

DreamSeeker Magazine

Voices from the Soul



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The Bible Tells Me So . . . Or Does It?

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Putting My Best Foot Forward

Renee Gehman

and much more

Summer 2008

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Editorial: A Ballet of Cultures

In telling us of being a “real” ballerina, Kathy Nussbaum provides an engaging image through which to view this issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine*. This is because many of these articles in some way explore a ballet of cultures, or occasionally, its absence.

Earl Zimmerman tells of his and wife Ruth’s engaging in the ballet of their own and Indian cul-

ture. Gene Stoltzfus invites us to witness, of all things, a ballet of Amish and Buddhist cultural gifts. My column on marriage is not primarily a ballet of cultures yet was set in motion by a question from our African “son.”

Deborah Good is seeking to visualize what more graceful ballet might emerge if U.S. views of land ownership were less focused on private property and open to learnings even from the culture of a purple martin.

Mary Alice Hostetter tells of that life-defining moment in which she leaves her Mennonite subculture. Where does she go? She doesn’t tell us, but her steering wheel seems pointed toward the larger American culture. Now, by the very act of looking back at the leaving, she implicitly weaves for us a ballet of the subculture she left and whatever one she now writes from within.

Randy Klassen wrestles with how contemporary culture treats God as speaking (or not) through the Bible. We might see him as seeking a ballet of biblical and current cultural under-

standings. Some might choreograph the dance to favor one culture or the other more than Klassen does, but whatever the ideal balance, Klassen helps us enter a life-giving ballet.

Renee Gehman zooms in on one aspect of the biblical versus contemporary cultures ballet: foot washing. With both humor and candor she takes us inside preparations for the experience and helps us wonder how we experience the fullest meaning and humility of this particular dance between cultures.

Noël R. King sounds a cautionary note: What if the goal of the ballet is for a giant to plump us up for eating? Might her fable invite us to ponder how in fact cultural relations can be a ballet and not a dominance—even if by seduction that at first feels good—of one culture by another, as so often happens?

The books Daniel Hertzler reviews turn out to focus on the ballet between Jesus’ culture and ours. Who was Jesus to his people? Who is he to us? How do we dance with the real Jesus, not just our fantasy of who he was? These are some of the matters Hertzler explores.

Finally, is it too much of a stretch to see Dave Greiser as plumbing learnings from a ballet between ordinary and prison cultures, and Alan Soffin between the consumerist culture and whatever culture transcends it?

—Michael A. King

Many of these articles in some way explore a ballet of cultures.

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Publication, Printing, and Design
Cascadia Publishing House

Advertising
Michael A. King

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

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Dear Editors:

Please pass on my gratitude/admiration to your editors and the writer responsible for such strong poetry as “I think of Ohio, and the trains at night, / So long ago. / The long, dark, hollow call / Of other times,” by Alan Soffin (Spring 2008). Superb! —*Jeremy Frey, Tucson, Arizona*

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

Real Ballerina

Kathy Nussbaum

A couple of years ago, I drove my son to the Richmond Ballet School of Dance for a school activity. On my way out of the building, I passed a door with a window, behind which I heard the muffled sound of a piano playing classical music. I looked in and saw a group of little girls in pink tights and ballet slippers lined up at the ballet barre.

I felt a wave of sadness that took me by surprise. By the time I reached my car, I was crying. Not until I saw that room full of little girls doing pliés did I remember how much I had longed as a child to become a ballerina.

I used to take the “B” volume of our World Book encyclopedia and find the ballet section. The well-worn, dog-eared pages showed the basic positions for ballet instruction complete with illustrations that I recall vividly. I practiced them for hours pretending that I was a *real* ballerina. I pretended in the way that *only* a child is able to do . . . with unabashed and complete surrender to the power of my imagination . . . the kind that completely encompasses one’s being and makes time stand still. That was how I danced.

Despite my unwavering belief that I was performing graceful pirouettes and jetés, the average onlooker no doubt saw an ordinary six-year-old girl with

arms and legs flailing about, spinning and jumping all over an imaginary stage—accompanied by vinyl recordings of classical ballet scores, bought by my mother with Green Stamps and played gloriously on our 1964 console stereo.

But I was lucky enough to have a Benefactress who, unlike the average onlooker, believed fully in my imaginary world. Her name was Ruth Hummel. She was the equivalent of a doting granny. Ruth was no blood relation and had no children of her own, so she claimed us (my brothers, sister, and me) as her own. No grandparent or auntie, or parent for that matter, could have worshiped me more than Ruth did.

A registered nurse standing at about four feet, eleven inches, Ruth was part adult, part child, part Mary Poppins. Ruth thought I was the most amazing and beautiful ballerina ever born. She would ask me time and again, in all sincerity and earnestness, to please dance for her. I can still see her smiling broadly and bouncing gently to the music's rhythm as she tirelessly watched me perform "Swan Lake," "Giselle," "Sleeping Beauty," and the "Nutcracker Suite."

Throughout my childhood, my imagination and play fortified and comforted me. Ruth was both interested in and accepting of my imaginary machinations. Because she never treated them as if they were silly or childish, she became a trustworthy playmate who was privy to my inner world.

I was lucky enough to have a Benefactress who, unlike the average onlooker, believed fully in my imaginary world.

I was really a princess from a foreign land temporarily staying at 305 West 25th Street, and Ruth and I were frequent guests on the Mike Douglas Show, filmed in my living room.

There we answered lots of important questions very intelligently, finishing off the appearance with me singing the proverbial ballad into a hair brush.

I am now 47 and never actually took ballet lessons (or appeared on Mike Douglas). But sometimes I feel as if I *re-*

ally know what it is like to be a ballerina, as if I have actually danced "Swan Lake" with Mikhail Baryshnikov in Russia, or England, or New York. I often dream I am a ballerina and my body is moving fluidly and gracefully across a stage.

Maybe I was a ballerina in a previous life, or perhaps these are memories from the collective unconscious. More likely, the power of my imagination as a child, along with the help and witness of my benefactress, was potent enough to create what can only be described as a "virtual" memory.

I grew up to be a child and play therapist. I have treated hundreds of children over the last 20 years, and I often think of Ruth when I am working. The power of a child's imagination coupled with helpful, appropriate mirroring from a caring adult is at the core of the healing relationship.

As I sit with an eight-year-old, I watch him put on a knight's costume. With a pretend sword, he kills the bad

monsters, saving the good ones. I reflect back to him, "You are so brave and strong! You saved everyone!"

Without directly talking about being violated by an older step brother, over time this little boy is experiencing reparation. Just as Ruth's presence in my virtual experience of ballet is permanent, I hope that this child and I are co-creating a lasting, virtual memory of him as a knight: strong, brave, and full of goodness.

The tears that came when I saw those precious, little girls in the ballet class were tears of sentimental recollection. The were tears triggered by the adult, bittersweet "memories" of flying down the stairway of our row house (inspired by the televised airing of Mary Martin in "Peter Pan" in the early 1960s), of having once been a *real* ballerina and a *real* princess, and of Ruth's unconditional delight in everything I did.

Ruth joined me in my imaginary world, and in doing so she mirrored back the goodness that she saw in me. My very being was inextricably shaped by her amazing presence in my early life. Despite her physical death seven years ago at age 85, she remains permanently part of the magic of my childhood—and my memories of being a real ballerina.

—*Kathleen Zehr Nussbaum is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Internationally Certified Child and Play Therapist, and clinical supervisor. In 2007, Kathy wrote, illustrated, and self-published a short story for adult women that celebrates the Feminine Divine. Kathy lives with her husband Phil and sons Zachary and Jacob in Mechanicsville, Virginia. Kathy welcomes your thoughts and feedback at Knussbaum11057@comast.net.*



Life Passages: Our India Assignment

Earl Zimmerman

Maybe it was a 10-year itch. Our children sometimes tease me that I'm like Pa Wilder in Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* series. When things get too settled I have an inner compulsion to move on. Or maybe it was one of those change-of-life decisions.

I like to think it was the prompting of the Spirit, but I'm more cautious about claiming divine guidance in such matters than I once was. Perhaps that's because of all the political and religious leaders who claim God's leading in ways that are rather dubious. I'm more aware of our capacity to deceive ourselves than I once was.

In any case the decision to take an assignment with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in India with responsibilities for programs in Afghanistan, India, and Nepal was an exciting new challenge. Ruth and I were keen to learn from people outside our American context. She wanted to build closer relationships with many Asian students she had come to know during her years as co-director at the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU). I was feeling more and more distance between the global ethics courses I was teaching at

EMU and my past experience on the field.

