

DreamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul



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Books, Faith, World & More

A Testimony of Three Theologians: A Review of The Priestly Kingdom, of Hannah's Child, and of Out of Babylon

Daniel Hertzler

and much more

Autumn 2011

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Editorial: Mundane Details as Big Pictures Fracture

As we headed toward this autumn I shared with Eastern Mennonite Seminary staff and faculty a quote from *New York Times* (Sunday August 21, 2011) columnist Maureen Dowd. She offered the memorable thought that “Americans are curled up in a ball, beaten down by a financial crisis, an identity crisis, a political crisis and a leadership crisis.”

At that very moment a strange rumbling began. We later learned it was an earthquake centered not even a hundred miles away. We weren't quite sure whether to think God wanted to confirm or unsettle my citing of Maureen Dowd. Soon after a hurricane raked much of the same area.

Unsettled times. Hard to know how to plan. Hard to get a clear picture of what to focus on. Such factors came to mind as I pondered whether this Autumn 2011 issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* has a uni-

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fyng theme. I couldn't quite find one—except when I started thinking that this collection of articles feels a bit like our times: each of us focusing here and there on this or that catching our attention or seeming to be something we can make sense of amid larger forces we can't get our minds fully around.

So this *DSM* seems not to provide so much an intentional bigger picture as to echo times in which if we can grasp a bigger picture it seems to be the sense that things aren't entirely holding together, whether locally, globally, or at the level of our physical environment.

This seems also to connect with the lead article by Brenda Hartman-Souder, who is by no means one unaware of things that make one curl into a ball, living as she does in an unsettled part of Africa, yet who decides to focus memorably and invitingly on the joys of fruits.

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David B. Greiser, Brenda Hartman-Souder, Daniel Hertzler, Michael A. King, Noël R. King

Publication, Printing, and Design

Cascadia Publishing House

Advertising

Michael A. King

Contact

126 Klingerman Road
Telford, PA 18969
1-215-723-9125

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Marlin Jeschke

My column, which follows, is my effort to find some sort of meaning in the many deaths of parents and mentors that have marked my past year and unraveled much of my own previously taken-for-granted personal big picture.

We might think of Joyce Peachey Lind as learning from lives whose unraveling she experiences in court even as she worried the lesson her son has learned is itself more focused on the small picture than she might have wished for. On the other hand, Woody Allen, as reviewed by David Greiser, could be thought of as sometimes paradoxically finding bigger pictures through the very act of exploring life's small and sometimes petty details and dramas.

In Daniel Hertzler's review of three authors who loom large in their intertwining fields, it can be fascinating to learn something about the autobiographical details intertwining with and sometimes seeming to run counter to their larger authorial themes.

As she says goodbye to *DSM*, Deborah Good can be read as saying that big pictures cannot hold—life stages are impermanent. Suzy, in Noël King's telling, experiences a huge big-picture shift—aliens live among us!—but for now Suzy mostly just keeps eating at Taco Bell.

Marlin Jeschke shows God's big dreams for the Holy Land perpetually stymied by peoples ever at odds with each other in Israel-Palestine. Finally the poets address some larger matters—grief, life itself—through such mundane details as soybeans and touch football.

Daily details amid forces that seem to shake the earth itself. Life on earth today. —*Michael A. King*



On Apples and Adjustment

Brenda Hartman-Souder

I just impulsively crunched down an *apple*. I almost never do this. But I can tell you it tastes EXACTLY the same as every other pale-green, exported-from-South-Africa apple here.

When eaten soon after bought at about 45 cents each, they are crisp, fairly sweet, and firm in texture. But they lack any significant, variety-confirming taste. They're grown for import. Our early delight at discovering apples here in Nigeria quickly turned to disappointment that these apples were, despite their expense, so ordinary.

Some of the *oranges* here are out of this world, their peel a deep lime-green. I carefully weigh each one in my hand and select heavy ones bursting with juice. They each cost about seven cents. Slicing them open reveals bright orange and juicy flesh, sweet and refreshing, reminiscent of the naval oranges flown into Syracuse from California during the winter but free of dyes and fresh off the trees.

The apple's peel is slightly more green than a Yellow Delicious green. When bought by a reputable vendor, they're bruise- and worm-free—boring, safe apple with the imperfections bred right out of them.

Where are the Lodi and Early Transparent? The Paula Reds, Crispins, Cortlands, Macintoshes, Empires? Where are the Galas, the Jonathons, the Jonagolds and the Gala Golds? The Pippins? The Red and Yellow Delicious? Where are the Granny Smith? Braeburns? Fuji? Northern Spy and Spy Gold?

I know, I know, these varieties need a cold winter. We should be grateful for what we can get—carefully crated, kept cool, flown-in apples.

Guavas are beginning to grow on the kids. Greg likes the sauce, cooked and strained like applesauce. Val will pop an entire peeled half in her mouth. The yellow, bumpy skin, when bruised or cut, is reminiscent of cloves. The pink-peach centers are full of seeds, but this fruit is addictive—grainy, almost sweet, mysterious.

I rarely eat apples here—they're too expensive. We buy enough so the kids can have one each at bedtime. Upon arrival, the green apples immediately became a bridge between the world we'd just left and the one we landed in. A bedtime apple in Syracuse, a bedtime apple in Jos.

The fruit of the *papaya* ranges from pale gold to bright, bold orange, the texture a little like cantaloupe. They are stood up on end in the market stalls and fruit vendors can tell us which day they'll be ready to cut. We follow their instructions, then pick up the firm slices with our fingers and chow down.

Once we bought a bunch of the small green apples here and they all tasted like moth balls. (No, I've never actually tasted a moth ball.) Val took one bite and traded in her apples for banana slices.

Bananas are grown abundantly and are as predictable here as they are in any western supermarket, except that Mama Ayaba (Hausa for banana) used to bring them right to our office, the round tray carefully balanced atop her head. She had to give up the business because traveling to the wholesalers' part of town was getting dangerous and expensive with continued interreligious violence. Bananas are basic, except for the petite fingerling that hides hints of vanilla and flowers I can't name.

Small green apple. Not good for stewing, cooking, baking. Only good for stretching memories and holding onto rituals and maybe a little fiber thrown in as well.

Pineapples can be dicey—you never know if you’ve bought a good one or not. But if you have, you thank your lucky selection and eagerly cut the dripping, sticky sweet fruit into chunks that are often snatched before supper. At half the cost, they surpass even the Dole Gold variety back home.

Green, small, antiseptic apple. If I live here yearning for New York apples, the taste in my mouth will always be bitter. Fullness of life in the present cannot be bought with imports from the past.

Did you know that green mangoes make a great apple pie or crisp? That guava sauce goes perfectly with pork? That papaya can be diced . . . for a sensuous salsa?

