DreamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul

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Marginalia
Cracking Up: Can Peacemakers Have Humor and Hope?
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and much more

Winter 2002
Volume 2, Number 1

Editorial: Between the War and the Gingko Leaves

I'm not usually prone to escape fantasies, but this fall has been enough to turn anyone to contemplating how to get *out* of whatever we're *in*. I've followed some of those famous escape routes of North Americans—sleep, food, and movies—and added some hopefully healthier ones to the mix—walks, books, and playing with my baby. Either way, my goals have been non-thinking, diversion, oblivion.

I'm sure I would have had these urges even if the September 11 violence and the ensuing U.S. strikes in Afghanistan were the only crises (although "only" seems a bad choice of words). But then a friend dies just after September 11. Two sets of friends hit marital crises. Now everything seems loose at the hinges, or skidding downhill toward some edge.

So how does one avoid falling into extremes: the drain of workaholic activism and friendship, or the apathy of escapist pleasures?

I wonder how to balance the absorption and action in the world's and my friends' pain and the forgetfulness that suddenly becomes a grace-filled gift. Daily I wander between these two territories: replaying global and personal tragedies in my head and wondering how to pray or help, on the one hand; and the irresponsible joy of pushing a stroller and thinking only of sunlight and ducks and gingko leaves, on the other.

So how does one avoid falling into extremes: either the drain of workaholic activism and friendship, or the apathy of escapist pleasures? This issue of *DSM* provides one model of such balance. You'll find essays on the September 11 violence and U.S. military action and others that don't mention it. You'll be asked to touch the dust of the World Trade towers Steve Kriss wipes from his forehead with a tissue, then keeps for weeks, "feeling it was somehow too sacred to throw away." You'll be asked to consider arguments about arrogance and peacemaking and how to best follow Christ's way in days of two-sided terror.

Then again, you'll vicariously watch movies with David Greiser and read a book with Daniel Hertzler. You'll taste electricity and enter "the apparent, winter quiet" through poems by David Wright and William Dellinger.

Ultimately, as Parker Palmer writes in *The Active Life,* we should move beyond what he calls "the vacation approach," in which we exhaust ourselves engaging with the world, then retreat into contemplation to gather up energy for the next round. Action and contemplation can occur simultaneously, Palmer writes, so they are "the interwoven threads that form the fabric of who we are and who we are becoming."

For right now, however, when the grief of the globe and my friends' lives exhausts me, I'm going to settle for walking back and forth between the pain and the beauty, action and contemplation, absorption and escape. I have a feeling that I'm finding God somewhere in the middle of both.

—*Valerie Weaver-Zercher*

Editor
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Editorial Council
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Publication, Printing, and Design
Pandora Press U.S.

Advertising
Michael A. King

Contact
126 Klingerman Road
Telford, PA 18969
1-215-723-9125
pandoraus@netreach.net

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Veni, Sancte Spiritus

When the broken hearted spirit arrives, no one knows
how it enters the room, what to call the groaning ghost.

It could be flame, could be wind, could be song, or syllables
arcing on lips like sparks, arching tongues
to unfamiliar diction, speech so inarticulate and pure.

Wind, flame, words rush over us,
out of us, in a humiliating gush,
until the air bears the sounds of wings.

A dove hovers, trapped in our room,
its rounded, translucent blue head
dazed against the windows.

God is a small, brown-grey, beautiful bird
beating wings against unbreachable glass?

The comforter's voice vibrates in the spirit-drunk:
Shut up and listen. Lift up the sash.

Let the dove loose, a flame to singe the streets and sky.

Let untamed language fall on a thousand unsuspecting tongues.

—*David Wright's poems and essays have appeared in* The Christian Century, The Mennonite, *and* re:generation quarterly, *among many others. He teaches writing and literature in the Chicago area. February 1-3, 2002, he will be featured poet at the Mennonite Arts Weekend in Cincinnati, Ohio (see http://www.mennolink.org/arts-weekend/).*

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Cold Spell

Julie Gochenour

I shiver. It's only a mile to the barn, but the temperature has been dropping all day. I check the thermometer. Fourteen degrees. My coat, hat, and gloves feel invisible. So does my long underwear. The pond has completely frozen over. Only the neighbor's sheep, standing out of the wind, noses buried in their hay, seem oblivious to the cold.

I make a beeline for the truck. The steering wheel is like ice; even with gloves on, it all but grabs my fingers. But there's no use starting the heater. It would only blow cold air.

If possible, the barn's even colder. I fumble for the one electric light switch just above the stairs. "He sent darkness, and made it dark," says the voice in my head. Then I find the light. "What you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops," the voice murmurs as I go down to feed the calves. I push the voice aside and start filling buckets.

Even underground, it's so cold my breath condenses into clouds. The bottoms of bank barns have always struck me as holy places, places of refuge. My breath prayer of many years rises up in me as I pour sweet feed the length of a trough. "Lord Christ, be my

center, my life," I breathe. "Lord Christ, be my center, my life." Wind rattles the barn roof. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven. . . . Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me." Uggh.

Time to feed the cows. Despite the round bale in the barnyard, they're already waiting, looking up and jostling for a place at the trough as soon as the first door starts to open. I stretch to toss alfalfa, like bread from heaven, out the open doors into the empty racks below. "The eyes of all wait upon you and thou givest them their meat in due season," I think. Just as suddenly, I recall the drought a few years ago when there was no hay. Turning out the light, I slide the huge doors shut on the memory.

The cold is still there, waiting. Without the shelter of the barn, it takes my breath away. "Okay, God," I say, "I know you're here." I don't recognize that my words are a challenge. Or demanding. But the wind carries them away almost before they're spoken. And there's no answer, only the cold.

Bouncing over the frozen ruts, I look back at the barn sitting solidly in the growing darkness. But even that comfort is whirled away. "Fool, this very night your life will be demanded of you." It takes a long time to warm up once I get home.

After supper, my hands in warm dishwater, the house a cozy 70 degrees, I'm reluctant to think back over the afternoon and evening. The woodstove in the living room has pushed the cold back to within an inch of the walls, and it's easy to pretend winter's not there.

But somehow the Spirit has penetrated my defenses. God's words, words that strike me as cold and hard, confront me. Like the cold seeping through my gloves and boots when I go out for the night's wood, I can't ignore them. Out on the farm, I can't push the cold away. In church and at Meeting, in morning quiet time a few feet from the woodstove, I can disregard it. But oh God, what does that choice cost me?

Carl Jung believed the church crystallized our historical experience of God into dogma and ritual to insulate us from living experiences of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of the risen Christ, like I had in the barn. I confess that most of the time I want insulation. I want my life climate-controlled. I don't want to be cold or exposed to the cold dishonesty in me. I want God climate-controlled too. I want to ignore hard things in the Gospels and focus on a God who is comfort, warmth, and light.

But things don't always square with my spring or summer version of you, God. Job doesn't. Neither do so many psalms. Or the life-changing demands that accompany Jesus' promises. Neither does reality. Like Job, there are times I have hard questions. Questions about cancer, birth defects, and the deepest distortions in human nature. Questions about my own losses, brokenness, and destructiveness. At heart, it's always the same question: "Where are you, God?"

But I'd rather argue than think about it. "Who wants a cold God?" I ask as I get ready for bed. "Who wants a winter God who asks hard things?"

Then right after I turn out the light, I glance out at the trees. Wind still roars through bare branches, slamming waves of cold against the house. I remember it is the frost, the cold, the frozen ground that keeps me and all growing things safe, that insulates and protects me from the deadly warmth of arrogance and complacency.

I repent. Climbing in bed, I pray, "Oh God, Your cold is part of our reality. I don't understand it, but pretend it isn't here, and I pretend this part of you right out of my life."

Suddenly, unexpectedly, the last thing I thought I'd ever say is torn out of me. "Thank you for the destruction, God."

I wake up about 2:00 a.m. and I listen to the furnace pumping hot water from the basement to cast iron radiators in every room of the house. The alarm clock counts the minutes—2:10, 2:17, 2:25, 2:30—but I can't decode the message.

About quarter 'til three, I give in. My feet find my slippers where I'd tucked them under the radiator. I pad downstairs in the dark, enjoying their warmth on my toes. The stove has already burned halfway down, and I work two more big chunks of wood in the small side door. A few live coals spill out. I clean them up and, wide awake, reach for my monastic diurnal and find the office for Lauds.

"O ye Dews and Frosts, bless ye the Lord: O ye Frost and Cold, bless ye the Lord. O ye Ice and Snow, bless ye the Lord: O ye Nights and Days, bless ye the Lord. O ye Light and Darkness, bless ye the Lord. . . . "

But it is not enough. It is not enough to realize that the cold of winter, the cold of life, are also part of God's reign, God's salvation, and that they praise him.

I take a deep breath. Then another. "Okay," I think, "here goes." I step into the abyss of faith; out past logic, theology, and my deepest need, desire, and efforts to stay warm and safe and comforted; out into what looks like an abyss because I can't see, feel, touch, taste, or more than barely believe in God in that darkness.

"Thank you, God," I say. "Bless you for what I see but don't understand. For what hurts. For all I've experienced and will experience. Help me to let you, cold or warm, comforting or frozen, into every room of my heart."

I feel the quiet that precedes peace. But I sense that I still haven't gone far enough. Even this isn't honest enough. Suddenly, unexpectedly, the last thing I thought I'd say is torn out of me. "Thank you for the destruction, God."

The blessing stops me in my tracks. How can that be? Yet the thought feels so right it takes my breath away—that this is the yes, the cold, wind-driven yes being asked of me. But how can that be? I ponder in the darkness.

The woodstove goes from flames to coals again and I continue to sit. Finally I reach for my journal. I don't even notice the room getting colder.

—Julie Gochenour, member of the Religious Society of Friends, is completing her M.A.R. She and her husband Gary live on the family farm in Maurertown, Virginia.