Both of us felt a pull to return to Asia, where we had previously spent eight years. It was hard to explain; we felt an inner tug in our spirits. And we clearly wanted to follow Jesus wherever our adventure would take us.

Saying goodbye, however, was much more difficult than we had imagined. We underestimated how firmly we had put down roots in Virginia, where we had lived and worked for the past 14 years. Our identities were deeply shaped by our family, our many friendships, and our professional roles, mine as a pastor and teacher and Ruth's as an administrator.

There were the many memories associated with our passive solar home we had built when I was a seminary student. Our children had spent many of their growing years here. Ruth had spent countless enjoyable hours laying out and caring for our flower gardens, perennials, and groundcovers.

The hardest part was saying goodbye to our three children. They had gone with us to the Philippines on our first Asian sojourn. Now they had their own lives, and we would have to relate through emails, phone calls, periodic visits, and the wonderful new technology of calling from computer to computer while using a web-camera through which we can see each other. There was no such thing when we went to the Philippines back in the 1980s. In those days we'd put through

an expensive phone call to our family during Christmas and hope we'd have a clear connection.

Saying hello to our new world has had different challenges. To be honest, our lifestyle in North America had slowly grown cushier than we realized. Our 50-plus-year-old bodies complain more about physical discomfort and stifling heat than our young adult bodies did 25 years ago. We expected the smog and the press of people in a large Asian city but were still not prepared for the intensity of Kolkata (Calcutta), the city we now call home.

I knew the statistics on India from classes I had taught at Eastern Mennonite University. One-third of the more than a billion people who live in India earn no more than one dollar a day. But such statistics are not the same as actually seeing how the constant influx of economic and political refugees over the past decades has shaped Kolkata. The global gap between rich and poor has grown wider in the years since we lived in the Philippines.

At the same time, a third of India's people are doing quite well in the new globalized economy, thanks to information technology and Indian resourcefulness in various other fields. India is also home to a cultural and religious history thousands of years old. Indian intellectuals are among the best in the world. And Kolkata is a hub of such artistic and intellectual genius.

Both of us felt a pull to return to Asia, where we had previously spent eight years.

Ruth and I had read many books and watched various films on India to prepare ourselves for our new assignment. But nothing could prepare us for our arrival in Kolkata. It rapidly sank in that this was all quite foreign, even though we had previously lived in Manila, another huge Asian city. We would need to start over in a very different life. We swallowed our rising panic and tried to put on a brave face. What had possessed us to leave our secure world in Virginia?

Such panic was quickly calmed by the welcome we received from the Indian MCC staff. They were a wonderful oasis in this strange teeming city. We saw the passion on their faces as they explained the various ministries they were involved in. And they so much wanted us to succeed.

After three months at language school studying Hindi, we're now in the thick of working at many social service and peacebuilding ministries. After busy days in the office we enjoy walking around our neighborhood. We walk past many small shops and streets full of people. We pass flowing water hydrants where people are washing. We pass machine shops that spill over onto the sidewalks. We pass poor laborers who have thrown up a piece of plastic supported by sticks against a wall as temporary shelter. And we meet desperate beggars seeking a handout. People everywhere are friendly, and we're surprised at how

quickly we're beginning to feel at home.

Along with other MCC staff, we recently visited a development project near the Bangladesh border. We enjoyed the verdant green scenes of growing crops as our train traveled through the rich river delta. At the end of the train line, we walked to the river and were ferried across on small boats. We then climbed onto motorcycles that had been converted into huge tricycles for carrying passengers.

When we arrived the local welcoming committee showered us with music and flower petals. They proudly showed us their beautiful demonstration farm in the middle of the vast delta, interwoven with canals and small rivers.

In this very poor area, seasonal agricultural workers earn only \$25 a month and primary school teachers earn about \$125 a month. Local women's groups and farmers' groups are working hard to transform their villages and create a better life for their families. One women's group was in charge of preparing the gourmet feast for our outdoor picnic. It was so rewarding to see their pride and confidence in hosting us. They are clearly determined to create a flourishing community.

Some of the challenges they told us about are the dowry system and early marriages that force women into prescribed roles with little future. In addition, micro-credit economic

schemes, raising social awareness, and adult education are all part of their efforts in social transformation. They believe women are crucial to the well-being of the family and the entire community. Empowering women is a key to the empowerment of their villages.

How we wish the faithful supporters of MCC in North America could have been there with us to see the many ways in which their contributions are put to work. Ruth and I have the blessing of serving at the intersec-

tion where it all comes together and God's reign is brought closer. "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

—Earl Zimmerman is the author of *Practicing the Politics of Jesus: Engaging the Significance of John Howard Yoder's Social Ethics (Cascadia, 2007)*. He and his wife Ruth are the Mennonite Central Committee Regional Representatives for India, Nepal and Afghanistan. They live in Kolkata (Calcutta), India.



Monks and Amish

Gene Stoltzfus

Buddhists and Amish, two communities from widely different parts of the world who refuse to use violence against enemies, are in my imagination these days. Both had members who were killed by someone from outside their community. Both refused to retaliate. Both consider the person or persons who killed their members worthy of love and forgiveness. Both have developed teachings, styles of social formation, rituals, and tough disciplines over centuries.

We can learn from these communities which have tried, if imperfectly enough, to build a culture of peace. In both communities nonviolence is not simply a political tactic but a way of life. For the Amish people and the Buddhist monks, nonretaliation is so deeply rooted and beyond question that outsiders with utilitarian lenses can be startled by the consequences of these deeply held convictions.

Both my mother and father came from families that had Amish roots. They used *Deitsch* (Pennsylvania Dutch) to talk to each other when they didn't want us, their children, to understand. As I grew up, Amish people regularly came to our home to see my father, Mennonite pastor and bishop, and discuss problems occurring in their communities. I was usually cut out of those conversations either by language or closed

doors, but I sensed emotional trauma and trouble.

To a child, the solution seemed simple: If there was a problem, just stop being Amish. I was not attracted to their life of horses, buggies, oil lamps, and suspenders. Later my attitude changed as I became more impressed with their conviction and tenacity for healthy living, compassion, and faithfulness in a mean world enraptured by skin-deep Hollywood love.

As a young civilian volunteer in Vietnam during the war, I came to know the Buddhist communities there, the distant cousins of the Burmese monks. On June 11, 1963, three weeks before I arrived in Vietnam, Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc burned himself to death at a busy Saigon intersection to protest the persecution of Buddhists by the Vietnamese government. Self-immolation in Vietnam by monks has a long history, often but not always interconnected with political protest.

Two years later as a volunteer in Nha Trang, a city north of Saigon, I was asked to be treasurer of the emergency relief committee at the pagoda where Thich Quang Duc once resided as a monk. The huge American troop buildup in 1964 in the Nha Trang area created refugees; the lifestyle of these foreign soldiers was also exacerbating conditions for the whole population. I reluctantly agreed to a brief tenure on the committee, knowing that access to money in those desperate conditions could

lead to suspicions. Eventually the monks agreed to take on the task. They and their civilian supporters carried on the work without gossip.

On October 2, 2006, five Amish girls were lined up and shot in a simple one-room school building in Pennsylvania. The world was shocked and held its breath as our "civilization" tried to explain to itself the reasons for one more school shooting. The encore was even more positively scandalous when the world learned that the Amish reached out to the family of the perpetrator who took his own life. They offered forgiveness and support, sharing some of the millions of dollars of contributions they received to help the victims' families.

Today the school has been torn down and sod planted where children once learned to read. Was this event of terror a defeat or the suggestion of another way worth noticing?

In Burma the monks who are not in detention by repressive military rulers who call the country Myanmar, have returned to their pagodas. There they practice meditation, prayers, daily begging, and study Buddha's Middle Way. When months before they suspended services to the military in many areas of Burma, they had dusted off one of the most ancient tactics of nonviolent culture—passive resistance and noncooperation.

Through the centuries young Amish have from time to time been conscripted into national armies.

To a child, the solution seemed simple: If there was a problem, just stop being Amish. . . . Later my attitude changed. . . .

Since the Amish refuse to engage in military service, Amish conscripts practice various forms of noncooperation when alternative service is not an option. Some refuse to put on a uniform. Others refuse to march or take on any assignments. Their actions have led to responses from officers ranging from tolerance to angry punishment, even death.

For both of these communities, acts of noncompliance and passive resistance are a method of love and preparation for reconciliation. Punishment is never an end in itself. Both understand noncooperation to be a necessary stage of building a culture of peace that is in accordance with the will of God or the higher truth.

As I write, there are memorials, funerals, and last rites for monks who died praying with their nonviolently protesting feet in Burma's streets. Thousands of their supporters had to decide if it was safe or worth the risk to attend these rites for the monks and their civilian coworkers.