The coming of the *mango* is cause for celebration. By late March, they arrive in the market from warmer parts of Nigeria—a small, moderately sweet variety, but eagerly welcomed. Then Mercy, my favorite fruit vendor, starts to sell the “pineapple” or Peter mango from Benue State. They are huge, the size of a small cantaloupe, and when perfectly ripe their taste is unrivaled—an exotic, intoxicating blend of pineapple, coconut, and mango all in one fruit, a piña colada that needs no rum.

By April, Jos mangoes are ripe and luscious, the trees as common and their fruit as prolific as the apples we used to anticipate each autumn. I discovered that a former resident had, along with numerous orange, grapefruit, lemon, and avocado trees, planted a pineapple mango tree in our front yard. To win the annual competition with the birds, we pluck early and allow them ripen on the kitchen sill. The kids squabble over who gets the most and slurp the juice at the bottom of the bowl.

Did you know that green mangoes make a great apple pie or crisp? That guava sauce goes perfectly with pork? That papaya can be diced and mixed with hot Scotch bonnet peppers, onions, lime juice, salt

and basil for a sensuous salsa? And let me add that all this fruit, often growing freely in neighborhoods and fields, supplements and adds vitamins and nourishment to a sometimes meager diet for many Nigerians.

The fruits of Nigeria beckon us from countless road side stands. A dose of familiar comfort food at bedtime continues; we can't entirely pass up those green apples on their perfect pyramids at the fruit vendors. But grounded by old rituals, we now partake and are nourished by new flavors, by the diversity, taste and texture of the juicy, sweet, succulent fruits of Nigeria.

—*Brenda Hartman-Souder, Jos, Nigeria, serves as co-representative of Mennonite Central Committee Nigeria and, along with spouse Mark, as parent of Valerie and Greg.*

The Cloud of Witnesses Locks In

Michael A. King

When we're young we do younger person things and when older we do older person things. My early writings pondered young marriage, babies, children growing. More recently I've written my way through the decline and then death of both my parents. There is more to life than aging and death, and the day will come again to celebrate that. Yet for now I find the death of one more major mentor producing this column's focus on being surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, as Hebrews 12:1 so memorably puts it.

Last spring's death was of key mentor Paul M. Schrock. Paul taught me publishing. In the 1990s with heavy heart he downsized me from a financially distressed Herald Press. But he wrapped my termination in the ongoing support that contributed to my being able to own my own publishing company after leaving Herald Press. Then his support contributed to my becoming a seminary dean.

But after a fall in a library, working among the books he loved, he was gone. As I mourned his departure amid gratitude for ways he had blessed me, his moving on intertwined with my parents' departure. And it dawned on me that without intending to, I was visualizing Paul along with my parents and other departed loved ones in a kind of cloud, a cloud of those who had by faith "run with perseverance the race marked out" for them (Heb. 12:1), a cloud of those who

were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. . . . longing for a better country—a heavenly one. (Heb. 11:13-16 NIV)

We each, I'd guess, experience having a famous idea, long known, lock in so personally it seems that only now do we get it. Last week was my time to feel "cloud of witnesses" locking in. I don't mean that I perfectly grasp Hebrews, whose writer might find my appropriation unrecognizable, but simply that the image has now become for me particularly powerful.

We do, if we feel the longing for that better country, seek to run our race toward it. As Hebrews puts it, we welcome the things promised from a distance, never fully experiencing them here. So there is always sorrow in the race, the sorrow of a destination not fully reached, a yearning not wholly fulfilled. I suspect in addition to the grief of losing physical contact with those we love, our sorrow at funerals comes from awareness that neither the one we memorialize nor we ourselves when our time comes get as far as they and we would wish. Along with the here-were-the-wonderful-achievements parts there are always the didn't-get-there parts wistfully to ache for.

But precisely in regret over the country not reached emerges the power of the cloud of witnesses image. Because the witnesses, though within Mystery we can't fully know, are now nearer that country. They become the cloud of those who know how impossible it is to get all the way to God's country in this life yet whose vision of it far off shaped their lives on the way toward it. Then beyond their earthly race they've become our cheerleaders, these who have been there but

have now handed us the baton with which to race on as faithfully and far as we can amid our own longings we also will not entirely satisfy.

I suspect that a gift of many memorial services is the power to peel back the veil between those who have raced beyond death and those still racing here. At memorial services the barriers between those living and those dead, those past and those present, we ourselves as living beings versus the dead ones we will someday at our own funerals be, fade away. For precious minutes we live in God's time, in God's way of experiencing, as those by the finish line and those still racing toward it intertwine.

The living can feel the dead and the dead, I suspect, can touch the living.

The living can feel the dead and the dead, I suspect, can touch the living. Tears and joy mingle, tears because so much grief will pour in when the holy moments of the service pass yet joy as we experience a foretaste of existence beyond division into here versus departed.

The cloud of witnesses is a way of celebrating that we're all in this together, we who have run the race and we who run on, as cheerleaders and runners seek to mingle in that most real of families, God's family—a family larger even than the categories of alive and dead in a country where we welcome the things long promised.

—*Michael A. King, Telford, Pennsylvania and Harrisonburg, Virginia, is Dean, Eastern Mennonite Seminary; and publisher, Cascadia Publishing House LLC. This reflection was first published in The Mennonite (July 2011), as a "Real Families" column.*

Lessons in Traffic Court

Joyce Peachey Lind

I spent an hour and a half at traffic court this morning, accompanying my son, Jake, who had received a speeding ticket the month before. We decided to have him go to court and perhaps get his fine reduced. It is his first ticket, and he is 18, so to drive the point home, we mandated that he sign up to take a driver improvement course.

We tried to get him in before the court date, but he was only able to sign up for the Saturday following his court date. We told him to wear his nicest clothes and be respectful and polite. We instructed him to say “Sir” or “Ma’am,” though he thought “Your Honor” would be best. “Be proactive and play the game, and you might get a break,” was the implication. He wore the purple button-down shirt and the nice pants he had worn to the Jr./Sr. Banquet. He opted out of the yellow tie.

The court room was pretty full, so we walked up to the front row, excused ourselves past a

young Latino woman, and sat down. I had been there myself for a ticket once before, but this time I wasn't nervous or worrying about what I was going to say. We had stopped at the bank and Jake had \$130 in his pocket. I didn't need to worry about the cost. It wasn't my ticket, after all.

His appointment was at 10:00, but we were there by 9:40. There was lots of time to watch and listen to the other cases. At first I was hoping to get information about how much the ticket would cost. My son had had a broken collarbone most of the summer and hadn't been able to work much. So I figured the fine and court costs were going to use up most of his meager savings (again, education needing to happen here).

But soon I became interested in listening to the circumstances of each individual case. We were close enough to the front that I could hear most of what the judge was saying and usually could tell what each defendant said. I could at least follow the gist of each case.

It struck me early on that the front of the room looked a bit like a formal church service. . . .