Reflections on Time and the Meaning of Life

Elizabeth Raid

Each summer I return to southeast Iowa, where the General Conference Mennonite Church began in 1859. Sometimes a family reunion draws me. Other times we mourn the loss of an older family member. hen the Zion Mennonite Church, Donnellson, Iowa, celebrated its 150-year anniversary on October 14, 2001, this provided a joyful reason to return.

This article emerged from one such visit. I had just left family, church, and my employment of almost ten years at the General Conference Mennonite Church headquarters to move to a new city to begin seminary. The questions of who we are and why we are here seem to resurface during times of change and uncertainty. During my time of transition, I looked for connection and hope in the church and community where both of my parents, Howard Raid and Pauline Krehbiel, grew up.

Speak to me, O stones! Cry out, O graves! Rise up, those who lie forgotten! As the wind blows through the mighty oak sheltering you, leave your silence and awake. Speak! Tell me who I am. What hopes and dreams did you leave unfulfilled for me to discover? What gifts have you left unused for me to explore?

Here lies great-great-great grandfather Henry Ellenberger, first Mennonite minister west of the Mississippi. Here lie Christian and Johannes, Barbara and Anna, pioneers in this land, founders of my church denomination. What genes have come to me through grandparents: August and Laura, Clara and Harvey?

Dear Ann Marie, cousin whose sweet smile and happy laugh I remember—but at age twelve stilled by polio—what have I learned from you?

And Uncle Arlo, whose passing brought me here today—what of your gentle spirit and gracious living with those in need am I to carry?

Sweet Mother, your name Pauline Victoria, so regal, so full of spiritual elegance. Come, hold my hand and rock me gently in your arms. Sing soothing songs to still my restless spirit. You left too soon—before I could give back to you enough of all the love you gave to me.

Blank is the line of date of death by your name, Father. "Howard, leader of church and college" is engraved on the stone. The blankness of your mind through Alzheimer's leaves unwritten all I'd wish to say to you, if you were standing near, remembering your brother, laid to rest today.

So what remains when we return to dust and ashes scattered here? Which of your joys and sorrows have I not shared? What is left for me to live that has not many times already been?

I sit in silence waiting for your words for me.

Before I leave, I pause to read the verses etched upon your stone, dear parents. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" (Prov. 3:5-6).

How can it be that these words burn deeply in my heart and often echo in my mind! They give shape and meaning to my journey as they must have to yours, somehow connecting us through endless time. Perhaps in the stillness of your womb you spoke to my spirit and placed those words upon the altar of my soul long before I read them on your stone.

And what of me? Will I give gifts to those who come after, as all of you have given to me?

One verse remains unread. Father's verse holds the key: "But be doers of the word, and not merely hears who deceive themselves" (James 1:22)

The gifts received from each of you today give courage and purpose for the journey. What verse will be written on my stone? May the answer come in the living of my life. *Written at Zion Mennonite Church cemetery.*

Editorial by Howard D. Raid in* The Mennonite*, May 29, 1962

It was relaxing to drive the familiar roads of eastern Iowa. Memories flooded my mind of bygone days—of riding in a buggy on a muddy clay road, of sitting on the little folding seat behind the stinging tails of the trotting bays, and of driving cattle along this same road. But a newsflash from the car radio crowded these memories out of my mind. The United States had successfully launched a man into space. As I pondered this I came to the old family cemetery where I turned aside to con-

template the world around about me. How important was it that we had another man in space?

As I stood before the tombstone of my great-grandfather, I wondered what he was like. This man had passed on to me many of the characteristics which I possess. He had no way of knowing I was to come into the world. He left his home country, traveled the unknown sea to a strange and wild land. He had faith that man would go on, and that there would be those who would come after him who too would wrestle with the great problems of life.

More than a hundred years in this great land had done things to his children's children. All of the opportunities of a great new land were to be those of his progeny. The land had changed even his name—it had Americanized it. The land provided economic opportunities so his children's children had the economic resources needed for the "good life." Even beyond the security of food and shelter they had the opportunity for education, to accumulate the learning of the ages. Greater than these was freedom: the right to worship God according to the dictates of their hearts without control by the state.

Thus I stood and pondered this man who was my forefather and yet whom I had never seen, who however determined that I was to come into the world, who influences my life beyond measure. As I thought of this I wondered why he came to this new land, what was he seeking? Did he find here those things that he wanted?

How connected life is! How generations have the same wonderings, the same questions, the same hopes and dreams.

In turn I wondered about those who would come after me. Would they someday stand beside my stone and ask questions like this? Would there be those who would be thankful that I, too, had lived? Would they be pleased that I in my own way had pioneered and enabled them to find the opportunities to earn a living, to secure an education, and to worship God?

Is this the way man goes marching on down through the pages of history standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before, reaching to greater heights than ever dreamed of by those preceding him? Are we now so wise in our own knowledge that we shall destroy all of this good earth which God in His wisdom has given us? Of what value is the man in space or a two-thousand-mile-an-hour bomber unless it provides the basic needs of life that our bodies be fed and our souls enriched?

How Connected Life Is

After I wrote my reflections, I discovered the above editorial by my father while researching the book I'm writing about him. How connected life is! How generations have the same wonderings, the same questions, the same hopes and dreams.

—Elizabeth Raid lives in Bluffton, Ohio, where she is ministerial intern, First Mennonite Church. She plans to complete her M.Div. in 2002 and looks forward to service in the Mennonite world. Her passions are reading, writing, walking, travel, and meeting new people.

Holy and Hallowed

Life After New York, After September 11

Steve Kriss

If I forget thee
Let my tongue forget the songs
it sang in this strange land
and my heart forget the secrets
only a stranger can learn. . . .

Let my blood forget
the map of its travels. . . .
if I do not remember,

if I do now always consider thee
my Babylon, my Jerusalem.

— "On Leaving Brooklyn," from Julia Kasdorf, *Eve's Striptease* (Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1998)

I am a native of Somerset County, Pennsylvania. For the past two years I had lived in New York, returning to Pennsylvania this summer. For me it was hard not to take the events of September 11 personally. I teetered on tears for days. For hours I searched the Internet for information, nervously, hopefully, wonderingly. I read newspapers from New York, Pittsburgh, Johnstown, Sydney, and Tehran daily. I couldn't sleep, couldn't keep myself from information.

I had returned to New York the week before September 11. It was a wonderful leisurely visit through the city. I bought books at the Strand at South Street Seaport. I ate a dinner of rice and beans and flan in

Central Park with friends. We were reprimanded that night for parking too close to a hotel where N'Sync or some other boy band was staying, with a crowd swarming outside hoping for possible glimpses. I bought a New York City skyline panoramic photo to hang at my new residence in Pittsburgh.

It was a beautiful and idyllic day. It was a day in the city that had become my home, a place of energy, possibility, diversity, oddity, sin, salvation, hope, and dreams. It was a day to say goodbye to two years of a good life in a city I loved.

Returning to the city in October was a painful pilgrimage. In my last sermon at the church I pastored in New York, I confessed that New York was my Jerusalem. New York was a holy place. It was the place where I felt God in a bizarre but wonderful mix of people, in human struggle and striving, in creativity and mundane routine, in the way the soaring architecture intermingled with water and sky.

Driving toward New York on Route 78, I craned my neck, strained my eyes to see the twin towers. These were the beacons of my regular trek across Pennsylvania and New Jersey back to the city. I looked and persevered, hoping with all of my being that somehow the buildings would remain. Maybe it was all some sort of strange hoax. I squinted. I saw nothing. As I drove over the Goethals Bridge onto Staten Island, I decided I couldn't look anymore.

My first credible view of the skyline, minus the towers, was from Brooklyn. I had nervously crossed the Verrazano Bridge, feeling its structural vulnerability as I passed over the narrows at hundreds of feet above the water. The city was still magnificent, larger than life, crowding along the water of the harbor and the East River.

I called my parents on my cell phone to let them know that I was seeing the skyline. And yes, it was true, the World Trade Center was no longer there.

That night a friend and I had dinner at a Filipino restaurant in Queens. Asian vendors on the streets of the neighborhood were hawking all sorts of patriotic gear. We tried not to talk about September 11.

She was finally sleeping again. September 11 hd been her second day as a hospital chaplain intern in Manhattan. The hospital prepared for the worst, for thousands of injured. My friend's weeping came in the realization that the hospital had prepared for wounded who would never arrive. A day after our visit she called me to let me know that she had been unknowingly providing pastoral care for a person diagnosed with anthrax.

In the days of revisiting Manhattan, I noticed a solemnity in my own steps. New York was not what it used to be. The streets were not packed. I pondered the possibilities of anthrax while I shopped at the Virgin Megastore in Times Square. At Penn Station, dozens of posters crying out for lost loved ones hung at the entrance. While hundreds of people walked around me, I read the names of the sought ones. I looked at happy smiling pictures and lurid details of life that described these missing people. I read them out of respect the way one reads names on gravestones.

Inside Penn Station, an empty storefront become an impromptu message board. I read it as well, caught in the stories between the lines. Scrawled in large letters above the top were the words, "New York: You are still beautiful."

The words reminded me that those who are wounded often need encouragement. I thought of women who have mastectomies, about the deep need to know that they remain a woman, that they remain beautiful despite the loss of part of their own body, a part which gives significant identity.

It took several days for me to muster the courage to walk through Lower Manhattan. Thousands of people must trudge to work every day in that area, but I felt nervous and voyeuristic.

It took me several days to muster the courage to walk through Lower Manhattan. Thousands of people must trudge to work every day in that area, but I felt nervous and voyeuristic. I began to define my visit as article research. I would make my visit on the premise that I was writing something for *DreamSeeker*. Without the sense of purpose of article-writing, I might not have been able to legitimate, or compel myself into, the excursion. Yet within my soul I knew I needed to go, I needed to see, I needed to smell.

I took the Staten Island Ferry into Lower Manhattan. There were national guard patrols in the ferry terminal and on the ferry itself. Coast Guard cutters were in New York Harbor. Helicopter gunships were in the air. This was not the New York I remembered. I walked off the ferry and up Broadway. I realized I had walked this path more often than I have walked on North Main Street in Davidsville, Somerset County, where I grew up.