In all cultures, the most deeply held values of faith and vision are ritualized at funerals and memorials. These events can evoke more repression. However, they are also the moment to announce renewed vision and hope. As the dead are remembered, thousands of soldiers and their officers wrestle with how to live with the murders that they carried out.

These two communities are both growing. Amish membership now approaches 200,000. New Buddhist communities are springing up around the world. Neither offers an easy path. Both communities continue to in-

vent ways to overcome new problems of living in a world infused with cultures of violence and therapies teaching adjustment to ego needs.

Amish biweekly worship hours probably wouldn't grab the fancy of many, although the community meals that follow reflect culinary talent and abiding hospitality. The best vegetarian food I have tasted was with monks in Vietnam pagodas. Most young Amish return to the church after "sowing wild oats." Both communities have identifiable garments developed over a long history of learning to treat the earth and each other kindly and respectfully. Both look back to the spiritual courage of their founders and continue to invent the way to faithful living.

The theology/cosmology of the Buddhists and Amish are worlds and centuries apart. However, the outworking of their gentle hands in peaceful living reflects courage, confidence, and innovation and is a challenge to all of us. I and we can continue to learn from them about the creation of a beloved community and the liberation of God's people and earth from the toxic stuff of our time.

— *For 17 years, Gene Stoltzfus was Director, Christian Peacemaker Teams. Since retirement he has been living with wife Dorothy Friesen in Fort Frances, Ontario. During and following the Vietnam War, he worked in Vietnam and elsewhere in South-east Asia, where he spent many days with Buddhist monks. This article first appeared in his blog at gstoltzfus.blogspot.com.*

May You Tell Me Your Secret About Marriage

Michael A. King

"Mr. and Mrs. King," wrote our African son (who took on this role when our families adopted each other due to our daughter's year of living with his), "may you tell me your secret about marriage." He asked this, he said, because he sees people marry, then soon divorce. We were saddened by this evidence that divorce is a cross-cultural tragedy, moved by his interest in our marriage, and stirred to thought.

Many of our friends' marriages haven't made it. We've watched their rifts broaden until too wide for crossing. We've navigated such awkwardnesses as which ex may prefer to attend which party with which child.

So why are we still married? Not because we're perfect, our children who leave the room whenever one of the infamous Michael-Joan "negotiations" erupts, would confirm. Not because it has been happily ever after; we have dug many a canyon of our own. We think longingly of the thousands we spent, early in marriage, on counseling. Oh, if we could have invested it instead, those decades ago, and reaped the

miracle of compounding, now if we hit rough patches our Money-We-Didn't-Spend-on-Counseling Fund could send us to smooth things out there by crystalline rivers and blue lagoons.

So what is our secret? Probably that we have no secret. We've only been forced to learn, by trial and error and God's undeserved grace mixed in, some combination of the same principles most couples have to practice to stay married amid the many pressures turning odds of making it no better than 50-50.

What are those principles? We don't claim to know them all. Maybe there are 10, and each couple has to pick their essential handful. But for us they seem, the older we get, to be boiling down to three.

That would be negotiating money, sex, and power, right? Actually once upon a time yes. The first half of our marriage did seem to revolve around resolving that classic trio. Again and again we had to fight our way through to fresh accommodations in these areas. But in the midst of matters so complex whole tomes on their implications for marriage have been written, simpler, gentler principles turn out also to have been trying to be noticed. These are our current three:

First is *sharing a sense of mission*. When we first met, Joan still a teenager and I barely in my twenties, we were both dreaming of doing

something with our lives beyond the same-old same-old. Joan debated being a missionary to Russia. I investigated spending time in Poland with a Mennonite service agency. Neither dream came true. Yet how often, these three decades later, we realize that one

We've been forced to learn, by trial and error and God's undeserved grace mixed in, some combination of the same principles most couples have to practice to stay married.

of the strongest ties that binds us remains that ongoing yearning to do something more with our lives. So we've spent countless hours listening both to the other's individual call of the soul as well as exploring what our souls are calling us to offer together.

Second is a principle so simple probably most of us have to get kicked around a good long time by life and each other before we believe in its power: *be nice to each other more often than mean*. Recently we ran across John Gottman's "magic ratio," which, based on research into hundreds of marriages, suggests that a marriage needs five positive interactions for every negative one. Fall below 5 to 1, and expect trouble.

I tested this as crassly as I could: I started phoning Joan and telling her I was just trying to get closer to 5 to 1. Even *this* method of implementing the ratio turns out to generate delightfully tender mutual energies.

Third is what Joan and I have come to call *the leaves*. Yes, the leaves. Early in our relationship we'd lie on the floor under the library study tables at Eastern Mennonite University and talk and talk. One day under

"my" carrel, middle of second floor facing Lehman Auditorium, we got to talking about the leaves. It was autumn, and as so often on the EMU campus, the leaves were hauntingly lovely. We found out that both our spirits ached with longing in the presence of those leaves and that the sharing of the longing made the aching even sweeter.

The leaves have become our shorthand. They stand for everything in God's creation that makes our spirits not only ache for the beauty out there but also throb with the joy of jointly

cherishing it—whether under cottonwoods in the desert Southwest, mango trees in Africa, or the common old maples on our front lawn.

So there you have it, dear son: Common mission. Nice more than mean. The leaves.

—*Michael A. King, Telford, is owner and publisher, Cascadia Publishing House LLC; and editor, Dream-Seeker Magazine. This article was first published in The Mennonite (Oct. 2, 2007, p. 30), as a "Real Families" column.*



I Want to Live Like a Purple Martin in a Saguaro

Deborah Good

For a year or two in high school, the most expensive thing I had ever owned was a pair of hiking boots. Then it was a down comforter and, later, a CD player. In the years since, I have grown a much longer but mostly unimpressive list of “things owned, over 100 dollars”—bike, floor rug, mattress, computer, and, as of a few years ago, a light blue Honda Civic.

None of these compares to a purchase I am pondering today. I have good reasons to consider it. Still, I stumble at the thought of attaching my name to a possession as invaluable and undomesticated as this: one acre of West Virginia woods, selling for 30 thousand dollars.

Property ownership is, of course, commonplace. The people I know are more likely to invest in a house or a condo than in a patch of maples and poplars. Nevertheless, for a non-homeowner like me, the prospect of buying land is a bit like grabbing hold of a new and unfamiliar branch in the tree I’m climbing, hoisting myself up, and freeing my head from the foliage to look around at my life.

What does it mean to own—a couch, a dog, a business, an acre?

There are the legal definitions. But day to day, the personal experience of knowing I have control and primary responsibility over everything I own infuses me with a sense of—oh, I don’t know what for sure—identity, wealth, power, security, and, grandest of all, SELF-SUFFICIENCY, the drug that carries us all forward on the rivers of capitalism.

In the Blue Ridge Mountains of West Virginia, I traipsed around the land I may own someday soon. There are a dozen or so lots for sale, each labeled with a number nailed to a tree. I stood on Lot 1203, watching water gush over rocks and down a ravine, wondering how any of us could think it possible to own part of a stream; or the leaves-to-dirt mixture softening a hillside; or its moss, its trees.

In reality, I suppose no one owns a stream. The molecules of bonded hydrogen and oxygen are there and then gone; it would be impossible to grab hold of them with your bare hands if you tried.

You could, if you wanted, kneel on the bank with a mayonnaise jar, fill it, and cap it. You could set the jar on your window sill to catch bits of sunlight like magic floating dust. You could claim you had captured part of a stream, but you would be wrong. You would be the proud owner of a mayonnaise jar filled with water.

Chief Seattle of the Duwamish and Suquamish Indian tribes has been

credited by many for a speech he supposedly gave in response to an 1854 treaty proposal. “How can you buy or sell the sky,” he asks. “The land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?”

With a little Internet research, I find that the historical merit of crediting Seattle with these words is dubious at best, that the “Chief Seattle” who has been attached to this speech and marketed by myriad environmental causes is, as one anthropologist puts it, “a fabrication by whites for whites.” (William S. Abruzzi, “The Myth of Chief Seattle,” *Human Ecology Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2000, pp. 72-75).

Even so, evidence does suggest this: The understanding of private land ownership we accept today with hardly a second thought arrived on boats from Europe, right alongside the guns and disease that nearly wiped out the peoples already living here. If you trace history back far enough, all land that is today “owned” by individuals or entities was first acquired through conquest—usually racist, bloody, and violent.

