DreamSeeker Magazine
Voices from the Soul

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and much more

Spring 2003
Volume 3, Number 2

Editorial: A *DSM* for Explorers and Homemakers

What do we do in an era of inflamed passions when we want to do more than simply argue? Many of us feel in the midst of life-and-death struggles in relation to such considerations as preserving space for our core theologies, the future of denominational structures, or the literal life and death of the thousands who could be swept into war or terrorism. And we feel we must speak not just to win arguments but also to bear witness, before it is too late, to the light we have been given.

Then the complication: Everything in me cries out that the way I see things must be true, yet there you are, witnessing with equal fervor. All would be well—except that what you believe must be done to right the wrong is what I see as the wrong against which I must testify.

What you believe must be done to right the wrong is what I see as the wrong against which I must testify. . . . Let *DSM* be a place where explorers and homemakers, like the lion and the lamb, can lie down together. . . .

This is the agenda I wrestle with in this issue's Kingsview column (pp. 41-44). But why mention it also here? Because these matters have a bearing on what this magazine looks like, and I would like *DSM* more fully to embody the vision I (with assistant editor Valerie Weaver-Zercher) have for it.

In my column, I suggest one way to relate across the different camps we fall into is to name some of us explorers and some homemakers. To oversimplify, explorers innovate, homemakers preserve. I dream that both can be dear friends, which is why I said this in the Summer 2001 inaugural issue of *DSM*: "I'll . . . work to keep *DSM* from drifting only toward the leftwing radicalism some see as the inevitable result of seeking new dreams. Surely there is as much fresh speaking to be done by those . . . who dream their way across the unexplored terrains of the traditional."

DSM has in fact featured voices I'd see as speaking from the traditionalist, homemaking side. But the drift seems to favor explorers. As editors, Valerie and I no doubt contribute to that. I was shaped within a homemaker setting, rebelled against its constrictions, and spent years exploring before aiming to return home while still exploring. I do want both, but in *DSM*'s pages, exploring seems to win.

Thus my plea to our valued *DSM* readers and writers: If you have a homemaking side, or know of articulate homemakers—or any who think differently from those now writing—connect us! Let *DSM* be a place where explorers and homemakers, like the lion and the lamb, can lie down together in peace.

Let *DSM* be a forum where last time (Winter 2003, pp. 24-27) I could speak in anger and this time I and all of us can view matters from a different angle as J. Ron Byler (pp. 2-3) offers another perspective. Or this time the fierce words of a Wendell Berry can be heard, then another time equally impassioned words from a different voice.

—*Michael A. King*

Editor
Michael A. King

Assistant Editor
Valerie Weaver-Zercher

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

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

Publication, Printing, and Design
Cascadia Publishing House

Advertising
Michael A. King

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

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A Plane Story
Noël R. King

Michael A. King's comments on anger in "Kingsview" in the Winter 2003 issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* stirred some rumblings for me. More often than not (*way* more often than not), I squelch the beginnings of red-hot feelings as quickly as possible. Better to do that than to let them come out in unseemly ways, right?

Michael's identification of his own anger and the possibility that some of it might be healthy gives me hope for handling anger in my own life. And even within the church, could it be that anger, even toward wrongs within our own community, can be channeled as "well-aimed rage"?

Could it be that Michael has settled for feelings of anger when he could take more meaningful steps toward change or correcting his own misperceptions?

In addressing "denominational organizations" and "ideologues," however, could it be that Michael has settled for feelings of anger when he could take more meaningful steps toward change or correcting his own misperceptions?

Reading Michael's comments, I find myself caught between my own anti-establishment self-image and the realization that I am now a denominational bureaucrat. The young man who marched and lived in urban communities has grown older and is in a denominational role working hard to hold the pieces together in our new church.

Michael did not name particular situations in his critique. However, Mennonite Church USA, to which a good many readers of *DSM* no doubt belong, is a small denomination, not an impersonal, faceless entity. It's our congregations, conferences, and agencies. Most of us touch these institutions in very direct ways, or know people who do. Thus I couldn't help but read Michael's concerns with specific examples in my mind. When trouble hits the church, the half-truths and the not-quite-the-whole-story stories can be frustrating.

For example, have workers been trampled over at Mennonite Publishing House, where many employees were downsized? Or were difficult decisions forced by lack of financial support from the church? Has Eastern Mennonite University, which asked its faculty to reaffirm the MCUSA confession of faith, outlawed dissent? Or have university leaders tried to honestly respond to the constituency they represent? Has Mennonite Mutual Aid, along with other church agencies and bodies, disregarded mutual aid by refusing to insure some at-risk individuals? Or have they managed to salvage an insurance program for our pastors?

It all depends on how you tell the story and the preconceptions you choose to honor when telling it. In actuality, there is usually truth at both poles and at many points in between.

Mennonite Church USA—all the parts of a new denominational entity organized within recent years from older denominational bodies—is beginning to take shape. As it does so, we need to give voice to our concerns and misgivings. We also need to support and encourage the leaders of our congregations, conferences, and agencies.

I need to learn to express my own anger more often, even as I serve the denomination. Between the realities and challenges of institutional responsibilities is the role of the prophet I too often overlook.

Others, too, need to express their anger when warranted. They also need to talk to those who have more information and to those able to make needed changes. In each of the institutions mentioned above (and in others that may perhaps more accurately reflect Michael's concerns), there are people working hard to follow God's leading and to create a network of relationships that can benefit the whole church.

Yes, Michael and others stirred to anger, the church—whether the denomination is Mennonite or another—does not always get it right. But you are part of that church. Don't settle just for anger when you can get involved in your congregation, conference, and churchwide agencies. Help the church make the decisions that will make us more truly Christian and Anabaptist in our institutional styles and that will help make us a more just, healthy, and faithful church. When justified, the church deserves our anger. And it deserves even more.

—J. Ron Byler, Elkhart, Indiana, is Associate Executive Director, Mennnonite Church USA Executive Board.

Dear Editors, *Dreamseeker Magazine* online has been a tremendous blessing and inspiration to us since our discovery of it.

Thank you so o o much for the fine choice of subjects, especially your concern for the mental health of our friends, and how we need to be there for them. The article "Show Up" (Summer 2002) was so encouraging to us. Keep up the good work. Blessings to you in this ministry.

—Jim Herr, Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Dear Editors: I received my first issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* (Winter 2003) and have read it, cover to cover. I particularly liked "The Enigma of Anger," by Garret Keizer and Michael King's response, "What Amos Might Rant about Today." I understand Michael's strong attraction to the Keizer article. The powerful storm is a stunning event when compared to the almost insignificant source of previous anger. We tend to rant about things that don't really matter when there is injustice of unbelievable magnitude all around us.

I also liked the poem "Dinnertime," by Tina Swartz Burkholder, very, very much. So many dinners entangled with so many memories! The format is pleasing. Here's to many more issues. Don't forget to include things that make us laugh.

—Dorothy Cutrell, Deland, Florida

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

Finding Our Way Home

Still warmed by your clammy farewell kisses,
we speed over Ohio's frozen surface
past flat fallow farmland.
You always wished we'd love
the likes of such flatness.

Today the snow-dusted soybean stubble
is like confectioners sugar on Pop's stiff whiskers,
but what my fingerprints hold is the memory
of soothing your rising-bread-dough arm,
skin smooth beyond its 93 winters.

My fingerprints hold it steady,
steady as a glass brim full
on this frigid Wednesday journey,
whose bright hours jostle us
as we all find our way home.

—*Sharon Jantzi Kraybill*

Journey

Sharon's mother has died.
Tonight
there's no sleep
on my side
of the moonlit bed
only the thought
of Sharon's grief
unwinding along
the weary miles
to Michigan
and home again,

the long, slow trip
to childhood space
subsumed within
a greater span
of painful ache
too sharp, too new
to truly name—
the sense of loss
so close at hand
it all but stops
a daughter heart.

—*Julie Gochenour*

Sharon Jantzi Kraybill, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, wrote "Finding Our Way Home" while driving home after saying good-bye to her mother, who died the next evening. Under sponsorship of Eastern Mennonite Missions, and serving with husband Herb, Kraybill taught English in Nazareth, Ethiopia for 14 years. She now does some teaching for the Eastern Mennonite University degree completion program in Lancaster. She is always looking for excuses to converse with Scripture and hold her new granddaughter Raewyn.

Julie Gochenour, Sharon's friend, wrote "Journey" on receiving e-mail from Sharon telling of her mother's death and that Sharon was driving back to the funeral. Neither knew at the time of the other's poem. Julie, member of the Religious Society of Friends, is completing her M.A.R. She and husband Gary live on the family farm in Maurertown, Virginia.

A Citizen's Response

To the National Security Strategy of the United States Of America

Wendell Berry

The National Security Strategy published by the White House in September 2002, if carried out, would amount to a radical revision of the political character of our nation. Its central and most significant statement is this:

While the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists . . . (p. 6).

By this new doctrine, the president alone may start a war against any nation at any time. The very idea of a government acting alone in preemptive war is inherently undemocratic, for it does not require or permit the president to obtain the consent of the governed. As a policy, this new strategy depends on the acquiescence of a public kept fearful and ignorant, and on the compliance of an intimidated and office-dependent legislature.

The alleged justification for this new strategy is the recent emergence in the United States of international

terrorism, defined as *"premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents" (p. 5)*. This is truly a distinct kind of violence, but to imply by the word *terrorism* that this sort of terror is the work exclusively of "terrorists" is misleading. The "legitimate" warfare of technologically advanced nations likewise is premeditated, politically motivated violence often perpetrated against innocents. The distinction between the *intention* to perpetrate violence against innocents, as in "terrorism," and the *willingness* to do so, as in "war," is not a source of comfort.

There is little acknowledgment in the National Security Strategy that terrorism might have a cause that could possibly be remedied. The *"embittered few,"* it seems, are merely *"evil."* A government, committing its nation to *"rid the world of evil,"* is assuming necessarily that it and its nation are good. But the proposition that anything so multiple and large as a nation can be "good" is an insult to common sense. It precludes any attempt at self-criticism or self-correction and it leads us far indeed from the traditions of religion and democracy.

Frightening as are the threats that confront us, they do not relieve us of the responsibility to be intelligent, principled, and practical. Curtailment of civil rights, defiance of laws, and resort to overwhelming force—the ready products of fear and hasty thought—cannot protect us against the destruction of our own land by ourselves. They cannot protect us against the selfishness, wastefulness, and greed that we have legitimized here as economic virtues and have taught to the world. They cannot protect us against our government's longstanding disdain for any form of self-sufficiency or thrift, or against the consequent dependence on foreign supplies, such as oil from the Middle East.

