

DreamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul



“Joe, You Are a Miracle”

Joe Fields

Beyond Dressing in Holy Images

Polly Ann Brown

Kingsview

Shivering Toward the Love of God

Michael A. King

The Rowboat Needs Both Oars: Discipleship *and* Grace

C. Norman Kraus

Ink Aria

Seeing Salt in a Different Light

Renee Gehman

I Flew a Little

Joyce Peachey Lind

The Day They Ask

Kirsten Eve Beachy

and much more

Winter 2005

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Editorial: Feeling and Living God's Love

I visualize four thematic waves lapping out from this issue of *Dream-Seeker Magazine*, each somewhat different yet drawing energy from the same ocean. The ocean is perhaps life itself, in all its mysteries, complexities, energies, and interconnectednesses.

The first wave has to do with what it's like to feel the love of God. The first part of that wave to reach shore is Joe Fields' story of how love replaces alcohol, so that after years of literal and spiritual prison this man who once hated himself can conclude, "Joe, you are a miracle." Next comes Polly Ann Brown's telling, in both poetry and prose, of shedding holy images until she could conclude that "I am loved absolutely and unconditionally by God." And I report on a friend's experience of that same love of God.

The next wave has to do with how we live the love of God. On the crest of this wave is Norman Kraus' examination of our need for discipleship and grace—which could also be described as our need to experience and pass on God's love. Renee Gehman explores to what extent "salt" and "light" are helpful passing-it-on images. And I read Joyce Peachey Lind as helping us understand that when love and life most fully intertwine, we fly a little.

Love includes connection. I feel warmly, meaningfully connected with that which I love and am loved by. Connection is the third wave.

Within this wave Kirsten Eve Beachy yearns to connect the one not Mennonite with why being Mennonite is something to love. David Greiser explores how integral to the film "I ♥ Huckabees" is "the connectedness of all things," and Noel King tells us of a woman so connected with all things that she can speak even the languages of heart and blood vessels, lock and key, or pillow. Meanwhile Ross Bender shows us how much is connected with the cows coming back.

The final wave is made up of Deborah Good's column on navigating through gender matters and Daniel Hertzler's review of books on consumerism. This wave might be visualized as involving specific issues that arise in our quest to navigate through experiencing and living God's love amid our interconnectedness with each other and all things.

Welcoming Renee Gehman

It's a delight to welcome Renee Gehman, a junior at Gordon College both majoring in English and steeped in a lifelong love of words, as *DSM's* new assistant editor. Renee is simultaneously learning the publishing trade and contributing her already considerable skills to it, as she polishes my first round of editorial work and writes her own column, "Ink Aria," appearing for the first time in this issue. Welcome aboard, Renee!

—Michael A. King

It's a delight to welcome Renee Gehman . . . as DSM's new assistant editor.

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Letters

Dear Editors:

I encountered *DreamSeeker Magazine* for the first time this fall, thanks to an email forward from my mother. I'm glad to discover a journal in the Anabaptist tradition committed to publishing "voices from the soul." Many thanks to you and the others involved in this creation!

—Kirsten Eve Beachy

Dear Editors:

I've been reading *Dreamseeker Magazine* on the web since it began, and it's all right. Frankly, though, I miss *Mennonot*, for which I was a regular columnist. (For more see www.keybridged.com/mennonot/)

It seems impossible to support a Menno arts magazine with that jazzy, irreverent, Mennos-on-the-edge flavor where *avant-garde* Mennos can get together and say f—. Don't get me wrong, Alan Kreider and Daniel Hertzler have their place, but the Beat Generation they are not.

And now *The Other Side* is folding. Alas.

—Ross Bender

Dear Ross:

I concur, *DreamSeeker Magazine* is not *Mennonot*! My wish is for a forum where some articles trend toward Men-

nos on the edge but willing not to say f— because that will cut other worthy readers out of the audience. My ultimate wish—though the trend is not terribly promising so far, since readers on the traditional side seem not to be as large an audience—is for enough vigorous traditionalist writers/readers to speak up to enable giving more latitude to writers/readers on the other edge.

I say this because of course *DSM* could publish farther and farther on the left edge, but then eventually it would become only a cliché—another place to go for ideological ranting to the converted. I weary of that.

On the other hand, if over time *DSM* becomes known as a forum where you can push the edges on left *or* right (or yet other shades of the spectrum), then the mix of voices will help the magazine as a whole transcend ideological screaming even if particular voices, whatever their leanings, are strident.

In addition, we'll see if this is a vain hope, but the effort is to position *DSM* as having an inner circle of Mennonite readers but also outer circles (with inner/outer here not meaning better/worse) of readers from many other communities.

—Michael A. King

“Joe, You Are a Miracle”

Joe Fields

I was born in Georgia in 1942. With four brothers and four sisters, I was raised by my mother, my grandmother, and my grandfather.

When I was nine, I killed a white man. I was returning home from a party with my sister, Jeannette, who was seven. Three drunk guys drove by and hollered at us to get off the road. They drove up the road, turned around, headed back, stopped the car, jumped out, and chased us across a field. I was scared; I thought they might rape Jeannette. When one of them fell into a ditch, I picked up a fence post and hit him over the head. He died.

The police locked me up and said, “We should hang you right here in your cell.” At the trial, the judge told me that I was lucky to be alive, that they should have hung me, that no matter how young I was I had no business killing a white man. He said that since he couldn't send me to the electric chair, he would give me life in prison. I was to serve half of my life sentence working on a chain gang.

For 14 months I worked on the chain gang. I was the only child. We cut trees, cleaned roads and ditches, cleared a space for a national park. We worked during

the week and returned to our camp on Friday evening. Twice during that first year, I was raped.

My mother wrote to a government official, arguing that I was too young to be on a chain gang. I was put in a regular prison before my eleventh birthday. In prison, someone tried to rape me a third time. I nearly killed him with a knife I had bought from another prisoner.

By the time I got out of prison and moved to Philadelphia in 1960, I had developed the traits of an alcoholic. My grandmother had put the fear of God in my heart, but after the first time I was raped, the fear of God left. My whole personality began to change.

The second time I was raped, I became angry at God. I hated society. I was filled with bitterness and resentment. I no longer believed in the human race. I hated white people to the core. When I picked up my first drink at the age of 21, I became an instant alcoholic.

Alcohol seemed to ease the pain and hurt. It gave me courage and hope. I felt as if I could act out all my fantasies, as if I could do anything. It promised me happiness. I had not known happiness. It promised me love. I had not felt loved. It promised me that I would be able to get rich.

Alcohol promised a lot, but eventually it took away my ability to work, my ability to think. In the end, it left me with nothing but pain and suffering. Soon I could not stop with one drink. I could no longer control my actions. Over the next 20 years, I was

in about every penitentiary in the state of Pennsylvania, usually for burglary. Alcohol put me back in prison.

Every time I got out of prison, the only thing I wanted was to drink and stay drunk. And that's what I did. Alcohol had taken complete control of my life.

Once while I was serving a two- to six-year prison term, a sister who was living in Philadelphia died. They let me out of prison to go to her funeral. I had no feelings about my sister's death. When they let me out in Wilkes Barre to get the bus to Philadelphia, I got drunk. By the time I got to Philadelphia, I was in a blackout. I didn't know where I was. It took me hours to find my family. I hadn't seen my mother in 10 years. During the three days that I was home, I spoke to her only twice.

During my 20s and 30s there were periods when I was sober and able to hold a job. After leaving one rehab center, I stayed sober for two years. Yet I didn't follow through on what people there told me I needed to do. At the time, I still didn't believe that alcoholism was a disease, that it could kill. I still didn't believe that one drink was too many and a thousand never enough.

After being sober for two years with a good job, I picked up another drink, woke up after two weeks drunk in an empty house, got up and went and looked in the bathroom mirror. I had such a powerful feeling of horror and hopelessness, I broke the mirror with my hand, then went and tried to jump off a bridge. A policeman pulled

me back. Something, someone always intervened when I tried to kill myself.

I continued my pattern of getting drunk and being sober, of being in and out of rehab centers. I entered a halfway house run by a Catholic priest. Someone taught me to drive and someone else bought me a 1963 Oldsmobile. I finished a welding school and got a job at a welding company. I was making good money and had a lot of friends from my AA group—people who cared about me. Yet I still didn't see alcohol as my enemy.

Soon I was offered a job at a country club. My sponsor told me not to take the job, that I would be making too much money, too fast. He didn't believe I was ready to handle a lot of money. But I didn't want to listen to anyone, didn't want anybody telling me what to do with my life. I took the job, shined shoes in the locker room, and from the large tips, in three months, I was able to save over \$8,000.

One Monday morning, I woke up with a bad cold. I didn't go to work. I went to the drug store and got a bottle of Nyquil. That bottle cost me three years of hell. I got drunk and in one night—all in one night—lost my job, lost my room, and lost all my money. I ended up walking up and down streets in Coatesville, trying to sell a color TV for a hundred bucks.

I stayed drunk, ended up in another empty house, and finally called some friends. They got out of bed at

3:00 in the morning, in the middle of winter, came and got me, and took me to another rehab hospital.

But I still wasn't ready. I didn't share in the meetings. I still was not ready to be honest with myself.

In prison and out of prison, I tried many times to commit suicide. I hated the way I was living. Sometimes I felt numb. I felt fear. I would wake in

the morning with the shakes, scared. I would feel a tremendous, unknown fear, not knowing what it was about, what I could do about it. There was nothing left to do but to take another drink to calm me. I used to walk the streets of Philadelphia praying to God that he would put me back in

prison because I didn't want to live on the streets.

