

DreamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul



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and much more

Autumn 2008

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Editorial: Grist for the Election

As this issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* goes to press, the U.S. presidential election is in full swing, and Election Day results will arrive while this issue remains current. Something tells me *DSM* will not change the outcome. And I'm not aware that authors in this issue wrote with the elections in mind. So no effort will be made to throw *DSM's* ginormous clout behind one candidate or another.

But I will note this: With the advent of the Internet, blogs, and what some have said is now a one-hour cycle, depth is dropping from our national conversations. Though they have much to offer and are transforming news coverage in valuable ways, I am shocked, often, at what I see in blogs. Even if the main author manages to offer depth, what the respondents say is often mind-boggling.

When word broke that Sarah Palin was a vice-presidential nominee, I Googled her. And soon found myself in a morass of unprintable blog comments that revolved around her sex appeal.

The writers in these pages do better. Whether serious or lighthearted, they offer depth. Engaging their articles will not tell us precisely whom to vote for, though the drift of some concerns does seem to favor one type of candidate over another. But the articles do provide grist for this election through the types of issues they address and the ways they engage them.

I am shocked, often, at what I see in blogs. . . . The writers in these pages do better.

Take Vince DeGregoris on anger. Amid the anger spewing from blogs and political parties, here is one of the more thoughtful treatments of anger I've seen—and in response to a prior thoughtful addressing of anger by Mark Wenger, whose current column in turn invites us to mentor each other into maturity.

Earl Zimmerman then invites us into that large and timely issue of what we do with war. More lightheartedly yet reminding us that deep commitments can have their humorous underpinnings, David Wright addresses sharp objects. Dorothy Cutrell cuts straight to a huge election issue—money—even as Deborah Good connects with another: immigration and language.

Renee Gehman brings a light touch to her celebration of wondrous creatures. And Dave Greiser reports, of all things, on a lovable robot. Yet how pertinent both their columns are as we vote on behalf of one view of God's environment or another while the oil runs out.

Jonathan Beachy spies light even in the shadows of how we handle prisoners. Amid election blather, poets M. Christine Benner and Leonard Neufeldt give us stanzas packed with meaning. And Daniel Hertzler draws us into theological depths.

Finally Noël King reminds us not to meditate too hard on all of this. Or, no matter who wins the elections, we may be gone, gone, gone!

—Michael A. King

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Dear Editors:

Regarding “Putting My Best Foot Forward,” by Renee Gehman (*DSM* Summer 2008), Renee—thank you for a spontaneous eruption of soul-refreshing laughter as I read the line, “I was ready for foot washing.”

Oh yes, and thanks for the lingering smile engendered by the image of the “red Salsa polish.” So, okay, I ended with a somewhat chastened smile—but it was still a smile!

As for Randy Klassen’s “The Bible Tells Me So . . . Or Does It?”—what a succinct, non-threatening (?) presentation of an often considered threatening subject. —*Audrey Musselman, Peoria, Illinois*

Letters to DreamSeeker Magazine are encouraged. We also welcome and when possible publish extended responses (max. 400 words).

Understanding Anger

Vincent DeGregoris

After reading “Rehabilitating Anger” (*Dream-Seeker Magazine*, Spring 2008), Mark Wenger’s article on anger with much appreciation, I thought there was more to be written about the subject. Anger is a difficult emotion for most of us, primarily because it is the single most powerful motivating emotion we experience.

When a stimulus occurs, the body goes into a defense mode to protect us. Ultimately it is a defense mechanism that produces adrenaline which causes the blood pressure to rise and the breathing rate as well as sugar in the blood to increase. The body is ready for action, for flight, freeze, or fight. In fact anger can be called a secondary emotion that is a response to pain—the pain of fear, anxiety, stress, frustration, or guilt. Yet anger is good. It is God-given, as are all our emotions.

Emotions are poorly understood and difficult to fully appreciate. Our emotions are our response to what we perceive about a situation. And two persons may respond differently to the same situation. In a football game, the two sides in the stands are viewing the same situation but perceiving it differently. Our

thoughts about a situation and our body's response to those thoughts are what we call emotions. There is a sudden chemical change in our body that produces energy and mobilizes us.

Many misconceptions have developed because anger can be very bothersome. Anger is not bad or sinful. The wrong expression of anger might be. The writer of the letter to the Ephesians says it this way: "Be angry and sin not." It is not our anger that is wrong. It is our expression of the anger that can be either destructive or constructive.

There are many ways in which we express our anger in a less than helpful manner. Some refuse to even say the words, "I am angry." They refuse even to admit to the angry feelings.

But my professional experience as a psychologist tells me that anger will be expressed, if not verbally then somatically, meaning by our bodies. There is a book on anger in which the first hundred pages lists all the diseases related to the non-verbal expression of anger. This amounts to turning the anger against the self.

The other self-destroyer, an inward expression of anger, is what we call depression. Here we engage in self-blaming that makes whatever depression there might be even worse.

There are also outward destructive expressions of anger. The first is what I call the volcano. This is best known to me as one who grew up in an Italian household. During my

childhood the backs of our dining room chairs were wired together. This was because one day my grandfather went into a rage. I was in the house that day, a day I will never forget. Such a destructive expression of anger may cause need then for an embarrassing apology, damaged relationships, loss of a job, and more.

There is another type of outward destructive expression of anger. It is the type of expression that has as its motto, "Don't get caught." Sarcasm is one way of expressing anger using humor. But it is a dart-throwing humor.

Then there is the expression of anger called pouting or clamming up. "I'm not going to talk. If you don't know what the issue is, that just makes it worse." Or "If you're trying to help me, it's not good enough." There are other subtle indirect ways to express anger, whether gossip, affairs, failing in school, or keeping someone waiting.

So anger is basically good and necessary when expressed constructively and clearly. We can even be angry at God, as the psalmist writes in Psalm 13. Or read the book of Job, who said those wonderful words, "O that I knew where I might find God that I might come before God's presence and present my case before him." Mendelssohn made those words sound a bit melodious and never did capture the anger in his music.

When we get angry at God, we need to know not only that it is a gift

So anger is basically good and necessary when expressed constructively and clearly. We can even be angry at God. . . .

God has given us but also that it is something God understands and talks about most. We call it the wrath of God. Read through the Bible; note how often the phrase *the wrath of God* appears. God is angry—and anger is good.

Another misconception is that we can store up anger. We can't store up an emotion. What we store up are the memories of past hurts or pain. What we might think of as storing up anger actually amounts to reigniting the anger of the past.

A third misconception is that anger and aggression are the same. Properly used, aggression can be a way to assert our own right, our own personhood. However, when aggression is directed against someone to do harm, it can become hostility and can be destructive.

The final misconception is that angry people aren't responsible for their actions. It's too easy to say, "I couldn't help it. I was so angry I couldn't see straight." Don't believe it. How we express our anger is a choice we each make. We can learn to express our anger responsibly and non-destructively. Here as in other facets of anger, we need to take a hard look at what we have learned from our family of origin.

So, if anger is so good, what is good about anger? First, anger is a danger signal. It indicates that something is a threat. Then we need to ask ourselves, "Is this important? And is it changeable?" Here the Serenity Prayer can help: "Lord, give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the

courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

But anger is also a drive for independence and individuation. When something or someone threatens growth toward maturity by overdomination, our self-esteem is threatened. This is why the two's are so terrible. "Terrible two's" are fighting for self-worth, much like some adolescents.

Anger can also be an idol detector. It helps us learn about ourselves and what idols we don't want disturbed. More importantly, anger shows us where our values are. If we value people, then we'll be rightly angry at any injustice in the world. If we value children, when you hear of someone abusing a child we become angry.