People were milling around. I have never before seen definitive milling around, but that was happening as tourists took pictures and pressed against barricades.

I noticed a smell in the air that reminded me of days when the steel mills were working in western Pennsylvania. Religious opportunists were passing out brochures and tracts. Window washers on scaffolds were cleaning the soot and dust from tall buildings with lots of windows.

I could only get within about two blocks of the actual site. A friend who is a New York cop told me I could probably get closer with my press and preacher credentials. I decided this was close enough.

I noticed the dust on window sills. I wanted to run my fingers through it. It would be a tangible connection to what had happened on September 11. I watched another man carry out my thoughts. I watched him run his finger along the ledge of a window of a closed shop. I watched him then look at his finger, covered with dust. I thought to myself, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust." I decided I wanted to leave the dust alone.

A sign on a storefront read, "This is a hallowed place. Please treat it and each other with the respect that it deserves." I noticed that Trinity Church was closed. A sign proclaimed that its doors would open again, soon. I looked for the domes of the Orthodox church that I knew had been destroyed by the falling towers. I was amazed at the number of portable toilets in the neighborhood. I remained silent as I took pictures.

I was not stunned by the sight, as I expected, but I felt as if I was staring at a open grate into hell, a place where the reign of evil came to dwell on earth. The smoldering debris helped lend credibility to my thoughts as smoke arose from the acres of rubble. I felt the grittiness of the air in my mouth and in my nose. I would later wipe my forehead with a Kleenex and look for long moments at the dust. I kept the sooted tissue for weeks, feeling it was somehow too sacred to throw away.

I ran to catch the ferry again at dusk. I stood in the cargo bay where vehicles are usually transported. I watched the skyline get smaller behind me and an expansive sunset rest vibrantly beyond the Statue of Liberty and the sprawl of New Jersey. I felt like each of us on that ferry leaving Manhattan that night breathed some sort of prayer. I felt like somehow in that dusky light we were both thankful and realizing something about vulnerability. I know at least I was.

The storefront sign told me what I always knew. This place was holy, hallowed. It was made holy not only by the death of thousands but also by the lives of millions. I began to think that the realizations that followed in the wake of September 11 were rooted in coming to terms with the obvious but to which we are often oblivious.

On September 11, I was in Somerset County. I was among people who in the early morning of that day were thanking God they lived in the rural respite of the mountains. While mourning the acts in New York, many were silently grateful for their relative safety in the Allegheny hills, until a plane fell out of the sky and into an abandoned strip mine next to Lambertsville, outside of Shanksville.

On September 11, we discovered that we are all connected. The actions that may have been instigated by one man, hidden in the hills of a country half a world away, connected with the lives of an odd assortment of people across the globe. We cannot hide in our hills or in our cities. We are connected to the life of Wall Street and Main Street, to the life of the nation, to the life of the global community; to faith, politics, and policies both similar to and different from our own.

On the night of September 11, I returned nervously from Somerset County to Pittsburgh, where thousands of people had been evacuated from the downtown skyscrapers earlier in the day as Flight 93 passed near the city. The night seemed particularly dark. With no planes in the sky and no traffic on the three rivers, Pittsburgh was silent. Cities should never be that quiet.

I stopped to gaze from an overlook at Pittsburgh's downtown. I scanned the skyline intensely; suddenly it seemed so vulnerable in my mind. I knew that somehow we were all vulnerable. I prayed for God to keep us safe.

Somehow, in confessing our vulnerability, we live in grace and peace. Somehow in knowing our vulnerability, we are able to come face-to-face with acts of evil, and to know that we are all transported day by day by hope, contained in the love that is God. That makes every place somehow holy, all of us somehow hallowed.

For this reason, I must remember. For this reason, I must have bold, compassionate faith. For this reason, I still love New York and Somerset County and am learning to love Pittsburgh. For this reason, I must learn to love those who have committed these acts, jarred me from my happy life and into the real struggle of figuring out what it honestly means to love those who might call themselves my enemies, and to love the places they love and to know the places they call holy. And I must learn to forgive those who would hold me captive to my own dreams and fears.

Kyrie eleison
Assalamu alaykum

—*Steve Kriss is a student at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, a legal resident of Somerset County, Pennsylvania, and someone who will always be in love with New York.*

Of the Seasons

of the seasons when we talk
how, hour by hour now
the summer fades, its flowers gone
plant by plant the species brown
fall or stand, if that's the nature
of the wind in season.

how friends and lovers
mellow with the fall
words of warmth and light
yellow with the leaves
and their glowing warmth
with a reaching touch
about a world, about.

how the fireplace about
we group and warm
talk and feel the quiet.
the apparent, winter quiet.

—*William Dellinger, Cherry Box, Missouri, is a farmer and member of Mt. Pisgah Mennonite Church.*

What Should We Do with Terrorists?

Ronald B. Schertz

Americans, together with many other people and governments around the world, were incensed by the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Thousands of civilians were killed in the single largest terrorist attack ever upon the United States of America. Many voices called for action and expected some kind of response.

In the days following the attack, the president and the Congress, with almost complete unanimity, declared their intention to respond militarily against those who perpetrated these terrorist acts. Most American citizens agreed that the military retaliation which then began to unfold was needed.

Do Christian pacifists have anything to say about what should be done to terrorists and to those who threaten future terrorism? Does our ethic of love and our rejection of war, killing, and revenge mean that we reject all forms of societal punishment of wrongdoers? Can we offer positive guidance on how to simultaneously love and punish our enemies? Can we participate in the punishment of our enemies if it is done within the ethic of love? To what extent does the ethic of love extend beyond care for injured persons and allow us to deal with persons who cause injury or restrain them from similar conduct in the future? Are we able to offer positive alternatives to military force?

The gospel teaches that we are to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Moreover, it instructs us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Peace church congregations carry out these teachings through relief efforts on behalf of victims of injury and disaster. Pacifism is also expressed in two ways: nonparticipation in the military or police force, and urging the government to abstain from war.

It would be difficult to argue that nothing should be done. The attacks . . . were evil.

The changing situation today raises new questions because of the rapid explosion of technology. Hostility is no longer limited to military confrontation by one nation against another on some defined battlefield. The speed of communication and travel and our relatively open society made it possible for a small covert group to wreak havoc with seeming ease and impunity.

The events of September 11 show that there are persons in the world who intend to destroy our society, even at the cost of their own lives. The threat of death, disease, and destruction at the hands of terrorists is real.

Likely most persons would agree that citizens have the right to provide for a common defense against attack (Preamble to the Constitution of the United States so states); that society has the right to *prevent* those who attack from doing so again in the future; and the right to *deter* others from engaging in similar conduct.

In this context, three practical questions confront Christian pacifists. (1) Do we believe that the government should do nothing, or do we believe that it should do something? (2) How should government punish someone in a way that accomplishes valid societal goals? (3) Can this be done in a way consistent with pacifist religious beliefs?

It would be difficult to argue that nothing should be done. The attacks against our country and its citizens were evil. Past mistakes in government conduct and policies may have been contributing causes, but these mistakes do not justify such acts. And as we learn more about the perpetrators, credible evidence may suggest that a change in government policies will not deter them from future attacks.

If we agree something should be done, could Christian pacifists support a system of punishment? We reject revenge, retribution, retaliation; most contemporary legal ethicists would agree. Admittedly, it may be difficult to separate a motivation for revenge from more lofty goals, but within an enlightened system of criminal justice, prevention and deterrence are considered valid concepts.

Prevention and deterrence could be implemented in one of two ways: voluntarily, or involuntarily. Voluntary compliance would result from a perpetrator agreeing not to engage in such conduct in the future. This

would fulfill the goal of prevention but not of deterrence. Involuntary compliance would occur if a perpetrator either was restrained to prevent him from repeating the conduct in the future, or was offered inducements to stop the atrocities. Both would fulfill the prevention goal, but only the first would operate as a deterrent. The second action would likely lead to additional inappropriate conduct—extortion. Within this framework, punishment based on a perpetrator's involuntary removal from society seems to be the only solution offering any realistic hope of success.

The third question is the most difficult for Christian pacifists to answer. As Christians, we believe the gospel guides us in our relationship to God, our relationships with other Christians, and our relationships with non-Christians in the world. How we conduct ourselves is of course shaped in part by the context of our times.

As the context changes, we are challenged to rethink old assumptions. Old definitions of war, force, punishment, police, and military may not fit current realities. At the same time, there seems to be a growing realization, even among non-pacifists, that military action will not resolve the issues provoked by September 11 or deter others from their course.

Where should we begin? With an ethic of peace or with the grim realities of terror? Is our ethic one of love, one of justice, or one of peace? Are they one and the same? If not, does our pursuit of one amount to a form of idolatry, which limits our pursuit of another? Does a peace theology begin with an absolute ethic and then rule out other responses without regard for the probability of results?

Or do we start with the reality of the present atrocities and the continuing threats of terror to determine what response would be effective, then ask how such a response can be implemented in a way consistent with our religious beliefs?

Some assume that police action is more ethically acceptable than military action. Is life-threatening force acceptable in either case? Are there situations in which the ongoing threat of injury is so credible that doing nothing would be worse than engaging in otherwise unacceptable conduct to prevent more injury?

These are difficult questions. If Christian pacifists hope government and society will take our stance seriously, we need to address not only what the government should do to prevent future terrorist acts, but also how it should deal with the perpetrators of atrocities. The answers need to be consistent with the redemptive spirit of the gospel, but they also need to address valid societal goals.

—Ronald B. Schertz, Metamora, Illinois, is an attorney engaged in the private practice of law in Peoria. A graduate of Goshen College and the University of Illinois College of Law, he is a member of the Mennonite Church of Normal, Illinois.

Is This the Best Peace Witness Mennonites Can Offer?

Mark R. Wenger

The events of September 11 and their aftermath have jarred all of us—deeply. One fault-line revealed in this global earthquake is what we mean by "peace witness" within the Mennonite Church USA and its congregations.