With this history in mind, and the realities of real estate markets, credit ratings, and my own ambiguous life plans, I feel in no way qualified to make a decision about purchasing land. The experience is yet another reminder of how much I live my life like a kid growing older: inquisitive, un-

The understanding of private land ownership we accept today with hardly a second thought arrived on boats from Europe. . . .

certain, and slightly terrified of the vast amount I don't know. I suppose we are all perpetually under-qualified. We can only do the best we know how, ask for guidance from everyone we can, make our decisions, breathe, hope for the best.

I worry about settling, without thinking, into conventional patterns of living that could tie me like a dog on a leash to needing a high-paying job. Conventional living expects us to graduate, marry, buy houses, fill our houses with things, have kids, add additions to our houses, fill our additions with new things. We should buy everything we need. Then we should buy even more.

Pretty soon we realize we are doing little more than treading water. Now we absolutely must have a high income just to keep our heads up where the oxygen is breathable. We call this self-sufficiency.

We can be more creative than that.

Our kindergarten teachers taught us to share the toys we played with. In adulthood, we would do well to relearn this lesson. I try to take note of alternative ownership models: car-shares, land trusts, housing cooperatives, families who choose to own as little as possible.

This is creative: In a front yard in Tucson, Arizona, a purple martin pokes its head out of the home it has built in a saguaro cactus, in a hole left by woodpeckers.

Our culture's obsession with personal ownership is coming around to

Our culture's obsession with personal ownership is coming around to "bite us in the backside". . . .

"bite us in the backside," as Barbara Kingsolver recently put it in her commencement address at Duke University. "We're a world at war," she said, "ravaged by disagreements, a bizarrely globalized people in which the extravagant excesses of one culture wash up as famine or flood on the shores of another."

Early in the summer, I stayed with some of my family at a cottage we had rented for the weekend. When the tomato soup was hot, I grabbed a dishtowel from one of the cabin-kitchen's drawers and set it on the table, as a hot pad, beneath the pot of soup. The plastic measuring cup I found in one of the cupboards made a splendid ladle, and the silverware drawer produced just enough soup spoons for the four of us. Four was all we needed.

When we were kids, my younger brother and I used to crouch over the creek with plastic cups poised in our hands. We nudged stones, flipped them, and watched the crayfish scuttle around exposed and frantic. We loved to listen to them clicking their way around the water in our plastic bucket.

Afterward, we counted the crayfish, sized them with our eyes, prided ourselves on our largest catch, and, at the end of the day, returned them to the stream. My brother and I knew the small creatures wouldn't do us any good at home and would not survive long in our captivity. I imagine us sighing, a little sadly, as we tipped the bucket and, one by one, watched

them swim their lobster-like claws to its edge, watched them tumble into the water below.

Is it possible, I ask myself, to hold my one acre of land (and everything I own) like this? Gently, creatively, and daily, letting it go?

—Deborah Good, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is likely to buy, with her

mom, an acre of woods along the western border of Rolling Ridge Study Retreat Community (www.rollingridge.net). She hopes this one acre of hillside will be better off with them as owners, rather than the investors or developers who might land with it instead. She can be reached at deborahagood@gmail.com.

Friendship . . . (in memory of Rod Childers)

Rod, my friend—or, as we called you back then for reasons I've long forgotten: "Pidge."

It's been more than thirty-five years. Does anyone still remember? I remember. I don't want to forget. I can't forget. My heartache has only deepened.

You started four years. Varsity fullback. As we said then—built like a brick shit-house.

Solid. Hard. Low to the ground. Not easily stopped.

The irresistible force moving the immovable object for a four-yard gain.

Then you'd get back up (more slowly in the fourth quarter).

December 1971. The immovable object was a semi. No getting back up.

They came by the dozen. Young and old from Elkton—those who cheered you on.

Rivals from Drain, Yoncalla, Oakland. They cried, too.

More than thirty-five years ago—can that really be?

Now, you are alone, there on the hillside above the Umpqua. It is a beautiful spot.

Since 1984 my dad, our coach—we called him Buzz—is only a long jump shot away.

That will keep me coming back from time to time (I saw your grave, summer of '07).

But now Buzz has his Betty nearby. You'll always be there alone.

"Rodney Vern Childers. Born December 1954. Died December 1971. Number 35."

We had good times together—
The rapids. My first drunk. Noticing girls. Playing ball. A few fist-
fights.

Wasting your dad's window panes with BB guns.
The analgesic balm in the jock (I didn't think that was funny).
Mr. Cotreaux's confrontation after you fire-crackered his garage.
"I want to tell you something, Mr. Rod Childers!"

Now it is more clear to me (kids don't appreciate these things enough).
The kindness, the wisdom, the humility. You were a true friend.

A little league trip. The excitement of the drive-in stop.
When you live in Elkton, Oregon, fast food is a rare treat.
But I was broke—too ashamed to let on. How did you know?
You had some spare change, no words needed to be said.

The sleepovers. Eighth-graders talking till dawn.
There's no God, we're on our own, I said. You weren't so sure.
That talk-show philosopher from San Francisco we listened to at night,
Ira Blue, said we need faith to be human.
By the time I realized you (and Ira) were right, you were gone. How did
you know?

Football. You started as a freshman—the rest of us were scrubs.
Game day, the scrubs run out at the end of the line. You ran out with
me, the last two guys.
Each game, four years, you and I bring up the rear—even as all-stars.
How did you know?

Yes—you were a friend. I know that now much more than I did then.
There is no love without loss. No friendship without sorrow.
We always will have to say goodbye sometime.
You weren't taken for my benefit (though benefit I have).
We learn through our tears, bittersweet.

Dear God help me not waste this gift.

—*Ted Grimsrud, Harrisonburg, Virginia, teaches theology and peace
studies at Eastern Mennonite University and about once every ten
years writes a poem.*

When I Was Eighteen

Mary Alice Hostetter

When I was 18, I left home and never looked back. I borrowed my brother's '63 Corvair, white with red interior. I loaded it with the few things I wanted to take with me as I left my first eighteen years behind to go to college.

I left behind the clothes that embarrassed me with their differentness—handmade dresses and ill-fitting hand-me-downs, the aprons my mother said would protect those dresses so they'd last longer, as if that was a good thing. Other clothes, the few things I'd bought on my own, I packed in the blue American Tourister suitcase my oldest brother had given me for high school graduation. Later, when I had access to television, I would see that it was the suitcase they showed being dropped from airplanes and landing undamaged, the contents intact.

I packed my own checkbook, my high school yearbook, where my friends had covered the pictures with notes recounting all of the wonderful times we had had. Under my picture it said I was "everyone's friend." I packed my dictionary, a few books, and the Wiss scissors another brother had given me for high school graduation. It seemed an

odd gift, but useful, and I have them even now.

The white Corvair purred as I started down the long lane, shifting smoothly into second gear. I did not notice the catalpa trees that lined the edges of the lane. I did not notice the brown tassels on the corn ready for harvest or the soft greens of the alfalfa fields almost ready for the third cutting. I did not look at the tomatoes in the fields, still a few green ones and lots more ripe and ready for picking, tomatoes that would be canned with no help from me. I did not pay attention to the cows coming down the path for milking. It would not be me closing the stable door behind them.

I turned right at the mailboxes onto Denlinger Road. It didn't seem quite right that the road was named for the other family whose farm was bordered by the road. They had only one child, and there were twelve of us. But, my father said, he had never been involved in politics, and the Denlingers were, so that was that. I did not glance at the road banks where I had picked bluebells and violets for Grandma Denlinger when I was walking back from the bus stop.

I turned left at the bus stop where for all those years I had waited with

my brothers and sisters, waited for the bus to come over the crest of the hill. On cold winter mornings it seemed to take forever. I did not think about all those years or about my brothers and sisters. I was leaving.

I did not even glance at the chinchilla farm or give it a second thought as I drove by. I did not care why it came or why it left. That day I was leaving.

I went past the chinchilla farm that was now a used car lot. Before the farm was built on a piece of land bought from our neighbor, I had never heard of chinchillas. We went to the open house when they invited the community, because we were curious to see these strange animals. Ours was not a "fur coat" sort of town, so it was not for ours or our neighbor's coats that they were growing the chinchillas.

I did not even glance at the chinchilla farm or give it a second thought as I drove by. I did not care why it came or why it left. That day I was leaving.

—*Mary Alice Hostetter, Charlottesville, Virginia, after a career in teaching and human services, has now chosen to devote more time to her lifelong passion for writing. Among the themes she has explored are reflections on growing up Mennonite in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, during the 1950s and 1960s.*



The Bible Tells Me So . . . Or Does It?

Randy Klassen

As kids, some of us sang, "How do I know? The Bible tells me so." I was excited to hear that the Bible did indeed tell me much of what I needed to know. Later I saw that it contains a wealth of wisdom about God, about us, and about how we are to live.