Harry Emerson Fosdick wrote a beautiful sermon on forgiveness based on Jesus' question, "Which is it easier to do, to say your sins are forgiven or rise up and walk?" It was difficult for Jesus to forgive sins, because he valued human life and knew what sin could do to people. Anger provides the energy to correct an injustice or to provide healing—as does the whole medical profession's anger against disease and death.

It is not easy to manage our anger, but some things can help. First, recognize your anger. Admit it. Call it what it is: *anger*. Don't use euphemisms. Don't deny it as anger, because until you recognize and validate your anger, you cannot manage it constructively and positively. Exercise helps some with adrenaline build-up. But more im-

portantly, process the emotion by asking yourself, “Why am I angry?” and finish the sentence with “I am angry because I’m afraid that. . . .” Then talk to a friend or counselor about it. Find out what you really want and why the anger is there.

Finally, learn to forgive to heal yourself. Forgiveness is giving up the right for revenge. Forgiveness is not excusing; it is not accepting; it is not forgetting. It is giving up the right to

have your own way. And we cannot forgive until we learn to love ourselves enough to let go of our anger. This is not an easy process. It is a lifelong process.

Yes, anger is good. And yes, we are told to “be angry and sin not.”

—*Vincent DeGregoris, Paoli, Pennsylvania, is Professor Emeritus of Pastoral Care and Counseling, Palmer Seminary.*



Beyond War

Earl Zimmerman

In 1969 I received a letter from our local draft board directing me to report for my physical. I was being conscripted to fight in the Vietnam War.

My most memorable experience at the army depot, where I went to get my physical, was standing in a large room full of draftees. We were stripped naked and lined up in rows. I can still see the one Amish draftee in the room who insisted on keeping his broad-brimmed straw hat on his head. An army medic was barking orders and telling us to forget about making medical excuses for not being able to serve. We were all healthy else we wouldn't be there.

What did those of us standing in line at that army depot know or understand? Precious little! There's such moral ambiguity in drafting or recruiting teenagers to fight our wars. They don't have enough life experience to make wise choices. I passed my physical and was drafted; however, as a member of an historical peace church I served my time as an orderly in a mental hospital instead of the army.

Today I wonder what happened to the other young men lined up on that hot summer day. I wonder how many of us actually served in Vietnam. How many died in combat. I wonder such things when I visit the Vietnam War Memorial. Are any of those

young men's names etched into that cold grey marble? Do their parents, spouses, or children visit there to trace the outline of a loved one's name with their finger?

Like most Americans of my generation, I hated the Vietnam War. There were relentless news-media images of fighting in a strange, far-away land—so many gruesome pictures of death and destruction. We became outraged when we began to grasp the extent to which our government lied to us about the conduct and progress of the war. Massive protests erupted on our campuses. As a consequence, I still instinctively distrust our government in such matters. No more lies, please no more lies!

It wasn't hard to be a conscientious objector in those days. I was a hero to many of my peers. This was radically different from the social ostracism my uncles had experienced as religious conscientious objectors during World War II. My Mennonite community believed that following the way of Jesus meant loving our enemies and not participating in war. We knew such convictions lead to social ostracism but believed it was the price we paid for being faithful Christians.

My moral struggle was not about being a conscientious objector. The political rhetoric of fighting for democracy in Southeast Asia rang hollow. In my unsophisticated way of reasoning, I couldn't understand why an American farm boy like me should fight against Vietnamese peasants in their rice paddies. To this day, I find it odd that we think we need to fight such wars far from our own shores. I

have heard all the reasons, but something still does not compute. What's really going on in our national psyche?

My dilemma, as a young man, was the growing distance between myself and the traditional Mennonite community in which I grew up. I questioned our separatist stance in relation to American society. The cost of such separation was too high even though understandable, given our history as religious dissenters. We were placing self-imposed limits on our potential for service as God's people.

I found such questions increasingly perplexing, but I was so unsure of myself. I knew I was morally opposed to fighting in Vietnam but felt disingenuous as a religious conscientious objector. My religious beliefs were a muddle. When the draft board letter arrived in our farm mailbox, it made me get serious, and I have been doggedly pursuing such questions ever since. What an unexpected gift!

I began to read everything I could find on the question of war and peace. Mennonite scholars, like Guy Hersberger and John Howard Yoder, made a significant contribution to my moral formation. I discovered the delightful passion of peace activists like Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr. My journey took me back to school and on various church and academic assignments in Asia and North America. I became determined to make my contribution to a world without war.

Thousands of years ago the prophet Isaiah wrote, "They shall beat their

swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:4). Is Isaiah's vision purely utopian or is it a goal worth striving for and possible to achieve? Can we imagine such a world? Do we have any idea what it might take to get there? Are we familiar with tools that can help us create such a world? Would it be possible to abolish war in the same way we abolished slavery?

The international picture is grim. Since the end of the Cold War, local cultural and religious wars have proliferated around the world. With the recent military buildup and the added costs of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States now has an annual military budget of \$626 billion. And President Bush continues to ask for billions upon billions for the war in Iraq. Our American military budget is rapidly approaching 50 percent of total global military expenditures.

How did our republic come to have a massive institution like the Pentagon, which dwarfs the military capability of any other country and overshadows every other branch of our government? Can we even begin to comprehend how it shapes us and our world? Can we imagine how different our local communities would be if only a part of those expenditures were instead invested in things like healthcare and fighting poverty?

Why does much of the world now see our government as a bully that uses overwhelming military force to get its way? I love America and believe we can be so much more.

Surely Mennonites and other peace-oriented Christians will want to join with conscientious Americans to struggle against our preoccupation with war. That means supporting policies that emphasize comprehensive security rather than cutthroat competition among nation-states. No country can be secure unless all are secure. We should support policies that move the world community beyond war to structures of international conflict resolution. And we need to enlarge the scope of national security by recognizing that all the challenges of our world, including sustainable development, environmental protection, and civil rights, need to be addressed to create a secure world.

Why does much of the world now see our government as a bully that uses overwhelming military force to get its way? I love America and believe we can be so much more. The values of democracy and freedom, embodied in the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights, have set unusually high standards of governance rooted in the rights and dignity of each person. They have made a real contribution to our world (even if they are often observed in the breach).

We still have religious and cultural traditions that can help us transcend our dark side. Among them are the bonds of community and the spirit of voluntarism, which our churches

nurture. At our best we genuinely care for the whole world, not just ourselves. The outpouring of contributions after the 2004 tsunami in Asia demonstrates our caring spirit. Any strategy for renewal will want to build on these spiritual capacities.

Though we think of the twentieth century as a century of war, including two world wars, there have also been significant developments in peacebuilding disciplines and practices. Among them are nonviolent strategies of social transformation pioneered by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. A whole literature is now been written on the use of strategic nonviolence. It's a force more powerful than violence. It has been used effectively to bring down brutal regimes and thwart foreign occupations. And it does so without the debilitating destructiveness of war.

Others have pioneered in peacebuilding disciplines such as conflict transformation, trauma healing, and restorative justice. I think of them as the preventative medicine of human relationships. Conscientious objectors increasingly recognize that it's not enough to say no to war. We need viable alternatives.

We all need to put our shoulder to the wheel to realize Isaiah's vision of a world without war. Even the U.S.

military has recently become interested in peacebuilding disciplines. Lisa Schirch, my former colleague at Eastern Mennonite University, has had the opportunity to teach such disciplines to classes at West Point. I find this both scary and hopeful. Scary because I worry about the ends they might be used for in the military, hopeful because I'm audacious enough to dream of a transformed military that's not addicted to war.

Today I have many more tools in my peacebuilding toolbox than I did as a teenager in 1969. I have also become more grounded in my central beliefs about war and peace. War is the attempt to resolve social conflicts through organized violence. However, genuine, lasting peace with justice can only be attained through peaceful means. That's why Jesus calls us to love their enemies and to return good for evil. In this way we become children of our God who is merciful and kind to all people.

