

# **D**reamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul



## **A War Child**

Robert Rhodes

## **Beneath the Skyline**

*Seeking Journey, Making Home: A Glimpse of Young Adulthood*

Deborah Good

## **An Exit or an Exodus? A Quest for God Amid Doubt**

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## **Exploring Islam and the Clash with the West: Review of *The Crisis of Islam***

Marlin Jeschke

## **Books, Faith, World & More**

*The Problem of Violence: Review of Three Responses*

Daniel Hertzler

*and much more*

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**Winter 2004**

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# Editorial: But Where Are the Women?

I have nothing against men. I believe I am one myself. And male or not, I want to be valued; I want to count; I want to have a voice.

Do women want these things? As husband of one woman and father of three, I have the impression this is certainly the case. But I would like not to speak for women but to hear from women.

Thus it has interested me—and with this issue of *DSM* caused me enough concern to report it—that women writers seem less inclined to ask to be heard in *DSM* than male writers. Quarter after quarter, when the time comes to assemble a given issue, usually plenty of articles by men are already on hand but fewer by women. This issue the matter came to a head: When I first assessed which articles were ready to run this quarter, only two were by women.

Unhappy, I made unusually proactive efforts to secure more articles by women I knew to be eloquent and insightful writers. Several came through with flying colors, thank God and them. Still female article writers in this issue are outnumbered seven to four by men (or nine to four if poetry authors are included).

This seems not due to lack of female interest in *DSM*. Though no effort has been made yet to track precisely how many women versus

men subscribe (and some readership we can't track since it's anonymous on the Internet), if anything women seem somewhat more likely to subscribe than men. This echoes what studies of reading and book buying tend to show, which is that women are the truly enthusiastic readers in North America.

So where are the women writers? Are they perhaps still less likely than men, so trained to speak up from day one, to claim their rightful public voices? Do they prefer to speak in other venues? When I asked my wife Joan to speculate, she suggested that perhaps (1) women still typically juggle a greater range of work and domestic duties than many men; and (2) women are less ready than men to say, "This is my time to write, violate it at your peril!"

Whatever the reasons, let this be clear: I think more women should be published in *DreamSeeker Magazine*. This is partly because women make up half the human race. Even more it's because I just plain happen to think that some of the freshest writing these days, maybe because they've traditionally done less of it, is coming from women.

Now, lest I drag my own marriage too far into what I am bemoaning, I must cease writing and run to wash the dishes.

—Michael A. King

**So where are the women writers? Are they perhaps still less likely than men . . . to claim their rightful public voices?**



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## Letter

**D**ear Editors: I just had to let you know how much I enjoyed reading about Michael King's trip West (*DreamSeeker Magazine*, Autumn 2003)! In fact, it reinforced my travel dreams to go basically the same route—some day.

Michael, your Honda is one year younger than my trusted Honda Civic. She is nearly 104,000 miles old and has acquired a rebuilt distributor in recent weeks. So I'm hoping she'll be as strong and loyal as her Sister King Honda, and take me where I want to go for a few more years.

One of my after-retirement trips is going to be to southern California and up the Pacific Coast to Portland, Snoqualmie, Seattle, and Beyond. I will use my dog-eared *Mennonite Your-Way Directory* all the way and back and will have the time of my life. I will *not* be as brave as a friend of mine who is now tenting her way to and from Seattle. I don't deal well with whining mosquitoes zinging at me as I cower against the canvas or things that go bump in the night when I'm in a tent.

Thanks again for the wonderful article. I do hope Jack Kerouac shared it with Jesus Christ—or vice versa. I'll bet they had a laugh or two as they remembered the trip.

Keep that little magazine coming!

—Audrey A. Metz

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

## *Children's Sermon*

The children are angry.

The story is too sweet,  
too much about love, Jesus,

being kind to neighbors. No  
prophet's head offered

on a king's platter like a giant  
frightened apple. No one suffers

God's wrath. No cities burn  
to fine ash as sulfur slides

down heaven's holy sluice  
to drown the wicked. No one

grapples God to a draw. A woman,  
(voice smooth as her pressed

flower-print skirt) displays pictures,  
all the colors of children possible,

arranged on Jesus' lap like strange  
construction paper bouquets, faces

like cotton blooms tucked over  
her prim legs. Adults laugh at restless

bodies, cringe as a stocky blonde boy  
wanders behind the woman, so even-  
toned and unaware, as he performs  
practiced karate chops and forms  
high kicks over her head. His mother  
eyes him from the third pew; he grins,

kicks, grins, kicks, until she clears  
the steps in a terrible blur to collect him.

She contains his flailing limbs in a sweep  
of her long mother's arms. He tries

to cry, but she smothers his voice  
in her own flowered breast.

The children sit still.

They have glimpsed God's mighty arms  
filled with their brother, have seen God's

long reach. They believe God's hands  
could gather them up for good.

—*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 litera-  
ture in the Chicago area.*

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## A War Child

Robert Rhodes

*Child of the moment,  
kaffiyeh of night,  
do you realize that since you came, we have not known what  
to do?*

—Iraqi poet Saadi Youssef, “The Trees of Ithaca”

I don't even know his last name. But I could find Hassan on some Baghdad thoroughfare with mysterious ease. He has come unheralded from the other side of the world, but I would know him as if he were one of my own children, even though we have never met and do not even speak the same language. I have imagined him for so long, and inhabited his life for so many futile afternoons, that this vicarious child has become whatever I believe him to be.

*Father, Allah, Jesus, Yahweh—please spare him this madness.* Or so I have bargained and implored, mostly with shadows. I have even prayed, assuming someone is still accepting prayers from this country of invaders.

Hassan must be nine now. When my friend Tom Cornell of the Catholic Peace Fellowship met him last Christmas—before the war, before the obscenity of the occupation, when life still was relatively quiet in Iraq—Hassan was shining shoes with a clutch of boys every day near the Tigris River in downtown Baghdad.

They congregated, this truant fraternity of bootblacks, near the big hotels where all the Western journalists and peace activists stayed. They plied their trade, ran the gamut of minor scams, and lived the way homeless boys live in cities all over the world. I try not to imagine what that really means, or what demeaning grief or neglect Hassan—a small boy with a beautiful cinnamon face—has had to endure because of his circumstances.

The territory they worked lay near one of the deep turns the Tigris takes through central Baghdad. On the far shore stood the Republican Palace, one of the primary targets of the American “shock and awe” campaign of aerial deconstruction. Today, the so-called Green Zone surrounding the headquarters of the occupation, with the palace at its center, is still subject to rocket attacks, suicide bombers, and other jolts of sudden fatality. So little has changed.

In short, the only home these children knew has been transformed into a smoldering district of the underworld, a place of depravity patrolled by frustrated and frightened soldiers who would sooner shoot than be shot, and who often do.

*Spare him this madness.*

In the local parlance, Hassan’s father is an “Ali Baba”—a thief, a ne’er-do-well confined to one of Saddam’s despairing jails for some untold

crime. No one really knows where Hassan lived, or how he survived exactly, only that he stayed close to the older boys with their shoeshine stands, keeping to the streets where they knew they could make some money and remain relatively safe from harm.

Though they would be hard to imagine, there are worse lives certainly, and far better ones, especially

as lives go for those who are alone. But this was all I knew at first of Hassan—an Iraqi boy on the other side of the world who has haunted my heart for more than a year now.

I have thought of the horror Hassan must have witnessed more times than I should. What must war do to a child like this? What grief, what immovable

fear must have faced him during this time of insanity, while people here went about their lives with barely a thought for their own orphans, much less for Iraq’s?

When the bombs began to fall, thousands of them, they turned Hassan’s neighborhood, his grim haven where people from the West occasionally alit, into a constellation of intractable doom.

*Are they still accepting prayers from this country of invaders? Please listen carefully then. . . .*

**I**n our home, Hassan has become a silent fourth child. Since I heard

**In our home, Hassan has become a silent fourth child. Since I heard about him from Tom, we have prayed for Hassan every night and tried in vain to imagine what his life must be like and how it must have been affected by the war.**

about him from Tom, we have prayed for Hassan every night and tried in vain to imagine what his life must be like and how it must have been affected by the war.

We never consciously chose to remember Hassan like this. It just occurred, in a sure and natural way that has made him real and alive to us.

Around the beginning of 2003, our children and I decided to light a candle to remind us to pray for Hassan, or just to stop in the middle of whatever we were doing to put ourselves in his place, mindful of whatever was happening in Iraq that day. Many nights, the tall glass candleholder—the kind found glowing next to Catholic altars—flickered until morning.

When I would put my children to bed at night, we often would pray out loud for Hassan, and for all the other children like him in Iraq or Afghanistan or wherever else came to mind. It is quite moving to experience the certain and authentic compassion that children feel for one another—a compassion that doesn’t discriminate or rely on reason for validation. In the mind of a child, I learned, the plight of someone like Hassan was no less a concern than anything that might befall us here, or disrupt the holy shadows of our own home.

As often occurs with children, my own powers as an adult seemed to evince far more influence or sincerity than I would have thought. As Hassan continued to become a part of our life—of our struggle with what had been happening in the world—the children hoped for some compelling

agent of mercy to come forward and intervene. It was a mercy I had been hoping for, too, though out of my own sense of powerlessness, and not from faith.

Finally, though, what was expected of me did become clear. As we talked about Hassan one evening this summer, our daughter Lydia, who is six, asked what I had hoped she never would.

“Hassan must be scared,” she said quietly. “He must really be hungry and upset because the war is happening right where he lives.”

I said Hassan probably was frightened, just as we all were when we thought about him. My wife’s fear has been an especially private one, defying words. But I said Hassan was a smart little boy who knew how to find his way around and get help.

“What if all the helpers he knows are dead or ran away?” she asked. Her distress had more integrity than mine ever did. “I’m afraid Hassan is going to get hurt, or something bad will happen if somebody doesn’t rescue him.”

My heart at that moment felt hollow and dusty, like an old pine cone jammed in my chest. My lungs went limp and cold and I castigated myself for ever bringing the subject up. Why burden children with a dilemma I had no understanding of myself? I tried to think of a way out of all this.

Then she asked, “When are you going to go there and bring Hassan to live with us in Kansas?”

Her question struck me with such force that I wasn’t sure if I’d really heard it, or simply intuited what both

of us had been thinking. Either way, I knew I had no answer.