I have experienced this fracturing from the vantage point of a pastor working among a 200-member Mennonite congregation in rural Virginia. It has sent my head spinning.

On the one hand, I have heard some Mennonite voices that sound a lot like *surrogate warmongers*. "Since we are Mennonites, we can't do it ourselves, but we'd sure be glad to see bin Laden and the Taliban bombed to hell for what they did." These comments filter out through the cracks from hidden places. To my ears these whisperings represent the traditional "two-kingdom" peace theology of Mennonites taken to an extreme. The government's job is to protect and defend its citizens, the logic goes. We Mennonites, though, can keep our hands clean and still bless those who bloody theirs on our behalf.

On the other hand, there are the *righteous peaceniks* who seem to have all the moral ambiguities ironed out. Their comments tend to emanate from Mennonite institutions through the media. Their tone is moralist; their strategic advice is sure. One official letter to President Bush confidently asserted on behalf of all Mennonites that "Our tradition of nonviolence teaches us that more violence will only continue the spiral of violence, placing more and more lives in danger."

Or take another example from the church press: "Violence has proved to be an utter failure in resolving conflict." Wow! That's breathtaking. From this angle, "two-kingdom" peace theology has gone the way of the horse and buggy. We postmodern Mennonites now offer advice to the government with all the moral confidence of fundamentalists.

As different as they are, what these stances have is common is a tendency to spout easy solutions. The first assumes that the church and the gospel of Jesus Christ have nothing relevant to say regarding how government administers its power. The second assumes that what is relevant and true for the church as the body of Christ is equally relevant and applicable to the state. The first is in danger of losing the moral muscle of Jesus' gospel of peace to the world; the second risks losing sight of the divine mandate of justice to punish evildoers.

I confess to finding myself in the muddled middle these days. Some years ago I extensively researched the peace witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German theologian, pastor, and radical Christian pacifist. Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship* (1937) draws a strong ethic of peace from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Christians have not only found peace in Jesus Christ, they are also to make it, insisted Bonhoeffer. And "to that end they renounce all violence and tumult. In the cause of Christ, nothing is to be gained by such methods."

Yet later in life Bonhoeffer joined a conspiracy to assassinate Adolf Hitler and replace Nazism with another government. The plot failed; Bonhoeffer was imprisoned and eventually executed. While in prison, his uncle asked him whether he thought Christ's law—"All who take the sword, shall perish by the sword"—was true. Yes, replied Bonhoeffer, the law is true and remains in effect. But some occasions call for people to act who are willing to take this very judgment on themselves.

In his unfinished *Ethics* (1955) and letters from prison, Bonhoeffer makes the case for "ultimate necessities" in which there is "no law behind which the responsible man (sic) can seek cover. . . . In this situation there can only be complete renunciation of every law . . . together with the open admission that here the law is being infringed and violated. Precisely in this breaking of the law, the validity of the law is acknowledged." Was the assassination plot against Hitler one such ultimate necessity in Bonhoeffer's mind? Perhaps.

By analogy, is it conceivable that genocide, terrorism, and rabid aggression—after peaceful alternatives have failed to bring remedy—may also constitute ultimate necessities? And could force of arms in the hands of the state be a responsible course of action, while acknowledging that here the law of Christ is being infringed and violated?

As a Mennonite disciple of Christ, I am willing to ponder and reluctantly concede such a potential role for the state in the present age. To be candid, I have found much public Mennonite peace theology after September 11 to be purist and utopian. The tone of address to the government is resolute, even arrogant. Not enough attention has been paid to the hard question of pursuing justice for the agents of murder. Simplistic answers to the conundrums of containing violent evil are bandied about with ease.

To be candid, I have found much public Mennonite peace theology after September 11 to be purist and utopian.

Nor have I heard enough focus on theology, or on the person and work of Christ Jesus and the peace of Christ. And a strong doctrine of the church as a distinct and living witness of Christ's peace seems to be receding in favor of public posturing. Is this the best we can offer the world? I hope not.

Here are general suggestions:

Let us, in the Mennonite Church, keep our eyes fixed on Christ Jesus, holding him in the center of what we say and do.

Let us keep our voices modest and humble, addressed mostly to each other and to the church living in Christ around the world.

Let us practice humility and service, willing to risk our lives in love for the sake of the victim, the oppressed, and the enemy.

Let us speak to the state with truth and grace, informing them that we are not free, out of reverence for Christ, to support or participate in violence and warfare.

Let us be diligent in urging governing authorities to listen to their own best instincts and religious values and to seek non-military alternatives.

Let us not demand that governments in the present age live at the same level of kingdom ethics as the body of Christ.

In sum, the manner and tone of our Mennonite community life and witness for the peace of Christ are as important as the content of the peace teaching itself.

I worry that official Mennonite peace theology, by injecting itself righteously into the political arena, is becoming less persuasive and believed in the local congregation. I fear we are rapidly moving from being a people who refuse to participate in killing out of reverence and obedience to Christ to a group in which a few deign to speak boldly of peace for all, while the majority of church members shake their heads in bewilderment.

I find that nothing becomes as formative for strong peace convictions as a congregational body-life rooted in a passionate love of Christ Jesus, his

person and witness. A life-shaping encounter with Jesus Christ in the company of other disciples is more decisive and convincing for developing a conscience for peace than all the public directives put together.

I wonder whether what might be called a "modified two-kingdom" peace theology offers more merit for retaining and building upon the Mennonite peace tradition for the future. Such an approach lacks some of the clean lines of the traditional two-kingdom theology and the simplistic universalism of the "violence is always a failure" peace theology.

But what it offers is a way of weighting our dual citizenship decisively in the direction of Christ without discounting the messy responsibilities of governing a sinful humanity. We witness humbly from within a corporate conscience formed by Christ without pretending we know best how government should act. May God continue to grant us the necessary footwear making us ready to proclaim Christ's "gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15).

—Mark R. Wenger, Ph.D., is co-pastor, Springdale Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, Virginia; and associate director of the Preaching Institute, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

A Selfish Sonnet of Thanksgiving

A cluttered, quiet home, paper stacked high
On every horizontal plane or chair.
A child whose greatest trial is her hair,
Tangled without mercy, every day. Why
Not sing slight psalms of gratitude when light
Pours onto hardwood floors? Or when coffee
Scents the middle of the day? I can see
From this window twenty sturdy, square white
Homes where grief arrives at night on colored
Screens that one deft finger can transform to
Happiness with a click. I say thank you
These jeans pockets hold just four creased dollars,
And when my wife comes through the kitchen door
We argue about laundry and not war.

—David Wright

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Nine Modest Proposals for a Peace Church in Perilous Times

Phil Kniss

I was sure I knew the answer to Miss Mast's question. But an invisible weight kept my hand from going up. Maybe my classmates would think my answer was stupid. I was shy, bookish, and couldn't hit a softball out of the infield. I knew my place in the social hierarchy of the sixth grade, so it was always safer to let others speak up first.

Today I am a Mennonite pastor, a representative of the historic peace church tradition, and now that the United States is engaged in one of the most popular wars since we took on Hitler's Germany, it almost feels like I'm back in Miss Mast's sixth-grade classroom. What dare I say without having everyone turn and stare at me? In the current all-out war against terrorism, there is little appreciation for a biblical pacifist response. I know my place; it is a great temptation to let others do the talking.

We don't expect all Christians to agree with us, of course. But even in a historic peace church, we have to

tread softly, because we are not all at the same place on these issues. We all agree that the terrorist attacks against the U.S. on September 11 were unspeakably evil. But there is sharp disagreement in our churches over what constitutes an appropriate Christian response to that evil. These disagreements aren't going away anytime soon. So how does any peace-teaching church manage to have a relevant word for a fragmented world when its own unity is being challenged from within?

For starters, I propose we stop talking about our "peace position." After all, peace is not a position. Peace is a way. It is a journey Jesus has called us to walk. I'd rather be on a journey, inviting others to walk with me, than to be at a particular position and have to defend it. Taking a journey is something you do on the move. Taking a position and defending it is something you do standing still. Give me the journey, any day.

How does any peace-teaching church manage to have a relevant word for a fragmented world when its own unity is being challenged from within?

So let me offer nine modest proposals that will help the church move a little farther down the road on our peace journey. I call these proposals modest because they won't bring overnight unity. They won't ensure that we all come to stand at the same "position." They might, however, help us start moving in the same general direction. And that should please the Prince of Peace.

(1) Let's immerse ourselves in the whole story of Scripture. We say we are a people of the book. Let's get serious about the Scriptures. We need them to guide us through these confusing times. No, the Bible doesn't have a chapter and verse that tells us how to respond to international terrorism. Some folks lift out a verse here and a verse there and declare "this is what the Bible says." That's not what I mean when I say get serious about the Scriptures. I mean become familiar with the God of the Bible—Old and New Testaments—knowing not only the Bible stories but the Bible Story. Many of us have favorite peace texts we often turn to. That's good. That's important. But our convictions on peace must be based on the whole of Scripture.

(2) Let's cling to belief in a God whose heart is for all his children. God loves people. You can't get more basic than that. God has a deep and abiding affection for all human beings, and wants all people to be reconciled—to others and to God. That is the most basic truth about God we can hold to. Every person on the face of this earth is God's creation. And God desires reconciliation with all of us.

(3) Let's agree not to take God's job away from God. We humans are very good at usurping God's authority. God is the only Creator and Sustainer of life. God is the only righteous judge of good and evil. Yet we presume to be able to determine which forms of human life are worth saving, and which are expendable.

Since the September 11 terrorist attacks, U.S. citizens have been informed by their leaders that the nation's mission is to "rid the world of evil." The Scriptures are pretty plain. That's God's agenda, and God is going to do it, in God's time and in God's way. "Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord." Sure, we should do all we can to make this world a better place, more just, more peaceful—but rid the world of evil? That battle belongs to God.