The last time I attempted suicide, I took all sorts of pills with bleach and detergent mixed together. I woke up in a hospital with tubes down my throat, my nose, inside my stomach. The doctor told me he had no idea how I had lived through it. He said I was a miracle.

When I got out, I began drinking again, but soon took a drink that would be my last. A friend of mine and I had gotten drunk on a Saturday night and I woke up on Sunday morning on the street. I didn't even know what year it was. I drank a fifth of vodka and couldn't get drunk. I drank another fifth of vodka and couldn't

The last time I attempted suicide, I took all sorts of pills with bleach and detergent mixed together. . . . The doctor told me he had no idea how I had lived through it. He said I was a miracle.

get drunk. I was scared that I was going crazy.

After drinking about three fifths of vodka, I called the mental health services and told them to come and get me. They found me on the street corner, balled up in a fetal position, crying like a baby, not knowing why. They put me in the hospital, where I stayed for three weeks.

The only thing I could do was cry. I couldn't do anything else. I tried to commit suicide after being sober for about three weeks, cut my wrists. They sent me to the state hospital, where I saw people who had lost their mental capacity as a result of alcoholism. They were in a vegetable-like state.

I had tried many times to get sober. I had promised God many times that if he would just help me through another crisis, I would get sober. Now, in this place, somewhere deep down inside me, I knew that I had to give up alcohol. I told God that whatever it would take to get me sober and keep me sober, I would do it.

That was 20 years ago. I came out of the state hospital and entered a rehab center. I learned that alcoholism was only part of my disease. My deeper sickness was the pain, the hatred, anger, and fear that I had stored up and needed to face and work through.

When I was a child on the chain gang, I cried after I was raped, then vowed that I would never cry again. I learned to cry again. I learned to live

again. I learned about humility, honesty, and forgiveness. I learned that people loved me and that I could love back. I learned how to receive and how to give.

How do I stay sober? I have remained heavily involved in AA. I go to as many meetings as I can, usually at least two a week, and I take the Twelve Steps seriously. I work them as hard as I can.

After I got out of rehab, I went away with my spiritual director, spent three days with him, told him every wrong, every hurtful thing I could remember—things people had done to me, things I had done to other people. Was that ever hard. I just got the garbage up and out.

When I was done and he hugged me and told me he loved me, I knew I could let it all go. I knew I didn't have to carry that load around anymore. I made amends to people. For my mother, who doesn't want to talk about the past, it is enough that I stay sober.

But I have also learned that there is more to life than just staying sober. After I got out of rehab, I took a year off just for myself. I went fishing by myself. I remember that first year going into a shoe store and buying myself a pair of shoes that fit. First time I ever remember having shoes that didn't pinch or flop around. They felt so good, I danced out of the store and down the street.

I stay away from people who judge or criticize me. I hang around with

people who accept me and make me feel good about myself, people I can laugh and have fun with.

Today, anything I can do to help another person, especially another alcoholic, I will do. I pick folks up off the street and drive them to a rehab center. I work part-time in a rehab center. I cook Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners in the church basement for people who would otherwise have none. Sometimes we've been joined by members of the police force.

A few years ago, I got married. I am learning more about love and commitment in this relationship.

Every night I thank God for help-

ing me through the day, then I throw my shoes under the bed so I'll have to get on my knees again in the morning, so I'll be sure to thank God for another day, sure to ask for help to get through it.

And I'm not afraid to look in the mirror anymore. Now, every morning when I look in the mirror, I say, "Joe, I love you." I say, "Joe, you are a miracle."

—*Joe Fields, Norristown, Pennsylvania, works part-time in a drug and alcohol rehab program and full time at Mercy Suburban Hospital. This is his story as told to and recorded by Polly Ann Brown.*



I went away with my spiritual director, spent three days with him, told him every wrong, every hurtful thing I could remember. . . .

Beyond Dressing in Holy Images

Polly Ann Brown

Many years ago we left our suburban church to attend an inner-city Mennonite church. The boundaries and call were clear: this was a “mission” church; we joined others who were helping those “in need.”

Soon, however, boundaries began to blur. During a Sunday morning service, a recovering alcoholic made his way to the front of the church, announced that he had fallen off the wagon, and asked for prayer.

Trying to name my discomfort, I thought about the wagons I’d fallen off in my life, my own history of substance abuse, and how church was the last place I would have brought the subject up. Church was a place where my helping self could flourish and keep me from acknowledging even to myself my own spiritual neediness. Church was a place where I put on my best face and guarded my image.

My image: As a child, I was a “good girl,” “mature beyond her years”; as an adult, a rock, “someone we can lean on.” I was dependable friend, nurse, doctor’s wife, and mother to four sons.

I became an achieving student in my 40s, returning to college and then graduate school. I learned how to play the academic game, found another place

to hide (in my head), got my Ph.D. by writing 219 pages in which I cited the ideas of 174 others, never once using the personal pronoun *I*, and became a university faculty member. But most important to me, I was seen as an upbeat, upright, all-around “nice person.” Someone once said to me, “I see Jesus in you.” Who would want to give that up? Not I . . .

At least not until I grew to know folks in our new congregation, persons whose dignity and clear-headedness were born of suffering, who had plunged to the depths and come up whole, at peace, living in a no-nonsense kind of way, whose candor was refreshing, whose lives conveyed, “This is who I am: a forgiven and loved sinner, seeking healing and growth the best way I know how, needing God, needing you for the journey.”

Hanging around such attitudes began to chip at the edges of my veneer. Plus dressing in holy images was wearing me out. With others championing my cause, step by step I began to inch my way toward my rightful place as a member of the human race in a broken world, caught with everyone else in a cycle of woundedness, like everyone else longing to be known and, being known, accepted and loved.

Ten years ago, with others, I helped to plan a class built on the Twelve Steps. We sought to create a space where people could talk freely

about their struggles and triumphs. Each week we continue to meet during the Sunday school hour in an office in a corner of the church. We read from a book that combines Scriptures with the Twelve Steps. We talk about how what we have read has challenged us and how we plan to work the wisdom into our everyday lives.

Step by step I began to inch my way toward my rightful place as a member of the human race in a broken world, caught with everyone else in a cycle of woundedness. . . .

A friend asked me once where I find true spirituality. My mind immediately went to the people I am with on Sunday mornings—in our Twelve Steps class,

in worship service. In these places, I move a little closer to acquiring that most elusive of all spiritual convictions—the conviction that I am loved absolutely and unconditionally by God.

“The root of Christian love,” said Thomas Merton, “is not the will to love, but the faith that one is loved by God.” And so I have been learning how to serve not in the old way, not out of fear of chaos—a habit that can be traced back to childhood—but rather out of the realization that I am loved.

Each week, at the end of our Twelve Steps class, we hold hands. We say together a simple and familiar prayer: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Then we head out to the sanctuary for the worship service.

Standing in the back row, singing, in English and Spanish, I bring “the sacrifice of praise.” Amid the din of outside city noises, I look around. Annie Dillard once wrote that she knows enough of God to want to praise him. So do I. And I know enough of these people to want to praise God with them.

—*Polly Ann Brown lives in Philadelphia with her husband, Ken. They are members of Norristown (Pa.) New Life Mennonite church. Polly Ann, a semi-retired educator, is writing a children’s book and planning another book encouraging ongoing dialogue among communities, families, educators, and students.*

A Comfortable Fit

When life was wearing my son down,
he asked a question I couldn’t answer,
a thing I had never learned:
“How do I learn to love myself?”
I knew Joe knew so I asked him.

“Took a year off just for myself,” he answered.
“After they ripped my gin-grieving soul
from the heap of flesh and bones they found
on a chester county street corner
and hung it to dry in an intensive care unit,
I went fishing by myself
and sometimes danced with light-hearted folks.

I bought myself a pair of shoes that fit.
First time in my life shoes didn’t pinch or flop around,
put spring in my first Twelve Steps.

I consorted with my mirror’d image;
found some good thing in that unfamiliar face.

At night on my knees, I thank God for the day
then throw those spit-polished black shoes under the bed
so I’ll have to get on my knees again in the morning.

And I stay clear of booze and box-stuffing people
who can kill the will in an instant with a word or a glance,
who misjudge the spring in my step
that only comes from shoes that do not pinch.”

—*Polly Ann Brown*

Shivering Toward the Love Of God

Michael A. King

For half my life I’ve known this friend, but never had I experienced him quite like at that breakfast. I had expected him to be stressed and maybe even fragile, because he’d been laid off after having some hope that a new position within the organization would be found. Last I’d heard he’d managed to piece together only a bit of this and that. Who I actually met startled me. He was stronger, clearer, more energized than I could remember ever experiencing in the decades I’d known him.

I was awed and mystified. What had happened? How—precisely when it would be normal for him to be broken—had he found whatever he had found?

At the time I didn’t tell him how puzzled I was, but it turned out I didn’t need to, because he answered my question regarding how he had come to be like this even without my asking it aloud. This is what he told me. He said that one day up on Skyline Drive in the Shenandoah Valley, as the sun was rising, its rays seemed to become the very presence of God. And he heard within the experience a voice, nearly as clearly as if the voice were speaking aloud to him, telling him that he was loved. I love you, God was telling him.

