DreamSeeker Magazine

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Winter-Spring-Summer-Autumn 2012
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Editorial: Across Boundaries

This issue of DreamSeeker Magazine crosses boundaries of faith, cultural, national, worldview understandings, and more. Article after article invites us to think about what is Other than our selves, circumstances, preferences, current arrangements.

Dorothy Yoder Nyce invites us to dream of a melting of the ice that in freezing our faith commitments prevents our grasping the value of other understandings. Titus Bender wants us to grasp that the view from "I" we so regularly champion in North America must give way to "We" lest we perish. Annie Wenger-Nabigon asks us to

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feel our way through what happens when a member of an oppressing people marries a member of those oppressed. Brenda Hartman-Souder invites us to join her in Nigeria where faith like Margaret's helps keep her on course.

Drawing us into pondering the nature of crazy and sane institutions, Alan Soffin helps us consider the possibility that many of the institutions we champion are actually crazy, and institutions other than those we tend to celebrate are the sane ones. Somewhat similarly if focusing over a century earlier, Daniel Hertzler's reviews of books on the Civil War show us that what looks like sane violence from one perspective can look problematic indeed from another.

Noël R. King's gives us a fresh angle of vision on ideas, which squirm away to become separate from us, originating with but ending up as other than us. In my column, I hope to show us how even family torment can yield to family transcendence. And the poets help us see across boundaries of seasons and kinds.

The astute reader may notice that this issue of *DSM* spans all four quarters of 2012. That is because my commitments as seminary dean are not allowing me enough time to oversee four annual issues. It's possible that this issue of *DSM*, as one columnist insightfully sug-

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gested I consider, should therefore be declared its finale. Though I don't rule that out, I'd like to leave space for whatever may happen next, including the possibility that if enough eloquent articles and columns turn up in the next year or so, the time may come to publish a 2013 issue. In the meantime, thanks to readers who have hung in through thick and—as seems currently the case!—thin. —*Michael A. King*

Winter Garden Baby

Days are growing longer they say
when January's pines stretch to loosen
sheathes of glass that fall to where snowdrops rest.

I hear the crackling…while crocus murmurs
under the bulge of mulch and stones
soothed by snow drifts like cream on calluses

flowing warm, deep in utero, rose
roots cling, squeezing milk from soil
for shoots and stamens.

The sun strains to lend a sparkle
as I walk through the garden gate pondering
when the ice should spring to water

sleeping snow crop swathed in shadows.
As Mother Earth gathers and nourishes,
preparing for the birth pangs of spring.

—*Mary Cantell, Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, is a voice actress and journalist by trade. The things she finds most endearing are rose gardens, hugging a baby whale, her husband's eyes, and indulging in the art of creative writing.*

Is the Ice Melting Near You?

Dorothy Yoder Nyce

Stories teach. The following 12 "windows"[1] into relationships of interreligious conflict or peacebuilding depict problems between people loyal to different religions or convey actions that enable good will. From children to older adults, within local and global locations, among Hindu and Buddhist or Jewish, Christian, and Muslim adherents, accounts reflect diversity.

Such difference is good; it strengthens what is distinct. As direct experience refutes fear of the unknown, effort toward good will can counter fundamentalist or extremist patterns. And as Hans Kung has taught: "There will be peace on earth when there is peace among the religions."

1

Writing in *The Dignity of Difference,* Rabbi Jonathan Sacks reports a gathering at the United Nations building, New York City, in August 2000 (Sacks, 5-6).

Over two thousand religious leaders met for the Millennium World Peace Summit. Billed to enlist leaders of major faiths to the cause of global peace, four days later participants signed a commitment to mutual respect, nonviolent conflict resolution, duty to the poor and the environment.

On signing, an Eskimo from Greenland, Angaangaq Lyberth, reported that ten years earlier a person returned to his village reporting: "There is a trickle of water coming down the glacier. I think that the ice is melting." Noting that day's peace accord, Lyberth described the trickle as a stream. He summed up the group's hope saying, "The ice is melting . . . The ice is melting."

2

C. S. Song from Taiwan is noted for Story Theology. In "The Wild Goose Lake" (Song, 143-44), Sea Girl longs for water from the lake to be released to the canals of her drought-hit village.