The National Security Strategy attempts to compound a foreign policy out of contradictory principles. This document affirms peace as the justification of war and war as the means of peace, perpetuating a hallowed absurdity. But implicit in its assertion of this (and, by implication, any other) nation's right to act alone in its own interest is an acceptance of war as a permanent condition.

This is a contradiction not reconcilable except by a self-righteousness almost inconceivably naive. The authors of the strategy seem now and then to be glimmeringly conscious of the attendant difficulties. Their implicit definition of *"rogue state,"* for example, is any nation pursuing national greatness by advanced military capabilities that can threaten its neighbors—except *our* nation.

And if you think our displeasure with "rogue states" might have any underpinning in international law, then you will be disappointed to learn on page 31 that

We will take the actions necessary to ensure that our efforts to meet our global security commitments and protect Americans are not impaired by the potential for investigations, inquiry, or prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC), whose jurisdiction does not extend to Americans and which we do not accept.

The rule of law in the world, then, is to be upheld by a nation that has declared itself to be above the law. An apparently childish hypocrisy here assumes the dignity of a nation's foreign policy.

Mr. Bush's addition of this Security Strategy to the previous bipartisan commitment to globalization exposes an American dementia that has not been so plainly displayed before. The America Whose Business Is Business has been internationalizing its economy in haste (for bad reasons, and with little foresight), looking everywhere for "trading partners," cheap labor, and tax shelters, while the America Whose Business Is National Defense is withdrawing from the world in haste (for bad reasons, with little foresight), threatening left and right, abrogating agreements, and alienating friends.

The rule of law in the world, then, is to be upheld by a nation that has declared itself to be above the law. An apparently childish hypocrisy here assumes the dignity of a nation's foreign policy.

Since the end of World War II, when the terrors of industrial warfare had been fully revealed, many people and many governments came to recognize that peace is not just a desirable condition but a practical necessity. In the years between our victory in the first Gulf War and September 11, 2001, we did not alter our thinking about peace and war—that is, we thought much about war and little about peace; we made no effort to reduce our dependence on the oil we import; we made no improvement in our charity toward the rest of the world; we made no motion toward greater economic self-reliance; and we continued our extensive and often irreversible damages to our own land. We appear to have assumed merely that our victory confirmed our manifest destiny to be the richest, most powerful, most wasteful nation in the world.

Those who oppose this policy can no longer afford to confuse peaceability with passivity. Authentic peace is no more passive than war. Like war, it calls for discipline and intelligence and strength of character, though it calls also for higher principles and aims. If we are serious about peace, then we must work for it as ardently, seriously, continuously, carefully, and bravely as our government now prepares for war.

—*Wendell Berry, essayist, novelist, and farmer, is the author of more than 30 books, including most recently,* In the Presence of Fear: Three Essays for a Changed World. *This essay, originally printed in an ad in the* New York Times *and on www.OrionOnline.org, is an abridged version of the cover article in the March/April 2003* Orion Magazine *and is used by permission. A free copy of the magazine containing the full essay can be obtained at www.OrionOnline.org.*

Following Wendell Berry, Reluctant Prophet

Marshall V. King

Wendell Berry was raised a Southern Baptist. But as an Anabaptist whose particular stream of Anabaptism is Mennonite, I can't help but wonder what would happen if he were an Anabaptist-Mennonite. Of course this farmer-thinker-writer-conservationist isn't going to become one of us, so to speak. His thoughtful view of the world is rooted in his community, his Kentucky ancestry, not that of my Mennonite heritage with its covering strings, cape dresses, or shoofly pies.

Still, when he came to Goshen College last fall, someone at this Mennonite school suggested that Mennonites adopt him. Someone else, however, said if that happened, Mennonites would chew him up and spit him out as we do other heroes.

Since the late 1950s, when Berry completed his first novel, his writings have exhorted people to think about the places in which they live and how they treat them. At first, it sounds as if Berry is advocating a return to the land. That's a notion that entices many who reminisce about or live out of the agrarian ethic. Berry says that he doesn't advocate going back to anything so much as creating communities that work. The things that make them work, according to Berry's way of thinking, happen to be some old-fashioned values and common sense.

The crowd that gathered for the first of Berry's two September 2002 speeches at the college included Mennonites, Catholics, Unitarians, and more. In his thinking farmer way, Berry debunked the rational mind that pervades modern culture. Industrialization has crept into just about everything, including religion, and people tend to think of much of life as commodities and economic products, he said. He prefers to approach living with a sympathetic mind, one that still values faith, loyalty, and, above all, love.

In his thinking farmer way, Berry debunked the rational mind. . . . He prefers to approach living with a sympathetic mind, one that still values faith, loyalty, and, above all, love.

In his Kentucky drawl, Berry read the story from the Gospel of Matthew of the shepherd who goes in search of the lost sheep. A shepherd with a rational mind would write off the loss of one sheep among a flock of 100. The shepherd in the story, one with a sympathetic mind, values the individual sheep and seeks wholeness. The shepherd knows or imagines what it's like to be lost and goes to find the sheep to spare it and return to being able to tend the whole flock. (Berry knows sheep. About the only commercial enterprise on his 125-acre farm is a flock of lambs they raise to sell as meat, he says.)

Berry as Guide Through Our Cultural Wilderness

Many Anabaptists have never heard of the man *The New York Times* called the "prophet of rural America." He doesn't dispense the pop psychology of Dr. Phil or Deepak Chopra. But my guess is that more Anabaptists, or Anabaptist sympathizers, would rather trust Berry than any pop psychologist as guide through the wilderness that is contemporary Western culture.

Berry himself would have no such thing. He's too private a man and says he isn't comfortable with the title of prophet. He's simply a man with work to do—work that includes sitting with a pencil and paper and writing. If you call Berry's home and get a busy signal, it's not because he's online. He says he'll never buy a computer and that his wife, Tanya, will continue to convert his handwritten manuscripts into the typed ones that have become 32 books.

But Anabaptists and those of like mind would do well to read Berry in one hand and the Bible in the other. He's not calling for everyone to buy a team of horses and go back to farming, but he wants all of us, whatever religious affiliation we may claim, to use what little intelligence we have to live in such a way that we do less harm to the land.

He admires the Amish and how they maintain their landscapes and

communities. He praises David Kline, an Amish writer in Holmes County, Ohio, who has found a way to provide goods for a local economy and value his place among God's larger creation.

But seeking wholeness isn't relegated to a type of people or only rural residents, though that's the place Berry prefers and works out of. People in cities should make agricultural decisions to eat responsibly and not contribute to the industrialization of modern agriculture, which Berry says dumps toxins into the biosphere and contributes to the erosion of the land we're responsible to care for.

At Goshen College, a few young Mennonites asked for advice as they sought higher education and vocation. Having taught for several years, Berry has been critical of higher education and, fed up, has left academia. Vocation, meanwhile, he has always advocated.

Berry isn't comfortable being asked for advice. He prefers to think and put forth ideas, hoping people will latch onto them. After the speech, Berry's son Danny, who drives with Berry to some events, stood outside the church waiting for his father to be done with the admiring mass. That didn't happen until nearly 11:00 p.m. Danny quietly protested how his father was asked for advice and said simply, "He's a thinker."

Being Inspired by Berry

This thinker said he likes Mennonites, as he's experienced them. But more important than being liked by him is being inspired by him.

Two generations ago, many Mennonites were separated from the modern culture. As practices within the church have changed, so has the comfort level with the surrounding culture. Now, many of us, particularly those born since John F. Kennedy was president, are engaged in the culture. This has made us, in belief, lifestyle, and appearance largely indistinguishable from those around us.

At a denominational Mennonite assembly at Nashville in 2001, I was surprised on July 4 to see Mennonites wearing Old Navy T-shirts emblazoned with American flags. Wearing a brand name T-shirt with a flag on it seems a far cry from the days of capes and coverings and offering allegiance only to God.

Greater involvement in culture need not in itself be a bad thing, but I think Mennonites who know little about cultivating the soil would do well to cultivate some of the discomfort Berry has with contemporary culture. Weighing what politicians, media outlets, and megacorporations which produce food would like us to consume is important. So is dissecting the marketing plans being aimed at us as we learn to express our different Christianity in a different world.

Rethinking Patriotism and Terror

Since 9-11, Berry has exhorted people to rethink patriotism and terror (see his article in this issue, pp. 5-7). He reminds people that if they love their family, people in other places likely do too and would experience loss the same way after an attack. Retaliating with an attack isn't the answer. "It's a choice really between anger and generosity," Berry said in Goshen. "If your government has rationalized its anger, then you're going to be stuck."

Berry first told the Goshen crowd that if he'd had a gun and the opportunity, he would have killed five terrorists to save hundreds of other people. He later recanted, noting that was a hypothetical situation one can never know the true end of. "How are you going to know the outcome? You don't know in time," he said.

Part of the answer to dealing with terror is to be peaceable before a crisis starts. Anabaptists do, or at least should, know a little about that and may do well to share such learnings with neighbors.

I hope we build institutions the way my conservative "Old Order" Mennonite neighbors built part of a barn following an early morning fire.

Reclaiming Anabaptist-Mennonite Strengths

In a culture that focuses on immediacy, Berry is still thinking about the lessons of a great-great grandfather and how he might live in a way that doesn't damage the earth for future generations. As a farmer, he knows this year's crop isn't the only one to think about. He knows that the trees and the stones are part of his land, not something to get out of the way so the land can produce more. Mennonites would do well to think about the larger point of view, valuing the generations of the past and thinking about those to come.

My generation of Anabaptists, like so many before it, is a bridge from the way we were to the way we are becoming. Some of us are from Amish families that worked with horses and without electricity only a generation or two ago. Some of our parents were involved in serious conversations about whether women should wear a prayer covering.

In Mennonite circles these days, there's fresh talk about such issues as evangelism, about the need for new church structures, about what to do about such a controversial issue as homosexuality. As we brainstorm what fresh forms of congregational life and denominational structures are needed, I hope we think about creating institutions that work.

I hope we build institutions the way my conservative "Old Order" Mennonite neighbors built part of a barn following an early morning fire. Hours after the fire was put out, about 30 of them gathered to rebuild the portion that had been damaged. By evening, when the men stopped for a supper provided by the family, they were nearly done. The previous summer they had done the same thing down the road for another member of the church and even donated animals to replace the ones he lost.