"I don't know," I said.

Our children are used to my traveling occasionally in my work, so making a trip to Iraq hardly seemed inconceivable.

"Someone has to go and rescue Hassan," she insisted. "You have to go and bring him here to live with us."

For her, the matter was settled, which made the whole affair even more heartbreaking. How many children, I thought, set adrift in this forlorn society, would be as generous as my own daughter?

I told her I would bring Hassan to be in our family if I could, but that things weren't that simple. I said I would have to think about it for awhile.

As she climbed into bed, I thought about what I really would do if there were a way to help Hassan. I tried to imagine what the parents of countless children in Iraq must be enduring through all this. As I turned off the lamp and stood at the door, Lydia called out again, this time with an urgency I had never heard from her.

"You have to go and save Hassan and bring him here," she said.

*Spare him this madness. Spare him these heedless invaders.*

"You have to do it. Time is running out!"

**H**assan, like a lot of his friends, is well-known among the journalists and activists who have been in Baghdad throughout the war. He is quite

charming and has a way of ingratiating himself to anyone with a heart.

Because of this, Tom and I have been able to keep track of Hassan, after a fashion, primarily through our acquaintances in Christian Peacemaker Teams and Voices in the Wilderness, activist groups with people still in the country. On the Voices Web site, there are even a few photos of Hassan, a couple of which we have on our computer at home—photos that, for us anyway, have become iconic of the fate of all Iraqi children. In one, he is eating an outsized piece of chocolate cake, a cup of tea nearby, amid crumbs. His clothes are tattered but warm, and he is smiling.

By e-mail, I have been able to get a few first- and second-hand reports on Hassan, and so has Tom. Over the months, we have been able to put together some basic, but occasionally harrowing, facts. Like all information emerging from a war zone, it is subject to considerable error and confusion. But when one is grasping straws, even rumors will suffice.

First, we believe Hassan was wounded. At some point during the invasion, apparently after American forces entered Baghdad and swarmed the neighborhood around the downtown hotels, Hassan suffered a leg wound. According to one report we received, the wound went untreated and did not heal for a long time.

He also has had some problem with his teeth. Though some of the photos that show Hassan on the

Voices Web site show a beautiful if crooked smile, he lost some front teeth when he was hit by a car, apparently before the war began.

At some point after the invasion, Hassan and his friends disappeared from the neighborhood around the Palestine Hotel. Apparently, they were edged out of their territory not by danger but by unemployed men who trailed the Westerners and the soldiers in search of income. Postwar economics were hard at work.

For quite awhile, this was where the trail went cold, and I began to wonder if Hassan had not passed out of our lives once and for all, his fate never to be known. Ultimately, this probably will happen, but the other day Tom told me he had heard a few scraps that gave at least a little hope.

Hassan's father apparently has reentered the picture. After many jails in Iraq were turned out amid the invasion, Hassan's father got out and was able to track down his son. What this means, we have no way of knowing.

According to Tom, though, Hassan and his father are now living in Al-Sadr City—a Shiite district in eastern Baghdad formerly known as Saddam City. This district was something of a stepchild in the hierarchy of Baghdad politics. During the Saddam regime, it was a place of outcasts, denied many of the utilities and amenities that were basic in other districts. Today, with the Shiite resurgence, Al-Sadr is slowly emerging from its own dark

age, though even by Iraqi standards this is not saying a lot.

Nonetheless, I cannot help but wonder if time is not still running out for Hassan, or at least for other children like him. Though the recent capture of Saddam Hussein adds an unpredictable wild card, reading the news of escalating violence in Iraq—violence that has little target anymore but seems to be violence for its own inverted purpose—hope becomes a distinctly short commodity. It even begins to appear pointless to hope, a mockery of what we know to be real.

Clearly, I will not be the one to rescue Hassan, if anyone does. Knowing this brings a terrible emptiness with it. But perhaps we have done a little, after all, to keep this child safe for a season, though I can't say what.

Still, having come this far with him, I find it astonishing that even now I don't even know Hassan's last name, or much about his broken family, or even the sound of his voice. But I know on the street I could find him with mysterious ease, and I can bring his face to mind in an instant, even faster than I can my own.

I even begin to believe that if time really does run out for Hassan, as I have been warned it could, I can somehow make it start again. This is all the hope I can afford.

—Robert Rhodes lives in Newton, Kansas, where he is assistant editor of Mennonite Weekly Review.



## Seeking Journey, Making Home

*A Glimpse of Young Adulthood*

Deborah Good

I am reading a novel. In it, the author creates a little world of people whose lives weave into and out of each other. The newspaperman plays basketball with the brother of a woman who becomes his lover. This woman's best friend is married to the newspaperman's photographer. And the photographer and the basketball-playing brother meet regularly with the same Jewish organization.

The characters' lives are interconnected as they visit each other, eat together, talk about each other, fight with each other, follow the happenings in each others' daily lives. They may not always get along—they may not even be friends—but in their own odd, unintentional way, these six people are community.

Some days, all I want is my own little world of people. I want to feel at home somewhere—in a geographical place, in a small community of people, in a grounded way of thinking and living. Instead, I feel scattered. I know too many people in too many places who believe too many different things. Too many, too many, too many. And therein lies the bane and the richness of my young-adult existence.

In her book *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (Jossey-Bass, 2000), Sharon Daloz Parks develops “journey” and “home” as prevailing metaphors in our lives. “The story of human becoming might best be understood as reflecting two great yearnings,” she writes, “one for differentiation, autonomy, and agency, and the other for relation, belonging, and communion”—home (49).

And what do I mean by “home”? Home is, first of all, a place. It is the familiar braided rug in your parents' living room. It is the stream that runs through the family farm. It is the crack in the sidewalk in front of 1800 Kenyon Street.

But home is more than location. It is a feeling of comfort and stability. Expectations are understood and people are constant. Dad always sits in the biggest chair, Beth's always yelling something at somebody, Mom says the prayer before the meal, and, gosh-darnit, everyone better play Monopoly with Tommy afterward. And although no one asks about the meaning of life, most people in the group would have something similar to say. Home is a geographical place, a group of people, a faith tradition.

I find in my own life, and in the lives of many of my peers, a tension between our desire to explore new territory and our hunger for a sense of home. We read books with ideas that

challenge the doctrines of our childhood—and then return to our home church for the annual Christmas hymn sing. We spend a year in an indigenous community in Peru, but we are relieved our parents haven't moved anywhere when we get back. We spend our weekends visiting friends

**Young adulthood is like standing in a crowded room of loud people and being told to follow “that voice.” We have a gazillion ideas of what our lives could look like and little idea how to get there.**

in various parts of the country, but in our search for community closer by, we start supper clubs and have keg parties. Even as we leave much of “home” behind, we seek ways to create it wherever we are.

In a song called “Cathedrals,” Jump, Little Children sings about times in life

when “you get a feeling that you should just go home—and spend a lifetime finding out just what that is.” These words capture what I think is a key challenge for many of us in my generation.

Last July, I sat around a professor's deck with a group of my peers, discussing our stage of life. Sometimes I think young adulthood is like standing in a crowded room of loud people and being told to follow “that voice.” We have a gazillion ideas of what our lives could look like and little idea how to get there.

So we meander about, bumping into each other, trying to make smart decisions, trying to pay our school debts and electric bills, still trying to discern what we believe, what we're

sure of in life—since somehow we graduated from college without figuring that out—and, mostly, trying to have a good time.

I turned 23 last month. When I reflect on the past few years of my life, I find it no wonder that I have a hard time knowing what to call “home.” I am not sure about a lot of things, including what job I will have in three months. In the past five years, I have lived in twelve different housing situations, and I’m about to move again. My college classmates and I are constantly navigating the next decision-making episode, the next transition. Almost every other weekend, I am helping a friend move or attending someone’s wedding.

I wonder whether my feeling of homelessness was true of young adults in the past. In part, I think it was—this life stage is inherently full of transition. But technology and travel make my world bigger and more accessible than that of many a few generations ago. Exposure to such a wide variety of people, places, and experiences may have left my generation with less of a sense of home than our parents and grandparents.

This morning, I rolled out of bed and pulled on some clothes. It wasn’t until lunch time that I looked down and realized how much my outfit said about my relationship with the world: I bought my purple “Graceland”

sneakers last month while visiting a friend in Germany. My long-sleeve top is from Guatemala where I spent a semester of college. And my necklace of dark brown beads was given to me by a friend who lived in India for several months.

In contrast, my 88-year-old grandmother has rarely left the state of Pennsylvania and recently wrote me a card saying, “You are brave to go so many new places, but I think I would rather stay home.” After traveling some in young adulthood, most of her children have returned to live in Lancaster County, a short drive from the farm on which they were raised. I wonder where my cousins and I will end up.

Thirty years ago, my parents graduated from Eastern Mennonite College (now University), my alma mater. Their friends scattered to different parts of the country and world, like mine, and they wrote some letters but gradually lost touch with many of their classmates.

I, on the other hand, live in the age of cell phones and the Internet. I am connected to the world—and to people from my past—in a way my parents never experienced. As a result, my friends from high school and college and I write emails and talk on the phone to keep in touch. We visit each other regularly, sometimes driving long distances without thinking it excessive or unnecessary. This may sound like fun, but it also leaves me

feeling untethered, scattered, homeless.

Also, I am not grounded in a faith tradition the way my parents were a generation ago. I grew up going to Sunday school and learning Anabaptist values from parents and relatives but am much slower to embrace fully any way of thinking and living.

As a child, the diversity of students in my D.C. public school classrooms taught me to be accepting of many kinds of people and to grant validity to different religious beliefs. As a college student, my friends and I watched “The Matrix,” a movie that asks if what we believe to be real is in fact a deception, and we felt like it said something about our lives.

We are living in an era commonly characterized as “postmodernism,” an era that defies definitions of truth and reality, and deconstructs foundational ideologies and moralities. In such a world, it is hard to feel at home in any one faith tradition.

I have loved my life’s journeys, but I am not content with homelessness. I have chosen to live in a bustling city of over a million people with no one else from my family, and to keep in touch with friends in many different places, but I am trying to create home even in my rather nomadic existence.

Next week, I move into an apartment with two good friends. I look forward to spending time there, filling the living room with furniture, decorating the walls with our things. I look forward to eating our meals around the kitchen table, debriefing together after our days at work, and being community for one another as best we know how.