(4) Let's not waver from a commitment to make Jesus Lord of our lives, and to follow his example in life. What does that mean? WWJD is not a bad place to start. Those bracelets and trinkets that ask "What would Jesus do?" are gimmicky and simplistic. And that question, by itself, may not answer all the complex issues we face in the modern world. But I still say it's a good place to start.

Can we picture Jesus and his disciples running a bomb squadron to confront the evil systems they had to deal with? They did confront the evil powers in their context, but they used radically different methods. Jesus taught in Matthew 5, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous."

We have to come to terms with passages like this. We have to come to terms with the methods Jesus used to confront his own enemies, and the powers of evil that were crushing his people. That is, if we want to make Jesus not only personal Savior but also Lord.

(5) Let's agree to always walk toward, not away from, those with whom we disagree. All of us have opinions on these issues. And all our opinions have points that can be challenged. We literally need each other in the community of faith. We need diversity of perspectives to find the truth. Everyone suffers from a certain measure of naiveté. If we never lay our convictions out to be tested and challenged, and if we just stick with those who see things our way, we will never discover our blind spots.

(6) Let's always spend more time listening than formulating responses. We must be quiet long enough to hear what the Spirit is saying. If we are always feverishly making our case, how will the Spirit break through to give us new insight? If we are constantly driving our own stake into the ground to maintain and defend our position, how will the Spirit nudge us a little farther along the road?

(7) Let's commit ourselves to work for peace with justice. That's the biblical picture. The psalmist sang about justice and peace kissing each other. There cannot be lasting peace without justice. In the Middle East, there have been lots of cease-fires, which some people call peace. But the injustice remains, so there's no real peace. And let's not short-circuit justice in the present crisis. It is right that those responsible for these massive acts of inhumanity be called to account for their deeds and that justice be done. But there is more than one way for that to happen.

(8) Let's always listen to the wisdom of the church. Notice how I phrased that: "*listen* to the wisdom of the church." Let's be familiar with the confession of faith of our own tradition—whether we are from a historic peace church or another Christian tradition. There are good reasons why some convictions have remained with us for generations. We can disagree with some of these convictions, but we must take them seriously and bend over backwards to listen.

On the peace issue, as well as others, some persons take their cues from secular media or pop culture icons, then enter a vigorous argument with their church's views. As a Mennonite, I have a problem with members of my church who can quote talk show hosts and TV preachers forward and backward but have never taken time to study carefully and prayerfully our own *Confession of Faith* and other teachings from our own tradition. I assure you, we Mennonites don't get everything right. Of course we may thoroughly study our tradition, whatever it is, and still find things with which to take issue. That's okay. That's good, even. But do listen to the wisdom of your faith community.

(9) I'm stopping with nine, because I don't want anyone to confuse these with the ten commandments. These are modest proposals, not commandments. Nine is *Let's never stop proclaiming hope*. That's something important we have to offer the world in times like these. Our theology of resurrection is a theology of hope. God can bring life out of death. God can bring peace out of chaos. And God has the last word.

—Phil Kniss, Harrisonburg, Virginia, is pastor of Park View Mennonite Church. This article is adapted from a sermon he preached at Park View on September 30, 2001.

Cracking Up

Can Peacemakers Have Humor and Hope?

Valerie Weaver-Zercher

The laughter struck me on a Tuesday evening, around 9:30 p.m., as I sat at my desk and addressed envelopes to George W. Bush, Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld, and Condoleezza Rice. Inside were petitions signed by several hundred people who had gathered at the state capitol in Harrisburg on Sunday to protest the U.S. military strikes in Afghanistan. A group of us from area churches had begun planning several weeks after September 11, knowing that although our government hadn't done anything yet, it was preparing for massive military action. Sure enough, as we sat down to lunch about an hour before leaving for the peace rally on October 7, the president announced the first air strikes.

Talk about timing. We held the rally, impressed with a new sense of the importance of our work. Some 300 people gathered on the front steps of the capitol. Reporters clipped microphones to our jackets. Speakers talked about the political relevance of Christ's way of nonviolence. That evening we took phone calls from radio stations, counted the offering for New York and Afghanistan, read the names on the petitions we'd circulated, and watched the news.

And until a couple days later, on that evening of addressing envelopes, I had successfully warded off any feelings of hopelessness. After all, it had been a "successful" peace rally by any measure. I felt invigorated by the importance of such work, and, to be honest, rather impressed with myself.

It was writing the names of the president and cabinet members on envelopes on Tuesday that finally brought home the absurdity of it all. Suddenly, helplessness—or was it reality?—knocked over all my activist mental barriers. Opinion polls showed over 90 percent approval for what Bush was doing.

Did we really think our rendition of "O Healing River" (albeit a beautiful one) would convince passersby to become pacifists? That reporters who covered our event would sign off by saying, "So folks, come on down to these people's next event and learn how you too, can become a voice for peace in our militaristic culture." That our little petition would show up in Bush's in-box, he'd read it, then storm into a cabinet meeting yelling, "Stop the bombing! Three hundred people in central Pennsylvania have a better idea!"

"What in the world do I think I'm doing?" I said to my husband, dropping my pen, and suddenly laughing. What could be more absurd than thinking that several hundred people—or even several thousand who were doing the same thing across the country—could change the mind of a commander-in-chief?

Then I stopped laughing, and we fell silent, as the despair that sometimes follows such laughter settled into my bones. Because the bombs were dropping even as I sealed the envelopes. Because my government was killing people as I pressed stamps into the corners of envelopes, gathered them into a pile, dropped them in the mailbox.

I've been analyzing my laughter ever since. It was, perhaps most obviously, cynical laughter, which recognizes the irony of small works in the face of gargantuan forces like war, famine, terror. It's the scene in cartoons where Tweety Bird kicks Sylvester the Cat, or where a scrawny milksop takes on a prizefighter. There's something inherently funny about the small taking on the big, the weak taking on the powerful and actually thinking they can win.

I think I was also laughing at myself, at the self-importance that had grown in me through the past several weeks of intense planning. While I probably never would have claimed that our peace rally would change national military policy, I would have said something nice about being faithful to Christ despite the odds against us, or that all significant social movements in history started with individuals or small groups of people, or that even a sliver of a chance that we'd make a difference made our work worthwhile. And I would have felt smug about being involved in a cause bigger than myself, and scornful of people who didn't feel that same passion.

On that Tuesday evening, however, even while I still believed all those things, I realized I needed more than dreams of success—or even fantasies of being a great disciple of Christ—to keep me going in this type of work. After all, this was the first real rally I'd ever helped to plan; I probably shouldn't be reaching burn-out just yet.

There's no doubt activists . . . doing "impossible" work need spiritual and communal resources . . . to maintain their energy. . . . But I'm beginning to think my laughter . . . contained the seeds of another important resource for peacemakers: a sense of humor.

So I began nosing around for stories of hope in hopeless situations, looking for models of peace activists and others who keep working tirelessly for impossible goals. And my "hope" file grew larger by the day.

I went to the library and checked out Jane Goodall's book *Reason for Hope: A Spiritual Journey*, in which she gives four reasons she remains hopeful about the future of our planet. She writes that the human brain, the resilience of nature, the energy and enthusiasm of young people, and the indomitable human spirit are what help her believe in a world "in which there will still be trees and chimpanzees swinging through them, and blue sky and birds singing."

I read Henri Nouwen's words in *With Open Hands*: "Hope includes an openness by which you wait for the other to make his loving promise come true, even though you never know when, where or how this might happen."

I went to an event where longtime peacemakers spoke about their work. When asked what keeps her going, Israeli peace activist Razia Meron replied simply, "There's a lot of work to do, so I do it. And I have friends to do it with." Catholic Worker Chris Doucot added, "If you don't do this work in community, you either lose your mind or you lose hope."

I met with my spiritual director. We talked about reading the works of people like Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr., meeting with like-minded people for support and prayer, and connecting all action with a deep spiritual life continually refreshed by a sense of God's presence.

And I found lots of pretty stories told by people who are working for change and trying to convince themselves that they're being successful: the throwing-the-starfish-back-into-the-sea one, and the one about how many snowflakes it takes to break a branch.

All of these things helped offset the despair that was waiting in the wings of my spirit that week following our rally. And there's no doubt activists and others doing "impossible" work need spiritual and communal resources like these to maintain their energy for such work. But I'm beginning to think my laughter, cynical as it was, contained the seeds of another important resource for peacemakers: a sense of humor.

Laughter seems exactly the wrong place to start, especially when the issues we as peacemakers are working on are as far from funny as you can get. It's no wonder activist-types get the reputation of being sour-faced, angry folk who go around chanting slogans and making the rest of us feel guilty. When you've seen starving children in Iraq—or like me, you have an overactive imagination that puts my son's face on an emaciated body—you're allowed to walk around scowling or cry yourself to sleep at night. And then, when you realize that your government is to blame—not indirectly, or in some existential way, but *directly* to blame—for the slow deaths of half a million children under the age of five in Iraq, you're allowed to walk around angry.

But I'm coming to believe that the work of peacemaking, especially activist peacemaking in times of war, needs our humor nearly as much as it needs our grief. We need to appreciate and communicate to others the sheer absurdity of the facts such as these: Military spending will eat up at least 47 percent of the federal budget in 2002. Since 1940, the U.S. government spent $21 trillion on its military; during the same period, it invested only $4 trillion on health care and less than $2 trillion on education. Indeed, these statistics and others would truly be funny if they weren't so sad.

We also need to laugh at ourselves, and to admit that some of our peacemaking efforts are just downright funny. A friend told me about a peace rally she went to recently at which the group was going to march to city hall. Problem was, they started out on the plaza right in front of city hall to begin with, which meant their march lasted all of 20 seconds or so.

The same friend told me about a friend of hers who works for the American Friends Service Committee and was part of the demonstrations against the Republican convention in Philadelphia in 2000. The demonstration space allotted to AFSC was so far from the convention center, however, that he and his coworkers didn't see any Republicans the whole week. Instead, they spent their time talking to the "Save the Greyhound" folks parked next door.