—*Earl Zimmerman is the author of Practicing the Politics of Jesus: Engaging the Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics (Cascadia, 2007). He and his wife Ruth are the Mennonite Central Committee Regional Representatives for India, Nepal, and Afghanistan. They live in Kolkata (Calcutta), India.*

No Sharp Objects

David Wright

I am a pacifist for a lot of reasons, some laudable and some pathetic. Tonight I reminded myself of one of the most pathetic: I cannot be trusted with sharp objects, even around myself. If I cause this much damage by accident, there's no telling what I would do if I ever *tried* to do bodily harm to another. When the minor bleeding stops, this is the story as I hope it is told, not as my wife will probably tell it years from now.

I was hanging a blind on the window in our living room, a task I should've gotten to months ago. I've already put up a lot of these in our house, so I kind of have a system that works, meaning I don't have to think too deeply about the process. One step is using scissors to cut a thick plastic strip that holds the slats in a bunch.

I couldn't find the scissors, so I was using a knife, a fairly dull kitchen knife (turn away now if you see where this is headed and recognize squeamishness in your heart). Sawing away at the plastic got me nowhere, so I pulled hard, very hard at the plastic strip just above my forehead. I got it, yep, sure did. Plastic strip popped in half, and the point of the knife caught me right on the hairline.

Now, a scalp wound doesn't have to be very deep to bleed a great deal (this my wife will tell me later).

However, at the moment the blood began to cascade down my face and onto my hands (and the floor and the carpet on the stairs), it seemed like a fairly serious wound. I hollered up the stairs to my wife, who was trying to get the children asleep: "Honey, I just stabbed myself in the head."

This caused undue alarm, especially on the part of my 11-year-old daughter. My two-year-old son, in the habit of repeating most of what he hears, says, "Honey, Daddy stabbed himself in the head." I bled most of the way up the stairs, into the kids' bathroom, and all over my feet (I was wearing sandals).

Direct pressure stopped the bleeding, a fairly superficial scalp wound. Spray & Wash took most of the blood stains out of the carpet.

On the other hand, my daughter can't rid herself of the images of her

daddy staggering into the bathroom with blood on his hands. My son thinks all of this is just something that happens. My wife, after gently and firmly treating the wound in her best doctor way, reminds me that I'm a "lousy patient" and wonders why I could not simply stay put rather than bleeding all over the house.

I, of course, knowing my history of self-inflicted injuries, am just really grateful to have only a story to tell. And I still have to finish installing the blinds. It makes me want to punch something. Or lie down. Has anyone seen the scissors?

—*David Wright and his family live in central Illinois. He teaches writing and literature at Wheaton College and is author of several poetry collections, including A Liturgy for Stones (DreamSeeker Books, 2003).*

It makes me want to punch something. Or lie down. Has anyone seen the scissors?



Real and Fake Money: How Much of Each Is Enough?

Dorothy Cutrell

For a long time I have been intrigued by the complicated nature of managing personal finances, particularly as this relates to my own generosity or stinginess in sharing my assets with others. It has seemed to me that money falls into two categories. It is a stash I use to take care of my need for food, shelter, clothing, plus other necessities such as wheels to get me where I need to go. Or it is simply numbers entered and stored in a computer somewhere that tells me how much wealth I have in reserve. I call the first kind *real money* and the second kind *fake money*.

While reading a conversation of Matthew Fox with Thomas Aquinas, a thirteenth century saint, I was startled to discover that Aquinas had a view of wealth strikingly similar to my own. He says,

Wealth is of two kinds, natural and artificial. Natural wealth, such as food, drink, clothing and shelter, supplies natural needs. . . . Artificial wealth, such as money, does not directly serve nature, but is invented by art to help the exchange of goods.

Aquinas goes on to say that

People should consider two points with respect to external possessions. One of these is the power of acquiring and disposing. . . . The other point that concerns people with regard to external things is their use. And in respect to this, people should not hold external things for their own use but for the common benefit, so that each one should readily share material things with others in their need.

Aquinas adds that the pitfalls of needing to increase wealth at any cost. He says,

When people have as their goal the gaining of wealth they will use any means—fraud or anything else—to this final end. . . . Those who take as their ultimate end the gaining of wealth, from this very fact, consider as good whatever they do to gain this end.

The burning question becomes, How much “fake” or “artificial” wealth do we need to assure that we will be able to meet our own natural needs? And how much of this wealth rather becomes a measure of power and prestige?

The organized church has often promoted tithing as a basis for sharing wealth. The view put forth by

The burning question becomes, How much “fake” or “artificial” wealth do we need to assure that we will be able to meet our own natural needs?

Aquinas seems to suggest a better way. While some among us have barely enough to meet their natural needs, others have tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars in reserve. Money begets money, so that those who have more than they need get every advantage in terms of interest, credit, and more. This makes it likely that their artificial money will grow and grow. Meanwhile those with nothing in reserve risk losing what few possessions they have, and if their health fails they may die for lack of medical care.

So how are we to live in the twenty-first century with regard to the acquisition and use of possessions? For those with a substantial amount of artificial money in addition to an adequate supply of “natural” money, tithing is totally painless. For those living on the edge of financial disaster, tithing may take money badly needed for “natural” needs. Percentage giving doesn’t make a lot of sense if we really care about the common good. It’s time to take a hard look at that artificial money and decide how to share it wisely with those who have little or nothing.

Often people who live righteously (and many who don’t!) accumulate wealth. Christians who have stored up large sums of money are often diligent in giving at least some away. Those who share from large reservoirs of money often donate to colleges, seminaries, or mission boards. If we are truly concerned about those in

need, this might be viewed as the “trickle down” method of helping those less fortunate than ourselves.

How can Christians with large fortunes help the poor more directly? I don’t have an answer, but some kind of foundation composed of joint owners might be able to think of a creative way to help house the homeless and feed the hungry.

Our money represents our labor, time, and thought. How can we share it wisely?

—*Dorothy Cutrell lives in DeLand, Florida with her son David and two dogs. At age 83 she enjoys gardening, reading, word puzzles, and friends. In 1986 she retired from work at Mennonite Publishing House in the Provident Bookstores Division. While at MPH she served as editor of Provident Bookfinder, a bimonthly book review magazine. Before his 1999 death, she and her husband lived in Denver, Colorado as well as Scottsdale, Pennsylvania.*



Pebbles in My Pockets (I'm Sorry, I Speak English)

Deborah Good

This is how I write a column. As my deadline approaches, I begin to poke around my life for a theme—at least a vague center around which my thoughts and eventually my written words can orbit. Then I pay attention. Miraculously, my theme shows up everywhere, in all sorts of places I never noticed it before.

I pick up the bits and pieces I find and carry them with me, like pebbles in my pockets. I find them in the news, in a story from a friend over dinner, in unexpected encounters, in the miscellaneous scramble of my days. Eventually, I sit down, I spill the pebbles across the table, and I try to write.

The column you are about to read began like this.

I was in the formerly East German city of Leipzig in July. I stood taking a picture of a historic trade building when an elderly man, himself holding a camera, passed me. His facial expression told me that the words coming from his mouth were probably brilliant and witty, so I smiled back, then decided it was best to be honest. “I’m sorry,” I said. “I speak English.” He

shrugged, a bit disappointed, and went on his way.

During my two-week visit to Germany, many people graciously spoke with me whatever English they knew (which was often quite a lot), since my entire repertoire of German vocabulary would probably fit on an index card. Other times, I was surrounded by a pool of words and stories and laughter that I did not understand.

I commented to someone over the course of my travel that I was getting tired of not understanding German, and I remember well her response: “They say that when you can’t speak a language, you lose 80 percent of your personality.”