It struck me early on that the front of the room looked a bit like a formal church service—men in suits, women dressed in pantsuits and heels, people going in and out, lots of whispering. And up front the judge presided over the congregation (all of us in the pews), with the worship leaders and acolytes making sure things ran smoothly.

Individual names were called, and there was a procession as one by one, each defendant went forward. After each case the guilty stepped to the side to receive their “bill” for their fees, then went out a door on the left where the money was collected.

My husband and I have often wondered where all of the doctors, lawyers, and businesspeople go when they get traffic tickets. None of them appeared to be in the court room waiting to have their names called, only to have everyone watch them walk down the center aisle to ultimately stand before the judge. The group of defendants and their supporters were a mix of society—white, Latino, and African-American, and a variety of mostly blue-collar or no-collar folks. But

no suited-up white-collar guys. They were all up in the front of the room. A couple of young men were wearing button-down shirts. But there were a lot of tattoos and nose rings, a lot of T-shirts, and even a man with shorts and suspenders. Most people didn't look like they had dressed up to come to court.

The judge was a pleasant man and very kind to the people who appeared before him. I'm sure he said, "How are you today, sir (or ma'am)?" to every person who came forward. He reduced charges, especially if the officer said a defendant had been cooperative, and dismissed some cases which involved fixing broken parts of vehicles (at least two speedometers had been "repaired").

One guy got a ticket for having tinted windows, something wrong with a mirror, and a "loud exhaust." He had sold his car in the meantime, and since there wasn't any way to know if the car had been fixed, his case was dismissed. A woman from Charlottesville was told she could make arrangements to pay her fines over time and didn't need to come to another court date, since she lived farther away.

A woman who was a nurse, based on the clothes she was wearing, had her charges reduced from 14 to nine miles over the speed limit and was told she could gain her "good points" back for her driving record by taking a driver improvement course. The man in the suspenders had just moved to town when he got his ticket for not having some kind of sticker. He showed his receipt and was told he was "free to go." People thanked the judge a lot, as well as the police officers.

One of the more lengthy cases was that of a Latino woman who had been ticketed for driving without a driver's license. In addition, she was driving a car with an expired license plate and expired registration. A Spanish translator had been called for her, so there were always two people talking—the one speaking in English, followed by the Spanish version (or vice versa), all on top of each other.

The judge asked the woman to tell what happened. She explained that the person who normally gives her a ride to work on the day she got her ticket didn't come to get her. She had to get to work, so she drove herself there. The judge asked if she was aware that she was driving without a license (which I thought was a dumb question).

Yes, she was, she said, but her supervisor at work is very strict and she would lose her job if she wasn't there. I don't remember all the de-

tails, but in the end she owed a \$200 fine in addition to court fees. It was the highest fine I had heard all morning, and I figured she was

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probably one of several people in the room whose hardships in life had just been compounded two- or three-fold that morning.

As for Jake, his name was finally called at about 10:50. He walked to the front in his purple shirt and one arm in a sling. He was greeted by the judge, who thanked him for appearing in court despite his injury. Jake politely pleaded guilty to driving 14 miles over the speed limit. The judge said he would need to take a driver improvement course.

“I’ve already signed up to take it this Saturday, sir,” he said.

The judge looked up, a bit surprised. The next thing I knew he was handing Jake a card with another date scribbled on it. Jake strode down the aisle, without stopping at the billing station, and I followed him out of the court room.

“What happened?” I asked. The judge said that since Jake had signed up for the course voluntarily, all he needed to do was return in a month, show that he had taken the driver improvement course, and his case would be dismissed.

The judge had told him, “You get the best of both worlds—you’ll get five ‘good’ points on your driving record, and you won’t have to pay the fine.” Jake was as pleased as I was bewildered.

Well, Jake learned his lesson all right. I’m just not entirely sure it was the lesson we were trying to teach him.

—*Joyce Peachey Lind lives with her husband and two children in Harrisonburg, Virginia. She enjoys hearing about the world from the perspective of her first grade students.*

“Midnight in Paris”

A Film Review

Dave Greiser

“**M**idnight in Paris” is Woody Allen’s forty-first film, and it is the first that I have attempted to review in print. I have followed Allen’s long film career almost since it began in the late 1960s with a series of formless, madcap comedies. It matured with the production of several romantic comedies—the best of which is probably the 1977 Best Picture Oscar winner “Annie Hall.”

Over the years Allen has ventured into a Bergmanesque period (beginning with “Stardust Memories”) and attempted films that mixed philosophical exposition and drama (“Love and Death,” “Crimes and Misdemeanors”). He has produced light homages to Shakespeare (“A Midsummer Night’s Sex Comedy”), and even forayed into romantic fantasy (“The Purple Rose of Cairo”).

Along the way, Allen has explored perennial themes that have mirrored his own personal struggles. He loves to tweak pretentious intellectuals—even though most would say he himself is

an intellectual. He muses endlessly on the value of life in a godless universe. He wonders whether he would be happier living in another place or another time.

Most of all, Allen agonizes over the inability of humans to remain content in long-term love relationships. Nearly all his films set love, death, and doubt against the backdrop of a large, gorgeously filmed cosmopolis. No one makes cities look better than Woody Allen.

“Midnight in Paris” contains all of Allen’s perennial themes, save his preoccupation with God. Set in contemporary Paris, “Midnight” is the story of Gil and Inez (played by Owen Wilson and Rachel McAdams). They are an engaged couple who have tagged along with Inez’ wealthy parents, who have come to Paris on business.

Gil is a schlocky but commercially successful Hollywood screen

“Midnight in Paris” contains all of Allen’s perennial themes, save his preoccupation with God.

writer. Like many writers, Gil harbors the dream of becoming a serious novelist. He is certain that Paris, with its bohemian memories of the jazz age when a poet or artist stood on every corner, would be the perfect place to live and to fire his imagination to become the next Hemingway. Inez wants nothing more than to settle down in Hollywood to a life of shopping and material comfort.

Over lunch in a bistro, the two run into Inez’ old flame Paul (Michael Sheen) and his new wife. Paul is an insufferable pedant with a superficial knowledge of nearly every aspect of high culture—art, literature, French architecture, wine.

While Gil is unimpressed, Inez is taken afresh by her old love interest’s brilliance. Soon, Inez is spending the evenings clubbing with Paul and his wife while Gil walks and admires the Parisian streets alone.

One night Gil becomes lost in the streets and sits on some church steps to get his bearings. The church bell chimes midnight, and a 1920s Peugeot filled with revelers pulls to the curb and invites Gil to get in.

Unfortunately, to reveal what happens next would be classified as a spoiler. In the interest of preserving the surprise (it's worth it!) for those who still want to see the film, I will simply say that Gil finds plenty of material to feed his literary imagination. In the process he and Inez will be made to confront the perennial Allen quandaries: Would somebody else's life be more interesting to live than mine? Is it really possible to find permanent contentment in a love relationship?