They rallied together to support each other and build something one of them needed. They enjoyed the work together, laughing and bantering in Pennsylvania Dutch.

The portion of the barn won't stand forever. When it or another por-

tion falls, more of them will gather to build something that works for the next number of years, something that helps one of the people in the community get along. In the broader church, I hope we take the same approach.

Such barn-building is a tradition among some of us. Others of us simply admire that tradition. At the risk of putting words in his mouth, I think Berry would have us find our own traditions and carry them out. Living responsibly in a place means knowing where you came from and where you're going. Anabaptists have rich traditions that should be recognized and carried forth into a world where plastic and yammering televisions are now predominant.

Eating Well and Rightly

Berry also encourages people to think about what they put in their mouths. Even those who live in a city can eat responsibly and eat well. Much of Mennonite cooking started with what was available on the farm: lots of meat, eggs, and garden produce.

Now most of our food is grown for us, rathen than by us. Some among us have chosen not to eat meat. Some have grown to value the simple, ethnic foods found in such Mennonite-related cookbooks as *More with Less* and *Extending the Table*.

I hope Mennonites continue to eat well but think about food in a larger sense. Reading Berry has taught me that eating is an agricultural and social act that has larger ramifications than quenching hunger. Eating food produced in a local economy is a more sustainable practice than opting for that produced by industrial agriculture megacorporations. Mennonites may not be as agrarian as they once were, but they can still play a role in creating communities that work and are sustainable.

This formerly Southern Baptist farmer (my impression is that he is now a nondenominational Christian) came to Goshen College for a couple days. He talked about living responsibly in the world around us and living thoughtfully, but with a sense of life as a mystery, not a commodity. Then he went back to his farm in Kentucky. The people who came to hear him went back to class or to their jobs as nurses, ministers, social workers, and much more.

I don't know if anything happened because the groups met. I hope so.

—*Marshall V. King, Goshen, Indiana, is a reporter for* The Truth, *an Elkhart (Ind.) County newspaper. He discovered Wendell Berry while studying at Eastern Mennonite University in the early 1990s. He now resides in rural Goshen with his wife, Bethany, and a lovely dog named Kohl, who is enjoying the two acres they recently moved to.*

There's a Pastor in the Women's Restroom!

Sandy Drescher-Lehman

A month ago, our daughter became a teenager. John and I had seen it coming and had pondered how we could best welcome her to womanhood. The ritual of a tea party, at which her female relatives and mentors would surround her and gift her with their womanly wisdom, held some appeal—but only to me, was my husband's gentle reminder. Me, the extrovert; the party animal for whom any occasion can elicit plans for a celebration! Our daughter, on the other hand, tries her best to be invisible. At 13,she is more easily embarrased than we would have imagined. A tea ceremony would definitely not be a bonding experience.

My desire to mark this passage lingered, however, because I wanted her to hear different voices from those I had heard at 13. I hadn't wanted to become a woman. I was proud of sewing my first dress, but kitchen duties were not going well. I didn't even know the worst yet—that most of my culinary attempts for years to come would land in the trash.

I wanted to make people laugh like my dad and to travel and preach and write like him. I couldn't imag-

ine having children. They were too materialistic, too dependent, and probably all like the boys I babysat. They spit in my face when I pushed them as high as they demanded on the swings, and they wouldn't eat what I made for lunch. Who needed kids! Who would want to be a woman?

As it turns out, I love being a woman and a wife and a mother, and I love to travel and preach and write. I have always wanted to give our daughter a jumpstart on appreciating who she could become.

Since her community of mentors has already broadened beyond our family and neighborhood, we invited the wisdom to come to her by mail in the form of entries for a scrapbook. She could then pore over the pages in the solitude of her own room as she was ready. That's more her style.

One prayer, sent to her from Kansas, caught my attention: "O God—help me to believe the truth about myself, no matter how beautiful it is" (Macrina Wiederkehr). Many women wrote similar encouragement: "Believe in yourself"; "Listen to what God is saying to you"; "Hear God's call for you, even if it doesn't fit the box others try to put you in." My soul thrills at these pieces of wisdom being shared with our daughter.

Another part of me, however, is angry that girls and women still need to work so hard at believing they are beautifully created. There are still too many times when women are blocked in our ability to hear God's call because of the parameters others believe we are born into and with which we consequently agree.

As I think about my profession, the pastoral ministry, I celebrate with my sisters who are also being used by the church in pastoral leadership. I celebrate because we have somehow been given the gift to hear and follow God's call in a place where we have been told God does not speak. We have been given grace to hear Jesus' invitation to help feed his flock and to know that this includes the church kitchen and children's Sunday school rooms even as it does not exclude the pulpit and desk of a pastor.

As one of my friends said when I was preparing to preach, "I was praying that God would give you a shot of testosterone, but what we really need is some mother's milk."

We are being invited into the holy moments of people's lives—birth, illness, marriage, baptism, anointing, and dying. Congregations are beginning to realize that women and men bring complementary gifts and together have more to offer than a solo pastor. Women no longer have to adopt the typically male structures of leadership through committees or power (or both), or of authority in relationships, to be recognized as effective pastors.

As one of my friends said when I was preparing to preach, "I was praying that God would give you a shot of testosterone, but what we really need is some mother's milk." We don't need to be men in women's clothing. We can be female pastors.

This is the world of possibilities I want to invite my daughter and her girlfriends into. I don't know that God will call her to the pastorate, and just because I have found fulfillment in working for the church doesn't mean I need her to do the same. But I want her to know that her call from God is not limited by her gender.

As I hear concerns in the Mennonite church and elsewhere about shortages of pastors, I long to hear an admission that we have only begun to tap the resources that can be found in the other half of the human population—the female half. I would love to see as many women being invited to our "invitation to exploring ministry banquets" as men. I long for the day when the girls see and hear as many women preaching sermons (not just meditations) as often as they hear men, so they can know it's in the realm of possibility that God could call them to be pastors as well. I long for the day when each of us loves ourselves and the church as Christ loves us, no matter how beautiful.

—Sandra Drescher-Lehman, Green Lane, Pennsylvania, loves to laugh, bake bread, bike, and work on the ministry team at Souderton (Pa.) Mennonite Church. Her husband, John, reminds her to keep breathing deeply, and her children, Maria and Jonathan, give her reasons to do all of the above.

The Spirituality of Geography

Daniel Hertzler

Dakota: A Spiritual Geography by Kathleen Norris. Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

I have been interested in history and geography ever since I can remember, but especially in history because it is more apparent as a defined discipline. We learned geography in elementary school, then went on from there. Historians have a more respected place in society. Geographers just appear as someone to be consulted as needed.

Yet the two are interactive. The story of our faith is related to the geography of the region where it originated. We are told that Abraham left a power center at the east end of the so-called Fertile Crescent. He moved westward and ended up on the land bridge between the two ends of the crescent. It has been an area both geographically and politically unstable.

The political instability has been documented repeatedly. The geographical limitations are not as often mentioned. Yet Daniel C. Hopkins reports that "The amount of level land for agriculture was generally restricted, and the Mediterranean climate, while well suited for farming, was highly erratic and caused hardships three or four years out of ten." From "Life in Ancient Palestine" (*The New Interpreters Bible*, vol. I, 215). The story itself provides inadvertent support for this by references to famines during the travels of the patriarchs and their families to Egypt.

But when we read the Bible it is history more than geography that we dwell on. Our attention is called to the exodus from Egypt, the development and the downfall of the Israelite monarchy, the exile and restoration, and particularly the story of Jesus Christ. If we have gone out into the wilderness and come back, it is the story which has drawn us back.

Kathleen Norris has gone into the wilderness and come back. She tells her experience by stages in *Dakota*.

Kathleen Norris has gone into the wilderness and returned. She tells her story by stages in *Dakota*. She was a child of church and Sunday school, but when she encountered new ideas from a professor of religion, she began to question her faith and realized "I needed liturgy and a solid grounding in the practice of prayer, not a demythologizing that left me feeling starved, thinking: If this is religion, I don't belong." So she dropped out "for nearly 20 years" (92).

She came back to the church after she and her husband moved to Lemmon, South Dakota, to the house her grandparents had built in 1923. The extended family did not want to lose the house, but no one else was adventurous enough to move there. This move from New York to South Dakota thrust her into a stern geographical and social environment. She writes, "More than any other place I have lived . . . this is my spiritual geography, the place I've wrestled my story out of the circumstances of landscape and inheritance" (2). Geography and history, of course.

There is a lot to be learned in the Dakotas. The weather itself is a hard disciplinarian, with extremes of cold and heat, drought and floods. In 1936 a town in western North Dakota set a record of temperature extremes within the same year: from 60 below zero to 121 above. Norris writes of "a day so cold it hurts to breathe; dry enough to freeze spit" (25).

The weather affects the economy and the economy the people. Dakota people tend to be independent and conservative, sometimes their own worst enemies. "It seems to me," Norris writes that "especially in Western Dakota we live in tension between myth and truth. Are we cowboys or farmers? Are we fiercely independent types or community builders? One myth that haunts us is that the small town is a stable place" (8).

In truth, she says, the Dakotas have never been stable. As many as 80 percent of the original homesteaders left, and today the Dakotas are a place to get away from. Regarding those who remain, Norris is impressed by the wisdom she found, wisdom sharpened by the need to cope with the weather. "The farmers and ranchers of Western North Dakota can wait years for rain. I remember that at the

height of a four-year drought, rain came only once all summer, on July 11" (18). She also commends "the language of unschooled people, the language I was not much exposed to within the confines of the academic and literary worlds" (19).

On the other hand, she is distressed by those unwilling to open themselves to outside influences, even by reading. She writes, "Who could be more impoverished than the man, who on hearing news of a former teacher, exclaimed in a tavern, 'That old cow. She used to make me read. Said I couldn't graduate till I read all she wanted. Well I showed her; I haven't read a book since'" (51).

Nevertheless, Norris reclaimed her spiritual heritage on the Plains. For one thing, her own Protestant past came back to her. "It was a shock to realize that, to paraphrase Paul Simon, all the crap I learned in Sunday school was still alive and kicking in me" (97). She also discovered that spiritual sensibility had been in her family. She had had two religious grandmothers, one a fundamentalist, but the other with "a livable faith and tolerance that allowed her to be open to the world" (99).