Eighty percent of my personality is wrapped up in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding *words*? I have mentioned this statistic to a few friends since, and all have agreed vigorously. Regardless of the validity of the 80 percent measurement, I imagine most of us who have been in situations in which we were the language-ignorant understand this feeling. We sit a bit awkwardly, trying to smile or even laugh on cue but with little idea what is going on. We feel strange. Boring. Unknown.

In the English-centered culture of the United States, it is easy to forget that English is considered a foreign language in most of the world, and indeed in many U. S. homes as well.

In the 1950s, a Muscogee Indian third grader in Oklahoma responded

to her teacher’s questions as honestly as she could. “Who in this class speaks a foreign language at home?” the teacher polled her students.

I imagine the little girl raising her hand along with others in the room. “And which foreign language do you speak at home?” the teacher asked.

“English,” the student responded.

In the 1950s, the girl was sent to the principal’s office for implying that English was more foreign than her native Muscogee tongue. (I

gleaned this story from an article by Richard Grounds, “English Only, Native-Language Revitalization and Foreign Languages,” *Anthropology News*, Nov. 2007, pp. 6-7).

I hope the teacher would have responded differently today. But there is evidence that little has changed in our national perspective on languages in the past six decades.

English-Only legislation at state and federal levels seeks to establish English as the official language of individual states and our country as a whole. Other policies reflecting the English-Only movement, including aspects of the No Child Left Behind Act, discourage bilingual education through rigorous standardized testing requirements.

Today’s United States, by and large, demands that all newcomers assimilate in language and culture, a process that devalues any group outside the status quo and shows no concern for the loss of identity that

Eighty percent of my personality is wrapped up in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding words?

assimilation requires.

Native languages have also been under threat elsewhere in the world. During college, I spent several weeks in Chiapas, Mexico's most southern state and home to indigenous groups with roots stretching back to the days of Mayan kingdoms.

The Zapatistas and other lesser-known groups in Chiapas have demanded of the Mexican society and government a clear recognition of their indigenous language and the right to provide bilingual education to their children. These groups understand that losing their native language to an onslaught of Spanish would mean losing a part of themselves.

Threats like these have anthropologists talking about "endangered languages" much the way environmentalists advocate for endangered species. They see the roots of indigenous knowledge, culture, and tradition as lying in these groups' ability to pass down their native language from one generation to the next.

Language-based discrimination and ethnocentrism are ever-present social justice concerns well worth a piece of our consciousness.

Perhaps, you might argue, life would be simpler if everyone spoke only one language the world over. Some of our miscommunication and intercultural confusions would be avoided, you say, and you might be right. This homogeneity, however, would not only be

impossible thanks to a long history of cultural evolution but would also be intolerable for one very simple reason (and this is my highly academic and sophisticated way of putting it): Languages are cool.

It is cool that even within one country, the English that evolves on the streets of Philadelphia is slightly different than that spoken on the streets of Chicago, both of which are significantly different than the English spoken in the halls of Congress.

It is cool that my mom, who was once a missionary kid in Ethiopia, still talks about her *icka*, an Amharic word for which there is no good English translation—except, maybe, "look at all my crap."

It is cool that certain Austronesian languages, from what I understand, have no word for the *self*, reflecting cultures that are more communal than my own I-me-myself way of life.

Language diversity can also keep us humble, if frustrated. This is the point of the Tower of Babel story, right? *Lest you humans get too arrogant*, says God, *I will make sure you regularly stick your foot in your mouth when communicating cross-culturally.*

The spaces where languages and cultures intersect are lively, complicated, and highly sensitive. They are ripe with both misunderstanding and bridge-building. These are spaces of utter frustration, embarrassment, profound learning, and—sometimes—hearty and (hopefully) good-natured laughter.

The spaces where languages and cultures intersect are lively, complicated, and highly sensitive.

In Washington, D.C., I recently joined a group of travelers ready to board what we often call "the Chinatown bus" to either New York or Philadelphia. One driver stood outside of his bus, yelling out its destination: "Eel-elf! Eel-elf!"

Some of us felt the need to clarify what he meant. "Is this bus going to Philadelphia?" we asked.

"Eel-elf!" he repeated.

I decided that this indeed meant "Philadelphia," a difficult word, I imagine, for a Mandarin-speaker. I put my suitcase underneath and got onboard. Once seated, I looked up to see the familiar block, yellow letters

that are at the front of every Chinatown bus I have been on: WE ARE NOT RESPONSE FOR ANY BELONGING, they read.

I smiled to myself as I leaned my head against the window, grateful for my Chinese-Only journey in my English-Only country, grateful for this life-pebble which I stuffed into my pocket and now extend, in friendship, to you.

—Deborah Good, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a Master of Social Work student at Temple University and can be reached at deborahagood@gmail.com.



Roots and Role Models

Mark R. Wenger

Kathy and I have less and less direct influence on the lives of our two daughters, both in college. This is as it should be, another chapter in letting go—trusting, and hoping that they have grown roots that will keep them grounded and wings by which they can catch the wind and soar.

I first heard this mixed metaphor from Loren Swartzendruber, president of Eastern Mennonite University. Roots and wings. The bizarre image of owning both roots and wings sounds like something out of the *Lord of the Rings*. But it captures well two competing desires I have for our children. Roots—that they be connected to the earth, to wisdom, to God; that they develop stable and enjoyable relationships where they are knit into a sustaining community. Wings—that they be free to venture into the unknown and seek faraway places; that they become individuals who develop their unique gifts and potential to the full.

As nations go, the United States is a relatively young country. Millions of immigrants have come to this place to make a new life. “Be all that you can be,” the one-time slogan of the U.S. Army, expresses the

mythic personal optimism woven into the fabric of American culture. Individual freedoms and rights are precious. The self-made man or woman is the hero. Our metanarrative tells of pioneers pushing the frontiers. The United States is a place where creativity and individuality rule the roost; it is a nation for sprouting wings.

How then do we help our children also grow necessary roots—the rhythms, habits, and values that honor the past and nurture community? Responsible parents do their best to instill these virtues of character and memory in their children. But there are clear limits to what even the best parents can and should attempt to do.

Good schools, peer friendships, and vibrant congregations can be a terrific help for growing roots. As a parent, though, I hope for something more. Specifically, I want our daughters to develop supportive relationships with other adults. I rejoice when the unexpected happens and I hear their animated talk about someone they’ve come to respect and look up to. It is often a teacher or a coach—someone who shows an interest in them and inspires them. Someone who becomes a role-model.

This is not the same thing as imitating a sports hero or swooning in the presence of celebrity. Such obsessive adulation is fed by a host of sources like *People* magazine, TV shows, websites, and YouTube

flicks fostering artificial intimacy and vicarious fantasies. Why should we care about the newborn twins of unmarried Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie? What difference will it make for us to know why Jennifer Aniston is so happy right now or what possessed Brett Favre to come out of football retirement?

But when Bible teachers Marion Bontrager and Michele Hershberger at Hesston College turned our daughter Regina onto *Heilsgeschichte* (God’s salvation story) and theology they promoted good root formation. Something similar happened last year with our second daughter Charlotte and her theater instructor Heidi Winters Vogel at Eastern Mennonite University. The sound you hear is me cheering.

These kinds of mentoring relationships have been critical in my own experience. In college and seminary, Willard Swartley taught me theology and Bible. But more than that, he modeled a way of life which combined head and heart, intellectual rigor and personal piety, scholarly pursuit and human compassion that was attractive and inspiring.

While some of my seminary classmates became senior or sole pastors of congregations, I have never regretted putting down roots at age 28 as assistant pastor at Forest Hills Mennonite Church, Leola, Pennsylvania. I learned a lot by watching and working with senior pastor Lester Graybill. I

How then do we help our children also grow necessary roots—the rhythms, habits, and values that honor the past and nurture community?

am grateful for these and other mentors whose influence helped give me roots and solid grounding.