I often heard "the Bible says" before a pronouncement that called for divine authority. The preacher wanted to convince the audience that what he believed or wanted us to believe was God's will. So he backed his belief with the Bible's infallible authority.

But do any of us who claim such authority really know what we are saying? Are we actually hearing and sharing the heart of God? Or are we using the Bible to support our preferred views about God and conduct?

We sometimes forget that when we use the word *Bible* we are referring to an amazingly varied library of 66 books written over some 1500 years. Each book was written for a specific purpose, in a unique style, at a particular time in history when its message seemed most relevant.

The oldest stories were orally shared before writing was used, which raises questions about their historical accuracy. In seminary I learned that biblical literature

includes poetry, metaphor, romance, legend, proverbs, visions, parables, allegories, prayers, apocalyptic and prophetic parts, historical sections, doctrinal letters, and more.

I enjoyed noting that Jesus used the humor of hyperbole in some of his teachings: “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out . . . and if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off” (Matt. 5:29-30). Don’t take that literally!

Many of the teachings of the apostle Paul we might take literally, but some, such as his reference to women forbidden to teach or have authority over a man, many of us would omit from that list. And it is probably best to leave many of the instructions from Leviticus to a past era. Shrimp and ostrich meat can be good for you, although forbidden in Leviticus 11:10-17. Leviticus also commands that adulterers, homosexuals, and those who curse God be stoned. Exodus includes those who work on the Sabbath in the list of persons to be executed.

There are about a thousand verses in the Old Testament which advocate violence against an enemy. Those do not sound like the “Father” in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son.

Jesus helps us here by saying several times, “You have heard it said . . . but I say to you. . . .” He upgrades the ethical standards, as in Matthew 5:43-44: “You have heard that it is said, ‘you shall love your neighbor and

hate your enemy,’ but I say to you, ‘love your enemies.’” A major New Testament theme has to do with overcoming evil with good, but since that is indeed difficult, some people retreat to the Old Testament passages to gain biblical justification for killing

the enemy. Then they can claim that “the Bible says so” even though Jesus rejected violence as an option for God’s children.

Part of our problem, I believe, is a misunderstanding of, “all Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We think that if God inspired it, the Bible

must be flawless. I thought that until I recognized that all of the New Testament was not even written or included in what is called “all Scripture” in this passage.

More important was my failure to recognize the purpose of God’s inspiration, which was to make the Scriptures “useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” To be trained in righteousness so that we are a people of good works is the emphasis here.

Inspiration did not keep Scriptures from grammatical errors. Mark, who made a few, is grateful. Or from numerical inconsistencies. The writers of Kings and Chronicles thank you. Or from occasional nasty comments, such as “Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash

them against the rock” (Ps. 137:9). David, if he wrote that, might ponder what to do with this in light of Christ.

Or from prejudicial generalizations, “Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons. . . .” (Titus 1:12-13). With apologies to the citizens of Crete. Or a male chauvinistic comment like, “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor, yet she will be saved through childbearing” (1 Tim. 2:13-14). Could the apostle of salvation by God’s grace granted equally to men and women have written those lines? I wonder. Many scholars do. Yet this text is still used to subordinate women.

The fact is, the books in this library were written by fallible men who reflected the hopes or fears of their particular time and place. Their expressions were colored by struggles with God and those whom they were addressing. These writings call us, centuries later, to wrestle with an understanding of what God intended to say to them and now to us. This calls for humble reliance on both sound scholarship and the Holy Spirit to recognize and apply what God is saying to us through this amazing collection.

Ultimately, we believe God has spoken most clearly in Jesus Christ, so we want to acknowledge his lordship over the Scriptures as well as over our lives. Then the purpose of God’s inspiration will be fulfilled.

The wonder is that through these fallible writers, God’s Spirit inspired them to say what we needed to hear to bring us salvation in Christ Jesus and enable us to become saved people.

Maybe that is why references to “love” appear over 400 times in this library we call our Bible. Jesus affirmed that love for God and love for neighbor ranked number one and two of all God’s commands. Paul caught that when he said, “The only thing that counts is faith working through love.” (Gal. 5:6). That’s it! It may be difficult to put into practice, but I cannot but be impressed by this repetition of the love emphasis.

The Bible tells me so, or maybe, as Christians we ought to say, “Jesus tells me so.” After all, for the Christian, Jesus and not a book—even if the best one ever—is “The Word of God” (John 1:14). We need to avoid idolizing it. Unthinkingly applying to the Bible terms like *infallibility* or *inerrancy* can amount to “bibliolatry,” as Karl Barth called it.

The Word of God is a dynamic revelation of divine truth, not simply scribal inscriptions on paper. We believe that God has spoken in the past through the prophets and can still do so today, if we listen carefully. But God’s clearest and most profound revelation is in and through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is best for me to give my attention to the One I call Lord and, hearing his words, follow where the living Word of God leads me.

—Randy Klassen, Walla Walla, Washington, is retired pastor of the Evangelical Covenant Church and author of *Jesus’ Word, Jesus’ Way, What Does the Bible Really Say About Hell, and, with his wife Joyce, of the forthcoming Loving Enemies.*

Putting My Best Foot Forward

Renee Gehman

Reaching into the depths of a linen closet, to a shelf filled with multitudes of cosmetic-and-beauty-product-gifts of Christmases past, my hand rested on a plastic container marked with graphics of white snowflakes and green footprints.

A natural herbal exfoliating treatment specially formulated with rare earth pumice granules to gently scrub away rough dry skin. Enriched with the antiseptic, deodorizing, and healing properties of Australian Tea Tree Oil, cooling Mint & Wintergreen, and soothing botanicals to condition and revive dry, callused skin during exfoliation.

Perfect.

I contemplated the various superior-sounding ingredients as I massaged them into the neglected soles of my feet. If the earth pumice granules were rare, did that mean I was perpetuating their scarcity, or were they somehow being replenished? Why were Mint and Wintergreen capitalized? Does “American Formula” sound as enticingly exotic in other countries as “Australian Formula” does to me?

Why did I feel a little cheated when I discovered in the container’s fine print that this was actually a prod-

uct of the USA, created in New York? *Oh well, at least I’m stimulating the economy*, I thought.

Rinsing my feet in warm water before towel-drying them, I checked the clock and regretted that I would have to bypass the foot scrub’s complementary foot repair balm, featuring aloe vera and chamomile. I quickly clipped my nails and set about applying two coats of a dramatically red polish named Salsa.

Second coat applied and dried, I gave my feet a final inspection. Satisfied, I slipped into my black heels, grabbed my keys, and was out the door.

I was ready for foot washing.

I think it was somewhere between the first and second coats of Salsa that I started to question the ethics of my preparation for foot washing. This would be my first foot-washing experience, and though I thought I had done well to allow this extra time in the morning to get ready for it, it just somehow didn’t seem quite right.

Look at the circumstances of the situation we are trying to model, the Foot-Washing Prototype: Jesus and disciples are gathered for dinner on a day not too far from the crucifixion, when out of nowhere Jesus—Son of God, teacher and master of the disciples—gets up from table, fetches a basin of water, and stoops to wash the feet of Simon Peter. Peter, embarrassed by this atrocious faux pas—no

way master should be washing feet of servants—declares this unacceptable. But he concedes when Jesus rebukes

him, saying, essentially: No foot washing? Then no share in me.

Jesus goes on to wash all the disciples’ feet. Then he explains that he has been modeling for them the servant lifestyle he wants them to lead, a life of never perceiving themselves to be better than anyone else.

It’s a beautiful tradition, really, laced with humility and intimacy and community. As the washer, I experience humility: I bend down to another’s feet and do something that in Jesus’ time was reserved for the household servant—and in my time is seen as dirty or awkward or both. In having my feet washed by another, I also experience humility, having to yield the dirty work of my own personal hygiene to the hands of another, dealing with the discomfort of being served by a peer as if I am “higher up” than she.

When I over-prepare, then, the humility is lost on both sides. After all, why should my washer find the experience of touching finely pedicured feet distasteful? On the contrary, her hands will probably smell quite pleasantly of Australian Tea Tree Oil afterwards. And Mint and Wintergreen, capital M and W.

As for me, how could I possibly experience the same humility having my Salsa-polished, tea-tree-oiled feet

How could I possibly experience the same humility having my Salsa-polished, tea-tree-oiled feet washed as I would if I presented feet to washer callused and sans-Salsa?

washed as I would if I presented feet to washer callused and sans-Salsa?