Recently, I have also started meeting a good friend for breakfast once a week—one more way to build consistency amid scattered relationships. And although I say that I am slow to embrace a faith tradition, I still go to church on Sundays, seeking God and, even more, looking for somewhere to belong.

We are a generation of nomads, jumping from place to place and job to job. But if you look closely, we are also a generation scrambling for stability and community, seeking ways to make home.

—Deborah Good, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, graduated from Eastern Mennonite University in 2002 and is currently an intern at The Other Side magazine ([www.theotherside.org](http://www.theotherside.org)). Since writing this article, she moved into an apartment in West Philadelphia with two friends where she is exploring the meaning of home.





# An Exit or an Exodus?

*A Quest for God Amid Doubt*

Mel Leaman

She sat by the sliding door in the kitchen. Sunlight streaked her silver-gray hair. “Mom,” I queried, “do you ever doubt God?”

Perhaps it was a silly question to ask a woman who had witnessed both miracles and misery but could still sing “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” with seemingly unwavering belief. Why couldn’t I sing with equal conviction?

A brief silence ensued. There is a lot of life to review when you have raised seven children. She thoughtfully replied, “Don almost died in Tanganyika and David in the States. Sometimes it was hard to understand God’s purposes as I watched my children struggle with various issues in their lives. The church had its challenges too!”

The family and her church were my mother’s passions. Dad pastored a Mennonite congregation in York, Pennsylvania for many years. They gave their all to God, whether on the mission field in Africa or in the local ministry.

My mother continued. “I’ve cried out to God countless times for wisdom and understanding.”

I heard the words before they fell from her lips: “But, Melvin, I can’t say I ever doubted God.”

Shamed by her strong assurance, I wondered how I could ever confess the depth of my doubts. She wouldn’t understand. It was safer merely to scratch the surface of my uncertainties. Mom’s kind of faith felt like a distant memory to me.

I was embarrassed to admit that my faith faltered, because the difficult times I had encountered seemed trivial in comparison to the things my mother had endured. Frederick Buechner suggests that “doubts can be the ants in pants of faith.” My belt had already loosened and I feared my pants were about to fall. Too many tough questions were just not adequately answered for me. I felt overwhelmed and guilty.

I was the pastor of a growing United Methodist Church where people were genuinely excited about their sojourns of faith. Lives were changing and love ran deep. Small groups were being formed while talk about relocating and building new facilities was in the air.

I felt breathless. They were energized, but I was exhausted. The fresh breath of God no longer “fill[ed] me with life anew.” The right words were there, but I lived and moved between the waxing and the waning of faith. How long could I stay there and serve with integrity? It was December 1994, about a year and a half after that

talk with Mom, that I penned this prayer:

*While faith is waning for me, O God, can I yet have faith in you? Will you hold me or let me go? Do you consider doubt the termination of relationship or transformation? Does my struggle for faith negate the effectiveness of my prayers, and of your faithful response? Will you yet pray for me when my prayers to you are confounded—*

**Frederick Buechner suggests that “doubts can be the ants in pants of faith.” My belt had already loosened and I feared my pants were about to fall.**

*perhaps infrequent? Can I trust your love for me or do you thrust me aside in my doubt and diminish my ministry?*

*Would you dare to accept the possibility that I may not be losing my faith, but rather expanding it? If you would, perhaps I could!*

*God, I have no other passion beyond that of following you, but when you are breaking out of my package, I must be free to explore and find you somewhere beyond the familiar trappings that once tied everything together. I fear you will not be faithful; that I will somehow step beyond the boundaries of your acceptance; that transformation might tear us apart rather than tender our love.*

*I do not want to lose you, O God, but I cannot find you fully in the confines of the faith to which I cling. Is to search, to stray? Can I really trust that to seek is to find? And if I stray too far in the seeking, could you yet find me?*

*Tenets of my faith are fraying at the edges; the garments of salvation are tattered. Does christocentricism imply exclusivism? Have I duly and deeply*

*considered the character and conclusions of other religions? Why would a God of love choose to create a world in which only some hear God's promise in Jesus, even fewer follow, and those who don't are damned?*

*How can life be affirmed as a gift from God when so many experience it as suffering, trials, temptations, and others experience it as a test with eternal consequences? Does the reality of my questioning suggest that I have been duped by relativism?*

*Oh God, please hear my commitment to you, yet also acknowledge the call that compels me to answer these and many other questions. If by January 1996 I cannot find a more comfortable integration of my faith and my questions, then I will consider leaving the ministry.*

The years passed; the doubts didn't. This issue was still under consideration. It seemed the harder I prayed, the heavier my heart became. Frequent confessions and constant petitions for renewed joy brought little peace. I shared my struggles with a few special friends. Still this was not enough to thwart the eventual disconnection between my calling and my questioning.

Attempts to be open to the Spirit from all sides of the theological fence found me at seminars on world religions, including a graduate course in Judaism taught by a rabbi and a member of the Billy Graham School of Evangelism. My experience at the evangelism seminar proved a turning point. I was greatly impressed by the speakers' enthusiasm, dedication, and

theological surety. Upon my return home I preached a sermon in like fashion. That experience only confirmed my discomfort with attempts to wrap truth in a package of certainty. The message had to be mine. Personal integrity demanded that I needed to preach from a more questioning spirit.

Church attendance increased. We bought property to relocate. The "promised land" was just over the horizon, but I wasn't sure if I could cross over Jordan with my people. I was a leader with too many questions. Growing churches need pastors with answers, don't they?

I experienced times of deep inner turmoil during the next two years. If I left now, the congregation would have to adjust to being relocated and also accept a new pastor. After 15 years of shared ministry, wouldn't a sudden exodus feel like an act of betrayal?

However, I could no longer preach with heartfelt conviction, so it seemed dishonest to linger. I didn't know what I was going to do, but I knew the vocation that had embraced me for over 20 years could no longer hold me. The following poem (written in August 1999, soon after I took a voluntary leave of absence from the pastorate) tells of some of the inner conflict I was feeling.

*For years my call has been to help people  
solidify beliefs and find firm  
foundations.*

*For years to come, my farewell to that  
call may feel like release and liberation.*

*The freedom from that call beckons me,*

*for I no longer bear the weight  
of responsibility.*

*The fear in that call brings the curse of  
being an unfaithful servant—eternally!*

*My God, is this an exit or an exodus?*

*Am I merely leaving or am I going some  
place?*

*Is this a dead end or is there a promised  
land just around the corner?*

An exit or an exodus: Which has it been? Perhaps a bit of both. I felt I had failed God and family in my exit from the ministry. How could a third-generation pastor let doubt defeat faith?

My prayer in 1994 noted the fear "that transformation might tear us apart rather than tender our love." I vacillate between the felt distance my decision has created and a longing to be held again. It's a real mix. Yet there are times God has come intimately close amid the chaos and despite the distance.

It is my hope that the Holy One determines to make this exit an exodus. God doesn't go for dead ends. Grace has to be greater than that! I am praying that it is a haven where exits lead to entrances. Hopefully, grace is

leading me home. Whether that home will look like where I've been or where I'm going remains to be seen.

The winds of transformation are on the move and no one knows where they may blow. It seems that even my present employment as a professor of religion is somehow providential. The story of my landing this position sounds itself like a serendipitous saga of grace. Perhaps the "promised land" is not always the end in mind as much as it is the process of moving simultaneously within it as well as toward it. "I don't know, Mom. What do you think?" The sojourn continues.

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## A Few Worries About Being a Poet

David Wright

**P**oets worry. We do so mostly in a narcissistic and sinful sense. We feel anxious about language and about ourselves, insecure about whether what we're doing matters to anyone other than us. Some of us come to believe the popular trope of the alienated artist, the misunderstood misanthrope parked at a coffee shop on the edge of society (and the margins of the church in particular). We give a poem to a friend or a relative, and they do not "get it." Their "hmm" or "I'm sure this would be lovely, if I understood it" reaffirms for us that we labor alone, destined to be, always, freelance human beings.

Poet Scott Cairns calls such worry "a rite of passage through which every adolescent (and certainly every nascent artist) must pass. But the issue is just that: the artist really must pass through it" ("Artists, Alienation, and Getting on with It," *re:generation quarterly* 5.4, 1999, n.p.).

Part of my own attempt to tunnel through artistic adolescence has been the discovery of another sort of worry, a kind of attention-paying that begins for me to

approach prayer. Now I do not believe, especially for a Christian poet, that writing directly equals prayer. I've had enough of art as transcendence and salvation. I do think, however, that many acts of faithful living can take on the shape of prayer.

The British poet W. H. Auden, in fact, claimed that the very essence of prayer was "to pay attention to something or someone other than oneself. Whenever a man so concentrates his attention—on a landscape, a poem, a geometrical problem, an idol, or the True God—that he completely forgets his own ego and desires, he is praying" (*A Certain World*, London, Faber, 306).

So we worry the arms of a well-worn chair or the seat of well-loved jeans, so busy living in them that we barely notice they have gone threadbare. We worry bread dough as we knead it. Some carry a pebble in their pockets, and when they feel anxious, their thumbs worry the stone thin until they must replace it with another.

What both kinds of worry have in common, and what attracts me to the term, is how they require imagination. To be anxious and to pray both require that we be able to project possibility beyond any given choice. Perhaps the most worried among us may be the most imaginative (though this is not to diminish the debilitating power of anxiety disorders).

What makes the difference is how our imaginations turn toward others

in ways that provide them with grace. So here, like a handful of stones or beads, I offer a few of my own peculiar worries about being a poet.

(1) I worry about the ponderous seriousness of a word like *poet*. Does the world really need more pretense masquerading as wisdom? A poem shouldn't have a point, a nugget of wisdom, another sermon, a fortune cookie's worth of advice. Though lucky numbers might be useful.

(2) I worry that I will write lovely, accessible poems that qualify more as decoration than art. The two Mennonites in drag, the lovely Illinois sunset—does the world really need more entertainment, more stuff

that matches the couch? Instead, the comfortable need, perhaps, to be reminded of our wounds, the wounds of others. Robert Frost says that "The poet rubs his fingers along old wounds, makes them burn" (quoted in Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life*, New York: Holt, 1999, 69).