This is not a new idea; it is as old as the dawn of time. Moses groomed Joshua for leadership. Naomi coached Ruth how to operate as a foreign single woman in ancient Israel. Jesus called his twelve disciples and poured himself and God's mission into them. The apostle Paul tutored protégé Timothy in church leadership. The medieval artisan guilds of Europe devised a careful system of apprenticeship for learning from the master and passing on the wisdom of the trade.

In a sense, the contemporary roles of social worker, reading tutor, and spiritual director, among others, are manifestations of this ancient model. Apprenticeship is particularly relevant for learning a profession. The newbie learns the ropes from the seasoned practitioner. The intern works alongside the veteran. The student teacher ventures into the classroom under the watchful eye of an experienced instructor.

Key features of these relationships include: An acknowledged expert and beginner interacting personally over a period of time where the learning occurs by instruction and imitation. Yes, imitation. Jesus said, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" after he washed the feet of his disciples (John 13:15).

Far better, in my view, is for youth and young adults to be in settings where they rub shoulders with teachers, coaches, and other adults who can serve as role models.

The apostle Paul wrote this advice: "In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had." (Phil. 2:5)

Learning by imitation is not particularly prized in American culture. In fact, imitation is portrayed as the ugly duckling beside the beauties of innovation, self-expression, and individuality. After all, who wants to be a copycat when it's possible to discover your inner bliss as the unique you?

But I wonder whether we endanger our children by pushing them to take flight in anonymous settings of education and employment for reasons of hoped-for prestige and success. In the words of Jesus, "What good is it for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?" (Mark 8:36)

Far better, in my view, is for youth and young adults to be in settings where they rub shoulders with teachers, coaches, and other adults who can serve as role models. Where they develop formative relationships with adults whose habits and commitments they can emulate.

Perhaps there is the risk of becoming root-bound, too stunted to be able to fly from the nest. But I believe there is a far greater danger for children in this culture: to grow up rootless without awareness of the wisdom of experience and without a sense of belonging. This is the plight of far too many youth and young adults, I fear. All wings and no roots.

If you are over age 30, take a moment to reflect on the crucial turning points in your life. I have a hunch that at those junctures of influence you'll see the face of someone you respected and imitated. Why not offer that attention and that kindness to those who are younger?

If you are between ages 12 and 29, look around for persons of experience and wisdom who inspire you. Watch them, listen to them, learn from them.

There is a distinctive joy when the magic of this exchange between the generations occurs. When it does, instead of a generation gap growing, roots of community intertwine in the good earth. With roots connected into the wisdom of ages, children can soar on the wings of the morning and never forget where they are at home.

—Mark R. Wenger, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is Director of Pastoral Studies for Eastern Mennonite Seminary at Lancaster.



The Marvels and Mysteries of Sea Creatures and More

Renee Gehman

I was never really interested in science at school. All I remember from my high school physics class is that each table was named for a Greek letter, and I sat at the Delta Table. Also, three of my friends and I nicknamed ourselves Force, Action, Reaction, and Acceleration, after factors in the law of inertia, for no reason except that there were four of us and four factors labeled in an illustration we were shown of the law.

This, of course, is a much more absurd and embarrassing memory than the Delta Table, so I will hereby cease reminiscing, lest anything more damaging to my reputation should come to mind. The point is: little of my science education is now accessible in my memory.

Yet when it comes to some of the intricacies of created things, I find that many organisms and behaviors and processes strike me as so incredible that my pondering of them becomes almost obsessive. And the more I ponder them, the more baffling they often become, until I am left stilled with awe, or restless with

anxiety, or alternating between the two.

Take the venus fly trap: a *plant* that eats *flies*. Or the periodical cicada, some species of which hibernate *seventeen years* at a time between wakeful, year-long seasons of breeding. Or a plant for which I only know the Vietnamese name, which translates as “embarrassed plant”—a very small, feathery-looking type of fern that closes up into a straight line the second you touch it. (If

you watch the movie “Rescue Dawn,” about American prisoners in the Vietnam War, there is about a five-second segment toward the end where you can see one of the characters silently encounter this plant and its personal space issues.)

Then there are animal stories I hear in the news. Gana the gorilla in a German zoo, who for six days carried around the body of a three-month-old son who had died of heart failure in her arms. Or “Colin” the orphaned humpback whale in Australia who attempted to nurse from the bottoms of large boats. Or Owen, a baby hippo from Kenya who lost his family as a result of the December 2004 tsunami that struck Southeast Asia, then adopted a 130-year-old loner of a tortoise named Mzee as the main parental figure and friend in his life.

Usually my experiences of amazement at creation unfold reasonably far apart, but I recently found myself

bombarded with them as my classroom of three-year-olds and I discussed various creatures of the sea during our themed “Ocean Week.” And as we talked about ocean inhabitants together, the children started to really express enthusiasm for the topic. I started to really wonder about what God could have had in mind with some of these creatures. . . .

And as we talked about ocean inhabitants together, the children started to really express enthusiasm for the topic. I started to really wonder about what God could have had in mind. . . .

There is the sponge, which is amazing to me simply for the fact that it qualifies as an animal, even without having any eyes, hands, feet, heart, or brain. There is the fascinating relationship of the sea anemone and the clown fish: The sea anemone has stinging tentacles it uses to catch fish for food, but clown fish are immune to these tentacles. So the clown fish can actually hide from predators among the sea anemone’s tentacles, and while in hiding, it returns the favor by cleaning the anemone’s tentacles for it.

There is the oyster. All it looks like to me is a shapeless blob in a shell, but it secretes a liquid when a grain of sand or other irritant gets into its shell. It secretes layer upon layer around the dirt, gradually reducing the irritation factor—until finally what remains is a single beautiful pearl.

Seahorses, which mate for life, are perhaps most intriguing for their gender role reversals. The female seahorse shoots her eggs into the male’s pouch,

and it is the male who carries the fetuses to term, thus, in effect, giving birth to his own babies.

The mahi mahi, also known as the dolphin fish, is one of the most sought-after prizes of many fishing enthusiasts, largely because of the wonder of reeling one in. As it fights a losing battle for its life, the mahi mahi changes colors, switching from bright greens to blues to golds, showcasing its full glory not in the moment of greatest physical well-being, but rather as its very end is upon it.

The list goes on, but I have enough questions for just these examples. Why a sponge, for instance. Why a porous lump of something you can barely even observe as living that absorbs lots of water? Why an anemone with stinging tentacles, and why a fish that is immune to them? Why a beautiful pearl that results from the intrusion of an irritating piece of dirt? Why, when the female of other animals carry and bear their young, a *male* seahorse carrying his to term? And why a fish that gloriously changes colors as it dies?

“For as the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and fur-

nishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so will my word be which goes forth from my mouth,” Isaiah hears God saying, “it will not return to me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it” (Isa. 55: 10-11).

I cannot bring myself to accept that, having said this, God’s detail work in often seemingly insignificant organisms means nothing of great consequence. I prefer to think that maybe God speaks as much in an oyster’s process of producing a pearl as in a sermon or an act of kindness.

I offer no theoretical explanations for how God creates, or to what extent the process involves or excludes evolution. At this point it seems enough for me to marvel, and to ponder over the mysteries and meanings behind the marvelous. And I find that thoughtful consideration of the intricacies of God’s creation helps to deepen my reverence for the one who would think up these things.

—*Renee Gehman, Souderton, Pennsylvania, is assistant editor, Dream-seeker Magazine, and a meditator on amazing creatures.*

How light can play tricks with your soul

Because of the double layer of plexiglass
I can see my own ghost
sitting primly
twice:

facing me on the seat of a backwards bus,
eyes blank, open, vacant,
the lights of the street passing through them

as we go. I see the pale light on her
shoulders, the long glimmer of blond hair,
the straight line, the round of her nose,
the tops of her ears shining like gold coins;

the shadows under her cheekbones surprise me.
These high lines are plagiarized,
poor copies of my mother’s face.