Besides the wonderful plot twist at this film's center, the other key to this film's success is Owen Wilson's portrayal of Gil. Allen's films nearly all contain a character with the Woody Allen persona (whether Allen himself or another actor), and in this film the Allen character is Gil. Wilson plays Gil with a kind of wide-eyed innocence that is missing from Allen's well-known version of the world-weary and slightly cynical schlemiel. Despite the posture of innocence, Wilson is able to believably deliver the wry observations and snotty one-liners that have become a Woody Allen trademark.

But this is more than a film of one-liners—it is a film that explores the self-discovery of its characters and, very possibly, the life learnings of Woody Allen himself. During one of his late night soirees, Gil is given a revelation: no one else's life is better than his own. No other period of history is any more "golden" than this one. No relationship that is worth pursuing is ever without its times of boredom, conflict and struggle. Life itself is flawed; tragically, beautifully so. Even in its absurdity, it is worth the investment.

Throughout his long career, Woody Allen has explored his love affairs on the big screen: love affairs with cities (New York, London, Paris), women (Louise Lasser, Diane Keaton, Mia Farrow) and even the genius of other film makers (the Marx Brothers and Ingmar Bergman). Perhaps because he has given us so much, we tend to take his work for granted. But watch "Midnight in Paris," and you may see why many (myself included) regard him as an American treasure.

—*Dave Greiser watches movies on the cheap at the Charles Theater in Baltimore, Maryland, where his St. Mary's University faculty I.D. gets him a half-price discount. He teaches homiletics and church ministry at St. Mary's and serves as pastor of the North Baltimore Mennonite Church.*

Goodbyes

Deborah Good

When gearing myself up for an afternoon of writing, I sometimes pull a collection by a favorite author from my shelf. I choose an essay, at random, which I read as though eating a pomegranate—slowly enough to release the tart juice from each tiny sac, and then swallowing, seed and all. Experiencing the rhythm of someone else’s written words helps me let loose my own. Anne Lamott and David James Duncan are among those who have bolstered me to face the intimidating white of the blank page.

Today I read Barbara Kingsolver—an essay entitled “Marking a Passage” in her book, *Small Wonder*. In the essay, she tells us how, over the years, independent booksellers have offered her refuge, sustenance, and then publicity that she considered vital to the success of her first novel. She describes her sadness when the Book Mark, one of her favorite independent bookstores in Tucson, closed its doors in 1999, unable to survive the growth of the Internet and the national

chains. *I hugged each of my friends behind the counter, she writes, and told them: I can't bear this passing.*

Goodbyes can indeed be hard. Goodbyes of all kinds can be so hard.

It is the big ones that we most remember. I remember bidding farewell to my first job out of college. I was on the editorial staff of *The Other Side* magazine, an almost forty-year-old venture in independent publishing, with offices at the intersection of Apsley and Pulaski Streets in Philadelphia. Our building was creaky and dusty (we opted not to pay for cleaning staff), and piled high with files and books and old magazines. We were underfunded and understaffed, but the hard work, commitment, and simple good-heartedness of readers, volun-

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teers, donors, and staff had helped put the magazine out every two months, year after year, since the Civil Rights Movement.

My second year at *The Other Side* was a real struggle for the organization. Finances and morale were flagging and eventually became so depleted that the board voted to cease publication. The whole staff was laid off, including some who had poured their lives into the effort for more than a decade. We said goodbye to each other, to the magazine, and to the creaky and dusty building we had come to know well. This was not an easy parting.

Other folks I know have seen their marriages end, their nonprofits close up, or their band-mates head in separate directions. It may be tempting to see these life events as more than goodbyes—as altogether failed endeavors. But I think failure is the wrong word. Sometimes seasons of our lives end not because of failure but because they have served their time, and their time is now up.

I like the Buddhist concept of impermanence—that life is in constant flux, that who we are in one moment is different from who we will become in the next. I imagine myself as molecules in a stream,

bubbling over rocks and between banks. Streams are somehow both rushing and serene, in constant motion and perfectly unchanging, all at once.

In the 1970s, my dad helped found a small, alternative school in Washington, D.C., called the Learning Center. Thirty years later, as he approached death to cancer, we learned that the Learning Center was also in its last year, due to financial challenges. I remember well my dad's reflection on this ending: "I feel some sense of loss, of course, in that something I helped give birth to is coming to an end," he said. But some efforts have limited life spans. The Learning Center's closing, he told me, did not undo the good it had done. For 30 years, the school had served foster children and children with special needs when few services were available to them.

Perhaps my dad's words seem to state the obvious, but when I am all mixed up in a pain-filled goodbye, it can be hard to remember that not everything can—nor should—last forever.

I come across a file on my laptop with a title that reminds me of a Pete Seeger song (later covered by the Byrds). My computer tells me the file is called *there is a season.doc* and that I wrote it a little over a year ago, late at night. I start humming the song (*Turn! Turn! Turn!*) and double-click on the file name, curious.

Sometimes is a good word to remember, I read, because very little in my life is always. Most seasons do pass from one into the next. . . . When the hard times seem interminable, sometimes is a good word to remember.

I vaguely recollect writing this sentence, during a rough patch. The rest of the page is a long list, one sentence after the other. *Sometimes I listen exclusively to Elliott Smith for an entire weekend. Sometimes I play soccer without shin guards. Sometimes I let my laundry pile up for three weeks. Sometimes I feel sad. Sometimes I cannot stop laughing. Sometimes I don't care, and sometimes I really, really do. Sometimes there is way too much to do. Sometimes I feel remarkable. Sometimes I feel remarkably inadequate.*

And on and on. There is a season. My grandfather would want me to point out (so, of course, I will) that these words weren't originally Pete Seeger's. They are from Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3: For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to

be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up . . .

And on and on. The verses ring with impermanence.

Jacob, my three-year old neighbor, has taken to throwing occasional fits when he learns that his mother is going somewhere without him. “But I-eeee want to go toooooo!” he cries, big, wet drops spilling onto his cheeks. His mom and I recently had breakfast plans. She managed to sneak out the front door to meet me on the porch, while he was playing with Dad in the backyard, hoping to avoid the teary scene. But I feel for Jacob, because I have been there too.

Every transition or slight shift in my life’s direction has involved a letting go. Whether I was hugging my new friends goodbye at the end

Every transition or slight shift in my life’s direction has involved a letting go.

of a week of summer camp, tossing off my jersey after my last college soccer game, or hugging my dad for the very last time, at least part of me always wanted to hold tightly onto whatever was familiar, wanted to (like Jacob) stick close to Mom and go wherever she went, instead of saying goodbye.

This moment marks for me a small yet significant goodbye. Here ends my final column for *DreamSeeker Magazine*. It has been more than seven years since Michael King, the editor, contacted me by email, inviting a submission. Since then, I have written over twenty-five columns for the magazine, always under the heading, *Beneath the Skyline*. I have grown up, both as writer and as human being, in the past seven years, and my quarterly column leaves a record of where I have been. Whether that record is more noteworthy or embarrassing is up for discussion.