Well, all right, cool, Jesus loves me this I know. God is love. The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell. So big deal, a voice says God loves you. Yes, neat, not to be dismissed, but hey, it's great also that when you draw in each breath there's oxygen there to keep you alive, but that doesn't mean you start looking clear and strong and energized just because one day it hits you that there's oxygen in this air and what a great thing that is.

So I was still trying to get a handle on what was up. So God had told my friend he loved him. So?

What I finally gathered was this: My friend had thrown back at God all the little and big sins and foibles and frailties he well knew he still struggled with, Christian most of his life or not.

And God had said, basically, "Don't care. That's not what I'm concerned about. You don't have to get it all right for me to love you. We can worry about how you're not perfect another day, but that won't change what I'm telling you now, which is just plain that I love you, that's that, and you don't have to do anything except hear it and know it and feel it."

That is what had changed my friend. God had loved him before; he'd known that before; but now he felt it in some fresh new deep down way that just soaked into him through and through.

It was so in him, in fact, that for days after I'd find my mind turning to it and wondering if it could actually be that God loved me too like that.

Because I know it in my head, but not always in my heart, in my bones, in my stomach or wherever the feelings come from that don't always seem to care too much what I know in my head. I believe God does love us like that, but I'm still finding my way toward feeling it.

Soon after my friend told me his story I was standing on a bridge over the Perkiomen Creek under one of the most brilliant blue skies I ever remember seeing. The air was as shiveringly beautiful as it gets, there in a pristine autumn day, and the sun glowed through it and onto shimmering leaves in such a way that it really did seem as if God himself was aiming to be seen and touched and loved in the glories of that moment.

Just then I sort of idly wondered what it would be like to actually believe that the love of God was like that and that it was a love that wanted to enfold me as much as my friend. Oh what a vision. But even though I could think it, I could only hold on to it for a few instants. I didn't quite know how to live all the way into trusting it.

Still, what if what my friend heard God say that day is true? What if God's love really is greater far than tongue or pen can tell? That's what I'm shivering toward trusting and feeling.

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

God had loved him before . . . but now he felt it in some fresh new deep down way. . . .

The Rowboat Needs Both Oars

Discipleship and Grace

C. Norman Kraus

Sometime in the late 1960s I was reviewing the sermons I had preached during the first years of my ministry, and I noticed that I had spoken quite often on the subject of love. But I also noticed something else. My emphasis in those sermons was on the *command* to love. I had urged the congregation to love each other out of a sense of obedience to the command of Christ. I was preaching a love *ethic*.

Of course Christ did leave us a command to love as he had loved, but that command assumed a prior gift of grace—a transforming relationship with God. "We love because God first loved us." This command of the God who first loved is an enabling command—the command of grace. It is not a matter of command (to love) *and* grace, as though these were two separate things in conflict with each other. The command *to* love is the command *of* love.

The "Law," or *Torah* in the Hebrew, as the prophets of Israel well knew, is God's instruction and guidance given as a covenant command of grace. God's command to love can never be separated from God's love for us.

There is, to be sure, a certain tension between law and grace, but they are not opposites which cancel each other out. Rather it is as if they are in a dialogue exploring the two sides of one complex reality. In more technical language we call this relationship of grace and command “dialectical,” and this dialectic is integral to our concept of discipleship. Without it our obedience to law becomes slavery, not an apprenticeship that by God’s enabling grace develops character.

When I was a boy growing up on the banks of the Warwick River in Virginia, Bishop George R. Brunk (d. 1938), who was a marvelous preacher, would use the rowboat metaphor to explain the necessity of maintaining what I am calling a dialectical tension. In a rowboat one needs two oars to row in a straight line. If one rows with the oar of faith only, she goes in clockwise circles. If one rows with the oar of works only, he goes in counter-clockwise circles. Both oars used in balanced tension, however, propel the boat straight ahead.

Before moving the argument further, I should note that the seventeenth-century Pietist movement tended to emphasize the experience of grace as the divine source of obedience while the Anabaptists of that same century stressed the importance of obedience as the response to grace. Discipleship should not be exclu-

sively associated with either emphasis. For both pragmatic and biblical reasons we need to understand our discipleship as a response to God’s enabling goodness.

Our everyday Christian vocabulary is full of dialectical phrases—although we may not think of them in that way. We speak of “law *and* gospel,” “faith *and* works,” “body *and* spirit,” “evangelism *and* social service,” “trust *and* obedience,” “the life *and* teaching of Jesus,” “Jesus as savior *and* lord,” “the nature *and* mission of the church” to name a few. In recent years the promoters of church growth have added another, namely, “evangelize *and* disciple” (verb), as though these were two steps in the process of calling people to salvation.

None of these words joined by *and*, such as “law and gospel,” represent separate detached entities. And they certainly are not opposites in conflict with each other. The words in each pair are in dialogue with each other in such a way that they throw light on each other. The good news is that we have been called and empowered, as Paul puts it, to obey “the law of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21).

Jesus is not savior if he is not lord. Indeed, it is when we begin following his discipline as lord that he becomes our savior, i.e., he can begin to bring God’s order and purpose to our lives. Jesus makes it clear that acceptance of his discipline, or “yoke,” is essential in

If one rows with the oar of faith only, she goes in clockwise circles. If one rows with the oar of works only, he goes in counter-clockwise circles.

our relation to him. True Christian faith is not simply believing in Jesus as a savior from guilt. It inherently includes faithfulness to the character and example of Christ. Faith is not faith, or as James puts it, faith “is dead” apart from obedience.

I emphasize this point because our modern analytical minds, which tend to separate and distinguish between aspects of a dynamic whole, often beguile us into simplistic, programmatic definitions that defeat the call of Jesus to follow him. The church is by its very nature the continuation of the messianic mission. And the command to “make disciples of all people” is precisely to evangelize them. The call to salvation is a call to relationship with Jesus as the “Master and Lord,” that is, a call to repent. It is a call to “take his yoke” or “discipline” and learn from him. And that is precisely what discipleship means.

Discipleship indicates first of all an attitudinal change toward Jesus. The word *metanoia*, or repentance, means first of all to change one’s attitude toward Jesus. On the day of Pentecost those who did not accept Jesus as the Christ, or Messiah, were called upon to repent of their insubordination, and to join his new movement (see Acts 2:38f). Their salvation depended on their coming into a disciple relationship to Jesus, and they were promised participation in the Holy Spirit if they would do that.

The call was not first to be saved (evangelized) and then to learn the ethics of discipleship, or as some would put it, then “be perfected.” Discipleship describes a saving rela-

tionship to Jesus as “my Lord and my God.”

By the same token discipleship does not describe a moral following of the teaching of Jesus apart from metanoia and submission. For example, Gandhi was not a “disciple” of Jesus although he respected him as a great teacher. So we should not speak of discipleship as though it were simply an ethical norm to which we try to attain. *The essence of discipleship is in the relation to Jesus.*

In addition, to describe the Christian walk as a life of discipleship implies that we always remain disciples, or learners. We never attain to “mastery.” It is in this context that Jesus told his followers not to call each other “master.”

Actually the word translated “disciple” means “apprentice,” that is, one who learns through continuing observation and practice under the discipline of the master. So discipleship indicates a continuing relationship of dependence and submission to Jesus as the Master.

And finally, to speak of discipleship points to the hope of transformation into the image of the Master. As we continue in relationship to Christ under the enabling discipline of the Spirit we have the promise that we will be transformed into his likeness from one degree of attainment to the next (see 2 Cor. 3:18).

Thus the call to “salvation by grace” is precisely a call to discipleship. We are not first called to accept Jesus as a “savior” from guilt and punishment (grace), followed by an ethical re-

sponse of obedience (works). We are “saved” by the gracious call to submit to Jesus as the One who calls us to follow him. The calling is to participate in the discipline of grace and thus find order, meaning, and hope in our human lives.

The relation of a disciple to Jesus as the Master is one of submission, dependence, empowerment, emulation, and finally, transformation by

grace. Such is the dialectic of faith and obedience. At its best this has been the goal of both the Anabaptist and the Pietist traditions.

—*C. Norman Kraus, retired in Harrisonburg, Virginia, is a Goshen College professor emeritus and has taught in numerous other settings in addition to being a pastor, missionary, and widely published author.*



Seeing Salt in a Different Light

Renee Gehman

If you count knowing “This Little Light of Mine” by heart, the Christian calling to be salt and light had been in my head since I was a three-year-old girl singing her favorite song on her rocking horse. After the rocking horse, flannelgraphed Sunday school lessons, church sermons, and going to private Christian school thoroughly exposed me to the metaphors of Jesus. I thought I had it all down.

There is, however, a pattern to discern in hearing the same thing many times. The first few repetitions go in one ear and out the other. You think, *Yeah, Yeah, I’ve heard this before*, you raise a mind-numbing barrier against the portion of your brain in which deep thoughts occur, and send your mind skipping through Friday’s lunch plans or that pesky hangnail.

But inevitably there comes a time when even hangnails become a lackluster topic. Out of desperation you let down the intellectual barrier a bit . . . then *BAM*—suddenly find yourself hearing the old words in a new and intriguing way. You realize, *Hey! This is a good point!*

I experienced this with my dad's reiteration that 14-year-olds are too young to date and, most recently, on tour with the Gordon College Choir. In the course of four days this past November, I heard my choir director give the same speech about 12 times, because it was the speech through which he introduced the closing number for all of our concerts (an arrangement of "Here I Am, Lord"). He would begin by stating Gordon's objective: to prepare students to serve as "missionaries," basically by excelling as professionals in all fields, being model Christians while working as lawyers, teachers, scientists, artists, and so on.