Norris did not stop there. She found a Benedictine monastery on the Plains where the monks were in some respects better able to cope with the environment than the farmers and ranchers. Benedictine theology helped her to define more effectively the faith within her which had not yet matured. They helped her to come up with what she considers a more satisfactory definition of sin. "'Sin in the New Testament,'" a Benedictine told her, "'is the failure to do acts of love.' That is something I can live with, a guide in my conversion. It is also a much better definition of sin than I learned as a child: sin as breaking rules" (97).

To get the benefit of the Benedictines, she has become an "oblate, or associate, of a community of some sixty-five monks" (17). She is thus able to participate in some aspects of monastic life such as retreats. She observes that "pray and work is a Benedictine motto, and the monastic life aims to join the two. This perspective liberates prayer from God-talk; a well-tended garden, a well-made cabinet, a well-swept floor, can be a prayer" (185).

So this is the tale of Norris who found God again in the Dakotas. Hers is a distinctive story. What does it say to people with different histories and less severe geographies?

As a one-time farmer and inveterate gardener, I keep an eye on the weather. In southwestern Pennsylvania we have had occasional droughts and also a snowstorm or a rainstorm once in a while; we've even had tornadoes. Our weather is not the sort of heavy taskmaster Norris found in the Dakotas. Yet each of us has a context in which we are challenged to respond to the ultimate question once formulated by Waldemar Janzen as "the question of a new 'ontology', in philosophical terms or, more simply, a new answer to the question: 'What is really, really real?'" (*Still in the Image: Essays in Biblical Theology and Anthropology*, Faith and Life Press, 1982, 32). If we are listening and looking, geography and history may help us find an answer.

My community has had its own peculiar historical geography. Some can be read on our historical markers. Outside Scottdale, next to the St. John's Catholic Cemetery, a marker commemorates a 1891 explosion at the Mammoth No. 1 mine which killed 109 miners. Seventy-nine are buried in a mass grave in St. John's Cemetery.

Scottdale is a town with a history of opulence it can no longer match. The size of the houses on Loucks Avenue testifies to this.

Scottdale is a town with a history of opulence it can no longer match. The size of the houses on Loucks Avenue testifies to this. A historical novel, *Milltown Yank,* by Matt Miller, is based on the fact that from 1929 to 1931 Scottdale had its own minor league baseball team.

So Scottdale was once a prosperous, smoky industrial town. But I have been told that with the coming of the Great Depression, every industry either closed or moved out except Mennonite Publishing House and the U. S. Casket Company. In due time the latter would also close, and recently even the former has been dismembered.

I have not been sitting in bars and restaurants enough to be able to quote directly the local perspectives as well as Norris has done. But I had the impression that for at least a generation many felt nothing really good could happen in Scottdale. Of course, many of the social and economic changes affecting us have happened in the whole country: urban renewal tearing down the small shops in the downtown area, followed by between-the-towns mallization and eventually Walmartization.

The two Mennonite congregations in the Scottdale area are exploring merger in an effort to respond to forces which have reduced attendance and resources. If schools and banks are presumed to be more effective by merger, can churches deliver a more effective witness by coming together in one meetinghouse?

I'm interested in the summary of Benedictine spirituality Norris has reported: a slogan combining prayer and work and even viewing work as prayer. Some have wondered about a connection between Benedictines and Anabaptists, particularly in the person of the martyr Michael Sattler. Arnold Snyder writes that "Close comparison of reformed Benedictine literature with Sattler's writings has led one scholar to the conclusion that Sattler's christocentric emphasis, as well as his stress on the church as the pure and separated community of saints, have significant intellectual roots in Sattler's monastic experience" (*Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. 5, 794).

The prayer discipline of a Benedictine monastery is specific and rigorous. Norris has noticed that they go "to church four or five times a day. . . . It's not for the faint of heart" (185). Neither, as some have noted, is

Mennonite faith and practice. But people with families and careers do not perceive that they can spare that much time for formal prayers. Still it is of interest to see that worship has emerged as an important subject in Mennonite conversation. Special resources are published for use in our congregations during Advent and Lent.

What of Mennonite geography and history? It appears that Mennonites and Amish who migrated to North America have been able to preserve aspects of the radical Anabaptist heritage the descendants of those who stayed behind in Europe let slip. Were such trends caused by geography or history? More likely the latter, and the political systems that were determined to squeeze out the radicalism, particularly the Anabaptist unwillingness to participate in war.

It seems ironic that the German Mennonites evidently resisted the military oath but agreed to join the army. In a report to the Mennonite World Conference in 1948, Dirk Cattepoel told of how Mennonites "unreservedly resisted the oath." However, "The preachers, elders, and deacons were drafted into the army" ("The Mennonites of Germany" in *Fourth Mennonite World Conference Proceedings*, 16-17). We can imagine that resisting the draft in Hitler's time might have subjected the church once again to martyrdom.

Now Mennonites are found throughout the world where we encounter a variety of geographies and develop a variety of histories. Indeed, one of the more creative Mennonite projects in recent years has been the preparation of a world Mennonite history. Several volumes of it are due ouy this year. As they come together in a worldwide assembly, Mennonites speak to one another and, I trust, seek to learn from one another.

Some of them today live in countries in which violence appears to be a way of life. Others have suffered from drought and food shortages. Famine, in the end, is just is effective as violence. As I write, the question of whether the 2003 assembly will be able to meet in Zimbabwe, as scheduled, is yet to be finally determined.

I have been told, however, that we should look for a conference somewhere this year. And wherever we meet, the coming together of Mennonites from around the world will be a way of exemplifying that a common faith is possible even though our geographies are as varied as the world is wide.

—Daniel Hertzler, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, a long-time editor and writer, currently contributes a monthly column for the op ed page of the Daily Courier (Connellsville, Pa.). He is also author of A Little Left of Center: An Editor Reflects on His Mennonite Experience *(DreamSeeker Books/Pandora Press U.S., 2000). He first read Dakota in connection with a seminar on "Writing as Contemplation" directed by Kent Ira Groff of Oasis Ministries, Camp Hill, Pennsylvania.*

Body Is a Four Letter Word

Karen Jantzi

Some of you who may not understand what I am about to say. In fact, you may think this article slipped through the editorial cracks. Let me assure you that it didn't.

I have a body. So do you. God created my body and God said that it was good.

Before you dismiss me as either heretic or lunatic, let me explain why that statement is one of the foundations of my faith.

Your body is the temple of God and the spirit of God dwells in you. I don't know about you, but this was not a comforting thought. They didn't use that verse to promote a positive body image. It was usually followed by a list of things I should avoid, things that would defile the temple of God. Another list of verses gave the impression that the body was evil, must be denied, even mistrusted. Listening to the body was listening to the devil. Only the Spirit was good. The Spirit and the body were at war, and I became an active participant in that war.

As I matured, I developed an uneasy truce with my body. I learned to take better care of it. In return, I expected it to leave me alone. But I was never able to

completely ignore my body's response to color and texture, flavor and smell, movement and sound. I felt out of place, uncomfortable in church settings.

Worship was about the mind, the spirit, not the body. Was I the only person who found it impossible to stand still while singing a gospel song? Was I the only one who craved the feel of silk, the colors of the rainbow? Most worship services seemed lifeless, incomplete, missing important elements. Evidence that my faith was inadequate, my spirituality immature.

I was never able to completely ignore my body's response to color and texture, flavor and smell, movement and sound. I felt out of place, uncomfortable in church settings.

My understanding of my body began to change when a good friend encouraged me to try massage. At first it was frightening, showing my body, the enemy, to a stranger. Exposing my lumps and jiggles and marks. What if she laughed? What if she thought I was disgusting?

Instead, I found a place where my body was pampered, cared for, treated with respect and dignity. I learned how to relax and allow someone to care for me. I began to believe my body deserved care and respect. I celebrated my body's ability to experience the sounds, colors, textures, scents of creation.

Several years later another friend invited me to a dance. Again I was frightened. I couldn't dance. I would certainly make a fool of myself. I didn't know anyone there except the woman I was going with, and I wasn't dancing with her. Two years later, I am still dancing, every week, sometimes two or three times a week. Dance taught me the boundaries of my body, how it moves in space. Dance taught me to sing the music with my muscles and joints as well as with my mouth. Dance taught me to celebrate my body's ability to respond to the rhythms, the music of creation itself.

I now have a different understanding of my body as the temple of God. If I am the temple of God, I am responsible for caring for my body, for honoring my body as the place where the Spirit of God resides. Because God designed me, chose me, dedicated me, my body is worthy of respect and dignity. I do not need to despise my body; it is not evil. It is a place where people encounter the living God.

God gave specific instructions about worship in the temple. There were colors and sounds, smells and movement. Gold, jewels, fabric, incense, music, vestments—all were used to remind people of the presence of God. Worship engaged the senses in celebration of God's miraculous work. My body's delight in texture, color, sound, movement, taste, and scent are part of this worship, this celebration.

Does this mean I should follow my body's every desire and impulse? Of course not. Everything in the temple drew the mind and heart to a deeper relationship with the living God. That is the question to ask when I choose clothes, activities, food, rest, and so forth: Is this honoring God in me? Will this reflect God or distract from God? What am I saying about God, about myself, about the people I am with when I wear, do, say, eat, or drink this thing? When people are with me, do they sense the presence of God?

It isn't about fear but love. I am the dwelling place of the God of love, mercy, justice, truth, and compassion. The spirit is not just in my brain, but in my body. My body is the place where love, mercy, justice, truth, and compassion dwell.

I have a body and it is good.

—Karen Jantzi, Schwenksville, Pennsylvania, is a life-long teacher and learner. After completing her Ph.D., she hopes to write and teach in international settings. Anabaptist by birth and choice, her spiritual journey has also been enriched by writers, poets, composers, musicians, ministers, priests, and ordinary people from many different faith traditions.

Dancing

Mennonites don't dance.
It's not something you ask about:
mothers frown, wave their hands,
talk incomprehensibly.
I used to sneak channel 12 on downstairs,
watch the Canadian National Ballet.
When I was eleven
my legs grown long,
I asked Dad for Nutcracker tickets.
I think he was happy,
my first time at a city stage
not filled with a choir.

—Cheryl Denise, Philippi, West Virginia, is author of I Saw God Dancing*, the collection of poetry from which "Mother God" comes and which was awarded first place in the 1998 West Virginia Writers Annual Spring Competition.*

Should Believers Churches Take Up Liturgical Confession of Sin?