(3) I worry that I unnecessarily limit language, the very medium and means of the art of poetry, by pinning it down instead of opening it up. To be faithful to how words can mean and affect us, a poet must hear in her language the play of precision and imprecision. Each word denotes and connotes. No word does either task completely, and poetry draws special attention to the multiple ways that words work. We must recognize, to paraphrase the Russian critic Mikhail

**To be anxious and to pray both require that we be able to project possibility beyond any given choice. Perhaps the most worried among us may be the most imaginative. . . .**

Bahktin, that words carry with them the places they have been.

A poem's line breaks, allusions, puns, images, and figures of speech all draw attention to the ways words are laden with meanings and histories. Christians in particular might recognize this imprecision and suggestive power of language as a gift. Each time we use language to indicate something in particular, we also suggest something else. If not, then we could not continue to make poetry (or to pray).

The biblical writers did not confine God to one word because they could not. They offered instead so many ways of opening our imaginations to mystery—father, mother hen, wind, storm, whisper, shepherd, wrestler, and (yes) rock. One of poetry's functions, then, for the poet and the church, could be to chastise us about how eager we are to denote God, to pin the Creator down, and extract a single, divine instruction. How wonderful to learn, as we struggle to say and hear anything, that language is not enough, and that God slips through our greedy hands (and language) to teach us we are not God.

Denise Levertov's poem "Immersion" suggests that "God is surely patiently trying to immerse us in a different language, / events of grace, horrifying scrolls of history." In other words, one of the things God shows us through language is how much mystery it cannot contain.

Levertov concludes her poem this way: "God's abstention is only from human dialects. The holy voice / utters its woe and glory in myriad mu-

sics, in signs and portents. / Our own words are for us to speak, a way to ask and to answer" (*This Great Unknowning: Last Poems*, New Directions, 1999, 53).

That's a use for poetry, then, to go ahead and speak, to ask, to uncover inadequate answers, not to merely reaffirm what we already know.

(4) I worry when a poem becomes an end. In truth, the world and the poem inhabit one another. Without a world teeming with objects, experiences, people and communities who sustain or damage us, we have nothing to write with or about. Of course the poem is not the world. The reading and writing of a poem are themselves sensuous, intellectual, and (if the poem works) unexpected experiences, all created in language.

However, for most readers, poems do not serve only literary ends. Poems offer themselves to us as parts of our other encounters. A poem about prayer may approach praying, but it does not replace giving our own attentions to the Divine. A few stanzas that sing about making love cannot stand in for the foolish wonder of a few stolen moments with a spouse. The poem may dwell in the space of the bed (or in our minds) along with our lover, but it does not kiss or speak or fail in the same ways as we please or worry or fail our beloved.

The challenge is to insinuate the connections between the poem and the places of everyday living, giving readers a way to travel between the two kinds of experience. Carolyn Forché describes poetry as a place "where the language discovers itself

and where language enables us to experience experience. Poetry is what maintains our capacity for contemplation and difficulty. Poetry is where that contemplation and difficulty converses with itself" ("Assembling Community: A Conversation with Carolyn Forché," *The Nimble Spirit Review*, [www.nimblespirit.com/html/carolyn\\_forche\\_interview.htm](http://www.nimblespirit.com/html/carolyn_forche_interview.htm)).

So, however poignant or difficult an experience may be, it is not a poem. I make this mistake often, merely narrating some "true" happening, forgetting that the language of a piece must invite the reader into a place that exists outside of my own feeling or insight into an event. Sure, something may have occurred, but the poem must make something else happen and must invite, not coerce, another man or woman into a new instance created by what the poem's language suggests.

What this implies, for me, is that I must learn to respect the integrity of an experience as well as the integrity of a poem, not mistaking one for the other, but recognizing their invocations of one another. Nothing happens to be "mined" for its usefulness to a bit of writing, just as no poem can be reduced to its mimetic function. Poetry can order experience as much as it is shaped by it. Yet poems are about the play of language against itself, not about pure fidelity to experience. It's in this play and work of language and experience where, sometimes, joy and insight emerge.

(5) I write poems best when I understand how little they matter. Paraphrasing Martin Luther, my friend

Kirby Olson said to me that an "artist is about as important to salvation as a farmer or a mechanic." And the best way to remember this is to know some farmers and mechanics (and doctors, teachers, bus drivers, musicians, bricklayers, waitresses, web designers, accountants, social workers, preachers, secretaries, and so forth).

If I focus only (or mostly) on writing and neglect my work as a teacher or parent, or forget to be a spouse, or absent myself from the other folks who are part of my church community, I run the risk of thinking that what I do matters more than it does.

However, when I actually belong to my various communities, rather than merely passing through them, I come to see that poems constitute but one of the many ways of fully engaging God's creation. I come to understand that any task—making dinner, making poems, making love—can matter. What we do matters best when it reminds us of our status as one of God's mere and beloved creatures, and when it connects us to other of those creatures.

(6) While they matter no more than other acts of work and worship, I can't help but hope that a poem I write might succeed in ways I have not predicted. We make works of art, in part, to converse with a whole history of other writers and readers who have come before us and who, we hope, will listen to us when we've stopped writing and speaking.

In my case, I want poetry to matter more to the faith community, and I can't figure out for the life of me how to make that happen. Though it's

made from the very stuff of daily speech, and though poetry works in part through a mingling of music and felt truth, its value still eludes many thoughtful people of faith. I suspect there's little I can do about this.

Yet I continue to read and write poems, hovering under the recognition that centuries worth of poets, including the prophets and psalmists and hymn writers, worried their particular combinations of words into forms that afflict and surprise me in necessary ways. Among Christian poets, works by Levertov, Cairns, Mark

Jarman, Kelly Cherry, Jeff Gundy, Ann Hostelter, Jean Janzen, Julia Kasdorf, and so many others provide me with hope and with models of how I might, indeed, worry my way into something like grace.

—*David Wright teaches writing and literature at Wheaton (Ill.) College, During spring 2003, Dreamseeker Books released his second collection of poems, A Liturgy for Stones. This article comes from a work in progress, Fidelities: Essays on Faith and Writing.*

### *My Friend at Firestone Asks About Poems*

You got any with forklifts in the middle?  
 Maybe some lines about solvents applied  
 to assembled tire beads or rubber coated steel wire?  
 Or about treadstock, or how lunch tastes  
 at midnight when your nose and throat  
 burn black, your hands feel like green tires,  
 waiting to be molded and cured? Anyone write  
 how good a football game looks on Sunday  
 at eleven-thirty when you've come off twelve-hours,  
 slept for three, maybe four, and settled  
 into a recliner, settled into three or four High-Lifes  
 to watch a batch of ham fisted boys  
 batter themselves against a sodded field,  
 against other huge sons of bitches who should be  
 throwing tires themselves if they weren't big  
 as Buicks? Got any stuff with layoffs  
 and new fishing boats on credit that, dammit,  
 no one will take back because they can't be sold  
 anyway? Your poems got room for a forklift,  
 a football game, unbreakable cement, new solvents,  
 lunch at midnight, a place to recline?

—*David Wright*

From *A Liturgy for Stones* (Telford, Pa.: DreamSeeker Books, an imprint of Cascadia Publishing House, 2003). Reprinted by permission of author and publisher, all rights reserved.

## The Tale of a Storyteller's Calling

Joy Swartley Sawatzky

**T**hose who know me well are not surprised by my imminent career change—only that it took me so long to get here.

But first the background. I had been meeting each month with a group of five other women to sit with the stories written down by Clarissa Pinkola Estes in *Women Who Run with the Wolves*. (Ballantine Books, 1992). This time as usual I waited until the evening before to begin preparing. I found myself wishing I had started earlier, since I had planned to have the group skip the chapter assigned for this month. The story was unfamiliar to me, and based on the title I was unsure it would take us in the direction I wanted for the group. Little did I know that this tale would give me words and images for the journey I have been on much of my adult life.

I am one of those career statistics, meaning that by age 48 I am about to embark on my eighth career change, more or less. It's been a fascinating journey from the days in college imagining what my first job as a nurse would be like to my current contemplation of what it will be like to devote all my energy to storytelling.

Estes's story "Manawee" is about a man who desires to court twin sisters but has to guess their names before he will be granted their hands in marriage. His own efforts fail, so he enlists the help of his little dog. It takes the dog three tries before he hears the names and finally gets home to his master to pass them on.

During his first try, he meets on his way home a lion who leaves behind a juicy bone. The smell is more than the dog can take, so he drags it off and savors it until all the flavor is gone, only to realize he has forgotten the names.

He tries again. This time he is distracted by a nutmeg pie, which he loves more than anything. By the time he finishes the pie, he has again forgotten the names.

He returns to hear the names for the third time, determined to let nothing prevent his arriving back home with the task completed. This time, the dog is accosted by a stranger who grabs him by the scruff of the neck and tries to shake the names out of him. Jolted within an inch of his life, he fights back, frees himself, and limps home with the names intact. His master gets to marry the sisters, and they all live in peace together "for a long time to come" (118).

Amid the many layers of meaning, the bottom line is that "even if we have failed time and again, we must try again, till we can pass it [the distraction] by and get on with the primary

work." (p. 125) Ouch! That truth stings me. From my earliest awareness, I have never doubted that my life was meant to have meaning and purpose. The search took me through nursing, community development, chaplaincy, pastoral ministry, social work, housing for persons with HIV and AIDS, a senior management position in a retirement community, and now to this new stage.

I am almost embarrassed to admit to the degrees, certificates, and trainings I accumulated along the way as part of the process. Some of the changes I made had to do with trying to discern call, and some had to do with convenience. Certainly I was victim to the juicy bone and nutmeg pie many times over—those distractions that satisfy the gut but not the work of the soul.

If I dare to say storytelling is the thing I am *really* called to, what about all the other stuff I've done for 20-some years? I didn't just accept whatever came along. I tried to listen to God through my own soul and spirit, to listen to the spiritual directors, therapists, and/or soul friends who were part of my life at any given time.

The question has always been the same: How do we know what is right for us at any given time? I didn't say yes to *everything* that came along. I tried to discern each opportunity to the best of my abilities, drawing on the commitments and resources I had in place, and always against the backdrop of call. I see some of what I did as steps to get to the next level. The com-

**The question has always been the same: How do we know what is right for us at any given time?**

mon theme, however, was the stories. I recently found journals that I have kept sporadically over the last 20-plus years. Already in Haiti in the early 1980s, I was doing things unconventionally, like developing a health and nutrition program using stories instead of didactic lessons to teach.