Of all this ghostly double’s form,
only her mouth stands out solid
from the dim tan of her body
and does not fade over the heads of other passengers.

Her lips are perfect—the top trapping shadows,
the bottom round and pink. I wait for her
to speak, to kiss me even, or to sing.

The second ghost sits a little ahead, smaller,
a blood-red garnet on her finger
curled around the first ghost’s throat,
grabbing her bag like an old lady on a bench.

But I am not old; if this is my ghost, never will be.
I wonder why there are two. What does it mean?

Two see-through sets of shoulders,
two pairs of vacuum eyes,
and one mouth?

—*M. Christine Benner, Summit, New Jersey, is a graduate student in the English Literature department at Drew University.*

Sanctuary

I sit in rank
silence, scraping away
hope of escape
with reason and duty.

I intend my faith and
resentment basely,
like livestock intend
obedience to death.

I taste the cruddy
water of salvation,
savor it
and swallow and spit.

Let me stand and leave
this solitary
multitude
for open loneliness.

Let me crawl on
tender knees, beneath
the pews, to violent
piercing prayer.

Let me spill this stagnant
cup of peace
in which I've slipped,
drowned for camouflage.

And I will learn to
worship slow, burn
my barren, own
my cluttered pain. And find

divine proximity
outside my blood-red walls.

—*M. Christine Benner*

Walle*E: Fable of Human Extinction

A Review

Dave Greiser

Summer is the season of blockbuster movies, generally long on style and short on substance. And any film managing to combine both elements fairly screams to be seen and discussed.

This morning I find myself at my keyboard, in that time of year when I generally avoid the theater in favor of home rentals. I'm pounding out a review for a new film I cannot stop thinking about.

"WALL*E" is the sort of film I would normally miss, no matter what time of year it might be released. In my search for "important" and "serious" films to see and review for *DreamSeeker Magazine*, I don't usually bother with animated movies. Clearly I'm going to have to get over both my snobbery and this major cinematic blind spot. "WALL*E" is a film that delivers a hard-edged message in a charming and slapstick package. It is a story that older children and adults alike will want to see, and *should* see.

Directed by Andrew Stanton ("Ratatouille" and "Finding Nemo"), and animated by the animation geeks at Pixar, "WALL*E" paints a world 700 years in the future. Earth has become environmentally unin-

habitable, and all the humans have been packed off to giant space labs where they live sedentary, low-gravity lives on comfy hover-chairs, surrounded by conveniences that have allowed them to grow fat and lazy.

The lone being left on earth is WALL*E. WALL*E is a solar powered robot left on earth to clean up the trash. And trash is all that appears to be left on the planet.

The opening scene displays a city of skyscrapers wreathed in brown clouds. Closer inspection reveals that each of the “buildings” is actually a pile of artfully compacted trash. Day after day, WALL*E picks up trash and stores it in neat, cubed piles. Night after night he wheels his lonely way to a storage area, where he closes his video-camera eyes and goes into sleep mode.

One day, WALL*E’s isolation is shattered by the discovery of a tiny, green plant—the only known example of biological life on earth. At about the same time, a sleek object resembling a spaceship descends from the sky, whisking WALL*E and his tiny treasure off to the space lab Axiom.

Onboard this ship, WALL*E discovers love with a sleek, specimen-gathering robot named Eva. How does WALL*E know about love? One of his few personal possessions back on earth happens to be an old VHS cassette tape of songs and scenes from “Hello, Dolly.” The love story is a nice

little sub-plot that asks a sci-fi question that’s been a perennial since “Frankenstein”: Can love exist in the non-human world?

The remainder of the film involves a conflict between the ship’s captain and his computer assistants over the question of whether the discovery of the plant means that humans may now be allowed to return to earth to begin re-greening its environment. So as not to inject plot spoilers for those who want to see the film, I’ll end the plot summary before revealing

more. Suffice it to say that the story successfully addresses its somber ecological subtext with a wit that combines verbal humor with sight gags and slapstick.

“WALL*E” employs the stunning visuals and sounds that viewers have come to expect from Pixar films. There is virtually no dialogue in the first 40 minutes—the message is carried completely by visuals and noises. The space station home of humans is a perfect playground of gadgets and conveniences painted in bright, attractive colors. Meanwhile, everything left on ravaged earth appears in drab browns and grays.

WALL*E, the hard working robot, is scuffed and rusty around the edges, yet his camera-eyes are soft and expressive. Eva, his robot love, looks sleek and shapely in ways that must only be appealing to male robots. There may well be an Academy Award

in cinematography in the offing for this film.

The movie carries two sledgehammer messages softened only slightly by its comedic tone. The first is that people are on the verge of completely destroying their beautiful planet. The second is that technology and materialism are making us all childish and stupid. It is surely no accident that the human beings in the film look like babies, all rounded bellies and tiny limbs and feet, dependent entirely on machines for their existence. Con-

sumer capitalism, the message seems to be, infantilizes all of us.

Watching “WALL*E” was a conflicting experience. Is it a kids’ movie? Science fiction? A fable? A cautionary tale? In fact, I think it is all the above. See it—and take the kids.

—*Dave Greiser teaches pastoral ministry at Hesston College in Kansas, where he depends on machines to write film reviews, teach classes, exercise, and do pretty much everything except sleep.*



Predawn Assault on Darkness

Jonathan Beachy

Pain from tooth extractions and suppressed anger fill his eyes to the point of overflowing, but he knows the system. He knows that any loss of self-control, verbal or physical, will have negative repercussions. So his eyes merely glisten.

“Why does she treat me like that? I *did* bring my meds with me. You can see my blood pressure on the machine—I have to have my meds. Why does she call me a liar?”

“Sir, I am sorry, I know you need your meds, your blood pressure is dangerously high. She told you you’ll have to wait through the weekend, but I’ll do what I can. Don’t take what she said personally. She has issues, and that’s her problem, but your blood pressure must come down.”

In the predawn hours, the cattle-drive-approach in screening people for health issues which may be exacerbated by their incarceration angers me as well. When my superior insists that I put my patient on hold but recheck his blood pressure, it is even higher, as his body reacts to the injustice he is experiencing.

“Sir, please drink this cup of water (*Lord, you see this man, I give him this water, as I would to you . . .*).

Take your time, I will call the doctor on call and see what I can do.” Once more he looks at me and makes full eye contact, but there is a shimmer of trust and not of anger.

Several rounds of medication later, his blood pressure is dropping to more acceptable levels. Another cup of water, and reassurance, “Whatever you are doing is working; if you have spiritual resources, tap into them. (*Lord, this place is cold and horrible, let this man know you care about what is happening . . .*). Please sir, take a seat on the bench. I’ll check you again in an hour.”

Later, he returns to my desk, and this time the goal has been reached. “Look at this sir, your blood pressure is tolerable now. . . .” I breathe an audible “*Thank you Lord.*”

He immediately responds with “Thank you, Jesus.”

Our eyes meet. I tell him, “You know, sir, every night when I come here I pray that because of my presence at least one person will know

God loves them. You’ve just been nominated.”

He smiles, stretches out his hand, says, “God bless you.” And somehow the cold and darkness of the place is lifted for a moment.

Several nights later we meet in the hallway. He assures me he is doing okay: “I was just telling my friends about the other night,” he says.

And I know that darkness has not yet “comprehended” the light, for one more candle now illuminates the night.

—*Since writing this true story, Jonathan Beachy, San Antonio, Texas, has been seeking to trade his nurse’s scrubs for a clerical collar inside the correctional system. Credentialed by the Western District Conference of the Mennonite Church USA, he hopes to continue assaulting the darkness. He may be reached at jonathan.beachy@gmail.com.*

He smiles, stretches out his hand, says, “God bless you.” And somehow the cold and darkness of the place is lifted for a moment.