Marlin Jeschke

Confession of sin has been a standard fixture in the liturgy of many churches for centuries. You may remember the old cadences of the Anglican or Methodist traditions, where the congregation recited, "We have broken your holy law. We have done those things which we ought not to have done, and have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and there is no health in us."

The absolution used to be intoned in words such as those from John's Epistle, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Today churches may have updated the language, but confession is still in the liturgy of most mainline churches. Because of the age and ubiquity of this tradition, it may sound like sacrilege to question it, but I believe it does call for examination.

To begin with, I wonder why there's always a confession of sin but not a commendation for the opposite—obedience to God's law. In just about any Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Mennonite, or other church, the average member obeys many more of God's laws in any given week than he or she breaks. If so, it would be more appropriate to have a positive confession, something like, "We are grateful that, thanks to your grace, we have kept your holy law and that there are encouraging signs of healthy spiritual life within us."

Now I'm sure that many people would immediately say this smacks of self-righteousness. But why? A confession that we have obeyed God's holy law is, as I have said, thanks to God's grace at work within and among us. And to acknowledge that we have obeyed God's holy law is as true a statement as to confess that we have broken it.

Perennial confession of sin without a commensurate recognition of the considerable extent to which we do *not* commit sin in our lives is psychologically unhealthy.

Perennial confession of sin without a commensurate recognition of the considerable extent to which we do *not* commit sin in our lives is psychologically unhealthy. As contemporary psychology would tell us, we must not only be honest about our failures and weaknesses but also give honest recognition to our self worth. Healthy personal and social ethical life is not possible without it.

Imagine a home in which at every supper Mom or Dad says, "Now children, let's all confess what we did wrong today, and ask for forgiveness for it." Imagine that they did so without commending the children for the good things they did, or celebrating their many positive activities and achievements. What a downer!

We shouldn't need a psychologist to tell us what's wrong with a family in which, at the breakfast table, Dad can talk only about the free throw his daughter or son missed in last night's game, and not about the 17 points she or he *did* make—or about that daughter or son's good sportsmanship. (A missed free throw may not be a moral matter, but the principle of negativity is still there in Dad's harping on it.) Sad to say, too many families do need a therapist to remind them moral behavior doesn't happen without positive reinforcement.

But there's another aspect to perennial confession that bothers me. It is the routine and general character of the confession that seems to give no attention to serious correction of those failures we *do* acknowledge.

Let me illustrate. Suppose patients came to a physician time after time for periodic checkups and confessed, "Doctor, we haven't observed the rules of health. We still haven't given up smoking, still have not overcome alcohol misuse, still not gotten adequate exercise, and still are overeating." Imagine that each time the physician said, "You're forgiven."

We would think there was some serious irresponsibility here. Any self-respecting doctor would counsel such

patients on how to join Alcoholics Anonymous, get into an exercise program, or start a healthy diet. It would be unconscionable to tell a patient not working at correcting such problems that she or he was simply forgiven.

Unfortunately most liturgical confession means little or nothing the following week in the lives of those who made such a confession. That is the feeling I get when I hear the weekly confession of sin in any church.

God knows confessions are needed on occasion—but for specific failures. If there has been an ethical lapse in the congregation, the entire congregation, not just some individual, may be prompted to confess the failure in life or ministry that led to such sin.

Yet that confession would, I hope, be accompanied by action, as the individual or congregation took specific steps to deal with failure much as physician and patient might take steps to deal with a health problem. Confession is real only if it is a step toward changing behavior, and that happens most effectively when it focuses on and names specific sins and is not just a general incantation.

It's important here also to understand the true meaning of forgiveness in response to confession. Rightly seen, forgiveness is not perennial absolution. It is not just letting people off over and over, which is a mere toleration of continued sinning, immunizing people against amendment of life.

In contrast, forgiveness rightly understood is empowerment. Where there is authentic penitence and confession followed by an authentic word of forgiveness, it liberates people and enables genuinely changed behavior. A perennial general confession and absolution without concrete steps toward overcoming sin does not lead to spiritual health and life but anesthetizes us against it.

We need to be reminded of the origin of the practice of weekly liturgical confession. As Dom Gregory Dix points out in his ponderous tome, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (1945), the church of the first centuries had two services: One was a service for catechumens (converts taking instruction with a view to baptism), and the other was a service of the "faithful" (baptized believers). It was the first service for baptismal candidates that included confession of sin, and quite appropriately so, for they were turning from their past life, "renouncing the devil and all his works." They were also taught the Apostles' Creed, which was the confession of faith they would make at their baptism.

When the service of the catechumens was over, the priest pronounced a "dismissal" of the catechumens, the word we still have behind the modern word "mass." Then followed the service for baptized believers, which included the Lord's Supper.

For some reason the two services got merged into one service with the passing of time. Dismissal ceased to mean that the catechumens were dismissed. Instead it became the name of the merged service, which now included weekly confession of sin by baptized believers. With that, a distinction between the purposes of the two services seems to have been lost.

With the development of Constantinian Christianity, the distinction between believers and unbelievers seems to have gotten lost too. In the full-blown Constantinianism of the Byzantine Empire and medieval Europe, all were automatically Christian just by belonging to their society, but at the same time many people were not really Christian. The distinction we see in the New Testament, between those who have crossed over into the way of Christ and those who have not, was erased.

With the development of Constantinian Christianity, the distinction between believers and unbelievers seems to have gotten lost too.

It is instructive to see how the apostle Paul writes to believers. In letter after letter he does not begin by calling for confession of sin. Paul begins instead by commending his converts for their walk, their good works, their obedience, the evidence of their following the way of Christ. True, he may follow this up with exhortation. But even in his letter to the Corinthians, in which Paul gets down to scolding and disciplining that congregation for their sins, he begins with commendation. That in itself should teach us what comes first.

We can see then how weekly confession of sin became part of the liturgy of European Catholicism, continued in European state churches, and has remained a practice also in mainline churches in America that are transplants of European state churches. What is disconcerting is the inclination of Anabaptist-Mennonite church worship leaders to become enamored with this liturgical practice. Maybe it says something about what we consciously (or unconsciously) feel our congregations have become: that we are now Constantinian too and not sure of the Christian status of our members.

If so, liturgical confession is not a cure for the challenge of perennial sin in the life of church members but actually perpetuates that problem. As we can see from the practice of weekly liturgical confession in the history of Constantinian Christianity, it does not achieve the sanctification of church members. It fosters the assumption of perennial failure; it fosters the idea of cheap grace; it doesn't address specific failures and doesn't help believers overcome them; and it fails to offer the kind of positive commendation for joyful obedience to Christ the Apostle Paul showed us how to use.

Confession of specific sin, accompanied by victory over such sin, is always in order in both individual and congregational life. But the weekly ritual of liturgical confession does not belong in the believers church tradition.

—Marlin Jeschke, Goshen, Indiana, is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Religion at Goshen College, where he taught for 33 years.

Through Turmoil, Chamber, and Love

When Death Announces Its Nearness, Part II

Evelyn King Mumaw

From Crisis to Rest

The conflict was fierce and raging. Should I submit to the poison of chemotherapy and the burning of radiation even though it was clear this would not cure the cancer? Or should I submit to time and the ravages of the disease?

I was tossed about from one approach to the other. I suffered intensely. I cried out to God for direction. But only silence surrounded me. To do or not to do—either way was a decision. Seldom if ever have I so thrashed around when faced with a major decision.

It was on a misinformed premise that I made my decision. I was to have another CT scan before starting treatment. I assumed it would inform whether there had been change in the tumor. If it was shrinking, I would not submit to treatment. If it had grown, I would take treatment. But by the time I learned that information would not be available, I was already in the system.

Strangely enough, I relaxed. I figured if I had not had the treatment, the time could come when I would think, *If only I had had the treatment when it was advisable*. But having had treatment, I would have the satisfaction of knowing I had done what I could. I would not need to deal with "if onlys." And I was at peace.

Waiting Room—Gloom

They come—young and old—on foot and in wheelchairs, from various walks of life, the obviously privileged and underprivileged, and the turbaned ones who shrink from exposing their hairless heads.

They sign the "in" register, are seated, and wait for the lady in the pink vest to call their names. Usually they are accompanied by a family member, a neighbor, or a friend. Mostly they wait in silence. No cheery banter or animated conversation. The atmosphere tends more toward gloom, hopelessness, and despair.

They come—young and old—on foot and in wheelchairs, from various walks of life, the obviously privileged and underprivileged, and the turbaned ones who shrink from exposing their hairless heads.

The in-out process continues for hours at a time. I am aghast at the numbers of people who must come to this place. And the "all kinds" of people struck by this plague!

Lord, help me and others to rise above this gloom and sense your presence, warm and intimate, regardless of this other ominous invader of our bodies.

The Chamber

The walls are six feet thick. The inside of the room is cold and sterile. The treatment table is hard, straight metal. The paper cover slides uncontrollably as I try to position myself on it properly. I lie there, hands above my head, midriff exposed. Above me is an ominous movable machine.

The attendant positions me perfectly. Then she says, "I'll be back," as she exits the chamber and leaves me there alone.

I know it will not hurt at the moment the radiation strikes my body. I know the technician is watching from her safe place. But for a moment I think of other chambers where observers watch the final struggle of the chamber's occupant. I try to think of other things and await the zapping hum and quick release to the world of unzapped people. Twenty-eight times I follow this procedure.

Radiation Technicians

What a task to have! One after another they lead their "victims" to the interior of the chamber. They position a patient on the table and the radiation machine above her before they exit, push the proper buttons, and watch by remote view.

Routine? Yes, but they are more than functioning robots. They are warm, gentle, sensitive, caring persons. It almost seems they know their patients personally as they anticipate their needs and calm their anxieties. They offer a warm blanket to temper the coldness of the chamber, a birthday card to recognize a landmark of

special significance, a friendly greeting, a cheery good-bye, and a congratulations card and a hug when the course is finished.

In tears I plead with them never to lose their caring warmth, never to let their work become routine or to harden them. "You know," I say, "You are dealing with so many hurting people."

"We meet so many wonderful people!" comes their reply.

A Bastion of Support

Thirty-plus journeys to the cancer center. Sometimes the trip involved a brief time; sometimes it was for hours.

Family, neighbors and friends. They gave their time, presence, support, and transportation freely, willingly, and graciously. With all those trips I never needed to drive my car, travel by myself, hunt for parking, or stay alone in the waiting room.