How will she get the golden key needed to open the stone gate? With the stone gate a metaphor for religious faith, the challenge becomes: How will hearts of adherents of diverse religions open up to the depth and riches of each other? Will they let the ice melt?

Rather than hold God captive—through our presumed right teachings or worship—we need to discover God beyond our valued limits.

3

Even works of art convey conflict. An allegory of sculptures titled "Ecclesia" and "Synagoga" (church and synagogue) appear at the Strasbourg Cathedral in France.

A "triumphant Ecclesia stands erect next to a bowed, blindfolded figure of the defeated yet dignified Synagoga." Proud church gazes over the other, the woman "conquered, with her crown fallen, staff broken, and Torah dropping to the ground." Here is Christian supersessionism ("ice") set in stone.

For her book *Has God Only One Blessing?,* Mary Boys invited an artist to create a new "posture" for the two figures. She believes that the relation between the two religions will be righted when the church repents of its distortions of Judaism, when Ecclesia sees Syna-

goga as her "partner in waiting for the full redemption of the world," Boys concludes (Boys, 33, 266).

4

Victoria Lee Erickson relates a story from a village in a beautiful mountain area of South Asia.

Two days early, arriving at night during a rain storm, and hungry, her group of Christian friends caught a village of Christians off-guard. It had no cooked food.

After the host prayed, they too prayed, sang, and shared stories in the hut—forgetting somewhat their yearning for food. Hearing noise, the host opened the door a crack. A horse appeared; the rider handed the host a bucket and left. Large, blue-shelled crabs dispelled hunger.

A near-by village leader, on seeing the visitors and knowing that the Christians were without food, had gone fishing with his Muslim neighbors on their behalf. Villagers of these two religions read their holy books together, share wells and a school, and protect each other. They also pray together respecting their diverse voices (Erickson, 98-99).

5

The one book of an Emory University faculty member, Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, describes her fieldwork over a decade done with Amma, a Muslim healer from Hyderabad, India.

Professional, public, religious roles for Muslim women, though rare, are noticed. Laywomen may practice healing or prayers in homes. Gender roles and arrangements matter for Amma and her teacher husband Abba.

Patients with troubles, her disciples value her charismatic, spiritual teaching and strength. Amma might see, diagnose, and prescribe spiritual forces for Hindu, Muslim, or Christian patients. "They're all the same in the healing room," she says. Writing diagnoses on paper "amulets or unleavened bread," she also may pray or recite from the Qur'an. Asked whether Joyce was a disciple, Amma replied, "She loves God and I love God, so we have a connection" (Flueckiger, 42, 68, 70, 142, 154, 168).

6

A kindred spirit of M. K. Gandhi's was Abdul Gaffar (Badshah) Khan. Khan and Gandhi bonded through nonviolent effort for twenty-five years before Partition and India's independence.

In jail with Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, and Christian prisoners, they studied each other's Scriptures and practiced "pure faith and austere ways." The Muslim reformer and Hindu lawyer continue to mentor, whether for sedition or as God's servants among disadvantaged folk.

Khan called the Pathans whom he taught Khudai Khidmatgars (servants of God). Not literate but armed with discipline and faith, their nonviolent resistance caused the British more fear than their violence. Khan believed that all faiths duly inspire their adherents and that "God sends messengers for all nations and people" (Easwaran, 145).

For the two "Gandhis," their task became "to serve and to suffer in the cause of truth." Within a year of Khan's uniting Pathans in Pakistan, he was jailed by a Muslim government that faulted him for being pro-Hindu. That Gandhi was killed by another Hindu who resented his pro-Muslim stance. Each was devout in his own religion yet most respectful of other living faiths, each was misunderstood by his own. Ingrained disdain for difference ('ice') prevailed.

7

In *A New Religious America,* Diana L. Eck notes examples of religious harassment—firm ice.

- A Muslim community of Flint, Michigan, discovered on leaving a holiday celebration that all of their vehicles had flat tires.
- A Hindu community in Kansas City found a side of beef hung on its temple door—vegetarians were not welcome in a city noted for red meat.
- At a Hindu temple at Monroeville, Pennsylvania, LEAVE was written across the altar, and Sikhs who shared the worship space found their scripture, *Guru Granth Sahab*, torn to bits.