I am grateful to *DreamSeeker* for a venue, to Michael for his encouragement, you for reading my writing, and to the many who have written thoughtful emails in response. My writing has felt most alive when it has become a conversation.

I am learning, I think, that always beyond the sadness of good-byes, new spaces open up—the way that dandelions sometimes grow up through the sidewalk where it cracks. I have come to see life as like the forests that are healthier if a fire occasionally blows through, taking out the dead wood in the underbrush, and like the pinecones I remember hearing about, which must endure the heat of a blaze before they will open and spill their seeds.

Deborah Good, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a senior research assistant at Research for Action (www.researchforaction.org) and author, with Nelson Good, of *Long After I'm Gone* (DreamSeeker Books/Cascadia, 2009). She welcomes your thoughts via email: deborahagood@gmail.com. With this column, she bids *DreamSeeker* a grateful goodbye.

—*Deborah Good, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a senior research assistant at Research for Action (www.researchforaction.org) and author, with Nelson Good, of Long After I'm Gone: A Father-Daughter Memoir (DreamSeeker Books/Cascadia, 2009). If you have thoughts to share or interest in receiving a copy of YUC's Pushout Report once it is completed, please email deborahagood@gmail.com.*

A Testimony of Three Theologians

A Review of The Priestly Kingdom, of Hannah's Child, and of Out of Babylon

Daniel Hertzler

Head and Heart. American Christianities, by Gary Wills. The Penguin Press, 2007.

The Priestly Kingdom, by John Howard Yoder. University of Notre Dame Press, 2008.

Hannah's Child. A Theologian's Memoir, by Stanley Hauerwas. Eerdmans, 2010.

Out of Babylon, by Walter Brueggemann. Abingdon Press, 2010.

In *Christian Century*, October 19, 2010, Stanley Hauerwas published a list of “5 picks in essential theology of the past 25 years.” Second on the list is *The Priestly Kingdom* and fourth is James Wm. McClendon’s three volumes; the first one, *Ethics*, I reviewed in the first issue of *Dreamseeker Magazine*, Summer, 2001.

I was aware of *The Priestly Kingdom* when it first appeared in 1984, but I had quite forgotten

what it said. So reading it was a new experience except for Yoder's familiar style. Yoder would not accept the sectarian label which some would apply in an apparent effort to minimize the impact of radical ethics. In "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood," he asserts that "worship is a communal cultivation of an alternative construction of society and of history."

After listing a group of alternative heroes, he observes that "How pointedly and at what points this celebrated construction will set us at odds with our neighbors will of course depend on the neighbors."

Further, "One of the reasons people deny the faith is, in fact (I suspect) that they think everyone ought to have to believe; therefore they

Yoder "observes . . . that government today involves more than domination and violence."

think that the meaning of belief must be adjusted so that it is acceptable or even irresistible to everyone. This is why the sharp edges of particularity must be honed off" (43, 44).

This is essential Yoder; when I read it I asked myself why I did not think to say that. The answer, of course, is because I'm not John Howard Yoder.

These quotations are from "Part I: Foundations." There are two more parts: "Part II: History" and "Part III: The Public Realm." Two chapters in the third part are of particular interest. In "The Christian Case for Democracy," Yoder takes as his text Jesus' comments in Luke 22: 24-27 on how rulers perform, along with some illumination from Weber, Troeltsch, and the Niebuhr brothers.

He observes, however, that government today involves more than domination and violence. "When modern social orders assign to government the administration of many other kinds of services, it is by no means necessary to apply to them all the same church-world dualism which the New Testament applied to servanthood and the sword" (165).

In other words, some forms of working for government may be seen as Christian vocation. Although he finds that Jesus' critique of the attitudes of rulers is basic, Yoder concludes that "The least oppres-

sive form of government is what our custom calls ‘rule by the people’” (171).

The last chapter, “Civil Religion in America,” describes in some detail how this religion works and ends with a five-point critique. He finally observes that “We call a nonviolent man ‘Lord’ and with his name on our lips deepen the ditch between rich and poor. We call ‘Lord’ the man who told us to love our enemies and we polarize the globe in the name of Christian values.” This, he says, “is idolatry” (195).

Again from an Anabaptist point of view this seems obvious. Why did not the rest of us think to say it?

For some 30 years I have read and listened to Stanley Hauerwas. I met him once, but now in his memoir I get a better understanding of the man. I find as I had heard before that he grew up in a bricklaying family in Texas. It was a cussing family, and after he went to Yale University and became an academic ethicist he kept cussing until he found a magazine article which identified him as “the Foul Mouth Theologian.” This made him “quit using the most offensive words. I simply became tired of and bored with having that aspect of my life made such a big deal” (120).

Hauerwas continually puts himself down. As he says it, he is a bricklayer who somehow went to college and then to Yale University. He stumbled into philosophy, theology, and ethics. He obtained a doctor’s degree and implies that when he got it he was not quite sure what to do, but it seemed he was expected to teach. So he found a teaching assignment at Augustana College.

When that assignment was apparently running out, he just happened to get into Notre Dame and later on to Duke University. He implies that his academic life has been an adventure, one surprise after another. Yet despite himself he has to admit some extraordinary accomplishments.

Of particular interest to me is his account of how he learned to believe in peace from John Howard Yoder. It began when he found a Yoder pamphlet here and there. Then he went to interview Yoder. The interview was not what we would call a success. Yoder was not particularly impressed by this interest in him. But he made available a pile

of manuscripts, and Hauerwas acknowledges freely that Yoder converted him to believe that Christians are called to be pacifists.

I find it also of interest that he reflects on Yoder's problem with women and how the church disciplined him. This summary helps me better understand what happened and why. He writes, "If I learned anything from John Howard Yoder, it is not to trust yourself to know yourself" (242). He describes how Yoder perceived that men and women should touch each other non-sexually. He began to practice this, but it was perceived as harassment of women.

The church attempted to discipline him, a difficult assignment when the person who had misbehaved was so intelligent. But Hauerwas reports that John was received back into the Prairie Street Mennonite Church on the last Sunday of 1997. He died on December 30 of that year.

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"How John's community responded to his inappropriate relations with women, for all the ambiguities and confusions associated with that response, is also a lesson in its own right. It is a testimony to a community that has learned over time that the work of peace is slow, painful and hard" (246).

A major theme in the memoir is the mental illness of Stanley's first wife, Anne. This began to be apparent soon after they were married although he reports that there were signs before hand which he was not able to interpret. They had one son, Adam, and Stanley became the major caregiver for him. For 24 years he tried to support his wife as he was able, allowing her to choose the house they would buy when they moved from South Bend, Indiana to Durham, North Carolina. She finally left him and he was to find another wife, Paula, a true soul mate.