Then he would talk about our call to be salt and light. This is what really awakened the walled-off section of my brain. He believes it is easy to be light, because all you have to do is plant yourself in a spot and just *be* what you are. Others will see your shine and feel your warmth—and that's it.

To be *salt* though, you can't just *be* salt; you must get into the "pot" (such as of soup). There you must allow yourself to mingle with the unsalty, dispersing your flavor throughout your surroundings, all the while maintaining your own potent, salty quality. The choir director sees Gordon's aim more as to educate students to become salt, going out to season the professional world with a Christian flavor.

Does the salt analogy still apply to Christians when we think of something as being too salty? Can Christians be too Christian?

Well, *this* was something new! My understanding had always been that salt and light were just two different images of the same thing; their relationship being one in which unity was found in sameness. Now I was seeing one as good, but the other as better. Exhilarated by a fresh perspective, I came away from choir tour with a new and exciting understanding of what I was to strive to become—salt.

Then a week or so after the choir tour's conclusion, while sitting in the school cafeteria, I noticed a student eating French fries alone. Normally I wouldn't watch a French-fry eater for more than a second or two, but this time I found myself enthralled by this student's curious ritual of re-salting his fries after every two bites.

Now I could understand a second salting, and maybe even a third, because sometimes the first salting is deposited with discretion, for fear of overpowering and ruining an entire serving of fries without even having enjoyed any. But as I observed a *seventh* salting, then an eighth, I was completely baffled.

Maybe it was the observation of monotonous repetition. More likely it was the salt itself. But in any case, my mind wandered back to choir tour, to my director's thoughts on Christians as salt and light. Now I wondered, *Does the salt analogy still apply to Christians when we think of something as being too salty? Can Christians be too Christian?*

The answer depends on who is defining *Christian*. Suppose I define Christian as one who adheres to Jesus' command in Matthew 22:37-39 to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind . . . and love your neighbor as yourself." Then no, I doubt a Christian can be *too* Christian.

But if one polled secular society, including the "unsalty" professional world, might words such as *hypocritical*, *condescending*, and *judgmental* come up? Might they arise from occasions in which someone tasted an oversalting whose unhappy excess lingered on the tongue?

The afflicted tongues might be those of the indigenous tribespeople whom the missionary asked to discard their customs; of the man cut off by a maniac driver with a Christian bumper sticker on his car; of the single mother on whom at church the disapproving eyes bear down.

I still see insight in my choir director's thoughts on salt and light. But if salt were *the* best image of the Christ's call, then why would he have bothered to introduce the concept of his followers as light as well? And if, as I thought for years, the call to be light was synonymous with the call to be salt, then are we to conclude that Jesus just had a redundancy issue?

A more reasonable explanation is that Jesus *knew people*. His provision of two similar (and yet different!) images of the Christian calling accounts for the diversity of God's creation.

Our world needs the salt-shaker dwellers, those who let themselves be salted vigorously into society in obedience to the great commission. But not everyone responds to the same kind of approach. Those who would shy away from the salt approach might find comfort in the quiet warmth of the light on the hill.

Salt and light are not united by their sameness, and one is not greater than the other. Their connection lies in the complementary way in which they image the Christian calling in its different approaches.

The idea of being salt—in a pot of unseasoned soup, adding flavor to the whole thing—is still exciting to me. But even though the sun is millions of miles away, still its light burns bright enough to make the flowers grow.

So as I continue on this path with salty soup on my mind, I must also make sure not to hide my light under a bushel. No, I'm gonna let it shine . . . let it shine . . . let it shine.

—*Renee Gehman, Souderton, Pennsylvania, is a junior at Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts; and DreamSeeker Magazine assistant editor.*



I Flew a Little

Joyce Peachey Lind

My neighbor, Nathan, is four years old. His mother and I are good friends, and we talk to each other almost daily. I go to their house for coffee from time to time, but sometimes I go to their house, just to talk with Nathan, and to hear about the world from his perspective. Nathan tells me about dinosaurs—how huge they are, and where they live. He tells me what things aren't safe, like rollerblading without kneepads. He sometimes tells me wild stories with wide eyes and great expression.

A couple of weeks ago, Nathan's mom phoned to tell me his latest "funny." Nathan came racing to tell her, "Mom! I flew a little!" He had been leaping and jumping around the living room and sailed onto the couch—flying as he went. He was convinced he had defied gravity—and flown!

Carmen and I chuckled about that. But after I hung up, I thought how wonderful it would be if more of us were able to recognize and proudly proclaim the times we "flew a little." For certainly all of us have had times of flying a little—even if no one else saw, even if no one else believed. We've all had times when we knew in our hearts that we had flown.

Growing up Mennonite I think I absorbed more than my share of humility. I got the idea that boasting

was a terrible thing to do. If I accomplished something, it was fine to smile and say "Thank you" when complimented—but improper to tell anyone how good I felt about what I had done. Even my smile and my thanks were done in an "Oh, I didn't do anything special" kind of way. Reveling in success was out of the question, and people who did so were show-offs.

But recently I've been urged to own my accomplishments, to hold them up proudly, to acknowledge them, and yes, even to tout them. Oh, how difficult! My Mennonite sensibilities scream at me to be humble, to be less, to be least. But in devaluing my accomplishments, I have often devalued myself. And that keeps me from being whole.

I remember one of the first times I played piano at the offertory in my home church—a congregation of 400-500 people. I was very nervous. Not only was I worried about making mistakes but also because rather than a hymn arrangement I was playing music from a movie soundtrack. I wasn't sure how that would go over!

But I played the piece. It was a beautiful arrangement, and I played it well. Sitting down in the pew afterward, I smiled inwardly. I had flown! A few days later I received a note from a member of our congregation, thanking me for playing and telling me that he appreciated the music. The affirmation was genuine, and I reveled—inwardly—in believing that I

had "done it well" and it had been meaningful to someone else.

That note made a lasting impression on me, maybe because I wasn't really going to own my accomplishment until someone else recognized it too. I was in church after all. That music was really supposed to be for God.

If I accomplished something, it was fine to smile and say "Thank you" when complimented—but improper to tell how anyone how good I felt about what I had done.

In my current congregation, school athletes and coaches sometimes ask for prayer for teammates during sharing time. On other occasions they share results of tournaments or report on upcoming sports events. At times I've wondered about the appropriateness of this. Athletics in church, of all things! Again, I suppose it is my Mennonite upbringing that whispers to me, telling me that sports don't belong in the "spiritual" realm.

But in the last couple of years, my perspective has changed. Our son Jake is contributing to that transformation. His experience of being guided by caring, mentoring adults, and learning to work with his teammates toward a common goal has given me a new understanding: When those athletes and coaches ask for prayers, they aren't asking out of an obsessive dedication to winning. They're requesting prayers for their community of players—for people they care about.

Jake is an enthusiastic and serious athlete. As a one-year-old, one of his first words was *ball*. As a five-year-old he learned how to play a game that in-

volved kicking a ball and strategically placing it in a net being guarded by an opponent. He was hooked. At age 11, he has grown into a skilled defensive soccer player. Jake does his part for the team, though he doesn't typically score goals.

Last year, during one of the league games, the coach put Jake on offense. He was in a position of trying to get the ball *into* the goal (of his opponent), instead of keeping it out of his own.

I wasn't paying much attention to the game that afternoon, until I heard the parents from our team cheering and shouting. I looked up in time to see Jake gliding down the field, dribbling the ball, an opponent close at his heels. We held our breaths as we watched him shoot, and the ball sailed past the goalie's arms. I saw Jake's feet come back and touch the ground. He flew a little that afternoon.

It wasn't a heroic goal, it wasn't a last minute tie-breaker. It was just one exciting moment in a not-so-special game. But for Jake, it was a glorious day.

After the game Jake replayed for us just how the ball happened to get to him, what he was thinking, how he

got past his challenger, how his foot kicked the ball. He reveled in his flight. And though neither my husband nor I love soccer quite like our son does, we shared his excitement as we drove home.

Each of us has our moments of flying, those times when our feet leave the ground, and in some magical way we hang suspended in air—savoring the experience for just a moment before we land back on solid earth.

So I hope that the next time I fly a little I have the wild abandon—like my neighbor Nathan—to race back to my husband, my friend, or my neighbor to tell them all about it. To tell them that I flew a little, and isn't it wonderful, and isn't it surprising!

And I hope my husband, my friend, or my neighbor will smile—even if they don't quite believe me, even if they don't quite get it—and savor the joy with me.

—*Joyce Peachey Lind is a mother, teacher, and musician who lives in Harrisonburg, Virginia. She is pursuing an M.A. T. in Early Childhood Education at James Madison University.*



The Day They Ask

Kirsten Eve Beachy

Someday it will happen: One of your colleagues—say the girl who teaches English 101 in the classroom just down from yours—will ask the question. It's best to answer without pausing.

Tell her you're Mennonite. As she squints over your shoulder, looking for the horse and buggy, say you're a modern Mennonite. Better yet, postmodern. You've got a liberal arts education, cable, Internet, and subscriptions to *The New Yorker*, *National Geographic*, and *Scientific American*.

Resist the urge to blab cultural details: your kitchen drawer full of recycled twist-ties, the compulsion to turn off all unused lights and appliances, the guilt you feel at throwing away used egg cartons because there isn't enough cabinet space in your grad-student rental.