From that point on I played peek-a-boo with my gift, trying it out through preaching and speaking but often too afraid to push the boundaries—and always dismissing the idea that storytelling could be my primary calling. I did many things because someone else thought I would be good at it, and because I had nothing else to suggest.

So why does this time feel different? For one thing, this time with storytelling, I am indeed saying "Yes!"

Seven years ago my husband Walter and I moved to Souderton from what we called the "front lines" of a life constantly maxed out with meeting the needs of others. In Souderton we began a life that involved more caring for ourselves than we had chosen to do in the past.

For me this care involved serious and uninterrupted spiritual and personal soul-searching with trusted support. A result was finally being able to begin trusting my own instincts as one who knows who I am and what I have to offer, who understands what God wants to be for me in all of this, and who finally is able to accept the love and support of a husband who believes in me even more than I do.

Add to that a job that provided a constant place to practice all the

things I was learning myself to be—complete with a boss who believed in me and demonstrated it by pushing and coaching me beyond the limits of what I would have said I was capable of. After almost five years of doing the hardest, most demanding work I have ever attempted, I found myself with a strength I would never have imagined possible for me. And so in the end, I have finally learned more often to recognize what I want for myself, not what someone else wants for me.

Leaving my current work to pursue storytelling feels like something I can't not do (the double negative seems called for). There is this nebulous thing of timing. The timing seems so right. I can finally glimpse what my calling will look like.

I say glimpse because it is all still being formed. There are these floating puzzle pieces of who I am as a storyteller. I have a passion for spiritual things, for women in search of themselves, for senior adults and the end-of-life journey, for grace and for forgiveness. The audiences seem disjointed, yet I know my calling involves storytelling for the soul. Stories that crack the heart open and invite listeners deeper into their own journey.

Could I have arrived here any other way? Probably. Does it matter now? No. What matters is this: Somehow the tenacity I needed kicked in. I refused to let go. I am grateful and amazed at what lies ahead.

—Joy Swartley Sawatzky, Souderton, Pennsylvania, is a recovering career changer and a soon-to-be professional storyteller.

# Exploring Islam and the Clash with the West

Marlin Jeschke

Review of Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*. New York: Random House, 2003.

Scholars in pertinent disciplines of study have monitored the Islamic world for quite some time now, as a survey of the literature shows. But interest in the world of Islam—chiefly because of Islamic terrorists—has grown exponentially since the 9-11 attacks and United States reprisals in Afghanistan and Iraq.

One of the rash of books since 9-11 is Bernard Lewis's *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*. Professor Emeritus of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton, Lewis has written much on Islam. Several of his earlier books discuss the relationship of Islam and the West: *The Muslim Discovery of Europe* (1982); *Islam and the West* (1993); *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (2001); and *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (2002).

The book jacket description for *What Went Wrong?* diagnoses the persistent unease within contemporary

Islam. "For many centuries, the world of Islam was in the forefront of human achievement. . . . And then everything changed, as the previously despised West won victory after victory, first in the battlefield and the marketplace, then in almost every aspect of public and even private life. . . . Bernard Lewis examines the anguished reaction of the Islamic world as it tried to understand. . . ."

"The most dramatic reversal," says John Miller in a brief Amazon.com review, "may have occurred in the sciences: 'those who had been disciples now became teachers; those who had been masters became pupils, often reluctant and resentful pupils.' Today's Arab governments have blamed their plight on any number of external culprits, from Western imperialism to the Jews. Lewis believes they must commit themselves to putting their own houses in order or . . . 'there will be no escape from a downward spiral of hate and spite, rage and self-pity, poverty and oppression.'"

Reflective Middle Easterners have vacillated between two questions: Who did this to us? and Where did we go wrong?

**I**n *The Crisis of Islam*, Lewis goes beyond a discussion of the crisis within Islam to an examination of the threats of extremist Muslims against the West. His review begins with the citation of the *fatwa* from Usama bin Laden and other leaders of jihad groups in 1998. That call to holy war

says that "to kill Americans and their allies, both civil and military, is an individual duty of every Muslim who is able in any country where this is possible, until the Aqsa mosque [in Jerusalem] and the Haram mosque [in Mecca] are free from their grip, and until their armies, shattered and broken-winged, depart from all the lands of Islam, incapable of threatening any Muslim" (xxvii).

The events of 9-11 were prompted, Usama bin Laden himself "explained very clearly," by "America's presence in Arabia during the Gulf War—the desecration of the Muslim holy land—and America's use of Saudi Arabia as a base for an attack on Iraq" (160).

Numerous Muslim apologists today seek to counter the Western image of Islamic *jihad* as something violent, saying *jihad* really means spiritual struggle. Lewis offers a survey of the use of that word in the history of Islamic literature, showing how often it has designated armed conflict. And he examines contemporary charges of "imperialism" against the West made by Islamic extremists, noting that the term *imperialism* is *never* used for the extensive Islamic conquests of the past.

Islamic writers were late in taking note of America in modern history, although today America has become "the great Satan." As Lewis puts it, "By now there is an almost standardized litany of American offenses recited in the lands of Islam, in the

**Reflective Middle Easterners have vacillated between two questions: Who did this to us? and Where did we go wrong?**

media, in pamphlets, in sermons, and in public speeches. . . . It includes war crimes against Japan . . . Korea, Vietnam, Somalia, and elsewhere. . . . And American actions in Lebanon, Khar-toum, Libya, Iraq, and of course helping Israel against the Palestinians. . . . Yet the most powerful accusation of all is the degeneracy and debauchery of the American way of life, and the threat that it offers to Islam” (80, 81). Islamic radicals also rail against “corrupt tyrants” of their own lands whom they charge with “American complicity.”

According to Lewis the Islamic world shows a failure to come to terms with modernity. It is most obvious in economics, since “the average annual income in the Muslim countries from Morocco to Bangladesh was only half the world average. . . .” (117).

The cause may well be political. Where Arab countries have tried “Western-style parties and parliaments [they have] almost invariably ended in corrupt tyrannies, maintained by repression and indoctrination. . . . No Arab leader has been willing to submit his claim to power to a free vote” (118). Too often democratic ventures in the Islamic world have meant “one man (men only), one vote, once.”

In a fairly long concluding chapter on the rise of terrorism, Lewis reviews the history of this phenomenon in Islam. In its early centuries Islam had its *assassins* (the word comes from the Arabic) and its *fedayeen* (meaning “one who is ready to sacrifice his life for the cause”). But they did not engage in suicide attacks.

Lewis quotes the words of Muhammad himself on suicide: “Whoever kills himself with a blade . . . , strangles himself . . . , throws himself off a mountain . . . , drinks poison . . . , kills himself in any way will be tormented in that way in hell. . . . Whoever kills himself in any way in this world will be tormented with it on the day of resurrection” (153). And in the past assassins and fedayeen did not engage in indiscriminate killing of innocent bystanders, which is against Islamic laws of war.

Lewis concludes his analysis in *The Crisis of Islam* with the words, “For Usama bin Laden, his declaration of war against the United States marks the resumption of the struggle for religious dominance of the world that began in the seventh century. . . . If the fundamentalists are correct in their calculations and succeed in their war, then a dark future awaits the world, especially the part of it that embraces Islam” (162, 164).

Although a notable scholar in Islamic studies, Lewis says little about the theological background to Islam’s modern dilemma. Islamic theology sees Islam as the product of a revelation that supersedes Christianity. And it views this revelation as final. Indeed, Muslim scholars at one stage of Islamic history declared the door closed to further interpretation of the Qur’an or of Islamic thought. This position is reflected in the modern Islamic fundamentalist fear of new truth and progress and its call to return to an Islam of the past.

Christianity, while seeing God’s revelation in Christ as definitive, has

noted Christ’s promise that the spirit would lead the church into further truth. Also those Christians with a healthy view of eschatology have allowed the vision of Christ’s future kingdom to lead them into new ventures, such as the elimination of slavery, equal rights and opportunities for women, democratic freedoms, and in fact openness to new discoveries in science, technology, and medicine.

These have too often been misused in the so-called Christian West—as evident in consumerism, environmental damage, and, especially, in the West’s wars. However, openness to new truth is a reason for Western progress in such matters as education, life expectancy, and (when it moves from theory to practice) human rights.

Islam and Christianity also have quite different understandings of what creates a moral individual and produces an ethical society. To begin with, Islam denies the doctrines of original sin, the need of a human transformation called conversion or regeneration, and the availability of divine grace to effect such change. Islam calls for the achievement of good people and a good society by the imposition of law from the top-down accompanied by the use of forceful sanctions. Unfortunately America also believes all too much in violence and force in war and in criminal justice to create a good society.

The apostle Paul recognizes that God has instituted rulers and “the

sword” but at the same time claims that ultimately good persons and a good society are achieved by the teaching of the gospel, Christ’s way, and its power to change people’s thinking (Rom. 12:2) and behavior (Rom. 1:16, 1 Cor. 1:18).

**So the  
Constantinian  
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nately all  
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onward.**

The quite different Christian view of how to produce good persons and a good society is what lies behind the Anabaptist doctrine of separation of church and state, or more exactly, the distinction between those who have accepted the call to live the regenerate life and those who have not.

**W**hen viewed according to Anabaptist emphases, throughout much of Christian history many Christians have not accepted the distinction between church and state. So the Constantinian state church arrangement was unfortunately all Muhammad and his followers saw in Christianity from his time (around 600 CE) onward. In this respect Islam and state church Christianity have been all too much mirror images of each other.

From the perspective of many Christians today, especially those standing in the believers church tradition, the Constantinian marriage of church and state was a departure from the way of Jesus and apostolic Christianity. Now Islam has always held that Christianity is guilty of a “falsification,” or corruption, of the revelation from God through Jesus, which



is why God had to reissue the true revelation again through Muhammad. This charge by Islam has focused more particularly upon the Christian Scriptures, but today's Christians should admit that the church did not remain true to the message of Jesus.

Admitting this may in fact be a prerequisite to better relations with Islam. At the very least, people in the believers church tradition should try to make clear to the Islamic world that they are not part of the church that still shows all too many features of Constantinianism and that all too uncritically supports many of the aggressive policies of America.