In the Introduction he writes, "I've written this memoir in an effort to understand myself, something that would be impossible with-

out my friends. . . . It is also about God—the God who has forced me to be who I am” (xl). In the Epilogue, he returns to the question of why he wrote. “Friends, particularly younger friends, began to ask me to give an account of my life. . . .

“I would like to think that this book might fall into the category of ‘testimony’ but I’m not confident that what I have done deserves that description” (285). At any rate, readers who have considered Hauerwas’ theological and ethical writings will find this account of interest.

Walter Brueggemann is an Old Testament scholar. One might not expect him to be writing a book on peace. But then Brueggemann has considered the Jewish exile and restoration and reflected on the message of the prophets. These become the background for this book

He takes note of the Jewish experience leading up to Babylon, then comes to rest on their life after Babylon, when Persia was the dominant empire. Persia permitted Jews to return from Babylon.

Jerusalem was rebuilt, but as Brueggemann observes, this was not a free Jerusalem. “In the Persian Empire . . . the local tradition vis-a-vis the empire had to be one of accommodation and resistance; accommodation enough to survive and prosper, resistance enough to maintain a distinctive identity and ethic” (131).

He says that “Doin’ Time in Persia” is a model for the U.S. churches confronting the U.S. empire. That America is an empire is documented by references beginning with the Monroe Doctrine and leading to the Spanish-American War, Theodore Roosevelt, the Yalta agreements, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the invasion of Iraq.

He finds the American churches specializing “in captivity in selling out to the dominant culture” (151). He suggests that “our engagement with empire can quickly become a case of the frog in the pot of boiling water. A little support of war, a little indifference about the environment, a little disregard of poverty, a failure to notice racism or sexism . . . a little of this and a little of that, and all too soon comes a lethal society.”

He cannot imagine the churches resisting the empire “except perhaps in the most sectarian practices of peace churches or among Pentecostals. . . . So what are the bishops, priests, pastors, and teachers of the church to do? . . . He concludes that “A responsible hermeneutic

for the church amid empire would teach us that social analysis is always taking place in Scripture. The texts constantly engage in the contest between power and truth telling, a contest we would do well to join ourselves” (152).

I have not perceived any sort of connection between Brueggemann and Yoder or Hauerwas although he makes the above casual reference to the peace churches. But Brueggemann makes effective use of the prophets and the Jews as models for the church using the same ultimate source as Yoder and Hauerwas.

Brueggemann makes effective use of the prophets and the Jews as models for the church using the same . . . source as Yoder and Hauerwas.

In a *Christian Century* article “In the Meantime” (August 23, 2011), Richard J. Mouw uses Abraham Kuyper and Leslie Newbigin as authorities to support his position in relation to the American empire. He is somewhat familiar with Anabaptism and notes in passing *Resident Aliens* published in 1989 by Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon. He indicates that their position is not his position, and he justifies participation of Christians in the police and the military. However in the end he acknowledges “the Constantinian danger of forming an unhealthy-and unfaithful-alliance between the church and political power.”

If he really wants to consider this issue and is not willing to deal with the Mennonite Yoder and the two Methodists Hauerwas and Willimon, maybe he would be willing to study the position of Brueggemann, who is in his Reformed tradition.

As for us with our Anabaptist history, if as time goes on our radical juices are failing, we may find renewal in these three testimonies. They outline a Christian way of life which is less than comfortable with the secularized religion of the American empire.

—*Daniel Hertzler, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, is an editor, writer, Sunday school teacher, and instructor for the correspondence course, Pastoral Studies Distance Education.*

My Best Friend Suzy

Noël R. King

My best friend Suzy is always one turn of the wheel different from anybody else, and I am just the luckiest person alive to be her best friend.

I met her in junior high school, and now we are in the ninth grade and still best friends. Before last month, however, I had never been to her house, and it sometimes made me wonder why, but she said that her mom worked two jobs and needed total peace and quiet in the house before she left for her night job.

One day after school, I said good-bye to Suzy and we headed home in opposite directions, like usual. But then I got the devil of an idea into my head. I decided to wait for a minute or two and then sneak back and follow Suzy home to see what her place was really like.

Three blocks later, I hid behind a wall of mailboxes and watched as Suzy went running into a yard full of flowers and trees. The front door slammed shut behind her on her way into the house, and a few seconds later I heard a grownup

yelling:

“Suzy! Hurry it up! We’re gonna be late! You know how important it is to leave exactly on time!”

“Yeah, Mom, I know! I’ll be there in a minute,” I heard Suzy yell back.

I thought, “Finally! They’ll all come running out that door to drive away, and I’ll get to see what they look like.”

After two minutes had passed and the front door remained closed, I began to wonder where my thinking had gone awry. If my eyes—I’ve got great eyes!—hadn’t caught a sudden movement in the sky, I would have missed it completely.

A sparkling, spinning spaceship was lifting off from Suzy’s rooftop the instant I looked up, but its gleaming hull was gone before I’d even had a chance to blink. Poof!

Propelled by shock, I raced over to Suzy’s front door and pounded on it like crazy.

“Suzy! Open the door! Suzy! It’s me, Amanda! Come back! Come back!”

The next day at school, there she was, standing at her locker just like usual.

I walked straight up to her and said, “Suzy, are you an alien?”

She blanched but said, “What of it? Who wants to know?”

I walked straight up to her and said, “Suzy, are you an alien?”

She blanched but said, “What of it? Who wants to know?”

“Suzy!” I wailed loudly and somewhat uncontrollably in her face. “Is it really, *really* true? Who are you?! Where are you from? What are you doing here??”

“Okay, okay,” she said. “Calm down. It’s still me. I’m still your best friend Suzy. Yes, I come from another planet and, yes, it’s far away, and, yes, my parents are aliens too, and, yes, we’re all here for a reason, but the bell’s gonna ring. I’ll tell you at lunch.”

After what seemed like a million time warps had passed, lunchtime finally arrived, and Suzy told me that she and her family were here on Earth on a factfinding expedition.

“We came to try it out before we settle here for good,” she told me. “We like a lot of the things you’ve got here—for instance, your oatmeal cookies, both with and without raisins, the warmth of your sun, and all of the brilliant colors of your flowers and even your clothes. But we are sickened at the thought of eating animal flesh, and we can’t stand your game of American football. It seems crazed to us. So all in all, we’re still sorting it out.”

She added, “We have to go back and make reports once a week or so. That’s where we were heading when you saw us last night. I looked out and saw you just before we zipped into overdrive.

“It’s okay, though,” she went on. “I’m really glad you know now. You can help me with the research.”

And that’s how I became an alien liaison, just like that. I had never planned on this being my career, but what could be more interesting or exciting? Suzy says that when they’ve been able to study me enough to make sure I won’t explode or anything like that in their spaceship, they will take me with them back to their place, wherever it is. She showed me on their version of Google Galaxy where their planet is, but honestly I just can’t get my mind wrapped around where it is in all the star constellations, planet systems, etc.