Say: "We're like any modern religious group." If she presses you for more, pick unique features: Peace. Service. Use peripheral vision to gage her comfort at speaking with a dutiful idealist. Do not pursue the subject unless she prompts you. Remember: You don't like to talk about yourself.

If she toured Amish country last July and sees you as a link to a world of charm and simplicity, she might

want to go out for a drink and discuss it more. Wait until you get to the bar to tell her you don't know how to drink. Order cranberry juice.

Start with some history. Tell her Mennonites and Amish are so interwoven you can't remember which group split off from the other and that the Anabaptists decided the Reformation needed reforming; "love your neighbor" meant renouncing violence. They rebaptized their members, who were then martyred in gruesome ways.

Buy your companion another beer before you continue. Share the stories that raised goosebumps on your childhood vertebrae. Your predecessors burnt, drowned, and hung in cages for the carrion birds and the spectacle. Don't forget: Dirk Willems, who escaped from prison across the thin ice of a pond, but turned back to rescue the pursuer who broke through. Burnt. Maeynken Wens, who was so persuasive the authorities screwed her tongue to her cheek so she couldn't evangelize on her way to her death. Notice, but do not mention, your companion's tongue piercing.

Change the subject: hymns. You grew up singing four-part harmony, usually a capella. Great-Grandpa composed some of these hymns on his organ until the elders decreed that musical instruments were too worldly. After the organ was sent away, he lined up his five children and made them sing the notes in his head. But the children were rarely available,

**Tell about:
Growing up
without
television
and scared
of movies,
even
Bambi.**

busy as they were stringing secret radio antennae under the kitchen table or persecuting the neighbor's chickens. Great-Grandpa stopped writing music. The elders were concerned. Why had he stopped composing? Under cover of darkness, he hitched up the wagon and brought home his organ.

Then there were the grandparents who left their Beachy Amish community and became missionaries in Haiti, as well as the grandparents who watched their dairy farm disappear beneath housing developments.

If you feel reckless, let your interrogator get you a drink. Go for something sweet and fruity. Make a joke about girly drinks. Don't close your eyes when you sip. After your stomach is warm, decide. Will you talk about yourself? If you dare, if she's not fiddling with her watch, plunge in.

Tell about: Growing up without television and scared of movies, even *Bambi*. Encountering an unknown character you called Dark Vader in the school yard. Sitting under the quilt at Homemaker's Fellowship while old women stitched impossible stitches, wearing thimbles to protect their fingers from the tiny needles and coverings to protect their heads from sin. The hymn sings some Sunday evenings when the black church joined you, and the singing got so fast and loud that even the old women forgot themselves and swayed.

Tell how your mother stayed home and kept a garden and made bread and yogurt and granola and

canned all summer long. How your father swept chimneys so he could go to night school and learn about computers. Tell about going to wilderness camp, where you went into the rainy woods with broken-zipped tents and canoed and hiked and sang and prayed.

Or about the youth group trips to the national Mennonite conference where thousands of kids prayed and wept and knelt, and of course you went up to the front and vowed to spend your life in the Lord's service. Talk fast, before her eyes glaze over.

Tell about the volunteer house in the middle of Appalachia where you spent one of your happiest years. Jump on to the liberal arts education—philosophy and theology and theater all teaching you that humans and their God are limitless creatures.

This was the time when you protested military actions, played drums at women's conferences, and swore on stage. Spent part of a summer living with lesbian newlyweds. Didn't smoke pot, though you surely inhaled a lot second-handed. Prayed in new ways. Let the Bible get dusty for the first time ever. Researched ways Mennonite daughters develop eating disorders. Met and married one of your own kind—a Mennonite farm boy, far from the farm. Found out your grandparents knew each other and once bought land together. You weren't surprised.

Then tell how you came here, to this state university where football is God and burning couches in the streets is a sacrament, to become a writer.

Don't tell your companion how many different ways you and your husband are sixth cousins. Don't tell about your aunt's 12 toes. Don't describe your own baptism, 12 years old and bashful, in a mix of glory and shame. Instead, drain your glass. Tell your friend about a song you sang at this summer's family reunion. Where there are Mennonites, this song is sung: Seaworld, the Metro, your parents' wedding, your own. Grab her sleeve. Lean in. Say, "I'm going to sing it to you."

Glance around to be sure nobody's looking, then start in a whisper, blushing furiously. Succumb to a fit of coughing. Overturn your glass. Shout, "The heck with it!" Maybe even, "The hell with it!" Stand on your stool. Belt it out. Try to sing all four parts. Everyone is watching, but it's time you do this.

*Praise God from whom all blessings
flow
Praise him all creatures here below,
Praise him above ye heavenly host.
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Amen, Alleluia, Amen, Alleluia, Amen.*

—*Kirsten Eve Beachy, Morgantown, West Virginia, is a recent graduate of Eastern Mennonite University, now pursuing her MFA in Fiction at West Virginia University. Her husband, Jason Alderfer, has determined that they are sixth cousins only once, but seventh cousins at least a dozen ways. This article is composed of notes she made for herself: Mennonite born, Mennonite schooled, and now, for the first time, shy and unsure in a world that knows little of Mennonites.*

The Unbearable Lightness of Meaning

A Review of “I ♥ Huckabees”

David Greiser

In the brief time I have been writing this column, I have reviewed only those films I thought were technically and artistically excellent. My reasoning, I suppose, is that I write only four reviews per year. Why waste my readers’ time on a seriously flawed film?

But every now and again a movie comes along that tries to do something important enough to warrant a review even if, artistically speaking, it falls wide of the mark.

“I ♥ Huckabees” is, I believe, such a film. It is perhaps the first *comedy* ever made that is explicitly about existentialism. (Woody Allen’s early comedies joked about the absurdity of life in a godless universe, but they used the Big Questions mostly to set up visual or verbal gags.) “Huckabees” follows some of the conventions of the screwball comedy while seriously exploring the meaning (or non-meaning) of life.

Specifically, “Huckabees” follows the life and travails of one Albert Markovsky, played by Jason

Schwartzman. Albert is an environmental activist whose open space coalition is trying to save a marshland from development by the big-box super-chain, Huckabees, “the everything store.”

Like many idealists, Albert also carries a lot of anger from having to live his life in a less-than-perfect world. In an opening scene he is shown standing in the marsh he is trying to save, screaming obscenities at the top of his lungs.

Albert is convinced that a series of encounters he has had with a tall African man are not a coincidence. He goes to a husband-and-wife team of “existential detectives,” the Jaffes (played by Lily Tomlin and Dustin Hoffman) for help. The detectives’ method of investigation involves following their client everywhere (even to the bathroom) since, in their thinking, everything in life is connected.

To get Albert in touch with his anger, and to help him appreciate the connectedness of all things, they zip him into a body bag. There he must confront the angry images in his head and learn to coexist with them.

Along the way, Albert learns to know a couple of the detectives’ other clients. There is Tommy (Mark Wahlberg), a fireman so environmentally conscious that he goes to fires on his bicycle; and Brad Stand (Jude Law), a Huckabees PR man Albert suspects may have hired the detectives to help undermine Albert’s work.

To get Albert in touch with his anger, and to help him appreciate the connectedness of all things, they zip him into a body bag.

We are also introduced to Catarine Vauban (Isabelle Huppert), a nihilistic philosopher who contends, contra the Jaffes, that *nothing* in life is connected—that life, in fact, is meaningless. Her business card

reads “Cruelty . . . manipulation . . . meaninglessness.” Tommy the fireman has been influenced by Catarine’s best-selling book, and he tries to convince Albert of its worth.

If all of this sounds hard to follow, that’s because it is. The plot of “I ♥ Huckabees” is scattered and screwball, because the film is about the dialogue, the characters, and idea of the connectedness of meaning and absurdity.

Unfortunately, much of the dialogue moves at breakneck speed, with the actors more often screaming than speaking their parts. At points I sensed that something of significance was being said here, but I wanted to rewind the film so I could hear it again. “Huckabees” is a verbose film, and while verbosity is not a flaw in-and-of itself, the pace of this dialogue suffers from too many double lattes.

In addition to the flaws in writing and pacing, the dialogue also misrepresents some important philosophical concepts. The connectedness of all things is a concept more associated with Zen thought than with existentialism. Existentialism has always sought to make sense of the life of the individual, and is less concerned with the individual in community.

I read a recent interview with David O. Russell, the film's director. Russell struck me as a brilliant man with a limited attention span, one who has started reading a great many books but finished only a few.

I suppose I could be accused of being picky. But then, the kinds of people who go to see "I ♥ Huckabees" will tend to be the kinds familiar with the ideas in the film. The film still works if we see it as a clash of world-views between Eastern connectivity and Western alienation. Will Albert find oneness with people and things, or only emptiness?

It would be misleading to leave

too strong an impression that this film is a philosophical exposition. It is not. It is a comedy, and it has enough hilarious and intelligent moments in it to elicit commendation.

"I ♥ Huckabees" is an occasionally ingenious comedy of ideas and a good deal of fun. It reaches for the stars of its big ideas and lands somewhere just above the smog of Los Angeles.

—*Dave Greiser is a pastor, seminary teacher, and wanna-be philosopher who lives in Telford, Pennsylvania. His one regret in life is that he is not Woody Allen.*



Icing on the Cake

Noël R. King

La Tonya Darnell loved to read, but not just anything. Her specialty was reading in foreign languages. She would pick up a book on the Russian state, written in Russian, and she would know exactly what all those funny-looking characters meant. She claimed that, when she read books, newspapers, and magazines in other languages, it seemed to her to be no different from reading in English.