Am I suggesting that a favorable way to prepare for foot washing would have been to run a marathon the day before, wearing those lucky socks worn without washing throughout my rigorous 20-week training program? Or that the lessons of foot washing would have been more effective if my sister in Christ had to wash my feet when I had a bad case of foot fungus? (Apologies to any readers whose appetites I'm spoiling.) No, I don't think so, and furthermore, I certainly hope not.

But would it have been so very bad if I had gotten out of bed that morning as usual, taken the usual shower, and walked into church with my chipped-nail-polish-nothing-spectacular-everyday feet? Why didn't I just do that?

I wanted to put my best foot forward. I wanted to give my foot washer a break. I wanted her to behold my pedicure and think, *Oh this'll be a piece of cake!* These are not abominable sins. But, I then reason with myself, what is to be gained from "cheating the sys-

tem" in a church tradition meant to symbolize what Jesus called me to? That is meant to teach me about humility and servanthood and unity?

If Jesus had wanted his disciples to prepare to have him wash their feet, he would have warned them. Instead, he surprised them, forcing them to come as they were. And considering that those were days of dirt roads, that these were men who spent a lot of time walking around or in boats, and that this was the Son of God with the towel tied around his waist and basin at his feet, I imagine this was a situation more embarrassing and humbling for the disciples than it could ever be for me.

Dear Next Person to Wash my Feet on Communion Sunday: Don't worry, I won't walk around in the dirt and the bottom of a fishing boat to properly prepare for an authentic experience. But please don't get your hopes up for feet that have no need for washing.

—*Renee Gehman, Souderton, Pennsylvania, is assistant editor, Dream-seeker Magazine, and a meditator on foot washing.*



My Giant

Noël R. King

Sometimes, when I eat too much, I worry that maybe something else is going on here, that a giant is fattening me up for the feast.

How am I to know what kinds of powers a giant might have—say, one who is to me as I am to an ant, in brain power and everything else that pertains?

Maybe on the day I go shopping at the grocery store, my giant KNOWS that I am headed there the minute I get in my car and drive down the road, green mesh bags in tow. Maybe he is the one who pushes the egg nog in front of the milk just seconds before I arrive. Maybe he is who then makes sure to draw my attention to bacons and eggs, cheeses, and chocolate bars on my way to the ice cream compartments.

My giant is probably even the one who whispered in my thoughts that other day to try the new triple fudge chunk brownie delight with whipped cream and sour cream ripples I saw squatting in the display case, resplendent and all by itself.

My giant is really very good at what he does. I just wonder if I am the only one he is fattening up special this month or if I am one of a flock.

Regardless, I plan to enjoy my time while it lasts. I LOVE this ravioli, for instance! And I LOVE being

so round and so plump! I feel
soooooooooo delicious!!!

—As circumstances warrant, through

*her Turquoise Pen column, Noël R.
King, Scottsville, Virginia, reports on
strange and wonderful things, in-
cluding her giant.*

Harvest of Souls

The corn is harvested,
Chopped and blown into silos;
Hay bales stacked in the barn;
Potatoes heaped in the root cellar.
It's revival season, time for the harvest of souls.

The evangelist comes from way up state,
Comes for a weeklong series,
Sermons each evening with enough hellfire and damnation
To cause sleepless nights
For those, like me, not born again.

Everyone but me, it seems, knows it's my time.
At fourteen, my soul is ripe for harvest.
My parents, the entire congregation,
Hold their breath in prayerful anticipation.

Each night I sit through sermons,
Through invitation hymns...
"Just as I Am,"
"Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling,"
"I Surrender All."

On the other side of the church
I see Henry, a boy about my age.
"Poor slow Henry,"
My mother always says.
Henry smiles as he strings Cheerios on red yarn,
Paying no attention to the evangelist
As he roars his warning about the fate
Of those not born again,
His face flushed with the exertion.

I envy Henry.
Like the children who gathered up front
Before the sermon to hear the minister's wife tell the story
Of Jesus' miracle with loaves and fishes,
Henry is innocent,
Not doomed to eternal flames

By a merciful God.
—*Mary Alice Hostetter*

For the Record on Jesus

Daniel Hertzler

Recovering Jesus: The Witness of the New Testament, by Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld. Brazos Press, 2007.

Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels, by Kenneth E. Bailey. IVP Academic, 2008.

Of the making of books about Jesus there seems to be no end. These two books commend themselves because each author walks the narrow path between scholarship and the needs of ordinary folks who want to be apprized of the findings of scholarship without being overwhelmed by the details.

Yoder Neufeld is aware that his is a delicate task. On the one hand, there are the skeptical scholars such as John Dominic Crossan and others in the Jesus Seminar, along with the implied skepticism of the students he teaches. On the other hand, he is committed to being faithful to the tradition as indicated by the subtitle.

His position is evidently in line with *The Second Naiveté* Mark I. Wallace describes in his own book. Wallace proposes that “A hermeneutic of the second

naiveté will focus on that give and take between text and audience; it will maintain that Scripture is more like a lively and open-ended game between its world and the world of the reader than it is a closed book whose meaning is exhausted by the standard theological lexicon” (119).

Yoder Neufeld is very careful. He reviews repeatedly the scholarly assumptions that thus and so about Jesus is impossible or not likely. Yet he states his

position early on. “The ‘stuff’ of Jesus matters a great deal to me as a believer. As much as I am a believer, I am at the same time a scholar. . . . I believe that it is appropriate and illuminating to bring to the study of Jesus the tools of a scholar who is trained not only in theology, but in the study of history and literature, especially as they relate to the biblical literature” (19).

So from time to time he reviews scholarly challenges to the tradition and then states his opinion, not generally as dogma, but more as possibility. From this perspective, he works his way through the topics of importance, beginning with the four gospels and how they are both similar and different. He concludes that what we can know about Jesus is tied up with the witnesses. “If we send the witnesses out of the room, the interview with Jesus is over, because he turns out to have left with them. How frustrating for the scholar who wishes it were different. But, from the perspective of a believer, should it be any different?” (79).

“Scripture is more like a lively and open-ended game between its world and the world of the reader than it is a closed book”

At points as I work my way through the book, I grow a little weary of the pace. Yet when he comes up with generalizations from time to

time, we are able to follow him. “Opinions vary quite radically,” he says, “on such centrally important questions as to how God intervenes in human affairs, that is, whether there are miracles of this kind” (114-115). Well, of course he is right.

Regarding the birth of Jesus, he writes, “My own position is one that recognizes a mystery at the core of these narratives, one that neither science nor history are in a position to judge” (121). The second naiveté, no doubt, and, if we wish, we are welcome to stand there with him. If not, it will be up to us to account for what we find in two gospels about the birth of Jesus. He goes on to point out that, of the New Testament writers, only Matthew and Luke speak of the virginal conception, so he leaves the issue somewhat open-ended.

He wonders about physical elements and symbolic elements in the account of the curing of the Gerasene Demoniac without coming down hard on either side. Regarding the account of the so-called triumphal entry he writes, “Despite the evident difficulties such data present to the historian, there is no reason to think Jesus could not have deliberately wanted to signal to his followers his mission as a peaceable messiah” (233).

As for the death of Jesus, he is careful to avoid overloading either the

Jews or the Romans with the responsibility. For the resurrection, he reviews certain interpretations from those who see “the New Testament accounts as the rough equivalent of a scientific report” to those who “think of the resurrection as a mythological way of expressing the ongoing relevance of Jesus” (287). He concludes by reference to Matthew’s observation that “some doubted” in 28:17 and finally with John 28:29, “Blessed are those who have not seen yet have come to believe” (289).

The final chapter “Jesus—Christ and Lord” addresses matters of particular concern to Anabaptists. In this he painstakingly works his way through Old Testament, Inter-testament and New Testament sources to pursue the question of what sort of person Jesus was understood to be, focusing on the titles ascribed to him. “The basic question this chapter intends to explore is this: how did the man from Nazareth come to be venerated as Son of God, or even as God?” (297). He borrows from James Dunn the concept “spectrum of respect” and finds that “At one end of the spectrum Jesus is only human, however special; at the other end he is solely divine” (300).

After reviewing the evidence from titles as well as “christological Hymns,” he concludes that “Our investigation has shown that both humanity and divinity are required to give a faithful rendering of the Jesus who emerges in the New Testament” (327). He offers this as his position for

the benefit of all who care about the issues.

“... Both humanity and divinity are required to give a faithful rendering of the Jesus who emerges in the New Testament.”

This, of course, is our tradition, and probably his grandmother could have said much the same. But in these days of scholarship and technological wonders, some of us cannot be satisfied with the first naiveté. If not, we are welcome to follow Yoder Neufeld in his articulation of the second.