Even if our protests and rallies and vigils go smoothly, there's an element of the absurd in each. I mean, really: signs, chants, and songs in the face of B-52s, smart bombs, and special elite forces? It sounds like a scene from a cartoon.

But if it's all a joke, and if what we're laughing at is the sheer absurdity of action in the face of the seemingly insurmountable, then what's the use of doing anything? How can laughter—whether at the idiocy of the world or our own action in it—sustain an activist any more than ego or anger or prayer?

Indeed, by itself, laughter can't sustain us for the long haul. But a sense of humor, combined with grief and prayer and community and even pretty little stories about starfish, might.

Just as I was nearly finished writing this essay, I read a statistic that made me disagree with myself and want to junk the whole thing. Five thousand Iraqi children die every month as a result of the U.S./UN sanctions: that's 5,000 little people as precious to their parents as my 10-month-old Samuel is to me. What could be more wildly inappropriate than laughter in the face of such carnage?

But strangely, almost impossibly, it's exactly in those moments of despair and hopelessness that laughter comes in again. Because the only way I have found to deal with those times, when in my imagination I become an Iraqi mother whose child was killed by sanctions—or an American mother whose child was killed when a plane slammed into a building—is to believe that eventually, in ways I cannot now fathom, the holy laughter of God wins.

Indeed without my belief in the final victory of God's laughter, the wars our country is fighting and the attacks of September 11 would drive me into depression or insanity. The pain of our planet, and of my simultaneous complicity and helplessness, is simply too much to bear.

So I choose to believe in laughter, my own and God's. I choose to believe that in God's eyes, the absurdity of these days lies not in our lame little peace rallies and our measly petitions but in the war-making machines that kill in response to killing. I choose to believe that in the end, whenever that is and whatever that means, God will have the last laugh.

And I think God's laugh won't be cynical like mine was on that Tuesday night. I think God's laugh will be hearty and full-bodied, the kind that rolls from the belly into the throat and then bursts out from between the lips. I choose to believe that some distant day, far beyond the tears of September 11 and October 7, God's healing laughter will cover us all.

—Valerie Weaver-Zercher, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, is the mother of an infant son and assistant editor and columnist for DreamSeeker Magazine.

Roof of Tin

waking in the night,
hearing the falling rain,
i wished for a roof of tin,
asleep.

—William Dellinger

Twister of Fate

Jamie S. Shaver

I'm in a self-destructive phase right now. I have stopped trying to deny this and have every intention of continuing in the same direction full force.

I credit Oprah with my heightened self-awareness.

Entering my junior year of college, I seem to have less of a vision for my life than ever before. Since about the third grade I have held the same basic goals for my future. "When I grow up . . . I want to be a teacher, an English teacher because I love to read. . . . I want to continue living in the Shenandoah Valley and cultivate my own rural, Christian beliefs into my three children—two girls and one boy, in that order—while maintaining my potential as the great American novelist of our generation. . . . "

That's the dream. As of last year at this time I was pretty well on my way toward that description, too. I was holding a high GPA with the corresponding majors/minors, entering year number four with my high-school sweetheart, and believing my own perfect mix of Ginger and MaryAnne qualities would pull me through with the book someday.

That was before the tornado.

The word *tornado* first came to mind when my doctor asked me if I was overexerting myself. "My life feels like a tornado," I joked. He then informed me that my life would be slowing down. I had mono.

Tornado is actually a Spanish word. It's a past participle that means to be altered, then restored. A complete cycle.

Tornadoes like the ones in "The Wizard of Oz" don't happen where I live. My grandma used to say that they would get stuck between the mountains in our valley and never find a way out.

Now I see her point. The tornado I'm inside is perpetually bouncing, suffocated between the fields of corn and national parks that surround it. If transposed to any other setting, I feel certain my twister would split apart into gusts of energy and drop me out unbridled. All the forests and mountains are barriers though; rivers serve as uncrossable obstacles now.

Meanwhile I'm spinning around inside the whirlwind, intertwined with silos, textbooks on Anabaptist life, chirps of slow southern drawl, babies to sit with, and calves to be fed. I am standing, solid and stable, centralized within.

The crazy part is that I'm worried about what will happen if these winds find a gap to exit by and deposit me elsewhere. Will all those things just fall apart and land in some sort of wasteland and shrivel away? I guess not.

Maybe my real fear is that I may not be able to step back in should my mind change again. That wasteland might be my only refuge outside the twister. How often do we cross over these mountains anyway? Hardly ever. The only reason for that is to visit the major hospital to our southeast or the nursing home which contains some family to the northwest. Places that will leave you shriveled.

I drove home from the doctor's office forced to follow a "farm-use vehicle" well below my wanted speed, and I began to yell at God.

I ran out of accusations and obscenities. I was drained and relieved. I said thank you to God for listening and told him I could move matters back into my own hands.

They didn't teach me that yelling was effective in Sunday school. Methodists rarely yell, certainly not at God. No one at my Mennonite university yells either, but it felt good.

After the first 20 minutes (of what could have been a 15-minute drive), I ran out of accusations and obscenities. I was drained and relieved. I said thank-you to God for listening and told him I could move matters back into my own hands. This, again, is not what my religion professors say will result in a positive response from the Almighty.

Next I took a vote. Every single one of my instincts went Republican: I would settle for things to stay as they are. That was three weeks ago. Since then, I have added vitamins to my daily routine and allowed my dissatisfactions to ferment.

This morning it all rushed back, though. After an outburst at work, followed by the inevitable sobbing breakdown, I clocked out early and came home, where I sit writing this.

I soared into the driveway, stopping just in time to hear my father tell someone in the garage he's proud of me.

I walked into my parent's house and was bombarded by my niece, thrilled as always to see me.

I slammed my bedroom door as the phone rang. It was a call from a friend who moved away but has made it clear he won't leave me.

I sighed as I heard the beep for call waiting. Work; they wanted me to work, again.

I am home, surrounded by the exact things that spur my anxious stomachaches in the morning. This is where I came to escape though, isn't it? A spot where my past will always be preserved, just like the agricultural land outside my windows.

I think God heard me on the drive home when I was stuck behind a tractor. He probably laughed because he knew I was disgusted with myself for identifying the tractor's make.

God must have also known that I needed a sounding board and that a tantrum was as close as I could come to repenting for the mess I'd gotten myself into and now needed help to get out of. Repentance appeared as a tornado for me this time: something that twists you away from the bad even as you know you'll spin right back into it. A complete cycle without even having to run outside this town's limits. My Old Testament teacher was right after all—God must be everywhere.

A new semester begins soon. I still plan to overwork myself, and I'll still have mono. The difference is that I know if I keep pushing through, eventually the cyclical motion will land me in the self-improved phase.

—*Jamie S. Shaver, a junior at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, has recently changed her major, the length of her hair, and her priorities.*

Epistemology and Trash, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and (Almost) Love Litter

Angela Lehman-Rios

There's trash in my neighborhood, and I hate it. Some of it drifts down the block, especially on Mondays, from the overflowing supercans of the restaurant on the corner. Some comes from students as they walk to and from the school down the street. I've seen neighbors drop trash out their car windows as they drive around and set bottles down on the sidewalk not 10 feet from a trashcan.

It's easy for me to think that people litter because they're thoughtless or lazy, or both. It's especially easy for me to think this because I don't litter: I put my trash in a plastic bag, put the bag in the supercan, and wait for the garbage truck to take it away so I don't have to look at it anymore. Easy!

I enjoyed all this ease for an awfully long time before I started to recognize everything was so easy because I was avoiding the bigger picture. Although I'm

not going to discuss here how trash is trash whether it's above ground or below, in a landfill, that's certainly a major element of the big picture. My realization has more to do with how easy it is to dismiss people whose actions are different from my own, so different that I can't understand them, and what the consequences of such dismissal might be. Piecing together a memory of trash in a different setting motivated me to look beyond the easy judgments about litter on my own street.

When I was in high school, I spent a summer in the southwest delta region of Alaska. A decade earlier, my family had lived there for four years, and my parents kept in touch with several people, some of whom we stayed with that summer.

One month we lived with Delores, a Yup'ik woman, and had the opportunity to go to her family's fish camp along the Kuskokwim River. All summer, families from Bethel and other towns up and down the river lived at their camps, where they caught and prepared fish to dry for a winter food source.

Among the many things I remember about fish camp is the garbage. Kool-Aid containers, old diapers, torn magazines, and other trash lay in heaps around the land by the river. As a peevish, judgmental teenager, I couldn't understand how anyone would live that way. If I thought any further than that, I probably chalked it up to ignorance, or, in a charitable moment, lack of education.

I also remember that as Delores and her mother and sisters gutted hundreds of salmon, they saved some of the fish eggs and heads to use in soup, but most were tossed on the riverbank, where gulls swooped down and fought over them. The sled dogs ate other parts that the people didn't eat or dry, and the rest was thrown away.

It wasn't until years later that I put those two pictures together and began to realize that I had been judging what I saw as "litter" by assumptions I brought with me from a different cultural context. Much of the trash Delores or, even more, her parents grew up throwing away was like those fish innards: things that would turn to dirt in a year or so. Inorganic or slow-to-biodegrade material was newer to that part of the world than to mine, and personal habits and governmental systems of dealing with permanent trash might not have been fully developed.

And of course, at fish camp, where the river is the only street, there's no curbside trash pickup. Even if there were, the trash would have to be loaded on a barge, or on an airplane when the rivers are frozen, and carried away south. Landfills are non-existent in a region where permafrost prevents digging below a few feet. And because there are no roads leading in and out of many Alaskan towns, everything, including trash, must arrive and leave by plane or boat. Disposable diapers can't just be casually forgotten. Trash remains ugly, and if it's burned, it makes ugly, noxious smoke.

I don't even know if what I saw at fish camp was litter. My dismissal of their actions as "ignorant" prevented me from understanding the full situation. If I had been more observant and inquisitive, I might have learned that everything was hauled out at the end of the fishing season. Also, I wish I had gauged how the amount of trash produced there by a group of 10 to 12 people compared to the amount produced at home by my family of four.