So for now, I just keep attending the ninth grade and eating at Taco Bell and going over to Suzy’s house. They said it’s probably best not to tell anybody else, so I haven’t. I am just dying to go on that spaceship! Although I will probably have to take some Dramamine.

Gotta run! That’s my homeroom bell, and as far as I know, I’m still an Earth Girl! At least for now!

—*As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Scottsville, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful or worrisome things, including hfriends who turn out to be aliens.*

Rethinking Holy Land

Engaging Jesus and the Land, by Gary M. Burdge

Marlin Jeschke

In *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to Holy Land Theology*, Gary M. Burge, professor of New Testament at Wheaton College Graduate School takes on America's Zionists, even naming notable ones such as the late Jerry Falwell, Hal Lindsay, Pat Robertson, Tim LaHaye, John Hagee, and the late James Kennedy. An evangelical who has traveled and studied in the Middle East, Burge is also a competent biblical scholar who reviews what the Bible has to say about the "Holy Land."

He notes the Old Testament land promise of the patriarchs with its conditions. Then already in chapter 2 he shows that in the Diaspora (exile) many Jews were redefining Judaism's "land theology." Scattered Jews were "a people widely distributed throughout the [Roman] empire *without a necessary territorial base*" (23, italics in

original), and their redefinition deeply influenced “the formation of Christian thinking in the New Testament” (24).

In his examination of the Gospel, Burge essentially follows W. D. Davies in holding that in the apostolic church concern for land is transmuted into faith in Christ. Jesus himself shows “disregard for territorial interests” and “does not value Jewish nationalism tied to divine claims for the land” (56).

The Book of Acts reports the establishment and growth of a global church embracing Gentiles. It was a church that saw “a territorial theology springing from Jewish faith as utterly foreign,” a church that “would have been astonished if they came upon men and women who promoted a Christian variation of Jewish nationalism” (71).

As for Paul, he “inevitably had to abandon a Christian commitment to Jewish territorialism” (92). Thus when Paul writes in Romans 4:13 that God gave Abraham the cosmos, the world, this promise, Burge says, “is no longer for Canaan—but for the world” (59). Or as Burge says elsewhere, “Abraham was promised the world, not the land of Canaan” (95). I would prefer to say, “Abraham was promised *not only* the land of Canaan but also the whole world” for reasons I will mention presently.

In his concluding chapter Burge explains how “Christian Zionists fail to think Christianly about the subject of theology and the land” (124). “*Ownership of land is not a Christian question*” (127, italics in original). “Pilgrimage is a good thing . . . so that we can revisit the events of history that save us . . .” (128). Yet “God is everywhere but ultimately cannot be located anywhere” (130).

I laid down Burge’s book with gratitude for his courage as an evangelical to counter the almost fanatic promotion of Zionism by many Christians, most of them from the evangelical camp.

But Burge somehow overlooks an essential point in the Bible’s land theology. Of all the things God could have promised Abraham, it was descendents and *land*. Why land? Because land desecration in bloody conquest has been and is one of the most fundamental sins of humanity, as Burge illustrates in an opening reference to Serbian “Christian” butchery of Muslims in Kosovo.

Abraham receives land as a gift, not through conquest, as Walter Brueggemann reminds us (and Burge quotes him). Abraham is a godly exemplar of how to possess land. But in the conquest under Joshua and later under the kings of Israel, Abraham's descendants desecrate the land by exterminating earlier inhabitants or, like David, engaging in bloody wars of conquest.

Abraham is a godly exemplar of how to possess land. But in the conquest under Joshua and later under the kings of Israel, Abraham's descendants desecrate the land by exterminating earlier inhabitants. . . .

Israel is given the task of sanctification of the land. It is because of Israel's desecration of the land that Israel goes into exile.

At the high point at the end of his ministry, Jesus rides into Jerusalem to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah of a coming king who will "cut off the war horse from Jerusalem. And the battle bowl shall be cut off. And he shall command peace to the nations. His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (Zech. 9:9). This triumphal entry and its accompanying text are important because they speak of territory and sanctification of it.

Burge does well to underscore the New Testament vision of a global church but should have added this: not that Christians are not concerned about land anymore, but that fidelity to Christ and membership in a global church lays on us Christians the call to sanctify the lands in which we live.

As I attempted to point out in my *Rethinking Holy Land* (for which Burge wrote a back cover commendation), from the time of Abraham to the present hour God has been at work seeking to coach humanity toward a new way to possess territory—receiving land as a gift and sanctifying it rather than desecrating it by bloodshed, violence, and war.

The New Testament does indeed challenge Zionist "Holy Land" theology, but it also challenges us all to work at what God in-

tended in the promise of land to Abraham—the ultimate sanctification of the whole earth.

—*A widely published author, Marlin Jeschke, Goshen, Indiana, is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Religion at Goshen College, where he taught for 33 years. He is author of Rethinking Holy Land: A Study in Salvation Geography (Herald Press, 2005).*

Just Thinking About You Today, Dad

I reached for the mug that says *Far* this morning.
I brought that for you when I was in Copenhagen—Danish for “Father.”

Now I have it back.

I’m eating soybeans for lunch.
They call them *Edamame* now.
Do you think farmers would be paid more per bushel if they sold
Edamame instead of soybeans?

The shells are salty, like my tears.

Last night I was talking on the phone with a friend.
She said, “Can I call you back, my dad is calling me.”

I noticed what she said.

I knew that you would never call me again.

But there was no sting, no sadness—just the thought.

It wasn’t until today that I cried.

—Mona Jean Harley, Madison, Wisconsin, lives with her husband and two children and works as a school social worker. This poem was written one spring day 17 years after the sudden death of her father, a farmer and school psychologist, reflecting the lifelong waves of grief that wash over a person.



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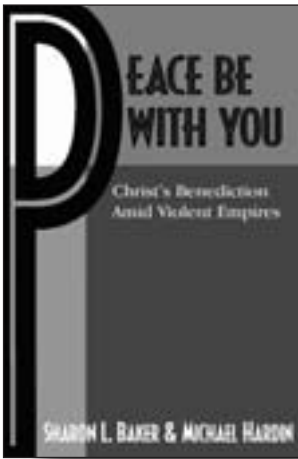
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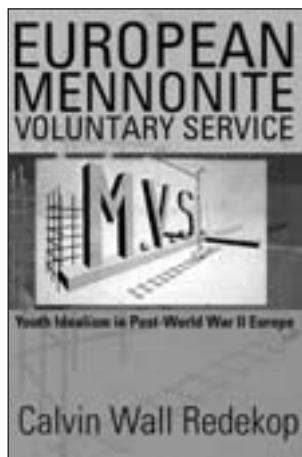
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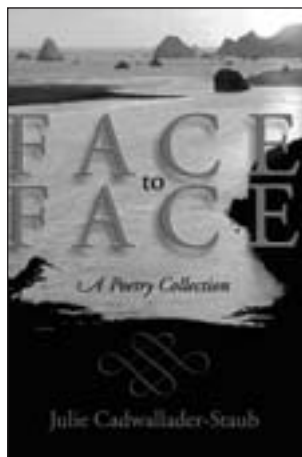