Kenneth Bailey’s unique contribution to scriptural interpretation comes from having been born in the Middle East and spending his professional life there. In her endorsement of the book, Edith M. Humphrey of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary writes, “Kenneth Bailey does not offer new perspectives, but ideas frequently as old as the earliest church and as the ancient church fathers, that may well be new to many of his Western readers.”

Bailey’s specialty has been the parables of Jesus, and I have his combined volume, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes* published by Eerdmans in 1983. It is a quite sophisticated study of parable structure. But what interests me more than the structural studies are his observations from Middle Eastern culture. Regarding the parable of the Prodigal Son he writes, “What the father does in this homecoming scene can best be described as a series of dramatic actions calculated to protect the boy from the hostility of the village and to restore

him into fellowship within the community. These actions began with the father running down the road. An Oriental nobleman with flowing robes never runs anywhere. To do so is humiliating” (*Poet and Peasant*, 181).

Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes deals with textual and structural matters but generally on a more popular level. Bailey applies his method to a variety of subjects: The Birth of Jesus, The Beatitudes, The Lord’s Prayer, Dramatic Actions of Jesus, Jesus and Women, and Parables of Jesus. Anyone wishing to preach or teach from the texts covered will find Bailey’s interpretations useful.

The author acknowledges the “gathered up” nature of the material when he writes in the preface,

This book came about in stages. Some of the chapters were originally transcriptions of professionally recorded video lectures. . . .

Other chapters are composed of new material on studies of parables that I published nearly three decades ago. The majority of these chapters are presented here for the first time. . . .

The chapters are a selection. . . . The goal is to offer brief glimpses of some of the treasures that await us as Western isolation from Middle Eastern interpretation of the Bible is slowly brought to an end. (9)

Bailey’s method is to begin with a study of the text and enrich it with

historical references, Old Testament correlations, cultural interpretations, and theological observations. In addition to his knowledge of biblical languages, he has access to various Middle Eastern translations.

In the first chapter he seeks to redeem the much-maligned innkeeper of Luke 2, who is said to have found no place for Joseph and Mary in his “inn.” Bailey observes that since Joseph “was descended from the house and family of David” (Luke 2:4) he would have had numbers of relatives in Bethlehem, and any of them would have been eager to provide lodging. As documentation for this point, he says the word for inn could also be translated as “guest room.” And from the arrangement of a typical peasant dwelling, which he shows in this chapter, putting Jesus in a manger was not anything unusual. He would have been right in with the family. A footnote on page 36 refers to a Christmas musical Bailey has written entitled *Open Hearts in Bethlehem* (Westminster/John Knox, 2005) which is “constructed around the ideas presented here.”

What Bailey says here makes sense to me, although I find it curious that no translation seems to follow that reading. However my UBS Greek-English dictionary translates *kataluma* as “room, guest room; inn.” So Bailey’s reading is given preference in this dictionary.

The same method used in the first chapter is followed throughout the book. Beginning with the second section, the Scripture texts are included in the book. With the Beatitudes and

the Lord's Prayer, this takes only a little space. When the texts are longer, their length means that the book is well over 400 pages.

Having the text in front of us is convenient and perhaps necessary to display the detailed textual study. But it does add pages. Also, the essence of each chapter is summarized at the end and in one case this runs to 15 points. I found myself skimming these summaries, but maybe if I were studying the text for a sermon I would take them more seriously.

Chapter 12, "The Inauguration of Jesus' Ministry," is a study of Luke 4:16-31 that analyzes and interprets Jesus' address at Nazareth. (I think this may be a lecture I heard at Tantur, east of Jerusalem, in 1990). Bailey observes that the text quoted by Jesus in Luke 4 does not quite match the text we find in Isaiah 61. He writes: "It is often assumed that Luke (or his source) did the editing. It is also possible to trace the editing to Jesus" (149). This suggests that Bailey, like Yoder Neufeld, follows the second naiveté. He is aware of scholarly doubts and assumptions but not bound to them.

For evidence that Jesus may have edited the text, Bailey observes that "Jesus lived near the beginning of the rabbinic period of Jewish history." Rabbinic rules for the reading of Scripture showed that it was required to read the Torah as written, but in the prophets one was allowed to skip some verses. So Bailey suggests that Jesus was following accepted practice by doing some editing of the text (155-156).

As for why Jesus' sermon so incensed the locals, Bailey proposes that the people at Nazareth were "settlers." "Galilee had become 'Galilee of the Gentiles' (Isa. 9:1; Matt. 4:15). In the second century Maccabean nationalism sought to 'create facts on the ground.' The plan of action was to move Jewish settlers on to the land in Galilee" (152). Bailey asks how such a group would view Isaiah 61. Certainly not as Jesus interpreted it.

Reading Bailey on Luke 4 helps us to feel the conflicts Jesus faced and why he was crucified. Separated by years and a wide cultural gap, we are in danger of failing to see the urgency of the situation and the message. Bailey offers to bring these front and center.

R*ecovering Jesus* is a carefully organized presentation, one to read and think about. *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* is more wide ranging and occasionally a little sloppy, as if the professor suddenly remembered an anecdote or a quotation and slipped it in. It is a book to keep handy and pull down when we find ourselves at work on any of the texts included in the book. The more we can know about Jesus and the context where he lived, the better we are able to say whether we really mean to try to follow him.

—*Daniel Hertzler, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, first heard Bailey lecture in 1990 at Tantur, an ecumenical study center between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. He remembers Bailey as both well informed and eager to inform his audience. He talked like a machine gun.*

Redemption Accomplished

A Review of "The Shawshank Redemption"

Dave Greiser

By the time this issue of *DreamSeeker Magazine* goes to press, it will be late summer—traditionally the big-budget, blockbuster season. Summer at the cinema is generally long on action and short on substance. While I will certainly get out and see the next "Batman" installment, and might even relive part of my childhood by enjoying "Get Smart," there's nothing on the horizon that beckons me toward a review.

That said, I'm going to indulge in that great old television tradition, the "rerun," by reviewing an older film. Since moving to isolated Hesston, Kansas, cable television has assumed a larger share of my movie-watching diet. Some days I think that cable TV endlessly recycles the same dozen or so movies. But for every mediocre action film that shows a dozen times a month (fill in "The Bourne Identity" and any James Bond film here) there is the occasional gem ("O Brother, Where Art Thou" or the second "Spiderman" movie). But the film I find myself drawn to watch over and over again is director Frank Darabont's "The Shawshank Redemption."

“Shawshank” is one of those films for which viewer appreciation has grown with time. Based on a short story by Stephen King, the film was only moderately successful when it was first released in theaters in 1994. After its brief theater run, it moved quickly to video rental. From there the film’s reputation seemed to take on a life of its own. In 1995 it was rated the top rented video of the year, and by 1999 the Internet Movie Database announced that a poll of its readership had pronounced the film the “Greatest Movie Ever Made.” At a more anecdotal level, I cannot count the number of conversations I have had with people who, on learning of my interest in movies, quickly ask me if I have seen “The Shawshank Redemption.”

What is it about this film that has resonated so deeply with viewers? I can only guess the answer, based on my own personal response to it. “Shawshank” is indeed a story of redemption—redemption and hope. It is a profound feel-good story.

To be sure, the film is well crafted and extremely well acted. Veteran actors Morgan Freeman and Tim Robbins, in their lead roles as Red Redding and Andy Dufresne, have each enjoyed outstanding careers as character and lead actors. Neither has ever been better than in this film. Freeman plays aging inmate Red with a wise nonchalance that nearly covers over the melancholy he feels from too many turn-downs for parole.

Red’s advice to new inmate Andy is to learn to live without thinking about the future. When Andy tells Red about his dream of living in Mexico one day, Red warns, “Don’t think about Mexico, because it’s down there, and you’re in here.”

The film holds other hidden treasures I only uncovered after several viewings.

Robbins’ Andy is an enigmatic loner, wrongfully convicted of murdering his wife. Far from following Red’s advice, Andy cultivates hope through nurturing an inner life that the penal system cannot extinguish.

One of the many memorable scenes in the film involves Andy’s locking himself in the warden’s office and playing a Mozart recording over the prison’s loudspeakers. When he is released from solitary confinement 30 days later, the inmates ask him how he survived. He responds that he had Mozart to keep him company. We need music, he says, to remember that there are places in the world that are not made of stone. “There’s something inside that they can’t get to . . . that’s yours.”

The film holds other hidden treasures I only uncovered after several viewings. One of these is the deliberate pacing of the story. Time moves slowly in this film, just as time must move slowly for those who are incarcerated. Emotions are present but are always muted, owing to the predatory nature of prison life. To show human weakness is to flirt with one’s own destruction.