Coming in retrospect to an understanding, however limited, about the reasons for "litter" at fish camp led me to consider my street here in Richmond, Virginia. As I've thought in circles about why there's so much litter in my neighborhood, and why I seem to have made the problem into something larger than itself (why not just go out and pick up the trash, Angela?!), I've realized I'm fascinated by something I just can't understand.

As I've thought in circles about why there's so much litter in my neighborhood, and why I seem to have made the problem into something larger than itself, . . . I've realized I'm fascinated by something I just can't understand.

I live in a small urban neighborhood with an especially strong identity, partly because it's physically separated from other neighborhoods by a river, a graveyard, a university, and a major road. Until recently, the resident population has been relatively stable, with the same families of working-class or underemployed whites living and dying here for generations.

I like the feel of a small, rural town, the grassy lots, the busy front porches. But we are in the city—and each house has a big trashcan given to us by the city. Many corners have public trash receptacles. To me, it seems so easy *not* to throw things on the street. It's not just that I think there's no excuse to litter, it's that I slam up against a wall between myself and understanding: why do some people litter?

I do know it's conjectured that people who feel a lack of ownership of their surroundings are more likely to litter. This might be relevant to my area, where home ownership rates are lower than nearby neighborhoods. And this might partly account for my difficulty in understanding litter: I grew up in a house my family owned, and we own our house now. I've always lived with enough resources to have either a physical or—maybe more significantly—a psychological ownership of my environment. If I feel in control of what happens to me, I'm likely to feel in control of and thus responsible for my surroundings, as well. As much as I read and learn, it's hard to imagine what it is like to not feel this way.

And probably because I've always been in relative control of my life, I become agitated over limits I can't overtake. I'm not talking about the trash now, but about my own incapacity to understand why, for example, someone would throw a plastic cup out the car window, in this neighborhood or anywhere. It takes a lot of humility to tell myself that although I may never truly understand some-

one's actions, I can continue to relate to that person as a fellow human. (It also takes a lot of humility for me to go out and pick up the trash without feeling angry.) It's easier to label as ignorant a person whose actions I can't understand, so I don't have to admit my failure to understand.

But a lack of understanding need not be a separating wall. In fact, it probably only appears that way to people like me who get preoccupied with a particular limitation. If I put my nose up to a single brick, it looks like a wall. I miss the vaster open area of our resemblance. For every thing we can't understand about another person, there are many more we can. I'm trying to do better at looking for those things among those neighbors who seem to have different attitudes about trash than I do, or those who have grown up with different relationships to their surroundings.

I'll always be fascinated by what I can't understand—I think that's natural. (Love, death, and God, after all, are among the great themes of art and literature!) It just took me a while to realize that sometimes I use my lack of understanding as an excuse to be judgmental or as a blinder to the bigger picture of human commonality.

—Angela Lehman-Rios is a writer living in Richmond, Virginia.

I Think I Know

i think i know,
that white-haired man,
it's someone i will be.
he follows the cowpath
carefully,
the sun has just now set,
they moan and bell-ring before him,
returning to the night-grazed field.

—William Dellinger

Some Films on the Spiritual Search

David Greiser

Changes that take place in a culture's worldview do not happen overnight. Film buffs can rummage through the movies of the past 30 years and find films that seem well ahead of their time, philosophically speaking. Many fans of the original "Star Wars" trilogy recognize director George Lucas's vision of a spiritually rendered world.

On a different, but no less spiritual slant, the late Stanley Kubrick ("2001: A Space Odyssey," "A Clockwork Orange," and "Eyes Wide Shut") often said that he wished for people to leave his films with a deepened understanding of human depravity. Today's cinematic storytellers stand on the shoulders of their occasionally prescient grandparents in the art of putting spiritual ideas on celluloid.

It is hard to ignore the recent spate of films which deal with explicitly spiritual subject matter. If I were to identify a cinematic year in particular, 1999 would be a good starting place. Within that year a raft of good films dealt with some element of the search for God, life after death, the meaning of being human in God's world, or the relation of one's ethical life to God and the life beyond. "Simon Birch," "Pleasantville," "The

Truman Show," "What Dreams May Come," "The Sixth Sense," "Fight Club," are all films that explore one or more of these themes in some depth.

Some of these films are outstanding, some quite flawed. In some cases they tantalize the viewer with the promise of exploring profound themes before retreating to safe, formulaic Hollywood resolutions. Three films from 1999 are especially worthy of note (and rental!):

Within that year a raft of good films dealt with some element of the search for God, life after death, the meaning of being human in God's world, or the relation of one's ethical life to God and the life beyond.

The Matrix. I start with the film most often mentioned in these sorts of discussions. I first heard about "The Matrix" from a 21-year-old film buff in my church. Based on the promotional ads and trailers I would not have bothered with the film, since it looked like just another orgy of special effects and martial arts. I was wrong. My friend tutored me in the movie's complexites when my 46-year-old-brain could not access its technobabble.

"The Matrix" is a visually groundbreaking cyber-adventure which uses elements of the science fiction and martial arts genres, creating a worldscape in which the nature of reality itself is redefined. The story involves a computer hacker (played by Keanu Reeves) recruited by a band of cyber rebels who have made a disturbing discovery about the world: it doesn't exist. "The world" is actually a sophisticated virtual reality (or "matrix") created by evil beings who lull humans into going unthinkingly to dead-end jobs to make money to buy things they do not need. The plot revolves around the attempt of the rebels to free humankind from its enslavement.

In addition to undermining western materialism, the film borrows liberally from Christian symbols and from the Christian story itself. The names of the characters (Trinity, Neo, Morpheus) play on Christian ideas, and the film's climax involves a death and resurrection to rescue a lost humanity. Unfortunately, the story retreats to a predictable Hollywood denouement complete with martial arts and automatic weapons fire. The motives of the evil beings who create the Matrix are never really explained. Despite these flaws, this is a wonderful film to discuss in a group of spiritual searchers.

The Green Mile. Director Paul Darabont's adaptation in this film of a Stephen King novel was nominated for "Best Picture" by the Motion Picture Academy. The world of "The Green Mile" is Louisiana's death row in the 1930s. Into this world comes a new prisoner, an enormous black man with an otherworldly ethos.

John Coffey was convicted of murdering two little white girls. Since he seems strangely calm and transparent with the prison staff, some guards begin to question his guilt. In time, Coffey exhibits supernatural healing powers, which benefit the guards' families. In a concluding sequence we are led to see Coffey's execution as a sacrifice that absorbs the wrongs of racist, angry people. Again echoes of the Christian story are apparent.

American Beauty. This film won the 1999 "Best Picture" award. I include it in this review not for any overtly spiritual themes but for its critique of affluence, emptiness, status-seeking, and suburban alienation, as well as its celebration of beauty. Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey), the film's main character, is despised by his wife, unneeded at his job, and disrespected by his daughter. Through an uncomfortable awakening to sexual desire for his cheerleader-daughter's friend, Lester reconnects emotionally with the reality of beauty.

There are several soliloquies on the pervasive beauty in the world and on human ingratitude for its existence. These themes give the film the feel of a suburbanized, twenty-first century *Our Town*. The ache for relationship and community in the story is a feeling postmoderns know well.

Looking for a few good rentals? Take your pick. Story is the prime medium through which meaning is revealed in postmodern culture. These creative films are among the mythmakers of the day.

—David Greiser, Souderton, Pennsylvania, is a pastor at Souderton Mennonite Church and a preaching teacher. He teaches a Sunday school elective on faith and films. In the next issue of DSM, *he will review the new Harry Potter film.*

If You Need a Second Opinion

Daniel Hertzler

Review of *The Body and the Book: Writings from a Mennonite Life.* By Julia Kasdorf, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

If you have a perceived illness and your physician does not give a satisfactory answer, you may ask for the opinion of a second doctor. If you are puzzled about ambiguities facing Mennonites entering the twenty-first century, perhaps you should consult a poet.

Although you may not notice it at first glance, poets are different from ordinary people. For one thing, they pay attention to matters many people overlook. Poets notice things. Along with this, of course, they pay attention to poetic form. This can no doubt be learned, although I perceive that poets are born more than made. An additional important characteristic is a certain intensity. Poets are driven to express themselves when others may be willing to let well enough alone.

Julia Kasdorf is a poet. She has demonstrated this by having two books of poetry published by the University of Pittsburgh press. The first one, *Sleeping Preacher*, received the 1991 Agnes Lynch Starrett poetry prize. For this award her book was selected from among more than 900 submissions.

Now the poet has published a book of essays. Why does a poet need to write essays? Perhaps to explain herself to non-poets. Poems are not always transparent to non-poets. On my first time through the volume, I underlined freely and placed stars beside especially important passages. On a second time through, I inserted more stars. I'm still not completely sure what I have, but it grows on me.

In the preface, Kasdorf defines the book's title broadly. On the one hand, *body* designates "the religious community . . . both as 'one body' and as the body of Christ—as well as my own and other bodies in all their blessed, fallen experience." As for *book*, this is to indicate the Bible and also the *Martyrs' Mirror:* "Throughout this collection, I'm concerned with the relationships between cultural tradition and innovation, collective history and individual memory, sectarian refusals and cosmopolitan desires; I seek to honor my distinctive Mennonite heritage even as I transgress and transcend its limits."

This broad definition provides a wide tent into which the variety of essays included in the volume can easily fit. It appears, however, that two topics are of particular interest to Kasdorf: sexuality and power. Actually, when we stop to think of it, are there any other important topics?

It appears that two topics are of particular interest to Kasdorf: sexuality and power. Actually, when we stop to think of it, are there any other important topics?

Poets, like other artists, need to pay attention. When we marvel at the skill of a violin or piano player, we do not always stop to think of the hours of seemingly useless practice required to maintain their skill. As for Kasdorf the poet, "From fifth grade on, every night, even at slumber parties or on the bathroom floor I shared with the rest of the family, I shaped whatever happened that day into words. To have something to write each evening, I developed the habit of watching and converting experience into language" (11-12).