8

Doug Hostetter has served with agencies like the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)

with war relief. His first MCC assignment in Vietnam during the American war was in Tam Ky, a village amid heavy combat 150 miles below the Demilitarized Zone. He asked what the local people most wanted; education for their children had priority.

He first explored with Christian groups in the area. The Protestant pastor's priority was "to win souls for Christ," not to help with literacy. The Catholic priest agreed, as long as the youth group worked with Catholic children—an option that would neglect Buddhist children (90 percent).

When the monk in charge of Buddhist youth was asked to help, he agreed without reservation—a striking learning for the young Mennonite. On leaving three years later, a good friend ended a long poem for Hostetter with "Your life has been like a tear in the eye of Buddha, crying for the suffering of the people of Tam Ky" ("God," 6).

Currently MCC's representative at the United Nations, Hostetter's stories and insight continue to grow.

9

One creative method used to relieve the anguish of Bosnia-Herzegovina was a fifty-member, interreligious, adult choir.

The Pontanima, Latin for "spiritual bridge," choir brought together members and music of Roman Catholic, Serbian Orthodox, Islamic, Jewish, Protestant, and Far East religions.

Expelled in 1992 from a seminary in Sarajevo, Josip Katavic, the Franciscan priest who started the choir in 1996, spent the intervening years trying to prevent conflicts, organize humanitarian activities, and help peace movements. Nine relatives including his father, 32 neighbors, and 82 from his native parish were killed during the war. Intent to forgive, he helped Muslim refugees, visited Serbs, and created Face to Face Interreligious Service.

Committed to interfaith dialogue and ecumenical living (to "melting ice"), choir members, themselves spiritually secure, witness to diversity and openness toward one another. From their common tragedy, they sing reconciliation. (Pontanima DVD) The choir transitions from—

- "Only God is the greatest/There is no God but Allah/Allah is the greatest/Give thanks to God" to—

▪"Hail Mary, full of grace. . . Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners . . ." to—

▪"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. . . ."

10

Newsweek's reporter Joshua Hammer offers a view of the disintegration of the region around Bethlehem during 2001-02. His book subtitle speaks: *Unholy War in a Sacred Place*.

One scene lingers: (Hammer, 191-212) the siege, by bedraggled Palestinian Muslim guerrillas, of the Church of the Nativity, Jesus' presumed birthplace. Who was more terrified—disoriented warriors circling the Basilica's ancient columns, staring "wide-eyed at gilded icons"? Or the fearful, presiding priest coping with militants in that holy site?

Within this "island of Christianity" among a "sea of Islam," rows of men bowed toward Mecca, between columns painted with scenes of the crucifixion and St. John the Baptist. They pled with Allah to deliver them from Israeli Jewish enemies.

By the time the Palestinian militant leaders, fighters, and security men left their sanctuary in the sanctuary, the priest held back tears ("melting ice").

11

Many American women have read *The Faith Club* in which a Muslim (Ranya), a Christian (Suzanne) and a Jew (Priscilla) search for interfaith understanding.

If all people of faith were as intent to learn from and confess faith alongside people loyal to other religions, conflicts might lessen. Intent to teach their children fairness, to confront personal stereotypes, and to enrich personal faith, these women met repeatedly. They dealt honestly with fears and asked tough questions of themselves and the other two. As they shared each others' holidays, more "ice melted."

12

A dialogue among Jews, Christians, and Muslims took place in late June 2009 at the Cairo Al Azhar University, "bastion of Islamic Sunni orthodoxy."

Pluralist writer and professor Paul Knitter reports his experience. After visiting scholars presented papers, locals launched into what seemed like ambush. They reviewed damage by the West: colonization, globalization, Muslim extremists resulting from the Iraq war, and U.S. support for Israel's destruction of Palestinians.

Knitter was asked to offer unanticipated closing remarks. He started with a Qur'anic quote: "If it had pleased Allah, He would have made you a single religion (*ummah*). . . . But I have made of you tribes and nations so that you may know one another" (5:48; 49:13).

