, adventures and struggles he recalls, friends, family, and students—find voice in these rich and eclectic devotional meditations. Personal, immediate, searching, and often surprising, the pleasures of this text are the pleasures of eavesdropping on intelligent, soulful conversations," says Julia Kasdorf author of *Sleeping Preacher* and more.

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Old Age

Tread carefully, Helen. This is new ground.
This is not the childhood you survived,
not the turbulent years of youth,
not the desert places of middle age.

This is a land with new rules:
Do not give advice, even when asked.
Do not tell the old stories over and over.
Do not recite your ills. They are dear only to you.
Do not ask people to speak up,
for they say they are not speaking more softly than before.
And do not ask them to repeat.
(Not all they say is worth repeating.)
Be cheerful. Smile when they say you are exceptional.
Take the arm that is offered, the best seat that is given you,
the doors that are held open for you.
Remember you are a pioneer with a frontier to be crossed.
You are traveling with the young and those who would be young,
who do not know that they will get old.
When you are alone you may talk to yourself,
sing a few bars of "Aida,"
twirl a few dance steps while the tea water boils
(but only if you are alone).
Pray for Grace!

—*Helen Wade Alderfer, Goshen, Indiana, taught school for 11 years and edited at the Mennonite Publishing House for 25 years. She reviewed books for 50 years and wrote poetry all her life, having had her first poem published when she was eight.*