But the greatest treasure in this film is the multiple layers of redemption in the story. Andy eventually

gains one form of “redemption” when he escapes while at the same time implicating his captors in wrongdoing. And Red finds redemption when, against all hope, he is paroled and joins Andy in his little piece of Mexican heaven.

At the risk of causing some eye-rolling among my readers, I’ll point out that some have teased out a Christ-figure, Andy’s character. Andy lands in evil Shawshank as an innocent. He takes on the fleshly life of an inmate and suffers unjustly at their hands. He descends, literally, into the bowels of the earth and escapes. When Red’s captivity ends, he goes to

where Andy has gone and rejoins him. Meanwhile the inmates tell and retell the details of Andy’s life.

Okay, so it’s a stretch. But it’s a great story, too. If you haven’t seen it in a while, rent “The Shawshank Redemption.” The writing, the acting, and above all the story are well worth the time.

—*Dave Greiser watches movie reruns and ducks tornados in his basement in Hesston, Kansas. The rest of the time he teaches pastoral ministry courses at Hesston College as well as Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary—Great Plains.*



Devotion Unspoken

Alan Soffin

Last night, at a small, Episcopalian church in Doylestown, I heard the Philomel group play Telemann, Vivaldi, and Bach. The music was the sound of human feeling. A double miracle: that feeling can be heard and that its hearing can be shared.

Though enveloped in the glory of the music, I at one point realized it flowed out upon a sea of gray. If there was anyone under forty in the audience, I missed that person. The rest were silver-haired or bald.

I was aware, at the same time, of the gothic-arched stained glass windows, the blue-tinted apse rising in a Gothic taper behind the players and the silence of the cross suspended before the altar, painted, with its own painted cross, on which Christ was painted, silent and suspended. Devotion, unspoken, to something higher, prevailed—a wordless upwardness in which the only supplication was the sound of human feeling woven into beauty by the body and the mind.

The whole was stillness of a time-unfettered kind, made stiller by the imminence of death—not just the death that neared us aged listeners, but the

death that stalked the glory of the music, and the modesty, as well, with which the building yearned for what ennobles life.

What was present was civilization—not its compassion but its passion, its upward reach from the primordial toward what invisibly ennobles. So fragile in a world whose gods are change and goods. I thought, I guess, of death—for the building

was so small in the world, the listeners so few in the world, and the music so little heard in the world.

—*The interests of Alan Soffin, Doylestown, Pennsylvania, include philosophy, religion, reflections on culture, filmmaking, writing, classical, jazz, rock, and international music.*

I Have Been Later On

(With a nod to Aldous Huxley)

I have been
Later on!
I know not how.

But there
I wandered
Plastic pastures
Under
Thousand-channeled Skies,
And heard no sound
That was not
Pre-recorded.

No meal I ate
That was not
Manufactured—
In the same plant
As opinions—
Antiseptically.

I had my genes done.

Post,
Postmodern pedagogues
Sealed with
Upraised finger
Students' lips
To keep them from
Imprisonment
In Language.

What some now call
"God's word"
At last was
Patented.

The "market" ran
Around the world—
A belt, a single box—
In which
All clerks were
C.E.O.'s and worked
Around the clock.

All news reports
Were fun.

Oh Brave reality!
That makes such comfort
Of mortality!
—Alan Soffin



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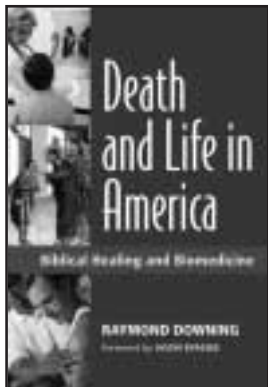
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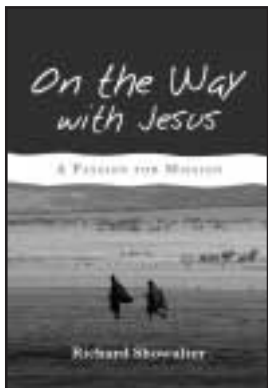
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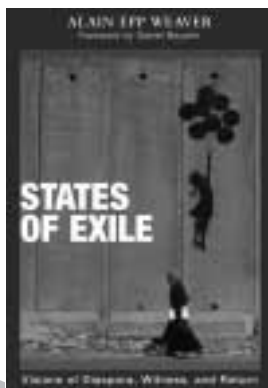


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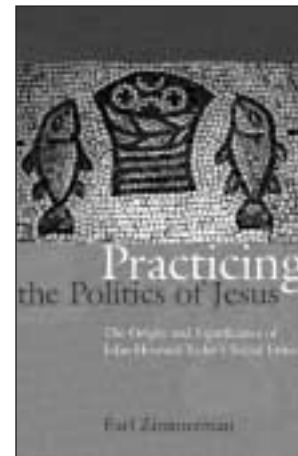
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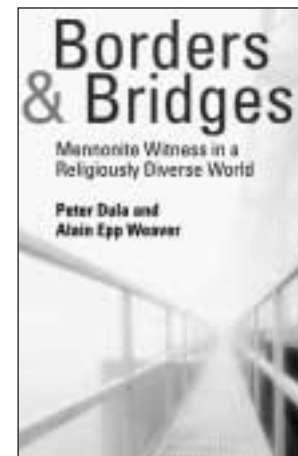
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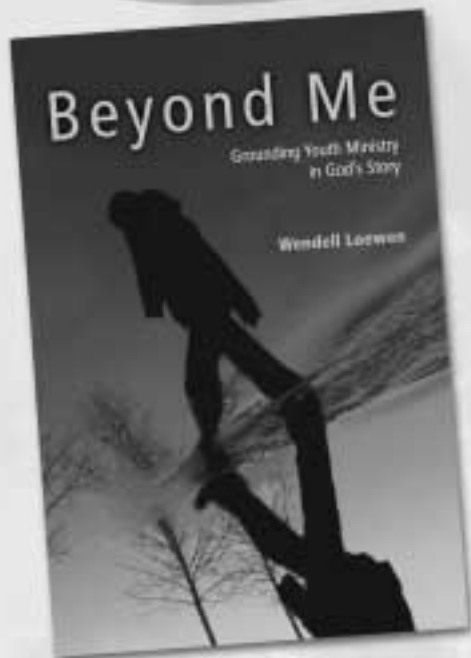
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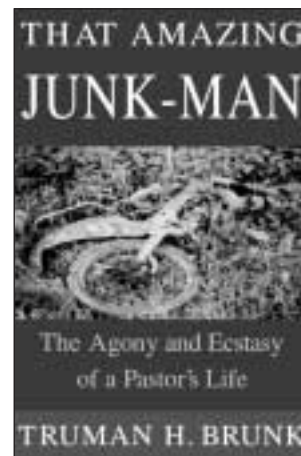
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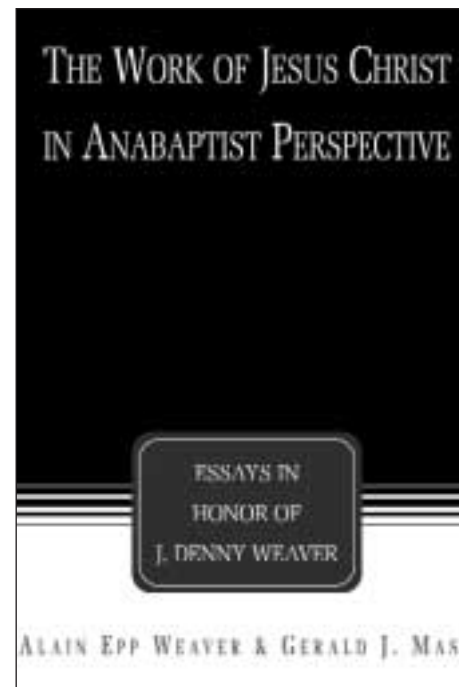
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Like Trees Planted by Streams of Water

On this small bluff, lives hang like leaves.
A psalm trickles and surges
in roiling eddies and worried curves.

The Illinois could erode the banks.
All the new and old oaks could tumble
into a templed dam. But roots twist hard

instead beneath the river's silted bed.
They fill and feed the farthest leaves
that burn until lives fall to the water

in flames. The colors catch and wither
in human debris. Between a milk carton
and one rented ski, a single, silver fish

breaks the gray-green surface of its world,
like a tiny god might puncture the sky.

—*David Wright and his family live in central Illinois. He teaches writing and literature at Wheaton College and is the author of A Liturgy for Stones (DreamSeeker Books, 2003) the collection from which this poem comes.*