They were Grace, Kathryn, Lelia, Arlene, Evelyn, Mary, Kenneth, Florence, Esther, Byron, and Audrey. And they were there as needed.

Thank God and all his emissaries who formed that circle of loving protection around me!

Holy Nudges

I wonder. Again.

Is Jesus trying to wean me from life so that I will be ready for him to take me home to spend my days with him?

Was that his first effort when I walked through the valley with my heart surgery? But I resisted. I let the doctors take me apart and put me back together.

I gradually rebounded and loved this life again. I was once more an earth child, albeit with a greater sensitivity to heaven.

Now this. A whole new vocabulary bombards and invades my thinking: incurable, terminal, palliative, core, hospice, and one year. *Why this?* I think again.

Maybe it is Jesus making his bid again. Nudging me. Weaning me gradually from earth. Calling me to think of heaven and a new home. And family and friends gone on before. Even more, calling me to reach toward comprehending my incomprehensible God. Getting me ready for face to face fellowship with him.

"I am coming, Lord. I just don't know when."

Doctor Visits

Each Tuesday I'd see the radiologist and each Monday the chemotherapist. For weeks the visits were much the same.

"Are you having trouble with nausea?"

"Not really. Just a little queasy."

"How is your appetite?"

"Oh, good. And my weight is holding steady."

"Do you have pain?"

"No. Not more than my arthritis."

"Any soreness in your mouth?"

"No."

"Any soreness where you're receiving the radiation?"

"No, not really."

The doctors looked pleased and I was surprised.

Then it hit me—the nausea, the loss of appetite, the vomiting, the weight loss, the weakness. It didn't take me long to lose ten pounds.

Now my countdown was becoming more and more difficult. Twenty-five down, three to go. Twenty-six down and two to go. So sick I missed going one day. But finally twenty-eight down. Finished! Congratulation card and a hug from the therapist

Followed by weeks of effort to regain appetite. And another CT scan.

New Empathies

My empathetic ability has expanded. Almost every time I look in the newspaper, turn on the TV, scan the obituaries, or listen to conversations around me, I hear or see that someone has or had cancer.

A whole new population with which to identify or empathize presents itself. And I can do it. I know the shock, the denial, the fear, the dread, the helplessness, the anger, the side effects of treatment.

"Lord, help me to use every emotion, every pain, every struggle . . . to understand, to care, to be a channel of your love and grace."

So soon Jesus responded to that commitment and fellow sufferers came.

Jeanette: Child of artistic promise, lover of birds, brim full of life and potential. Now at nine years old—with brain cancer that threatens her vision, her mobility, and her very life. She is completely bald from chemo.

I invite her to sit by me on the sofa. With my arm around her we talk, even though her participation is limited. When she leaves, she looks at me and says, "We could write!" Yes, little Jeanette, we will write about our cancers and about the Lord and our bird sightings, too.

Then came *Brian:* Young, hearty-looking, married less than two years. He too has been told it is malignant. Though surgery has presumably left him "clean," the experience is fresh in his thoughts and emotions, and he shares freely. "It changes your whole outlook on life," he says.

We understand each other's feelings. We recognize also the difference in age and circumstances. But despite those differences, we find each other in a special way.

Gethsemane

The chemo and radiation treatments are completed. The moment of truth approaches. The time for the scheduled CT scan draws near. The test that will tell the truth of my condition. Has there been any shrinkage of the tumor? Is it the same size as when the treatment began? Or is it larger than it has ever been?

I approach the day of the scan with deep feelings. If the Lord is to bring healing, it seems it should be now, before the scan.

I think of the thousands of prayers that have been and are still being offered for my healing. I beseech the Lord to gather them all together into one great petition and hear them.

I think of Jesus in the garden and plead as he did that this cup should pass from me. Please, please Lord, you can shrink it, slough it away, heal my body.

But I know my body well enough to know the deadly growth is still

there. I sense its presence—its effects. "You need to work fast, Lord."

And what if he doesn't? What if the scan tells clearly the dreaded story? Will I be angry? Doubt the efficacy of prayer? Doubt God himself?

I think of Jesus as he faced his death. His plea had been offered up. His whole being begged to avoid the horror that awaited him. Nevertheless, there was something greater, more perfect than release—"Not as I will, not my will, but as thou wilt, thy will be done," he cries.

I have endured the trial and have not been delivered. Now is my time to trust.

I can't see what would be good about death by cancer, about how it would bring him glory, fulfill his purposes. . . . But I can trust the One who sees what I cannot see; whose ways are far beyond my ways.

And so I say, "Nevertheless, not as I will but as you will; your will be done. And I will rest in your will."

The Report

The CT scan has been given. The hour has come for me to meet the chemotherapist and hear her report on the findings of the scan.

Matter-of-factly she tells me in essence that there has been no real change in the tumor since the earlier CT scan. It is the same size now as it was then. Furthermore, she adds that their treatment possibilities have run out; there is nothing significant they can do for me.

The one positive note I pick up is that the tumor has not grown since the last scan.

I receive the report as matter-of-factly as it was given to me. I am not surprised or even dismayed. It is much as I expected it might be.

Disappointed? Yes. I have endured a lot of misery and expense without having positive results.

I have been thinking of three young Hebrew men who, faced with a terminal trial, declared clearly and bravely that they knew their God was able to deliver them—but if God did not choose to do so, they would remain true to him.

I have endured the trial and have not been delivered. Now is my time to trust.

I remember that God is still able to heal. He is not dependent on the treatments.

Now what shall I do?

Alternatives

When the oncologists say they have no more help to offer one, it seems reasonable to pay attention to alternative suggestions. These came to me gradually from a variety of sources.

Soon after I came home from the hospital, I was cleaning out my files when I came to a folder labeled "Personal Medical." In it I found an item I had not thought of for a long time. It was entitled "Asparagus Therapy." Several years earlier a cousin who had been ill with cancer but was now doing fine sent me this material. I received the clear impression that this could be my answer. I read with interest how a group of cancer patients had regained their health by using four tablespoons of liquefied asparagus in the morning and the same amount in the evening.

My sister Almeda lives down in Paraguay. Soon after she learned of my illness she wrote about the bark of LaPacho. This tree grows in Paraguay and is used to treat cancer. I discovered in our country it is called Pau d' Arco and can be acquired in tea bags or health food stores. It is claimed that "its active ingredient lapachol has direct anti-tumor activities."

A friend offered "they say grape juice is good for your problem."

Another friend had heard of a doctor who had been considered terminally ill with cancer taking over her care and treating herself nutritionally. She had stopped using sugar and animal products. She now appears to be in good health.

A neighbor reminded me of Essential Oils and wondered if they might help. I called Reba. She brought her book and samples. It sounded interesting. I suggested we start with a basic limited program. Clove, frankincense, lavender, and mint are all oils considered anti-tumor agents. I settled for these, drops in hands rubbed on the tumor area and bottom of feet twice a day.

Even the medical world is acknowledging the benefit of prayer for the ill. Many people are praying for me. I have been greatly supported and strengthened by these prayers.

None of these alternatives is toxic, difficult to acquire or to use, very expensive, or in conflict with FDA recommendations. Whatever else they may or may not do, they are hope producers. And an attitude of hope is in itself therapeutic.

—Evelyn King Mumaw, Harrisonburg, Virginia, has long been a retreat leader as well as author of many articles and books, including Journey Through Grief *(Masthof Press, 1997) and* The Merging: A Story of Two Families and Their Child *(DreamSeeker Books, 2000). This article continues the story of her illness begun in the Winter 2003 issue of* DSM. *As she notes, her health is tenuous and at the moment it is unclear whether she will have energy to continue writing.*

In a Compromising Position

Valerie Weaver-Zercher

"Let us not, then, take our littleness lightly. It is a wonderful grace."—Macrina Wiederkehr, A Tree Full of Angels

I was almost going to spend next year in Southeast Asia. For several years my husband and I had been talking about spending his sabbatical in a year of service with a church organization, and we were now coming close to finalizing the details. We would rent our house, pack up our two-year-old and five-month-old sons, and catch a plane in May, one week after my husband's semester was over. We had told friends and family of our plans and, perhaps most telling, had begun that subtle but significant lingual switch from "*if* we go" to "*when* we go."

And then I chickened out.

Gave in to my inner scaredy-cat.

Bolted.

For the past several months I've been trying to figure out other ways to phrase this. I've been seeking more self-affirming and constructive language to describe my about-face in this process. These discourses are available—and this column is, in a way, about finding them.

But there's something raw, something stark about those first phrases that I can't ignore and don't want to ignore. I don't think it's just warped psychological self-flagellation, either, that makes me want to retain those characterizations. I think they hint at something deeper about the messages that our fears can contain, the grace of learning our "littleness," as Wiederkehr calls it, and the blessing of sometimes compromising our commitments.

My journey began last autumn, with intense excitement about the work I would be doing—the development of a curriculum for a peacebuilding institute. It combined two passions of mine, writing and peacemaking, and apart from the audible voice of God, seemed to fit all the characteristics of vocation and calling I could imagine.

I was excited about learning from the people with whom we would live, about the way this cross-cultural setting would form me and my husband as global citizens with more intimate understandings of international issues like poverty and war. I looked forward to telling my children about this year as they grew up, helping them understand the values and commitments that led their father and me to choose this.

But as snow and ice shouldered into the Eastern Seaboard, so did my doubts about this coming year. I won't recount all the doubts here, partly because I'm ashamed of some of them and partly because I can't articulate that deep, wordless, often nighttime-appearing intuition that a decision just doesn't "fit." Suffice it to say that anxiety began to outweigh my initial excitement about the position, and after much conversation with each other and some close friends, we decided to back out.

I'm still trying to figure out this whole business of fear. I'm accustomed to looking at fear as something to be overcome, not something to befriend.

So we're going to Kentucky instead. Appalachia is hardly as exotic as Southeast Asia. It won't stretch us in the same way, won't test our cross-cultural mettle. But right now, with two small children and only a year to give, it feels like a better fit. Ever since deciding this, I've felt a deep-seated sense of peace.

I'm still trying, however, to figure out this whole business of fear. I'm accustomed to looking at fear as something to be overcome, not something to befriend. Doesn't good psychology tell us that going deep enough into our fears will bring us insights into ourselves that unleash us from those fears' powers? Doesn't Jesus tell his disciples to "Fear not," and don't countless psalms offer comfort for times of terror? Fear prevents us from reaching for our ideals and causes us to compromise our deep-seated values. Right?