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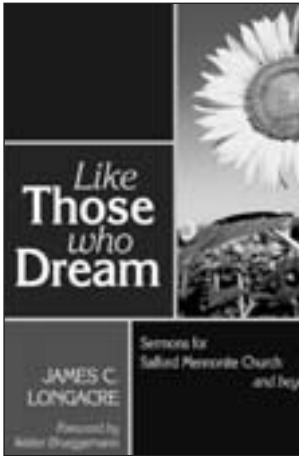
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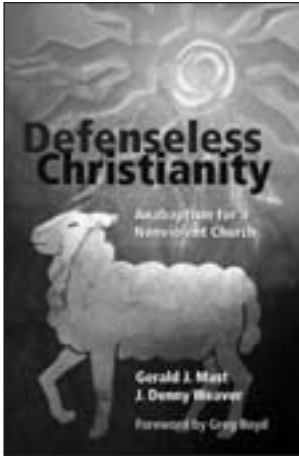
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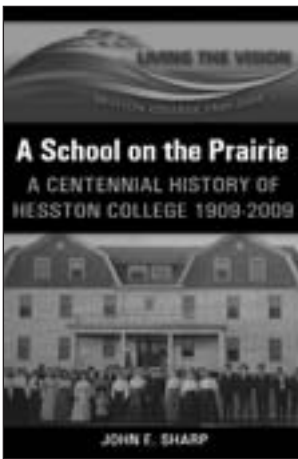
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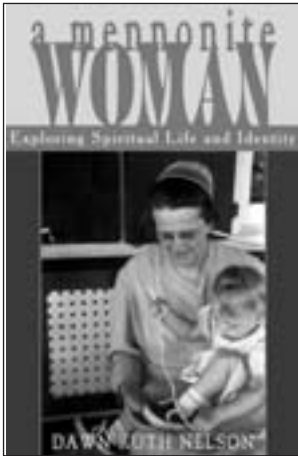
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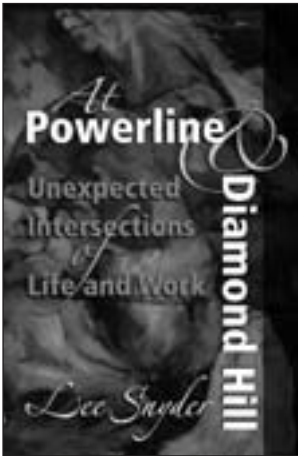
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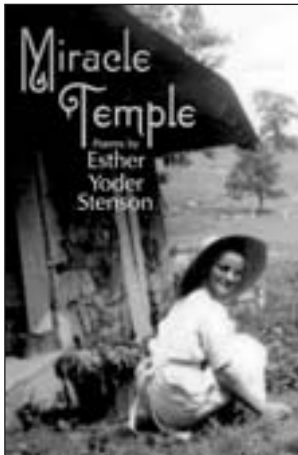
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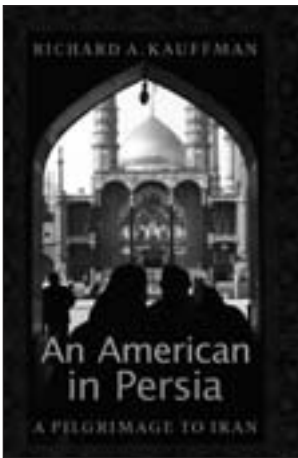
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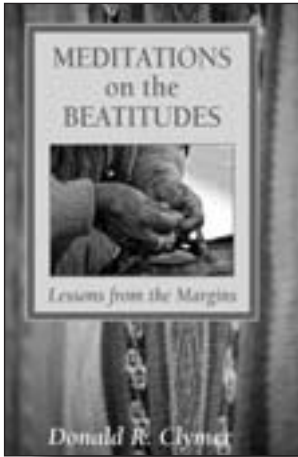
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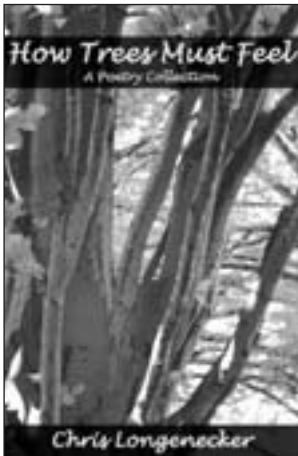
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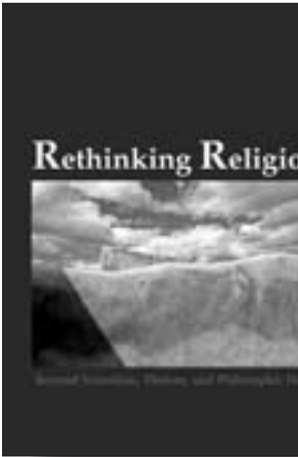
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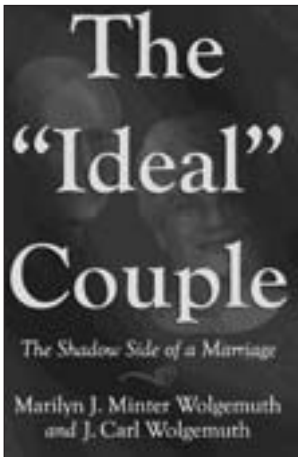
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If Life Were Like Touch Football

Driving north on Route 2A
from Vermont to Maine
listening to the news:
—the New England Patriots coach was caught
trying to videotape the handsignals of the New York
Jets—

I remember how we six sisters
would recruit a few boys from the neighborhood
for a pick-up game of touch football in the street,
how we'd break into teams,
huddle around whomever was chosen to be quarterback,
how the qb would extend her left palm, flat,
into the middle of the huddle,
plant the index finger of her right hand in the center of
her
palm, and then
with finger motions and whispers,
she would diagram who was to go where and when,
in order to so confuse and fool the other team
that one of us could break free
and go long.

Oh that feeling
of running as fast as I could
extending my arms, my hands, my fingers

as far as I could
watching that spiraling bullet of a football,
reminding myself:
if you can touch it,
you can catch it.
If you can touch it,
you can catch it.

—*Julie Cadwallader-Staub lives near Burlington, Vermont, and currently serves as the Grants Director for the Burlington School District. Her poems have been published in several journals and included in anthologies. She was awarded a Vermont Council on the Arts grant for poetry in 2001. She and her husband, Warren, were married for 23 years until his death from multiple myeloma at age 49. This poem is excerpted from her first collection of poems, Face to Face (Cascadia/DreamSeeker Books, 2010), a poem which was also featured on Garrison Keillor's Writer's Almanac.*