Her mentor has been Bertha, her father's stepmother, who was also her mother's aunt. When Bertha died Kasdorf lost "the only old woman I'd ever loved with my whole heart, a fierce woman who could judge and demand, who had a bossy streak as wide as the valley she came from but who could also love you wordlessly through the baking of wild hickory nut cake" (16).

Kasdorf evidently sees herself as a modern version of Bertha. Yet she will go beyond Bertha, for "to grow up as the kind of Mennonite I was and to write poetry that probes the reality of that experience is a serious contradiction. (A reflective essay also borders on embarrassing that sensibility)" (44).

Kasdorf's preoccupation with power must eventually lead her to H. S. Bender, a man of power two gener-

ations ahead of her—he died the year she was born. He "looms large in my imagination . . . father of Mennonite studies, intellectual heavyweight in a dark, plain suit tailored in Lancaster County, PA" (121).

She notices also John Howard Yoder and the Concern Group, which "sought to recover the essence of Anabaptism, which was more concerned with revolutionary moves of the Spirit rather than with the material realities of tribal identity and sacramental objects" (134). She observes that "Yoder, arguably the most influential Old Mennonite thinker of his generation, will have trouble respecting the bodies of his female students" (135). Sex and power seem never far apart.

In chapter 9, "The Gothic Tale of Lucy Hochstetler and the Temptation of Literary Authority," she exegetes the odd story of an Amish bishop taken to court for keeping tied his mentally ill daughter. She uses the case to point out the ambiguities in the efforts of John Umble, Guy F. Hershberger, and J. C. Wenger to defend the bishop. She herself identifies with both the mad daughter Lucy and Miriam, the bishop's niece, who reported the story as best she could. "Will I be Miriam, the dutiful scribe, or Lucy, raging in my chains?" (157).

Kasdorf acknowledges that in her poetry she has in one sense preyed upon her parents and other acquaintances. "Only after a book was published did my guilt and curiosity cause me to engage the subject of those poems in conversations about how it felt to be represented, and I found those conversations almost too painful to bear" (159). Yet she concludes that "the true poem forces an imaginative reach, and thereby it unsettles, scrambles categories, unnerves. To make another variation on an old theme: no disturbance for the writer, no disturbance for the reader" (163).

Kasdorf has revealed aspects of herself throughout this volume. In the final chapter it comes out that she was sexually abused as a child by an elderly neighbor while on the way home from school and bitten by a copperhead while attending a summer camp. Both experiences, one would observe, were in a location which should have been safe but turned out to be a place of trauma.

In a concluding afterword she refers as she has before in the volume to an issue bedeviling our churches: how to relate to homosexuals who perceive that a covenanted same-sex relationship is an appropriate Christian lifestyle. She has no answer for this problem except to assert that "I am more certain than ever of the need to resist coercion and violence against the body" (192). Since none of the other "doctors" seems to have a definitive answer either, we may have to wait for further revelation.

As I reviewed these essays, I was struck by the few and fragmentary references to the biblical tradition. The Bible is full of poetry, much of it prophetic, some of it erotic. How has this poet not made more use of the biblical poetry? But then I recognize that she has evidently not studied the Bible professionally. She seems to have left Goshen College early before taking the definitive Bible courses and in university has studied the literature of other traditions.

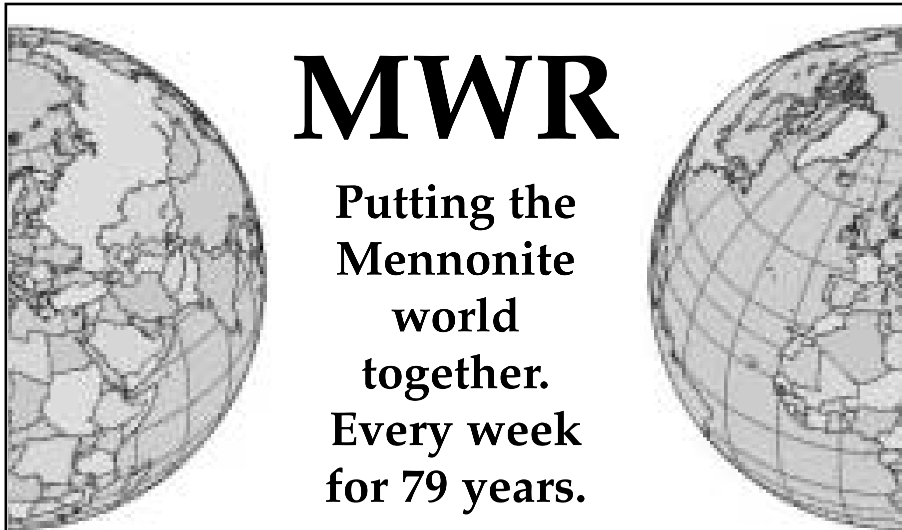
I was impressed, however, to find a report in *Mennonite Weekly Review* (Sept. 6, 2001) of a presentation she made at Bluffton College, where she contrasted the Tower of Babel story with Pentecost and asserted "This is an amazing reversal of the Babel story, and it suggests to me that the truest sign of the presence of God is not sameness, conformity or consensus of identity but real understanding amid profound difference and diversity." The article reports that "She urged new students to seek out new experiences, but not to lose the language of the past." From one who has dedicated her life to words, it seems an appropriate exhortation.

I learn in the book that Kasdorf has left the Mennonite church for the Episcopalian. In doing this she has joined a line of those who have found Mennonite tradition in some way too narrow or otherwise unsatisfactory. Must our most creative people always leave? It appears our only hope for continued vitality is to accept persons from other backgrounds who find the Anabaptist vision as we have been able to interpret it meeting a spiritual need in their lives.

As Kasdorf finishes this book, she anticipates a move from Messiah College to Pennsylvania State University. "It feels as if I am closing a chapter of my life, drawing closer to the landscape and people of my origins even as I drift farther from its institutions" (192).

Some will still want to consult her for her second opinion. Recently, when visiting my alma mater to be inducted into the Old Grads group, I saw a poster with her visage and the announcement of a lecture. Even though she has not become "a prince of the church," (139) some are listening. Comparatively few people in the world are granted as much.

—Daniel Hertzler, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, is author of a memoir, A Little Left of Center *(DreamSeeker Books, 2000) and instructor for Pastoral Studies Distance Education. Hertzler also walks the dog, cuts wood in season, works in the garden, and keeps a few bees. He and wife Mary have four sons and nine grandchildren.*



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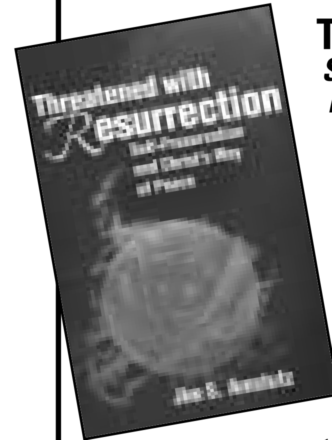

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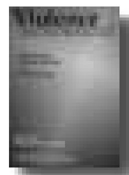

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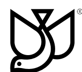

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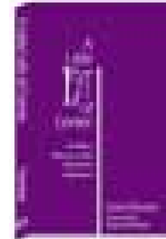

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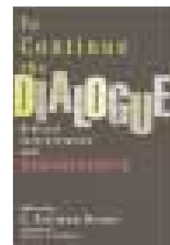
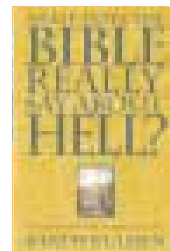


To Continue the Dialogue: Biblical Interpretation and Homosexuality, Living Issues Discussion Series 1, ed. C. Norman Kraus. "This kind of resource is the necessary beginning point for true discernment," says George R. Brunk III of these reasoned yet passionate calls for all who care about this issue to deliberate under the Spirit's guidance. *Authors:* Kraus, Richard Kauffman, Marcus Smucker, David Schroeder, Paul Lederach, Melanie Zuercher, Ed Stoltzfus, Lin Garber, Michael King, Don Blosser, Carl Keener, Douglas Swartzentruber, Ted Grimsrud, James Reimer, Reta H. Finger, Mark T. Nation, Carolyn Schrock-Shenk. *Respondents:* Brunk, John Lapp, Mary Schertz, Willard Swartley, Richard Showalter, Elsie and Don Steelberg, Elaine Swartzentruber. *6 x 9 tr. pap.; 332 p; $23.95 US/35.95 Can*

Fractured Dance: Gadamer and a Mennonite Conflict Over Homosexuality, C. Henry Smith Series 3, Michael A. King. "What a joy that a theologically Reformed psychologist can profit from a Mennonite pastor who courageously engages a raw conflict with the playful hopefulness of a postmodern, Gadamerian hermeneutic," declares Dan B. Allender. "In a controversy like that over homosexuality, this dispassionate analysis is welcome and necessary," comments Reta Haldeman Finger. And John A. Esau observes that "Behind and sometimes through the scholarly overlay of *Fractured Dance*, one feels the passion of a Jeremiah who cares deeply for his people amid a tragic era." *6 x 9; 304 p; $22.95/33.95*



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We would sometimes hold
a red battery, nine volts,
against our tongues,

pressing for interminable moments,
until power's metal flavor,
its stunning signature wrote

itself into our neurons,
flared across synapses.
But Sam always recused

himself, always went to fix
something to eat, maybe a slice
of cheese between parallel

slabs of white bread.
We dared each other to endure
longer. We worked hard

on the nuanced expression
that can mask a ten-year old's
crazed kaleidoscope of pain

and glee. And Sam stood,
chewing his sandwich
savoring American cheese

and Wonder Bread
while his friends tasted
electricity and explained

to him how it felt to dare.
Still he stayed mute and stared,
unwilling or unable to translate

our numb tongued languages of joy.

—*David Wright*

Forthcoming in *A Liturgy of Stones*, DreamSeeker Books, 2002. Published here
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