0300 Hours

Chains joining leg irons jangle a ragged rhythm,
not so the ordered cadence of these shuffling feet,
challenged at times by reprimands from the watchmen—
and then by the stifled curses of the men who wear them.

Shivering blurs goose bumps on bare arms and legs,
but no response, primordial or other,
can change the weight of the glowering darkness
as hope retreats into tattered street-stained clothes,
and head, elbows, and knees morph into ambiguous masses.

Three a.m.—indigestion pervades the bowels of the county jail;
Held prisoner as well, catharsis seems as impossible as the
metamorphosis of this frozen inferno into healing light. . . .

—*Jonathan Beachy*

Theology and Science in Conversation

*Reviews of Anglo-American Postmodernity
and Alone in the World?*

Daniel Hertzler

Anglo-American Postmodernity, by Nancey Murphy.
Westview Press, 1997.

*Alone in the World? Human Uniqueness in Science and
Theology*, by J. Wentzel van Huyssteen. Eerd-
mans, 2006.

These two theologians teach in seminaries at the opposite ends of the country. Murphy is at Fuller in California and van Huyssteen at Princeton in New Jersey. In the books reviewed here, neither appears to be aware of the other, although both are giving extended attention to the relations between theology and science. In this review, Murphy's book serves as an introduction to van Huyssteen's, although it is not her latest book and does not fully illustrate her engagement as a theologian with scientists.

Murphy would have us understand that theology rests on philosophy and that inadequate philosophy

will foster inadequate theology. She observes that the philosophy which underlay modernity went back to Descartes, since whose time “the ideal of human knowledge has focused on the general, the timeless, the theoretical—in contrast to the local, the particular, the timely, the practical.”

So, she says, these questions arose: “What is the nature or source of foundational beliefs—clear, distinct ideas, impressions, sense data? What kind of reasoning is to be used for the construction—deductive, inductive, constructive, hypothetical-deductive” (10)?

The result, she says, has been “foundationalism,” the idea that any position one holds must be built on a solid foundation section by section up to where we are. But she reports that foundationalism has been found to be logically impossible. There is no way to start at the bottom. One always has some assumptions. On reflection we would think that smart people would have recognized this sooner, but so it goes.

Today, says Murphy, philosophers are inclined toward “holism,” a strategy which recognizes “a complex mutual conditioning between part and whole. It recognizes different levels of complexity and recognizes as well that no one level can be thoroughly understood in isolation from its neighbors” (34).

She reports that theologians have been attracted to foundationalism

Today, says Murphy, philosophers are inclined toward “holism” a strategy which recognizes “a complex mutual conditioning between part and whole.”

and that it has been the source of ongoing controversy. What foundation should be appealed to? “The short answer is there have turned out to be only two options: Scripture or experience. Conservative theologians have chosen to build on Scripture; liberals are distinguished by their preference for experience” (89).

Such a forced choice is no doubt the source of the fundamentalists’ insistence on labeling Scripture as “inerrant and infallible.” Anyone who studies Scripture carefully should be able to see that these are impossible standards. As for experience, this too seems like a foundation of sand. Who is to declare what experience is authentic?

A related issue is a question of interventionism versus immanentism. “Conservatives take an interventionist approach to divine action—God is sovereign over the laws of nature and is thus able to override them to produce special divine acts. Liberals take an immanentist approach, emphasizing God’s action in and through natural processes” (100). Murphy proposes that we need an approach to knowledge that gets off dead center.

After a wide-ranging review of philosophical strategies, she comes to the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, who

has said that all traditions, religious and secular alike, are shaped by their interpretation and application of a formative text. He emphasizes that fruit-

ful participation in an intellectual tradition requires prior formation of the character of the participants, the acquisition of virtues that allow them to participate in the practices constitutive of their tradition. This is in sharp contrast to the modern ideal of an enquiry in which the solitary knower was required first to rid the mind of all prejudice (tradition) before he could begin. (151)

With this behind her, Murphy is ready to reassess the relations between religion and science. How reply to the scientific charge that theology depends on subjectivism?

She finds an answer in what she calls “the theory of discernment that states that it is possible to recognize the activity of God in human life by means of signs or criteria, some of which are public and relatively objective.” She holds that this theory “functions in Christian theology in exactly the same way as theories of instrumentation do in science.”

Two criteria for theology she finds are “consistency and fruit.” One issue among Christians, she observes, is who should discern. As a Church of the Brethren minister, Murphy highlights the Anabaptist-free church tradition where “discernment is a function exercised by the gathered community. That is, it is the job of the Church to decide who are the true and false prophets” (163-164).

From here she goes on to propose that ethics should be considered a science because, as she says, “the social sciences raise questions that they

alone are not competent to answer. . . . So it would be useful if we could add to the top of the hierarchy of the social sciences the ‘science’ of ethics. Such a “science,” she explains, “would be the science whose job is to compare and evaluate systematic theories for the good of humankind and help with spelling out the consequences when such theories are embodied in social practice” (185).

A model of relationships among the sciences which she illustrates in the book shows theology at the top with ethics just below it and physics at the bottom. But, she says, modernity tends toward reductionism, to seek “to reduce morality to something else” (201). This has been particularly true of biologists, but she asserts that in fact all moral systems are dependent, either explicitly or implicitly on beliefs about the nature of ultimate reality” (207).

Thus, as she holds, the bottom-up position of reductionism is not possible. Everyone must have some assumptions. To operate on the basis of ethics and theology is no less logical than some other assumptions.

To me it seems a sensible argument, although I have not seen any responses from the reductionists. But I find, as stated above, that the Murphy book serves nicely as an introduction to van Huyssteen’s *Alone in the World?* based on the 2004 Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh. This author’s concern is to find common ground with scientists.

In these lectures he proposed to pursue two issues: “repositioning a

contemporary notion of interdisciplinary reflection, and pursuing as an interdisciplinary problem the issue of human uniqueness. I will argue that theology and the sciences find a shared research trajectory precisely in the topic of human uniqueness” (8). Keywords in his development are “transversality” and “contextuality.” He assumes that if theologians and scientists take each other seriously, they can find common ground.

As does Murphy, van Huyssteen assumes the end of foundationalism and uses repeatedly the term *post-foundational*, an assumption which he perceives makes possible the theological and scientific conversations. The branch of science he has chosen for dialogue is paleontology—and he finds that some paleontologists are more satisfactory conversationalists than others. He particularly objects to reductionism among scientists and abstractions by theologians:

By recognizing the limitations of interdisciplinarity, the disciplinary integrity of theology and the sciences should be protected. On this view the theologian can caution the scientist to recognize the reductionism of scientific worldviews even as the scientist can caution the theologians against constructing esoteric and imperialistic worldviews. (219)

In opposition to reductionism, he holds that the religious impulse is culturally and not biologically driven. He finds evidence for the beginning

of religion among our species in the cave drawings of southern France, which are dated some 40,000 years ago (176). He suggests that at this point there was a breakthrough in human development “the amazing emergence of what Stephen Mithen has called cognitive fluidity. Science, art, and religion are all deeply embedded in the cognitive fluidity of the embodied human mind/brain” (214).

A key word here is “embodied.” He will respect and support the human connection with all other natural life.

Having made this connection, he goes on to discuss human uniqueness, drawing on both scientific and theological resources. In the final chapter, he reviews the issue of where interdisciplinary conversation may break down and emphasizes that it is important for the theologians to operate from theological assumptions and not concede too much.

As an example of the latter, he critiques theologian Edward Farley who, he says, seeks to develop a generic position beyond his Christian tradition. “He has a highly contextualized and concrete view of human nature, but the generic post-Christian theology that emerges does not even attempt to embed this embodied human condition into the concrete particularity of a specific religion or lived religious faith” (306).