"What's the big deal?" she would say. "I just don't get it. What's so hard about reading this stuff? It's all the same to me."

And so it was, as hard as that was for the rest of us to believe, much less fathom. I once gave her my birth certificate to read, and she did, right like that. I myself cannot even read it—it is in Latvian, and I know nothing about that language even though it is supposedly my mother tongue.

And just the other day, when we went to a movie together, she awed me with her insight into the Chinese plot, which was much different from what the English subtitles had led me to believe. I must say, life with LaTonya was fraught with great understanding.

Now, what I just told you is pretty incredible, but at least it is well documented that many people can and do understand more than one language (I person-

ally do not happen to be one of them). But I am going to tell you a little secret here because I am bursting to tell somebody—anybody at all, actually: LaTonya’s gift “translated.”

“Well, of course,” you might say. “Silly,” you might add. “That’s what you’ve just been telling us.”

But, no, that’s not what I mean. What I mean is that her gift for, well, *regular* languages extended to other languages, ones that I did not even know existed.

For example, LaTonya could tell you in detail what her heart told its blood vessels just before it sent them on their way out into her body (“Watch out!” “Go easy, there” “You’ll be fine, just fine”). She said she constantly heard the jabbering, and even found it somewhat comforting. At the same time, she understood the gist of all her other body parts talking to each other (muscles to bones, kidneys to gall bladder, nose to ears, and so forth).

Oh, but it went far beyond her body, too! When she came home from work and unlocked the front door to her house, her key welcomed the lock

and vice-versa. Her pillows at night talked to her hair. Her knees talked to her mattress and even whispered sometimes over to the windows (she had bruised her knee once something awful on a windowsill).

There are so many more examples I could tell you about! In fact, I could spend only a few days at a time with LaTonya because I would fill up too fast with information when I was with her. I would have to go home afterward and let it all spill back out.

Rocks are good for that. They are used to being spilled on. So I would go sit at the edge of this rock quarry near my house and let all that information roll right on out of me until I felt just right again (namely, empty).

And now I am going to go have some chocolate cake because it helps me when I eat after telling a story like this.

—As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Reston, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful things, including gifts of translation like LaTonya’s.



Where Did I Learn That an Outspoken Woman Is Undesirable?

Gender Matters, Part 2 of 2

Deborah Good

The following column is the second of a two-part series. The first, “Yes, Women Have Bodies” (DSM, Autumn 2004), brought my inbox more emails and led to more lively conversations than any other piece I have written for Dream-Seeker thus far. This, along with the fact that gay marriage and abortion dwarfed war and poverty as key issues on election day lead me to think that body and sex lie on a very sensitive and discordant cusp in this country—on that elusive edge where feelings run high, attitudes shift . . . and change happens. By all means, let’s keep talking.

It was probably 7:30 a.m. I was on a train from D.C. to Philadelphia. The train was rocking me gently back and forth, and I fell asleep easily, my head resting on my balled-up sweatshirt against the window.

I woke up maybe an hour later. *Good*, I thought to myself. *I needed that*. As I slowly dragged myself from my dreaming world, I became aware of something ly-

ing on my leg. I looked down. A man's suit coat was resting against my right thigh. It was then that I noticed the middle-aged man who had boarded the train while I was sleeping and now sat beside me, head leaned back, eyes closed.

Still groggy, I made a small motion to move his coat from my leg, then realized, horrified, that beneath the coat lay his hand. My businessman train-mate was sleeping with his hand on my thigh.

I can't remember exactly what happened next. I must have said something like "Oh, my God!" as I threw his hand from my leg. He must have shifted for a moment in his pretend sleep, but other than that, paid me no mind.

What I do remember is sitting there for the remainder of the trip, trying to build up the gumption to do what I had once been taught to do: Turn to this man and say in a very loud voice on this very quiet train, "Excuse me, sir. Your hand was on my thigh. I would appreciate it if you kept your hands to yourself." And then to watch while all heads turned to the two of us, and he, surprised and embarrassed, moved to a different seat.

I couldn't do it. Instead, I sat in silence and decided it would be easier to say nothing. *Maybe it was unintentional*, I justified, even though everything in me knew it was not. *If I get everyone's attention like that, what if people think I'm out of line? What if I really hurt his feelings? I don't want anyone to hate me...*

I know many women who were taught to be quiet, who grew up believing the Bible told them their wishes would one day be second to their husbands', who learned that a woman who speaks her mind is rude, maybe even a "bitch," and—worst of all—unfeminine and unattractive.

How archaic, you're thinking. We've been talking about this ever since the resurgence of the Women's Movement in the 1970s. I thought that way back in 1931 Virginia Woolf slayed the "Angel in the House"—the woman who was "utterly unselfish.... She sacrificed herself daily.... in short, she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others." Can we talk about something else?

Yet here I am in the new millennium, young, progressive, and fighting my own Angel on a train headed north.

I thought I had been taught differently. My mother is the kind of woman who says what she thinks. I grew up listening to her tell my dad he needed to listen before interrupting. And when I was five, a woman butted in the bathroom line ahead of us at the circus (apparently she really had to go), and my mom let the whole crowd know her thoughts on the matter.

At school, my teachers were boisterous women from Cuba and Argentina, and African-American women who had learned there was no other way to survive in a society

stacked against them than to be strong—in word and personality.

I grew up arguing with boy cousins and brothers, preferring soccer to shopping, and later finding my competitive, assertive personality made me different from the girls—and slightly intimidating to the guys—I met as a transfer student at a Mennonite high school.

I am still more assertive than many of the women I meet, particularly in Mennonite circles. But I have also worried that my forwardness is part of the reason for my less-than-thriving dating life, and I have sometimes chosen to play weaker than I am—and often wished I was. In college I found myself surprisingly quiet in some of my classes—and more recently on that train from D.C.

Where did I learn that an outspoken woman is undesirable? Where did I learn to not only keep some of my opinions inside, but also to downplay my intelligence, my successes, my skills as an athlete?

When I started to pay attention, I realized the reasons were all around me. There's Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel, and Mary Jane Watson, played by Kirsten Dunst in Sam Raimi's "Spiderman"—women who are kind but helpless. (Thank God for Gretel who uses her wits to cook the wicked witch in her own oven.)

Then there's Teresa Heinz Kerry who made a flurry in the media when

she told a reporter to "shove it." (Would they have even batted an eye if she had been a man?)

And there's church, where I learned that it is through service and self-sacrifice that I will find everlasting life—theology that is no doubt better suited for a self-assured man than for a woman who has already been socialized to lose herself in making others happy.

As a female athlete I have observed that in general women athletes approach competition differently than men do. The best coaches are aware of these differences. If you want men to improve, you pit them against each other. You criticize them and compare them with one another.

As they try to beat each other and compete for starting spots, they get better. Then they walk off the soccer field and remain friends.

For women, on the other hand, competition and criticism often have the reverse effect. In my experience, we downplay ourselves so as not to show up a teammate. Instead of motivating us, criticism from outside sources (like from a coach) can lead to greater self-criticism and a downward spiral in self-confidence. We don't want to compete seriously with one another because we fear we will lose friends when we leave the field.

These dynamics also play out in classroom settings. I have found that men enter easily into the healthy competition of intellectual debate. They play a game of one-upmanship, each trying to prove himself smartest

Where did I learn to not only keep some of my opinions inside, but also to downplay my intelligence, my successes, my skills as an athlete?

and most articulate. They argue back and forth, leaving the discussion with friendships intact.

In co-ed classrooms, I have found that women generally are slower to speak—in part, I suspect, because we believe we must have something of real value to say to justify taking up space in the conversation. And what we do say is less likely to be argumentative. We are careful not to sound smarter than our neighbor, and we nod our heads at each other, not in agreement but as a way of saying, “Yes, go on. I’m listening.” We take arguments personally and worry that any arrogance could scar a friendship.

In *Talking 9 to 5*, Deborah Tannen writes that “a man who learns to speak more forcefully will be perceived as more masculine—but so will a woman, and the consequences for her will be quite different.” As long as we talk about outspoken women as having “balls,” those of us who are women will always have a hard time speaking our minds.

Until being assertive is considered as feminine as it is masculine, we women will always be sacrificing

some of our sense of womanhood when we speak up.

Guiding my comments, then, is the contention that boys and girls, *in general*, are socialized differently. Expectations of adult men and women are *generally* different in limiting ways. But of course generalizations are always incomplete. Many men feel as silenced as women by one-upmanship models of relating. The characteristics that define “masculinity” and “femininity” in our society limit all.

The answers are not easy. Classrooms and workplaces—which currently benefit an assertive and competitive conversation style—need a redesign. We need to teach girls to speak up and boys to do more listening. And in the meantime, sleazy men should learn to keep their hands to themselves.

—Deborah Good, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, suggests fending off the winter blues with hot tea, a weekly swim, and a few road trips. Good conversation is also a must. She'd love to hear your thoughts on this column—or anything else. Contact her at deborahagood@gmail.com.



The Ongoing Struggle Against the Corporate Powers

A Review of Three Books on Consumerism

Daniel Hertzler

A High Price for Abundant Living, by Henry Rempel. Herald Press, 2003.

The Consumer Trap, by Michael Dawson. University of Illinois Press, 2003.

The Powers That Be, by Walter Wink. Doubleday, 1999.