Of course Islam too has suffered its corruptions, as reform movements in Islam show. Islamic reformers such as the Wahabhis of Saudi Arabia have decried the paganization of Islam in Arabia's history. The call by today's Islamic fundamentalists for a return to pristine Islam underscores the point. Unfortunately the clamor by many

Muslims for a return to a past Islam comes into conflict with the pressing need of the Islamic world to open itself to new truth in many fields: the natural and social sciences, economics, politics, and not least, even theology. That is the crisis in the Islamic world Lewis has presented in many of his recent books and is a reason for much of the turmoil in the Islamic world.

Lewis says at the beginning of *The Crisis of Islam*, "Obviously the West must defend itself by whatever means will be effective" (xxxii). The means the United States has chosen are not, I fear, effective, chiefly because they do not help the Islamic world find a way out of its present turmoil. And they surely are contrary to the message and calling of Jesus Christ.

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



## The Problem of Violence

*Review of Three Responses*

Daniel Hertzler

*War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning*, by Chris Hedges. Public Affairs, 2002.

*Is There No Other Way? The Search for a Nonviolent Future*, by Michael N. Nagler. Berkeley Hills Books, 2001.

*The Upside Down Kingdom*, by Donald B. Kraybill. Herald Press, 1978, 1990, 2003.

To review these three books together is perhaps a marriage of convenience. But I chose the second and third in part because they have a vision the first lacks.

Hedges does a masterful job of demythologizing war, but he has no real solution. His analysis of the popularity of war is comprehensive. He has been a war reporter, writes that "War and conflict have marked most of my adult life," and lists more than a dozen places where he has experienced conflict. As an "authority" on war he observes, "The enduring attraction of war is this: Even with its destruction and carnage it can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living. . . . It gives us re-

solve, a cause. It allows us to be noble” (2, 3).

Hedges has done more in life than chase battles. A graduate of Harvard University Divinity School, he has studied classic literature. I find it of interest that he refers repeatedly to *The Iliad* and Shakespeare, but includes few quotations from the Bible. One I noticed is not documented. He writes of “The seductions of violence, the fascination with the grotesque—the Bible calls it ‘the lust of the eye’—the god-like empowerment over other human lives and the drug of war combine, like the ecstasy of erotic love, to let our senses command our bodies” (89).

His ethical perspective is evidently drawn from Reinhold Niebuhr, mentioned twice in the book. Hedges declares himself in the introduction: “I am not a pacifist. . . . The poison that is war does not free us from the ethics of responsibility” (16). He closes the introduction with a mixed message: “The only antidote to ward off self-destruction and the indiscriminate use of force is humility and, ultimately, compassion. Reinhold Niebuhr aptly reminds us that we must act and then ask forgiveness. This book is not a call for inaction. It is a call for repentance” (17). I think Hedges has not comprehended the New Testament understanding of repentance.

With his introductory caveat in mind, we can go on to follow his analysis of war. Chapter 1, “The Myth of War,” states his thesis. Six more chapters provide commentary and documentation. “Wars that lose their

mythic nature for the public, such as Korea or Vietnam, are doomed to failure, for war is exposed for what it is—organized murder” (21).

I sat in a barbershop during the combat stage of the 2003 war in Iraq and was impressed by the strength of the myth. Everyone who spoke was in favor of the war. As I recall, one or two identified themselves as veterans, but I imagine most had only experienced war on TV. As I write, the myth is losing some of its power. Whether it will prevail through the next presidential election remains to be seen.

Throughout the book, Hedges draws on his experience as a reporter to document the baleful effects of war. In “The Plague of Nationalism” he describes how “National myths are largely benign in times of peace. But national myths ignite a collective amnesia in war” (46).

In “The Destruction of Culture” he describes the hostility between Turks and Greeks on the island of Cyprus and observes “the struggle by opposing sides to wrap themselves in the mantle of victimhood” (67).

In “The Seduction of Battle and the Perversion of War” he comments that “there is in wartime a nearly universal preoccupation with sexual liaisons. There is a kind of breathless abandon in wartime, and those who in peacetime would lead conservative and sheltered lives give themselves over to wanton carnal relationships” (100).

In chapter 6, “The Cause,” Hedges observes that “because we and modern society have walked away from institutions that stand outside

the state to find moral guidance and spiritual direction, we turned to the state in times of war. The state and institutions of the state become, for many, the center of worship in wartime. To expose the holes in the myth is to court excommunication” (147). I understand that Hedges himself experienced this; he was booed in spring 2003 while giving a commencement address on war at a college in Illinois.

In the final chapter, “Eros and Thanatos,” Hedges asserts that “to survive as a human being is only possible through love. . . . It alone gives meaning that endures. It alone allows us to enhance and cherish life” (184, 185). I can certainly agree, but Hedges does not appear to have any vision or strategy for responding to war except the Niebuhrian principal that the only way to fight fire is with fire. For any peaceful strategy we need to look further.

**T**he next two books go further. Both of these books are written by professors, which gives them a kind of survey characteristic, especially the Nagler book. But these authors have an alternative vision which Hedges lacks. (I mentioned the Nagler book briefly in a Spring 2002 *DreamSeeker Magazine* review of the book *Where Was God on Sept. 11?* This will be a more extended comment.)

Nagler is Professor Emeritus of Classics and Comparative Literature,

so he has a broad background from which to draw. I have not been able to ascertain from the book whether he belongs to a specific faith community, but at points he sounds like a Quaker. He makes an occasional reference to the Bible but is more likely to cite Gandhi or Martin Luther King Jr. He digs to the center of the problem of violence and just as thoroughly into the possibility of nonviolent response to violence. He begins with the basic question:

What is violence?  
Why is it getting worse? And  
How do we make it stop? (18).

Basic questions indeed. The answer, he says, is “the classic recipe for nonviolence: spirit, a sense of legitimacy (that one’s cause is just) and the willingness to sacrifice—if necessary to lay down your life. Those are precisely the three things that make resistance to an unjust regime successful” (33). It is of interest that these qualities are often called for to justify violence. It is the method that differs.

The typical question, of course, is whether nonviolence “works.” Nagler challenges the old chestnut which holds that violence is necessary because only violence works. His thesis is straightforward:

Nonviolence sometimes “works”  
and  
always works

**The typical question, of course, is whether nonviolence “works.” Nagler challenges the old chestnut which holds that violence is necessary because only violence works.**

while  
Violence sometimes “works”  
but never works (122).

The rest of the book elaborates this point of view. He discusses the issue of “meaning,” the basic point of Hedges’ book. Among the authorities he cites is Viktor Frankl and his search for meaning. Nagler asserts that “Everything I have been saying in this book is meant to shed light on that search, for I believe it’s possible to define what is meaningful for us who live in this crisis in history. The task is to create loving community, and the way to understand and address that task is through nonviolence” (172).

Nagler is well impressed with Gandhi and observes that he “devised a social program [that] nearly worked” (176). Gandhi’s campaign for spinning cloth made it possible for Indians to boycott the cloth supplied by the British. This put several million British millworkers out of work, but Gandhi went to visit them and explained what the people of India were up against. “Don’t attribute your misery to India. Think of the world forces that are powerfully working against you.” One of them responded, “We understand each other now” (190).

As we know, despite what was accomplished by Gandhi’s comprehensive nonviolent program, his successors did not follow his model. But the dream of nonviolence will not die, and Nagler refers to a variety of ef-

forts which have demonstrated in a smaller way that nonviolence can work. Among those mentioned are Witness for Peace (151, 239, 265) and Elias Jabbour (206, 212).

I think he must surely mean Elias Chacour, a Christian priest who works in Ibillin, a village of Galilee. I myself visited there in 1990. Chacour, a peaceful man, was able to develop a school for Palestinian children under the very noses of the Israelis. Despite government stalling, Chacour went ahead with the work, in part, I think, because he was known internationally. Nagler is also aware of Christian Peacemaker Teams (258, 259) and the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (299).

This is a hopeful book. Nagler has described the problem of violence and then looked for resources to use in fashioning a reasonable response. He ends the book with a brief description of a farm in Michigan where the farmers practice “nonviolent agriculture” and do not hate the varmints which prey on their crops (304). It seems an odd way to end the book, but perhaps he means to emphasize that all of us can do something nonviolently even though we may not be involved with worldwide issues. The Michigan people have found meaning in their effort to live nonviolently on their land.

**D**onald B. Kraybill’s vision is presented in quite a different manner. Whereas Nagler has identified violence as the problem and set out to

**Whereas Nagler has identified violence as the problem and set out to look for solutions, Kraybill begins with the teaching of Jesus. . . .**

look for solutions, Kraybill begins with the teaching of Jesus and works from there in typical Mennonite fashion. Indeed, the very title of the book comes from a remark by a person in a Sunday school class who “exclaimed with enthusiasm and exasperation ‘Everything here is so upside down’” (9).

Although the book has been in print for a generation, it deserves renewed attention because Herald Press has just brought out a twenty-fifth anniversary edition. Kraybill reports, “I have revised the text word by word to enhance its clarity and flow. Recent scholarship on Jesus and the synoptic gospels provided new insights for updating some of the chapters” (9, 10). I find it notable that a sociologist has stepped out of his professional field and studied the work of biblical scholars to provide “a book for lay readers” (10). During its 25 years the book has sold more than 60,000 copies.

After a chapter to define his position, Kraybill works his way through the three temptations of Jesus and on through a variety of other topics in the teaching of Jesus as found in the gospel of Luke and which he avers are still authoritative today.

Kraybill makes regular use of the metaphor of the detour to highlight typical ways of avoiding the sharp edge of Jesus’ teaching. I find three lists of these detours: in chapter 1, in chapter 7, and again in chapter 9.

In chapter 9, “Lovable Enemies” he works through an extensive list of Jesus’ teaching against violence and concludes that “the message of Jesus is clear. The use of violence, whether

physical or emotional, is not God’s way. Jesus shows us how to absorb suffering, not inflict it. . . . Nevertheless the call to love enemies has baffled human logic for centuries. Even the church has condoned the use of violent means in various ways” (186). He then calls attention to five detours often used to get around the teaching of Jesus regarding enemies.

The first of these is Old Testament warfare. However, “Jesus introduced a new norm, the Torah of love” (186).

The second detour has been Christian Crusades, “The temptation to think the God blesses and fights for particular nations.” But “Americans obviously trust weapons, not God” (187).