At the end of the discussion he calls attention to “a remarkable embodied brain, a stunning mental cognitive fluidity expressed in imagination, creativity, linguistic

abilities, and symbolic propensities.” But he observes also that we are “inescapably caught between what we have come to call ‘good and evil.’” So the Reformed theologian is speaking, and his final words addressed to the scientists are that “theology offers a promising key to understanding these profoundly tragic dimensions of human existence, but also to understanding why religious belief has provided our distant ancestors, and us, with dimensions of hope, redemption, and grace” (325).

In my initial reading of the book, I overlooked the last phrase and perceived that he as a Reformed theologian was more aware of sin than of salvation. But I was wrong to overlook the fact that the last words in the book are “hope, redemption, and grace.”

This review cannot do justice to these two wide ranging books, especially the second one. However, I found them useful, particularly the description of foundationalism and its limi-

tations. I’m glad for an alternative to the debate between fundamentalists and liberals. I could never see a solution to that debate and Stanley Hauerwas has said that fundamentalist literalists and their liberal critics are “but two sides of the same coin, insofar that each assumes the text should be accessible to anyone without the mediation of the church” (*Unleashing the Church: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America*, Abingdon, 1993).

As for van Huyssteen’s conversation between theologians and scientists, it seems a step ahead. How fast and how far it will go remains to be seen. In the meantime I’m not often in conversation with anyone who raises questions such as these. But who knows when it could happen?

—Daniel Hertzler, *Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, is an editor, writer, and chair of the elders, Scottsdale Mennonite Church.*

I’m glad for an alternative to the debate between fundamentalists and liberals.



What They Don't Tell You About Meditating

Noël R. King

Jack, I think his name was, joined our meditation class at the beginning of last spring, just when all the flowers were starting to bloom in our yards.

He seemed a pleasant enough fellow—but very taken with his thoughts, perhaps. Before our meditation sessions began most weeks, down in our Zen teacher's basement, he would ask countless questions about his thoughts and what to do with them in this or that or other situations of the mind.

Our Zen teacher always patiently, soothingly answered all of Jack's questions, assuring him there was no wrong way to be with one's thoughts during a meditation hour; that one simply allowed whatever arose in the mind to briefly appear and then pass on through.

"Okay," Jack said this last time, just before we closed our eyes, "so what do I do again if all my thoughts go 'Poof!'"

"So excellent!" the master beamed. "So wonderful!"

Incense wafted, cushions held us firm, my thoughts went by like clouds.

When the gong sounded sixty minutes later, I opened my eyes and saw that Jack was nowhere to be found. His cushion held a dent and nothing more.

That's what they don't tell you about this meditating business when

you start; then, when you finally catch on, baby, it's way too late. Your thoughts—and sometimes far, far more—are gone, gone, gone.

—As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Scottsville, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful things, including the risk of going poof.

The Poet Gives Up

Perseverance is a virtue,
as it develops all those other things,
but what about giving up?

Can't I be sainted,
in honor of my astounding wisdom,
for the day that I laid down?

I say we,
who realize the full value of quitting,
beatify the election of end.

—M. Christine Benner



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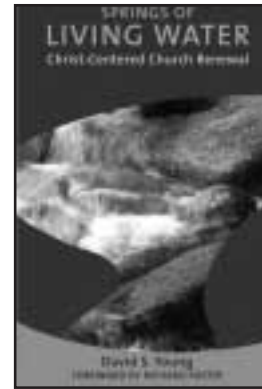
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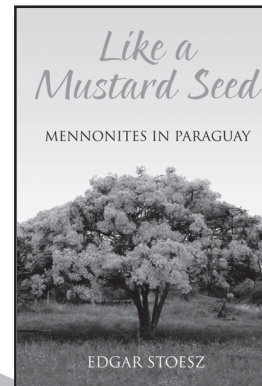
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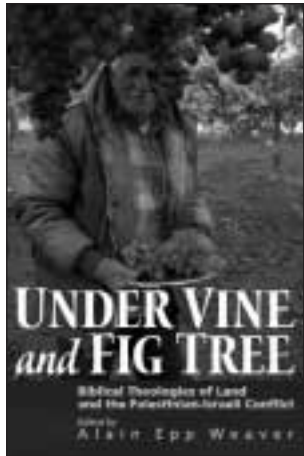
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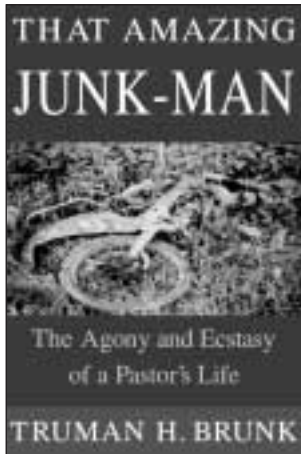
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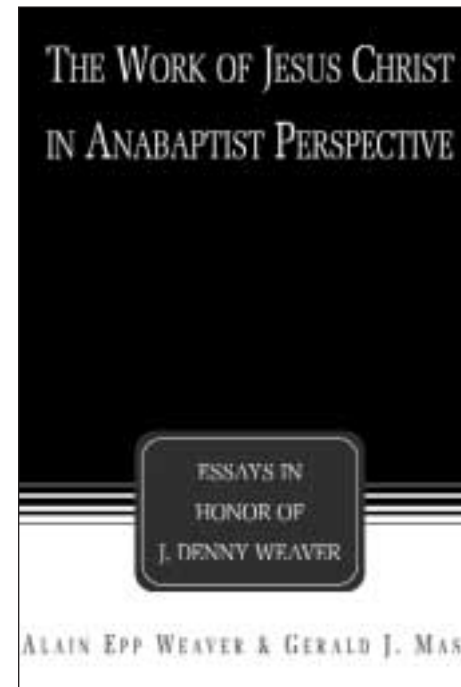
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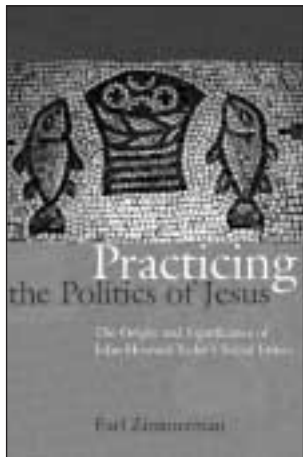
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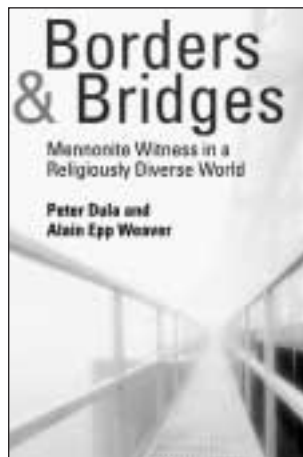
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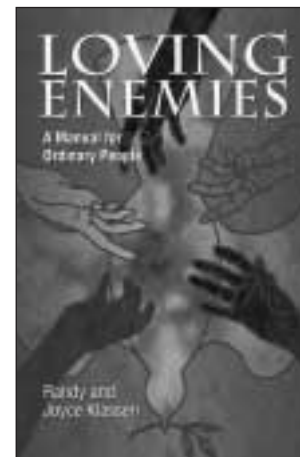
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Vigilance

We fear mountain passes, you and I,
And rotting cliffs. When words die out
We look for falling rocks
And black sides of stones
Stripped of lichens. We watch
The closed fists of young boys
On our street. We buy clothes
Without pockets for our children.
We ask them again and again
To show their hands.

We fetch every stone we can
To make our love lighter.

Yesterday our girls asked
How stones are made.
They're sketching fossils, ammonites
Beautiful as diamonds.
In ancient cathedrals
I have watched them run
Fingertips over tombs.

—Leonard Neufeld, Gig Harbor, Washington, is an award-winning poet. Among other books, he is author of The Coat Is Thin (DreamSeeker Books, 2008) the collection from which this poem comes (used by permission, all rights reserved).