At first I expected too much from Henry Rempel’s book. I hoped he would have a formula for use in the fight against predatory capitalism. Like the fable of the mice and the cat, I hoped Rempel would “bell” the cat of capitalism. Then I looked again and saw that the subtitle of the book is *The Story of Capitalism*. So the intention of the book is evidently description more than solution, shining a light rather than attaching a bell.

Having reviewed Rempel’s and Dawson’s works, I was still uneasy. So I spent some time with Wink’s, be-

cause he takes the discussion to a greater depth. Yet each book provides useful data for anyone seeking to understand the economic system which confronts us.

Rempel clearly has the background to write his book. He is described as a Senior Scholar at the University of Manitoba and “has led more than 20 missions abroad to evaluate projects of various agencies” (307). It is also pointed out that “During the writing, he met regularly with a small reference group representing faith, business, and development to ensure he interacted with diverse concerns and voices” (10).

Rempel personalizes the issues of capitalism by opening with a reference to a one-dollar mug of coffee which has come to him through the marvels of the market. He raises five questions related to the convenience and relative economy of the coffee concluding with “Does my preference for good coffee harm or help other people, either nearby or in Kenya? . . . To address such questions we need to understand the economic system that governs our lives” (17). Since all of us are impacted by the economic system, we can find ourselves somewhere in the book. But I don’t find a direct answer to this opening question.

Rempel spends some time with Adam Smith whose *Wealth of Nations* is, for some, a Bible of economic theory. But, as Rempel reports, histori-

ans do not all agree on the contribution of Smith. In any case, “we have come to worship abundance” (51).

As a response, he proposes “a set of seven sacred values that overlap with or should impinge on our economic system” (53). To those who pay attention to these the book becomes a source of perspective on how to function in this system. In condensed form, these are the seven: (1) human dignity, (2) community, (3) work as creativity, (4) vocation, (5) Sabbath, (6) fairness, (7) opportunity. We find any number of these values violated by the various economic forces we encounter.

Chapter 4, “Born to Shop” identifies a basic assumption of capitalism—all people are seen as consumers. “Our place within society is now defined by our ability to consume. Someone who loses that ability becomes a nobody, a non-person” (69).

It is not hard to recognize ourselves in this role. The frantic efforts of advertisers to persuade us to buy provide endless documentation. Our mass culture is supported by advertising. Commercial television and, increasingly, public television, newspapers, and most magazines depend heavily on advertising, which depends on consumerism. As the Christmas holidays approach, the whole system becomes nervous about what level of purchasing to expect. How will it compare with the year before?

As the Christmas holidays approach, the whole system becomes nervous about what level of purchasing to expect.

“Economists,” says Rempel, “recognize the complexity of human motivation, but tend not to question the underlying assumption that all persons have an unlimited capacity to want. After all, it serves economists well” (71). Yet the dependence of the North American economy on wants has brought the world to the place where “If everyone in the world obtained the material standard of living enjoyed by North Americans we would require the resources of three earths to meet the demands” (82).

In response, Rempel concludes that “The task before us is large. But it is not impossible. The human race has demonstrated again and again that where there is a will there is a way” (83). But is there a will? “The place to start,” says Rempel, “is to resist, nay reject, the drive by business firms to rename us as consumers. We need to reclaim our full humanity” (109). For myself, I keep in mind a rule of thumb: look for an alternative to anything advertised on television.

In subsequent chapters Rempel works his way through various aspects of the economic system. After capital, he comments on labor, then on natural resources. He discusses the role of government, problems of poverty, the issue of globalization, and the dilemma of militarism. “Some of the largest corporations might well face bankruptcy if suddenly forced to compete in the open market producing non-military goods” (259).

In the final chapter he asks, “Where Do We Go from Here?” This is a heavy question. What can he say that will make a difference? He begins

by acknowledging that “The capitalist system is like a massive eighteen-wheel truck barreling through history. It has an excessively powerful motor driven by the sum of all human selfishness. It has no brakes. The steering mechanism is clearly faulty” (261). So what can be done?

We will need a new driver for the truck, he says. Capital is no longer sufficient as driver. “Now the governing factor that limits continued ‘progress’ is our environment—the gifts of nature. As our material standard of living rises, the natural landscape deteriorates, the threat of local wars grows, and species become extinct.” He says we will need “a driver that will conserve and sustain the natural landscape rather than merely maximizing the value of output from a particular unit of capital” (269).

Can this be done? He acknowledges that “the road ahead will be difficult, perhaps downright painful. But if we set our minds firmly on the common destination and if we have the will to persist, we can turn our overhauled truck in the right direction and keep it going.” What is needed, of course, is some way for people to take charge of their lives and insist on “economic activity as a means to an end” instead of an “end in itself” (274).

It is an obvious but difficult goal, because each of us is inclined to make our own compromises with the system. But as Rempel asserts, “The beginning of a shift in power back to communities of people will be dialogue, first among people within each community and then among communities. This dialogue must draw on

the many values and beliefs that shape our actions.” Rempel notes hopefully that “Historically churches have served to model alternatives that are both possible and socially desirable” (275). But who will go first and attach a bell to the cat of capitalism?

If we think we need additional motivation, we may find it in Michael Dawson’s *The Consumer Trap*. Dawson perceives the marketing activities of big business as “class struggle from above.” He reports that “Big businesses in the United States now spend well above a trillion dollars a year on marketing . . . around \$4000 a year for each man, woman and child in the country” (1). This is a financial burden laid upon consumers.

In addition, “our increasingly market-saturated life space makes us dumber, lazier, fatter, more selfish, less skillful, more adolescent, less politically potent, more wasteful, and less happy than we could and should be” (2). As the book develops, Dawson traces the history of big business production and marketing. In the final two chapters, he focuses the issues quite sharply.

He describes how marketing works, how “corporation marketers pay little heed to what a fair-minded observer would describe as the best interests of their targets” (134). They simply want to market whatever products they have to sell: soup, soap, cola, or painkillers. “Compared with

corporate marketers we commoners are naive and intellectually diffuse about the architecture of our off-the-job lives. . . . We just want to live well” (136).

So the marketers target us with messages of products purported to enhance our lives. We are vulnerable.

So the marketers target us with messages of products purported to enhance our lives. We are vulnerable. Yet . . . we do have choices.

Yet, says Dawson, we do have choices. We are not required to submit to every message. With this in mind, Dawson develops a rationale for resisting these appeals. He acknowledges that “big business has created many real benefits for ordinary product users. Especially in the area of abundance and amusement. . . . Who would dare complain about the overall impact of the compact disc player? . . . but they have imposed many, and often very dear, costs as well” (146).

Following this he lists 14 deleterious effects of the corporate marketing program beginning with (1) clutter, (2) junk, (3) danger, (4) puff and fluff. On the issue of danger he cites a report that “between 1950 and 1989 there were more than 1.7 million people killed in automobile collisions in the United States.” He adds that this exceeds all U.S. war casualties in American history and these accidents “are directly attributable to a socio-economic system that puts private profits and maximum commodity saturation above all other considerations” (147).

Ninth on the list is “time and energy drain.” Here Dawson observes

that “the sheer number of hours Americans spend watching television advertisements that they would rather not see, opening and discarding junk mail; answering telemarketing calls; deleting spam; sitting in traffic, calming, restraining and negotiating with marketing addled children . . . is a major deduction from the limited energy supplies all people have to spend during their earthly days” (151). Is it not so?

Like Rempel, Dawson is hopeful that something can be done. He observes that “big business marketers’ domination of popular psychological and bodily habits is a mile wide but only an inch deep” and that “there is already a simmering if still incoherent cauldron of popular resentment of the costs imposed by the Consumer Trap” (169-170). He looks toward organizational resistance to the machinations of the marketing system. One might observe that the use of similar marketing techniques in the promotion of presidential candidates must surely add to consumer weariness with the system.

Both books end with an appeal for us to take charge of our lives. Rempel says, “Large corporations that are dependent on powerless employees and compliant customers are vulnerable to unified communities of people who want a better future for their children, a future in which they can freely express their creativity and build communities that cherish human dignity and fairness” (281).

Dawson, who does not give evidence of the same level of theological underpinnings as Rempel, neverthe-

less has a similar concern. His solution is democracy applied to economics. “The people might enjoy, not just a wide range of micro choices—which deodorant, toothpaste, car or magazine to buy—but also an unprecedented degree of control over macro choices, including the option of putting people before profits” (174).

It occurs to me that both of these books are “foreground” statements, dealing with an economic problem which confronts us directly. As we ponder these issues, we may profit from the perspective of Walter Wink in *The Powers That Be* who sees our economic system—like all systems—as an expression of the Powers. “These Powers surround us on every side. They are necessary. They are useful. . . . But the Powers are also the source of unmitigated evils” (1). All of the chicanery which Rempel and Dawson have described is readily accounted for by Wink’s discussion of the Powers.

In this book and in others he has written on the Powers, Wink is particularly concerned about violence. But violence and economics are sometimes related, as Rempel has observed in his comment on military industrialism.

Wink emphasizes particularly the spiritual nature of the struggle with the Powers. His last full chapter is entitled “Prayer and the Powers,” in which he states, “The act of praying is itself one of the indispensable means by which we engage the Powers. It is, [no space before comma] in fact, that engagement at its most fundamental

level where their secret spell over us is broken and we are re-established in a bit more of the freedom that is our birthright and potential" (181).

Wink must be right, but the final words suggest, as Rempel and Dawson have implied, that a clean-cut victory in this struggle is not to be expected. The worship of abundance is a perpetual temptation.