Yes—to all of the above. But what if at least some of our fears hold within them important messages from our "subconscious minds" (read: God), messages we need to listen to rather

than silence? What if my anxieties about going to Southeast Asia were signals that I was reaching some internal limit, some "littleness" that I needed to heed?

In his astute little tome, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*, Parker Palmer writes of the danger of trying to give something that one doesn't possess, of "violating one's nature in the name of nobility." When I try to live as the noble person I *think* I should be, rather than as the person I really *am*, I can offer only "a false and dangerous gift" to others, because I am offering something that I do not have.

Humbly recognizing, then, what lies within my nature and abilities—and what doesn't—becomes a spiritual discipline of sorts. . . .

Humbly recognizing, then, what lies within my nature and abilities—and what doesn't—becomes a spiritual discipline of sorts, a recognition of the organic, real, and God-given self. As Palmer writes, "God asks us only to honor our created nature, which means our *limits* as well as our potentials" (emphasis mine). For someone who has just backed out of a challenging assignment, this is a comforting phrase. It releases me from that perfectionist voice within that says I must always confront and tame my fears.

What pulls me up short of embracing it completely, however, is this: *What about the martyrs?* What if Anabaptist martyr Anneken Hendricks had decided in 1571 that she really ought to listen to her fear of being burned at the stake rather than overcoming it? What if Felix Mantz had decided that being drowned in the river Limmat was really beyond his organic, God-given nature, and that instead he would honor his "littleness," renounce his faith, and thereby skip that nasty water treatment?

Or what if, more recently, Martin Luther King Jr. or Ita Ford or Steve Biko or any number of modern-day martyrs had decided that they ought to pay attention to what messages their fears of death might contain, hunker down by the fire, and write nice little essays about recognizing one's limits?

In other words, is writing this column a step toward knowing and honoring the self that God created? Or is it simply an exercise in self-justification?

I've read a lot about childbirth recently, poised as I am just one month past my second labor. I entered my first labor convinced that I wanted a natural birth, or at least as close to it as I could get. I did end up asking for some pain medication during active labor, but it wore off after about an hour and I pushed out that nine-pound-one-ounce boy completely medication-free.

I have to admit that I'm proud of that fact. I liked the admiration of the nurses on the morning shift saying, "Wow, I heard about you!" And I'm proud that my body could accomplish such a feat.

But not proud enough to have attempted it again. In fact, I became terrified about giving birth a second

time. Those hours of labor and delivery during the birth of my first son were the most excruciating and traumatic of my entire life and hardly resembled what I hear some women describe as a spiritual or empowering experience. So this time around I decided to ask for an epidural.

I wavered whenever I read books and articles advocating natural childbirth, however, because I agree so wholeheartedly with them. I agree that childbirth is a natural process and shouldn't be medicalized, if at all possible; I agree that women should trust their bodies, since they've been giving birth without medical intervention for millennia; I agree that North Americans tend to unhealthily seek the eradication of pain from all aspects of life and that epidurals can be seen as one symptom of that.

But the distance between the nobleness of these ideals and the (literally) gut-wrenching reality of my fears was too great. So when hard contractions started on that cold January afternoon, I turned my back (literally) on my natural birth ideals and called for the anesthesiologist. I nearly wept with relief when the epidural took effect, and less than two hours later I was holding our second precious son.

So does catering to my inner labor-and-delivery wimp mean giving up those ideals of what I think childbirth should be? Is there a way to hold onto ideals even while admitting that I'm too weak or scared or tired to reach them?

I hope so. I also hope that some of my values are attainable. But mostly, whether in life plans or birth plans, I hope I can offer myself grace during those countless times when my "littleness" trumps my ideals.

—Valerie Weaver-Zercher, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, is the mother of a toddler son and a newborn son as well as assistant editor of and columnist for DreamSeeker Magazine.

On Being Maladapted

A Review of "Adaptation"

David Greiser

Years ago I owned the Pink Floyd album "Ummagumma." The album had an unusual jacket photo. The photo showed the band standing next to a mirror. In the mirror was an identical picture of the band standing next to a mirror, and in that mirror was the same picture, and so on until the reflections in the mirror grew too small to see.

"Adaptation," a brilliant and complex movie created by director Spike Jonze and screenplay writer Charlie Kaufman, creates a similarly dizzying effect. This is a story within a story within a story. It is the story of an orchid fancier, John Laroche, and his obsession to find and harvest ghost orchids in the Florida Everglades. It is the story of a screenwriter's attempt to transform a book about Laroche's story into a film. And it is the story of how the orchid poacher, the writer, and the screenwriter become improbably involved in each other's lives (I will not reveal how). Above all, it is an essay on the multiple meanings of the movie's title. It is a story that exists at several different levels simultaneously.

The film contains scenes featuring real actors playing themselves (John Malkovich and John Cusack); real people played by actors (Nicolas Cage as Charlie Kaufman and Meryl Streep as Susan Orlean); and at least one person, Donald Kaufman, whose reality the film never makes completely clear, even though the credits list him as co-writing the screenplay. Got that?

What do living organisms do to thrive in the real world? How do we adapt? One critic suggested that to watch the film "Adaptation" is to become personally involved in the challenge of its creation. If that is so, then this film is quintessentially postmodern, since such co-construction of narrative is a tendency within postmodernity.

What do living organisms do to thrive in the real world? How do we adapt? One critic suggested that to watch the film "Adaptation" is to become personally involved in the challenge of its creation.

In real life, screenplay writer Charlie Kaufman, the creator of the critically acclaimed screenplays for "Being John Malkovich" (1999) and "Confessions of a Dangerous Mind" (2003) nearly drove himself insane attempting to adapt Susan Orlean's beautiful book *The Orchid Thief,* into a film. After five months of the attempt, Kaufman created instead a movie about his experience: a fictionalized Charlie Kaufman trying to adapt the same book into a film.

The result is a movie that blurs distinctions between fact and fiction, serving as an extended commentary on the creative process and the choices writers must make between integrity and "commercial success." Anyone who struggles to write will identify with Charlie Kaufman's self-analysis, self-loathing, and general neurosis.

The fictional Kaufman is a "serious" filmmaker struggling to render an unfilmable book into a movie without resorting to the usual chase scenes, cheap romances, or characters "learning profound life lessons." In a wonderful bit of irony, "Adaptation" manages to sneak all three payoffs to us without for a moment resembling the usual Hollywood schlock.

Nicolas Cage seamlessly portrays both Charlie Kaufman and his twin brother Donald. Cage gets deeply enough into the opposing personalities of these characters that I quickly found myself forgetting he was playing two people and accepted his portrayals at face value. Cage's Donald Kaufman is everything Charlie despises: intellectually shallow, facile with women, unreflective. He has come to Hollywood to sponge off his genius brother and to write a formula thriller movie that will make him rich. And he *succeeds*.

Meanwhile, the intelligent and idealistic Charlie struggles with writer's block and a sweaty shyness around women. He desperately wants to turn *The Orchid Thief* into a film but lacks the social confidence even to meet its author. Even so, he develops a crush on her as he fantasizes about her book jacket photo.

Meryl Streep, a woman of a thousand subtle emotions, portrays Orlean, an author who falls in love with the scruffy orchid poacher (played by Chris Cooper). Laroche is passionate about orchids and Orlean yearns to become passionate about *something*.

To be sure, Laroche's passions are short-lived. In one scene he tells Orleans that for years his passion was butterflies. Then one day he dropped butterflies in favor of orchids. After orchids he turns to Internet pornography. Always he is consumed completely by his passion *du jour*, and that intensity seduces Orlean.

About two-thirds of the way through the movie, the story takes a couple of completely surprising turns, but I will not spoil the experience for the viewer by revealing what those turns are. As it is, I have probably told you enough only to confuse you. Don't be put off; if you like movies that tease your mind while essaying on integrity, passion, and the sweet torture of the creative process, you should adapt well to this film.

—Dave Greiser tries to adapt with integrity to the demands of his own life in Souderton, Pennsylvania. He is on the pastoral team at Souderton Mennonite Church and teaches preaching part-time at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

Becoming Dear Friends

Honoring Your Stance and Mine in the Body of Christ

"You're too authoritarian, conservative, legalistic," charges one group. "You value rules over God."

"And you're too liberal, worldly, even heretical," worries the other. "You forget to say, 'Go and sin no more.'"

They split.

For 500 years those of us who are Anabaptist-Mennonites have stressed faithful living *and* community. We have believed we must practice what we preach in relationship with each other. Sadly, we have often been true to our ethical stances while violating our vision of mutual accountability. Certainly other denominations wrestle with splits also, but perhaps few have been as bedeviled by inability to reconcile values that turn out so often to be in opposition.

Repeatedly we have disagreed regarding how to be faithful. Frequently we have resolved the clash by affirming our own stand at the expense of continuing fellowship. We see this in the history of splits in denominations, conferences, congregations, and even families which continue to this day.

Is there another path? Is there a peacemaking way forward which allows us, members of a historic peace church, not to hate but to love the enemies we make of each other? Is there a way *to be true to our deepest commitments without splitting from those whose passions don't match ours*?

Seeking ways to live together without losing our own hearings of the gospel has been one of my scholarly goals. I want to share pointers glimpsed in the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. This German Christian philosopher has studied how we can at the same time honor our original perspectives *and* be blessed by other viewpoints.

Seeing Prejudices as Treasures

One of Gadamer's key points involves *prejudice*. We often see prejudice as a bad thing we must replace with an objective view of whatever's really in front of us. But for Gadamer prejudices are simply initial prejudgments—unavoidable "biases of our openness to the world." He means we never see exactly what is before us. Rather, we see through the lenses of our histories, backgrounds, peeves, loves.

This is as it must be, thinks Gadamer. We see only through the lens of who we are. Our biases spring from our beings and are the lenses through which we see whatever we see. These lenses are life's and God's gift. We cannot take them off any more than our personhood. People aren't microscopes, instruments which relay impersonal data. People are people. And people see through drawing on the rich mix of relationships and thoughts and feelings and memories we all are.

But Gadamer isn't done. Yes, as initial lenses through which we see, prejudices are treasures. But to stop there would be tragic. Then we'd be locked into observing only what we first see. Then there would be no way for our understandings of each other, the church, the Bible, God to grow.