Knitter restated what Jewish and Christian speakers had learned of intense Muslim anger and pain, of their feeling misrepresented, of deep wrongs met through government and politicians. He clarified that many Americans share the anger and pain.

True listening and dialogue had occurred. The principle Imam of Syria wrote a poem for Knitter; listening to its lilting Arabic brought tears ('melting ice').

Are people of faith ready for a thaw? To allow religious "ice" to melt, will members loyal to given faith traditions hold to their sacred understandings yet credit insights present in religions?

Conclusion

Are people of faith ready for a thaw? To allow religious "ice" to melt, will members loyal to given faith traditions hold to their sacred understandings yet credit insights present in religions? Will integrity follow from saying, "The truth that you teach gives you meaning; I wish to learn from it to enhance being faithful to mine. For, God's truth exceeds what either of us claims."

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—Dorothy Yoder Nyce, Goshen, Indiana, has engaged in interfaith issues since first living In India fifty years ago. Her DMin degree of 1997 focused on interreligious dialogue. Her book of 2010 titled Multifaith Musing: Essays and Exchanges is available for $10 from 1603 So. 15th St., Goshen, IN 46526.

My Declaration of Interdependence

Learning to Say "We" and "I" or Perish

Titus Bender

A crescendo of voices throughout the United States declares, "We want our freedom. Help us dismantle the power of government." These voices raise an important issue. Many governments do oppress citizens who do not have enough power to protect themselves. However, this is only one side of the history of oppression.

Without appropriate limits set by governments, those who are powerful can treat vulnerable people any way they wish. Those with little power are reduced to begging for mercy or turning to violence.

Since the 1980s the economic distress for those at the bottom of the economic ladder has steadily gotten worse. The economic health of our whole society is intertwined. Eventually, if an increasing number of us fail economically, under the pressure, everyone is in danger.

During the past several years some political leaders have made efforts to strengthen the "safety net" to increase the possibility for all families in our country to meet the *basic needs* of their families: food, a job, temporary protection for the unemployed, adequate health care and an opportunity for an adequate education.

Voices from the "right" have become organized and funded (frequently by people with great wealth and power), to raise their voices against what they call a "government takeover." Following are some of their familiar claims:

"I have earned every penny of my wealth by hard work."

"Those who are most wealthy provide jobs for everyone."

"Thank God we are finally getting the government off our backs."

Many believe that all persons have the ethical right to make their own decisions without considering the rights and needs of fellow human beings. For me this is selfishness personified.

Throughout history humankind has struggled to discover the appropriate relationship of the *person* to the *institutional structures* around us.

*T*hroughout history humankind has struggled to discover the appropriate relationship of the *person* to the *institutional structures around us:* from family structures, to community structures, to state and national governments, even to the level of the United Nations. There are two "lenses" through which I search for answers: the lens of *history* and the lens of *theology.*

First, my view of history is shaped by writings of historians/social scientists such as Howard Zinn. In *A People's History of the United States* (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005), he interprets history from the perspective of those left out and/or forced out, who learned to wrestle back. He calls for people not to destroy institutions but to recover some of their power from the institutions that have exercised such control over them.

To me it seems clear that, throughout the world, we cannot continue the path of uncontrolled selfishness if we are to survive. Unless

we turn back from the extent to which we are *abusing* vulnerable people in America and throughout the world, and the extent to which we are *abusing* our planet, both we and our planet will self-destruct. (This could happen through global warming, nuclear war, or some other kind of destruction brought on by the selfishness of humankind.) That path is not inevitable if we learn to say "We."

Second, for me the *arena of theology is important and problematic*. When a person tells me, "I am a Christian," that does not immediately inform me about whom she or he really is.

It is possible to have a utilitarian view of Jesus: "He saved my soul." For Jesus this was not enough. He never permitted those who heard him to be aloof from the pain (and joy) of those around them.

(Here I must make clear that I know people from other faith traditions who practice principles that are in harmony with principles of justice, mercy, and love for all people.)