Now I am familiar with prayer for the sick and prayer for the government, but prayer for victory in the fight against the Powers sounds like a new theme for requests in the congregational prayer meeting.

Considering the seductive nature

of the economic Powers against us, we would do well to pray first for the purification of our own desires. The Powers will continue to pursue us in an effort to get us to join them in the worship of abundance. But Wink calls upon us to intercede for ourselves and our whole culture. "History," he writes, "belongs to the intercessors who believe the future into being" (185). So in the end, I suppose, we are still at the beginning.

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



the cows come back

once if I remember well
my grandfather scolded me
only once —
he was dying of cancer

he was a mild-mannered man
an Amishman, a pacifist
but when I drove the cows out to pasture
at milking time
he like totally lost it

he raised his voice and scolded me
in Pennsylvania Dutch
dialect curses
and in English too
some of which I understood

I had driven the cows back out to pasture
after they assembled for milking time
an irregular ragged huddle
around the barn door
the barn door with its faded ancient hexes

in my defense, I was very young
and my older cousin Philip put me up to it
we tossed pebbles at the fat Holsteins
and shouted "Co-boss! Co-boss!"
like our grandfather had taught us

shepherding them slowly back out to pasture
the way they moved, a majestic waddle,
inspired a sense of precocious sexual power in me
dawdling big-hipped behemoths
obeying my will

a city kid, on the farm for the day
I sensed some of the archaic wonder
of the primeval herder's life
maneuvering these extraordinary beasts
down the muddy lane

the cattle lowed in protest
they knew something was wrong
their udders full
it was milking time, dammit
but they obeyed

and my grandfather scolded me
it wasn't a curse
but it certainly wasn't a blessing
I could tell by the way the "Ach!"
grated, deep in his throat

when he came out to milk them
and found his grandchildren
back at the barn
proud of our accomplishment
(although Philip was smirking)

Grandpa knew immediately
our crime
and scolded us
I was abashed
I was only five, and a visitor on the farm

he limped back to the far pasture
shooing us before him
puffing and haranguing
in Pennsylvania Dutch
I doubt that he cursed us

he was a mild-mannered man
an Amishman and a pacifist
dying of cancer
he showed us the way to turn the herd
bring them in for milking

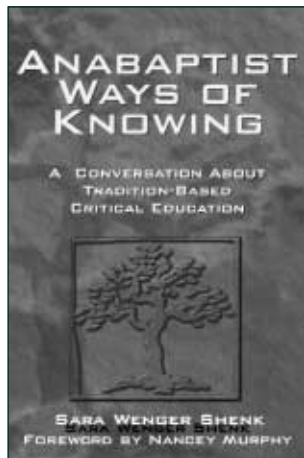
now in the city again
but fifty years later
I hear the cows coming back
the raccoons and possums and deer
reclaiming the back yards

the weeds growing up over the fence
a flash of lavender, goldenrod, ragweed
autumnal hum and haze of insects
and the deep-throated rumbling
as the cows come back

—*Ross L Bender lives in West Philadelphia. He has published articles, poetry and reviews in numerous magazines, including With, Forum, and Mennonite Quarterly Review as well as many now defunct, such as The Mennonite (old General Conference Mennonite Church version), Gospel Herald, Mennonot, The Builder, Festival Quarterly, and The Other Side. His website at <http://rossbender.org> features "Crazy Mennonite", a memoir in progress, and "Rosannadanna of the Amish."*

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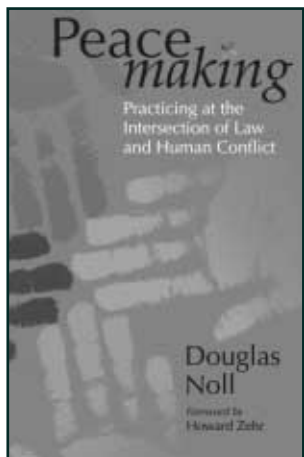
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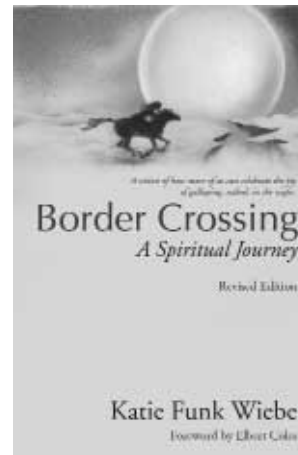
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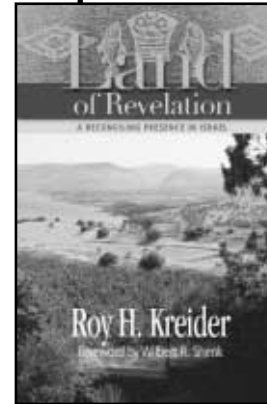
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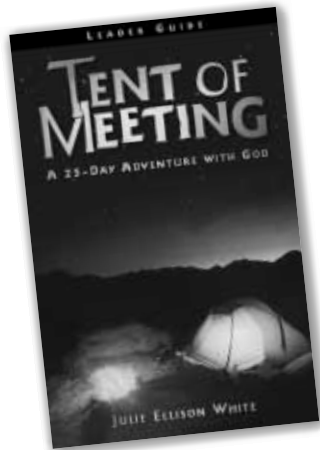
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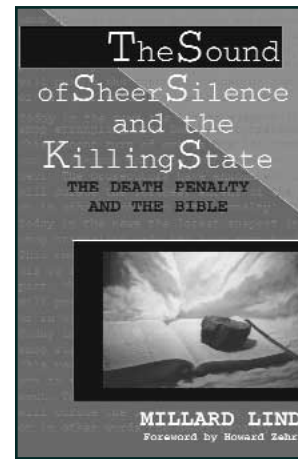
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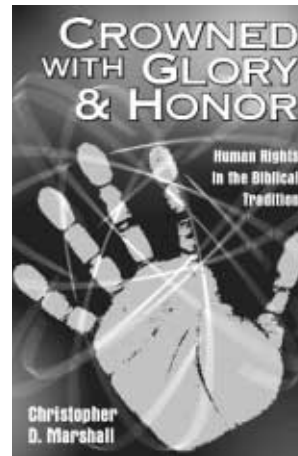


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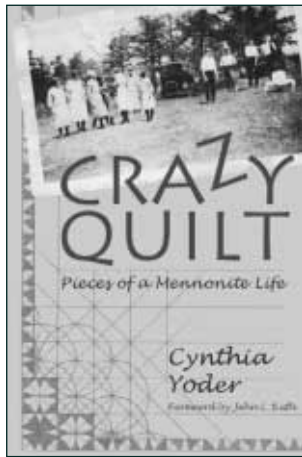
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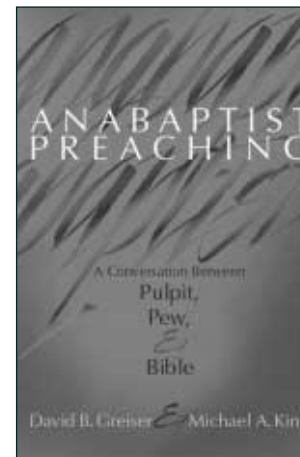
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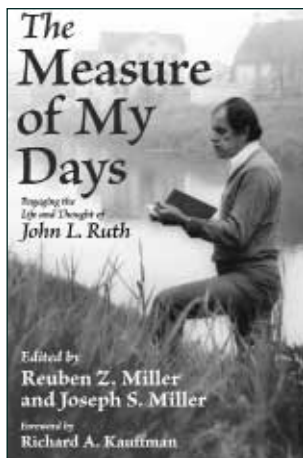


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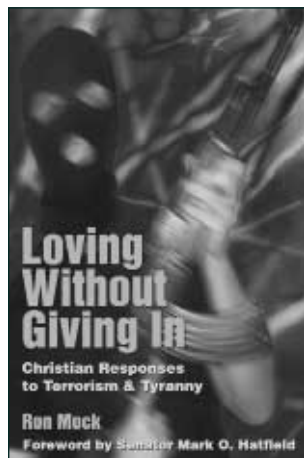


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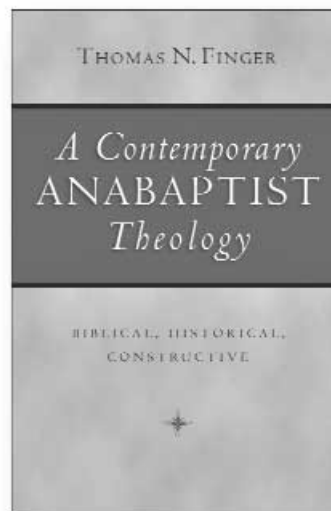
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(in)sanity

*In memory of my sister, Angela—
in awe of the courage you showed
living daily on the brink of (in)sanity.*

Rumi
speaks my soul I just know it
though understanding is a stretch
It's more a sense a knowing
the intensity of intermingled passions
tumbling fumbling over each other
sometimes beautiful other times bordering on
too intense for sane but
Reading him
I don't care how it sounds or reads
just how it feels
The rare gift curse of unfiltered emotion
sometimes too bright too muddy
but to whom
to humans maybe but not Godde
this is the me I want to share but fear
Stops
me in my tracks whispering Angela
how close am I to that so far but
really how do I know
Always afraid the underside of intense is
insane
on the bridge between silence and words tumbling
I falter and decide to just
wait

*—Starla J. King is a technical writer in Ashburn, Virginia. She
is the youngest sister of Angela J. King, who died at age 39 af-
ter years of living voraciously with bipolar disorder.*