A third detour has been the “just war” concept, a persistent fantasy when “enemies in the same conflict often called their cause ‘just,’ leading both sides to claim God’s blessing” (187). Another detour restricts the teaching of Jesus to interpersonal issues. For national issues, Christians would be expected to trust the government with support from Romans 13:1-7, often interpreted out of context. Finally, there is a detour which considers peace “as an appendage to the gospel.” Peacemaking is seen as a personal conviction and “military service is a matter of individual conscience. . . . National loyalty often rises above our allegiance to Jesus” (188).

Following these detours, Kraybill has a list of “nagging questions” about peace which Christians need to ponder. These include the use of force by government, self-defense and the pro-

tection of the innocent against tyrants, response to bullies on any level, how far to go in advocating non-violence, the issue of restraint of evil by violent means. This, of course, is where Hedges rests his case.

To these questions Kraybill can only respond that “Jesus’ call to love the enemy slices through the issues with simplicity and clarity. . . . Jesus calls us to faithfulness; to faithfully embody God’s loving forgiveness” (189, 190). He suggests that we “imagine the global impact if Christians in every country were willing to pledge that they will never kill another human being” (19). I have wondered about that myself.

Kraybill ends with a pledge of allegiance, evidently presented as an alternative to the American flag salute.

We pledge allegiance to the Lord  
of the worldwide kingdom of God

and to the values  
for which it stands—  
one kingdom under God  
with compassion and forgiveness  
for *all*.

In an odd way these three works complement each other. Hedges documents the monstrosity of war, but he has no other alternative. Nagler surveys a range of nonviolent options and makes a case for nonviolence as a working strategy.

Of course, as a fellow Mennonite, I am more at home with Kraybill, who goes deep into the teachings of Jesus and shows how they cut through all those sophistries which masquerade as wisdom.

—*Daniel Hertzler, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, a longtime editor and writer, contributes a monthly column to the Daily Courier (Connellsville, Pa.).*



## How We Cope

*A New York Minute*

Cynthia Yoder

**H**e didn’t have to squeeze. Another train would have come. But he pressed his knees into mine, and his hips into the backpack I was holding in front of me, and pushed through the door, squishing me into the back of the woman standing behind me. She couldn’t move, and we stayed back to back, like opponents setting out for a duel.

I was glad for the backpack. If it hadn’t been there, I’d have been groin to groin with this man who had shoved me into the sea of subway riders. He had a nondescript face, the kind you see in the business section of the newspaper. It was the kind of face that said he looked all day at numbers or some other commodity that made his eyes dull and his cheeks puffy like jelly donuts.

There was no room to move. I thought of the time I had ridden a Matatu in Kenya five years back. We had been so pressed together, I hadn’t noticed when someone dug deep into my front pocket and withdrew my cash.

Back in New York, someone shifted beside me, generating a six-inch pocket of space I moved into, but that created a new problem. It was a hot day in New York. The A/C hadn’t been on at my Madison Avenue

office because it was the first week of May, and it wasn't supposed to be 90 degrees yet. I'd worked all day at my computer, sweating in front of fans, trying to talk on the telephone like I was scrubbed up and pretty, the way they would expect someone to look at a Madison Avenue office in May. The problem now was that I had grabbed onto a bar above my head for support, and directly before my armpit was the dainty if oversized nose of a woman.

I thought about my deodorant, a new kind made from French green clay. It wasn't as effective as Tom's of Maine. I vowed to switch back. She, of course, could have turned her head. Why didn't she? Maybe she liked animal smells, the way I like the smell of salt on my son after he's been playing all day in the back yard. Or maybe it was the catch-22 that if she had turned she would have been admitting that my French green clay wasn't very effective, making things worse for both of us.

Maybe, I continued to reason, maybe she's like me, cooped up in front of a computer all day. Maybe it makes her happy to be doing something real, like jostling in the subway with the smell of a girl's sweat mixed with clay. Everyone has her way of coping with the grind daily life can sometimes be.

Like what I'm going to do right now. I'm going to bolt when that door opens at 34th, and tear down the stairs, part of the leading pack, sprinting through the underground corridor, smashing the turnstile with a hip, and weaving in and out, up the ramp that leads to the New Jersey trains.

**If I didn't have a son at home, waiting in his blue and red train pajamas to kiss me goodnight, I'd run clear out into the yard.**

I'm not in a hurry. I have six minutes to get there, but I bolt because my legs like it. My lungs like it. I run until I pass the man with the xylophone billy bopping out a jazz tune, then I run to the music, like someone important, like someone who's

going somewhere in a movie, perhaps to meet a lover she hasn't seen in twenty years. I run all the way down the escalator to track number eight, and I run down along the silver edge of the train until I get to the front car. If I didn't have a son at home, waiting in his blue and red train pajamas to kiss me goodnight, I'd run clear out into the yard.

—*Cynthia Yoder is author of Crazy Quilt: Pieces of a Mennonite Life (DreamSeeker Books, 2003), and her work has appeared in such literary publications as Parabola, The Cortland Review, The Sarah Lawrence Review, and Mennonite Life. She lives in New Jersey with her husband and son.*



## The Power of Words, Especially When They Are Not There

Noël R. King

**R**ichard Forblythe was a writer, and he was very happy about that. He was a very good writer, in fact, and he was especially happy about that. He knew that he was exceedingly fortunate to both love what he did *and* be good at it.

So he wrote away. He wrote reams and reams of words. They fell seamlessly from his brain onto his special writing tablet or onto his computer keyboard when he felt more like typing. Oh, they felt soooooooooo good!

Until one day he thought he noticed something. At first he thought it was his imagination, which he actually liked because he honored his imagination and really tried to pamper it. But then it got to the point where he could no longer fool himself.

The problem was, he would write and write and write, just as usual—with one difference. After an entire afternoon of just writing away—feverishly even, he thought—he would go back to read his day's labors

at the end of his writing session, as he always did, but would find only a few simple paragraphs strung together.

“Okay, that’s nice,” he would think as he read them. “They read nicely. That’s a great beginning. Now where’s all the other stuff I wrote?”

Yes, my friends. *That* was the problem. Where did all the words go?

Richard could not figure it out. He even had his wife watch him one day to verify that he wasn’t just imagining how the words came pouring out of him only to vanish upon his perusal at the end of the writing session.

His wife agreed that, yes, that was what seemed to be happening. She did not seem to think it was the catastrophic event that he did, however.

All she said was, “Well, you know, dear. Words are not what they used to be.”

“What! What do you *mean* by that?” Richard practically shouted, he was so agitated.

“See?” She only responded calmly. “That’s what I mean.”

Oh, it drove him almost mad. But still he kept writing. How can a writer not write? Or, at least in Richard’s case, *think* he was writing.

### One Month Later

One morning, almost exactly one month later, comprehension dawned

to ease Richard’s wrinkled brow and slow his racing heart. His breathing calmed, and desperation transformed into a small, quirky smile at the corners of his mouth as he finally understood something:

What he had been expressing was beyond words. Although he hadn’t recognized this until just that moment, the words themselves had. They had been withdrawing of their own accord, gathering beyond time and space.

As of this count, Richard figures he has probably “written” about 80 books and some 200 articles, only a few pages of which he can show you, if you are intrepid enough to ask.

He’s doing a pretty good job of gradually switching over to pride and a new sense of self-worth at adding constantly to the pool of meaning beyond words, but he is still somewhat sensitive to those whose words *do* still stick to paper. So, as of this printing, he has been unwilling to read this biographic sketch of himself.

His wife thinks that’s silly—“It’s just *words*, honey,” is what she tells him. “The real you is beyond words, remember?”

—*As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Reston, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful things, including words that are not there.*

**The words themselves had . . . . been withdrawing of their own accord, gathering beyond time and space.**



## Far Side of the Modern World

*A Review of “Master and Commander”*

David B. Greiser

I didn’t see “Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World” because it promised to be a film filled with insights on philosophies and worldviews. This film has little to do with the postmodernism which my columns are supposed to address. I saw it because it looked like an entertaining two hours. I saw it because it is directed by Peter Weir, director of many great films (“Witness,” “Gallipoli,” “The Truman Show,” to name a few). And I saw it because I’ve long been fascinated by naval history and warfare as well as warship life. At age 12, I devoured biographies of John Paul Jones and stories of Revolutionary War sea battles. I fantasized about pirate ships.

I recommend seeing “Master and Commander” because it is a well-crafted, well-acted, visually stunning adventure tale. It is an action-packed, entertaining piece of historical fiction—and only a little more. Still, the “little more” does invite some after-the-fact reflections on the worldview of the film’s time period, and I’ll get to those in due course.

First, the story. The year is 1805, and the context is the Napoleonic War between England and France. Captain Jack Aubrey (played by Russell Crowe) com-

mands the *H.M.S. Surprise*, a smallish, aging warship dispatched to South America to hunt down a larger, newer, better-gunned French frigate seeking to control the trade lanes to South America. Hard-drinking Captain Aubrey is a tough-but-fair commander, a battle strategist rational to the core and bent on conquest.

Dr. Stephen Maturin (played by Paul Bettany, who was opposite Crowe as John Nash's invisible friend in "A Beautiful Mind") is Aubrey's best friend and foil. Maturin is the ship's doctor, a man of science and reflection. As a surgeon he is supremely confident (in one scene he opens a man's skull and plugs the hole with a coin; in another he digs a bullet from his own chest), but his real passion is biology. He has been lured onboard partly by the promise that the ship will visit exotic islands where he will observe animals, bugs, and birds unknown in Europe.

Aubrey and Maturin spend most of their time not in battle but conversation. Long lulls between battles offer them the leisure to play classical string duets and afterward debate issues raised by their contrasting personalities. Aubrey, man of decisive action, needs to dominate. Scholar Maturin needs to know and reflect. Both men seek to stamp their natures on a 13-year-old deck hand (played by Max Pirkis), who briefly becomes the ship's captain while at the same time developing a love of natural science.

"Master" contains battle sequences as riveting and realistic as any I have

seen on film. One gains a sense of the terrifying confinement the men feel during battle, as cannonballs smash through the ship's hull at close range and the deck becomes slippery with blood. Those sailors who survive the artillery fire do so only to board the enemy ship where they try to hack the enemy to pieces in hand-to-hand combat. The brutality of battle is portrayed realistically and unflinchingly.

**Both the battle sequences and the conversations serve as commentaries on the modern view of the world.**

Both the battle sequences and the conversations serve as commentaries on the modern view of the world already deeply entrenched during this time period. Modernism was an age of conquest and the will to power; the war in which this story takes place was fought for control of that era's world.