Becoming Dear Friends

How do we grow? *By becoming friends*. A friend isn't just like me. If you and I are entirely alike, we're boring blobs of sameness. "Opposites attract," we say. So is the best friend the enemy most unlike me? No! Friends are enough alike to feel connected. "Birds of a feather flock together." True friendship is a blend: friends have enough in common to want to journey together. But as your friend I'm also drawn to what is unlike me in you which I sense can help me become the better person I yearn to be. Gadamer calls "dear" that part of you which can enlarge me, complete me, bring me home to the richer person I'm called to become.

If we saw each other as friends, then prejudices we treated as reasons for splitting we might instead see as dear to us.

If we saw each other as friends, then prejudices we treated as reasons for splitting we might instead see as dear to us. Imagine if not every clash of prejudices were cause for suspicion. Imagine if instead we asked, "Is your prejudice something that could be dear to me, complete me, cause me to grow into the larger person God is calling me to be?"

Gadamer is telling us there *is* a way to be true at the same time to ourselves and each other. That way invites us first to cherish our own prejudices. It then requires us to treasure the other's prejudices. It's as simple and as complicated as that. If all sides of a potential split truly make these two moves, they begin to step back from the fissure.

This remains a big *if*, however. *Both* sides must honor *both* sets of prejudices. Often only one condition is met: we value *our* prejudices. This in itself is right; I must be faithful to *my* truth for it to complete *you*. The problem is my not meeting the second condition of delighting in and risking being enlarged by *your* prejudices. Then again we exchange those "too-too-too" epithets. Positions harden.

Becoming Dear in Christ's Body

What might soften them? It's time to consult with the apostle Paul, who in 1 Corinthians 12-13 anticipated Gadamer. We may not squabble over exactly the spiritual gifts Paul focuses on, yet our theological and moral stances can be seen as gifts Paul also helps us manage. For Paul Christians are alike as members of Christ's body. Yet God gives us different gifts. We're as unlike as hands, noses, feet. Paul joins our common affirmations and different gifts by emphasizing that no gift can survive alone any more than can a foot. As parts of the same body, we're all dear to each other.

Paul stresses that now "we know only in part," we see only "in a mirror, dimly. . . ." All the parts, all the dim half-knowledges of this life, will pass. No gift, no stance, no matter how sure we are that we're God's prophets, will endure. Only one thing never ends. Only that which allows us to cherish what is dear in each other never ends: "Love never ends."

Love which never ends, because it lives and moves and has its being in God, is what may soften us. If love does spread among us, maybe we *will* treasure the *other's* prejudices as well as our own. Maybe we'll see splitting as a detour around the work of being completed by the other.

Such work may not prevent all splits. Some differences may truly be irreconcilable. My proposals open cans of worms I don't have space to address, am not aware of, or which at this time in our church life are wriggling too hard to hold. But though I need others to help me enlarge it, my prejudice is that the effort to remain in relationship is worth making.

Naming Each Other Dear Homemakers and Explorers

One way to begin might be to give each other not labels arising from enmity but names springing from friendship. Two names seem to me to highlight what in each other's prejudices we might see as the hand, arm, or leg which could become dear to us.

One is *homemaker*. Many amid today's chaos ache for home. This is why Frederick Buechner has called one book *The Longing for Home* and why he reflects on our love for earthly homes and that great Home toward which we're traveling. Their opponents label some people conservative, legalistic, rigid. What if as friends we named them homemakers?

What if we saw that we all would be homeless without those prejudices

through which homemakers make church home? My prejudice has been to focus on line-drawing dangers. But homemakers are teaching me much. What if I and we saw drawing lines, clarifying boundaries, conserving tradition as homemaker callings? What if we saw we can no more have church homes without such things than physical homes without walls and roofs?

Oh, but what if our longing for home grew obsessive? What if we only hunkered down? Then someday, food gone, lights out, the roof itself would cave in, the walls tumble. There at home we'd die. We need a second group. What if we named them *explorers*?

Their antagonists call them liberal, worldly, heretics—and indeed the labels hint at explorer tendencies to scrimp on home maintenance. But what if as friends we saw them instead as scouts, sent out to explore the territory, to ponder how in changing times food and light can still stream into church homes?

What if we applied such renaming, for instance, to divorce and remarriage? Homemakers stress the holiness of marriage bonds, consequences of breaking them, and the danger that easy remarriage will cheapen all marriage. But they risk making the divorced the church's homeless. Explorers want to update old church homes with the track lighting of God's forgiveness. But they risk weakening the walls which sustain marriage.

Homemakers and explorers can complete each other, however. This is the consensus that has emerged in a variety of congregations and church settings. Homemakers are bolstering church walls with divorce-is-tragic policies requiring members to process divorce and remarriage in congregational accountability structures. But explorer emphases are present in the move from eviction to faith that amazing grace shines even amid this sin.

Homemakers. Explorers. The names oversimplify; all of us are more complex than any one name can capture. But seeing one another through these or similar names may help us at least begin to grasp how dear we are to each other. Together we can maintain home and bring in food and light, if only we can learn amid our dim half-seeing to perceive this one thing fully: love—that true love from God which endures all things—never ends.

—Michael A. King, Telford, Pennsylvania, is pastor, Spring Mount (Pa.) Mennonite Church; and editor, DreamSeeker Magazine. *A version of this column was most recently printed in King's* Fractured Dance: Gadamer and a Mennonite Conflict Over Homosexuality *(Pandora Press U.S., 2001).*

A Plane Story

Noël R. King

"Hey, that was neat," Fred said to Thomas, his copilot. "We never even left the ground, did we?"

"Nope. Guess not," was Thomas's reply.

"Well, well," said Fred, who wasn't about to let the subject drop just like that. After all, it wasn't every day you started out to fly to Chicago in a 737 Airbus and ended up driving there instead.

It was a real case of one thing leading to another, but nobody quite knows what.

"Well, we just kept taxiing and taxiing. The next thing we knew, we could hear radio control in Chicago O'Hare, which was kinda weird, seeing as the airport we started out of was Dulles International," said Fred in an interview that evening. "Guess Tommy and I just got caught up in our conversation. Can't really tell you much more than that."

"Yup," said Thomas, not much for words, apparently, except when in the cockpit.

"I'm telling you," continued Fred. "Sure wish we knew how we did it. I'd highly recommend it to all pilots, you know, when runways back up or something like that. Or even when you just wanna try something different for once, you know? You kinda just wanna leap outta that cockpit sometimes if you have to keep doing the same old same old day after day."

"Yup," said Thomas. "That's true."

What about radio control, they are asked. Didn't the towers follow the plane's taxiing progress as it occurred?

"Nope," said Fred.

"Nope," said Thomas.

The two are being paid for the "flight" just the same as though it were a regular flight.

Most passengers who were interviewed following the "flight" expressed surprise at all the hullabaloo.

"What's the big deal? So we never left the ground. So what?" responded a harried-looking businessman rushing to his next gate. "A flight's a flight."

"Yes, it was a very nice flight," responded a gracious mother of three small children.

When informed it was not a true "flight," she simply replied, "Oh, it wasn't? Matthew! Stop pinching her." Turning back to the reporter, "I'm sorry. What were you asking me?"

Members of the public hoping to travel via the same non-"flight" method will unfortunately have to wait until it becomes more clear how this method was accomplished.

—As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Reston, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful things, including flights that don't leave the ground.

Postcript, March 19-31, 2003

This issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* was in preparation under the shadow of war. As has been true of so much in recent months, it was never clear when another before and after, all too reminiscent of the before/after created by 9-11, would emerge. Finally on March 19, 2003, as *DSM* went to the proofreader, the United States of America, fatefully implementing the policy of preemptive war Wendell Berry opposes in the lead article (pp. 5-17), went to war against Iraq.

There is no way to know as of this writing, begun March 19 and completed March 31, what is to come, as some still expect the liberators of Iraq to be greeted with joy and others suspect that the violators of innocent Iraqi civilians have plunged the world into a nightmare that will be unfolding for the rest of many of our lives. Or perhaps there will be an odd and ungainly mix, as both hope and horror streak out of Iraq and around the globe.

Let there be no forecasting here; there is too much already of being too sure of our truths. Let it simply be noted that this is a large historical moment, marking the beginning of a time in which hearts and bodies will break. Meanwhile we wait to learn what the new "normal" will look like, who will die and who will kill to bring it about, and whether the way of peace or the "myth of redemptive violence" (as Walter Wink puts it) will characterize it. —*Michael A. King*

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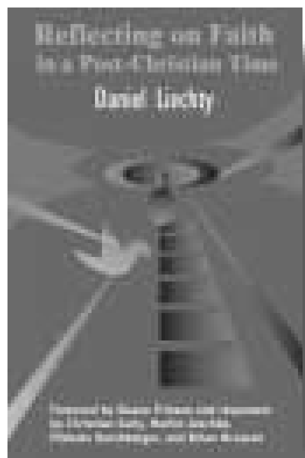

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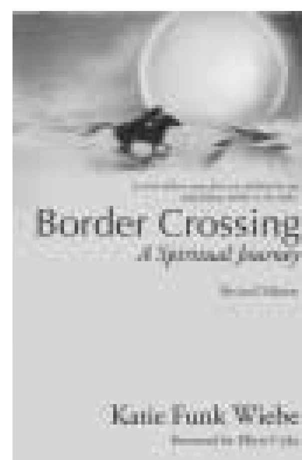

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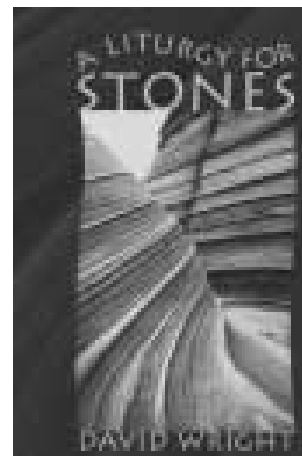

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Errand

Beside me in the blue Toyota van
you lean against the seat and stare
at the billboards, at the sunset

silently taking the world into
your mind in what proportions
I can only guess—does the Marlboro

cowboy looming before us color
your thoughts since you have seen
the movies that explain his lung cancer

death, or do you look beyond obstructions
to the purpling horizon, miniature pines
and dark houses, marking the place where

the earth curves out of sight? At the periphery
of my vision I am aware of your nine-year-old
body in jeans and baseball cap, freckled cheeks

and luminous dark eyes full and remote
as twin planets, as time's shadow
falling between us.

—Ann Hostetler, Goshen, Indiana,
is Associate Professor of English, Goshen College.

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