It was an age of reason. Aubrey uses reason to dominate, while Maturin excludes the excitement of discovery in pre-Darwinian science and Baconian research. Religion recedes. The Lord's Prayer is recited at burials of battle victims; otherwise the divine is little recognized. In a subplot, some of the crew believe a comrade is Jonah, whose spirit brings the *Surprise* bad luck; their view is not shared by their commanders.

In both character and mood, "Master and Commander" reflects the era of conquest and its confidence in reason. It is also one great action movie.

—*When David Greiser, Souderton, Pennsylvania, is not conquering (if in modernist mode) or deconstructing (if in postmodernist mode) his own worlds as a pastor and professor, he writes this column to justify his movie watching.*

## The Perfect Conversation

Michael A. King

There is a beautiful park at the north edge of Phoenix called the Dreamy Draw, the name itself rather lovely. I walked over an hour, higher and higher up and into its hills, until I was entirely enclosed in wilderness, even though behind I could still vaguely hear interstate traffic and occasionally through gaps in hills see Phoenix spread out below.

High up at the very center of a set of enclosing hills was a stone outcropping looking down over the mini-valley created by the base of the hills. A few sweetly green trees (green looks particularly sweet in the desert) grew at the center of the outcropping. The effect, looking down from above, was almost like that of a great altar rising up from the desert floor.

I was going to turn back before hiking down to it, then noted a stone bench that created a kind of entry to that spot and somehow invited further contact. So I walked to the bench and there saw these words: "August 15, 1999. When Ed (39), Mollie (8) and Lexi (6) Bull reached that highest point, they looked around and said, 'Papou, We like it here.'"

Unless I totally misunderstood, Ed, Mollie, and Lexi reached their highest point by, somehow, dying. I

think “Bull” is their last name and perhaps Ed was the father of Mollie and Lexi. Bull, set there in Arizona and combined with “Papou,” struck me as probably pointing to Native American ancestry.

Moved, I went past the chair to look out from that highest point, on a day when the desert air was cool yet the sun warm. I didn’t want to tear myself away.

For a time I didn’t, but then I saw a hiker coming up the trail far below, and he had his head and arms covered against the sun and a backpack, including water, on his back. I had thought to put on suntan lotion but not my hat and I hadn’t brought water. I began to feel exposed. I needed to get back to shelter and water. I also vaguely felt that as he neared the area, it would feel more comfortable to leave. So I did.

Just as I reached the end of the short path leading down to the bench on the outcropping, the hiker reached me. As he moved to pass me, he said, “All mine?”

“All yours,” I replied. “It’s a lovely spot.”

“Oh I love it,” he said. “Thank you.”

**Somehow we had found the perfect words to enact a ritual in which we each acknowledged the specialness of this place and one had the grace to ask for it as the other had the grace to relinquish it.**

Maybe you had to be there, I’m not sure, but can you hear it? It was the perfect conversation. So often the phrases seem just a tad off, the one or the other of us too awkward or tongue-tied to say just the right thing. Not this time. Somehow we had found the perfect words to enact a ritual in which we each acknowledged the specialness of this place and one had the grace to ask for it as the other had the grace to relinquish it.

I don’t want overly to romanticize Native Americans, who had their own flaws. But I couldn’t help but think of the fact that this was once their land, that they had elaborate rituals for relating to each other and to this land, that perhaps some of their own were memorialized by that bench behind me, and that two white men—their culture so often about pushing and shoving and taking the land from the other, no matter what sacredness is trampled in the process—somehow for once knew how to have the perfect conversation.

—*Michael A. King, Telford, Pennsylvania, is pastor, Spring Mount (Pa.) Mennonite Church; and editor, DreamSeeker Magazine.*

### *Silencing the Dead*

No longer  
Do we see the dead.  
No airport services for those  
Who died for us, or as officials say,  
For freedom.  
There was an era when the dead  
Were given air time and a sacrament  
Of flags,  
Before the hearse took them  
Beyond the truth  
Of lenses.  
A soldier’s corpse,  
You see,  
Is not quite silent.  
It has a thing or two to say  
Of policy.  
Ay, there’s the rub.  
From hero to embarrassment  
In just a bullet’s length.  
No final photo op  
For you, my friend.  
Unlike the poet, you will go  
Into that good night  
Quietly.  
Obscurely borne away,  
Your life  
Will never come to mind, not even  
In the silence  
Of the voting booth.

—*Alan L. Soffin, Doylestown, Pennsylvania, taught at Michigan State and Temple universities. An award-winning private film-maker, he is retired and writing on philosophy of religion plus teaching at the Center for Learning in Retirement, Delaware Valley College. His article “Why God Can’t Speak to Humans” was published in the Spring 2003 issue of DreamSeeker Magazine.*

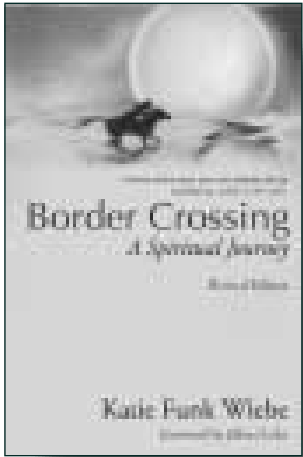




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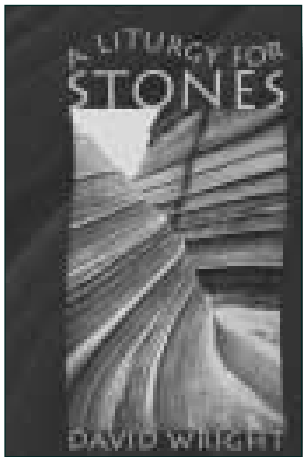
**Border Crossing:  
A Spiritual Journey (rev. ed.)**

by Katie Funk Wiebe, who  
“has designed a map for the journey  
of life—one useful to anyone between the  
ages of 16 and 100,” says Daniel Hertzler.  
“She helps all of us in our later years to real-  
ize deep water and drowning are not the  
same thing and that we can face these new  
depths with courage and hope. Her creed for  
older adults needs to be read (and  
practiced) by all of us who have crossed  
the border.” adds Richard L. Morgan.  
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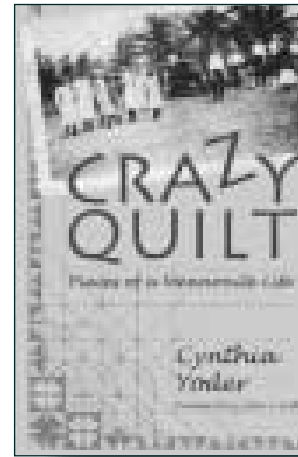
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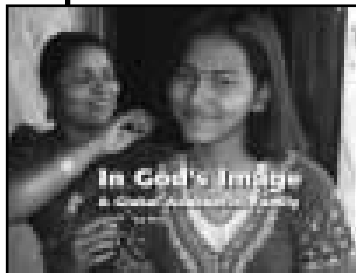


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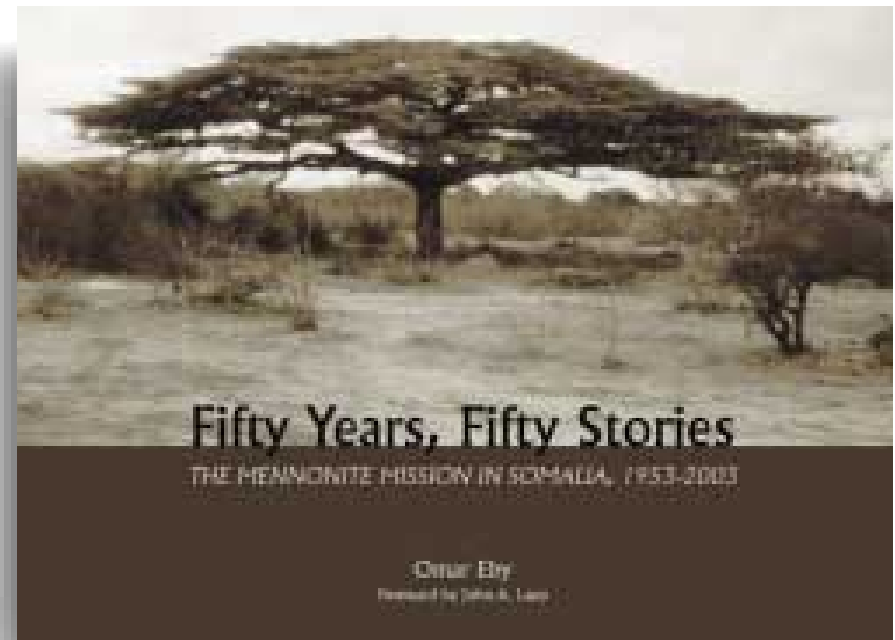
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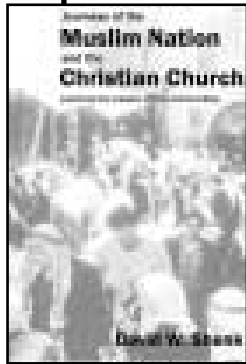


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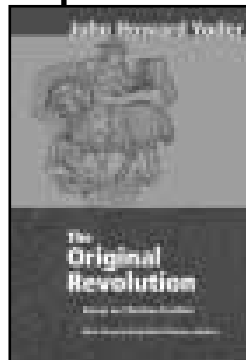
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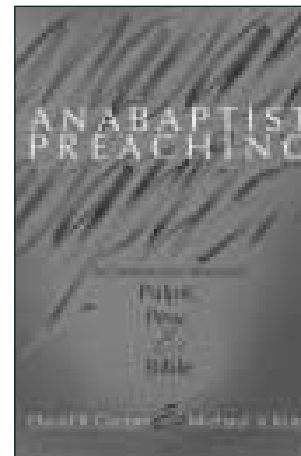
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and more back to deep, deep heavenly streams  
where a waif of a child watches me and sings  
from a tree, a golden birch that grows high  
in the middle of a river. He swings  
thin white arms through the wounded morning sky,  
keeps perfect four-four time to my breath, breath,  
breath, breath. His voice, richer than his years,  
echoes against my inner ear. "O Death,"  
he sings, "O Death." Of course he shows no fear  
as currents rise to his branch, reach his chest.  
A world waits, and wakes, just as waters crest.

—*David Wright*

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