Theology that guides me takes the *example* of Jesus seriously. Three of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke include an encounter with Jesus that goes to the heart of ethical questions. In the Gospel of Luke starting at 10:25, a lawyer asked him, "What is the greatest commandment?"

Jesus turns around the question: "What is written in the Law?" The answer comes quickly. "Love God with all your heart" . . . "and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus replies, "You have answered right. Do this and you shall live."

Then another question from the lawyer: "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answers with a story. A man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was attacked by thieves, was robbed and injured. Two leaders from the religious establishment came by and offered no help.

Finally, along came a Samaritan. Samaritans were looked down on by the religious establishment of that day. This Samaritan bound up the victim's wounds, put him on his own beast, and took him to an inn for care. With ironic clarity Jesus' story underscores that this "second class" Samaritan is an example of how everyone should love each other as we love ourselves (Luke 10:2-37).

If Jesus is right, it is impossible to do God's will without loving one's

fellow human beings as we love ourselves. I recognize there are many in the United States who adopt the following economic creed: If we each follow our own dreams, by such action we will have done everything we can to create a better world for those around us. This is an economic doctrine espoused by Ayn Rand. It is well described by the title of one of her books: *The Virtue of Selfishness.*

I hear the following proclamation from a significant number of people: Anyone who is *not lazy* can make a living. In the past three decades the gap between the wealth of those at the top and those at the bottom has widened. The misdeeds of some of the wealthiest caused the U.S. and the whole world to teeter on the edge of an economic abyss in 2008. Many of them are now working vigorously to weaken efforts to safeguard against future misdeeds by these same very wealthy people on Wall Street. And many of them point the finger of blame for the 2008 economic meltdown at those who have tried to strengthen the safety net for people who lost their jobs because of the meltdown.

Many, claiming the mantle of Christianity, adamantly oppose efforts to develop public policies that increase the possibility for *everyone* in this country to meet their families' basic needs.

Many, claiming the mantle of Christianity, adamantly oppose efforts to develop public policies that increase the possibility for *everyone* in this country to meet their families' basic needs. To me, that is like saying to Jesus of Nazareth, "Your command to love my neighbor as myself makes a 'feel good' fairy tale, but in our capitalistic country, it will never work."

I prefer the faith of the biblical writer of 1 John, who tells us in 4:20 that "He who does not love his brother [or sister], whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."

John Donne also speaks to and for me.

> No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. . . . Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never

send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

If our capacity *for independence* is not tempered by our capacity for *inter-dependence* we will experience shipwreck, personally and collectively. We can and must discover how to connect with each other and find ways that enable us to take appropriate responsibility for each other. The beginning point is learning to say "We."

Here is a snapshot of the widening wealth gap. In 2007, just before the current economic meltdown occurred, the *top one percent* in the U.S. controlled *33.8 percent of our nation's wealth*. The poorest *fifty percent* controlled only *2.5 percent of our nation's wealth* (http://www.businessinsider.com/15-charts-about-wealth-and-inequality-in-america-2010-4 see chart 2).

By way of comparison I invite you to do the math: For Americans who are among the 50 percent with the least wealth, the *average* person owns *one dollar* of wealth for every *676 dollars* owned by the *average* person among the wealthiest one percent.

A chorus of voices is demanding that we tax the very wealthy even less. They say it would be good for the economy. That would result in transferring some of the very small amount of wealth *from* the poorest *to* those at the top of the wealth pyramid.

Is such a transfer an option? Please permit me one short paragraph of sarcasm: We could cancel the Affordable Care Act (as indeed the Supreme Court may choose to do); cut the food stamp program by half; and cut off all unemployment benefits after three months of unemployment. I can think of one additional suggestion. When more families fall under the load, and they will, we might learn from Scrooge in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. "Are there no workhouses?" . . . "Let them go there."

There are winds of hope in the air. I think of Chuck Collins and Bill Gates Sr., to name two of those who have significant wealth. Concerned about the ever-steeper wealth pyramid, they co-authored a book, *Wealth and Our Commonwealth: Why America Should Tax Accumulated Fortunes* (Beacon Press, 2004). I hear at least an echo of Jesus. It is clear they believe that by sharing the wealth, up to a point, the lives of all of us will be enriched. I hear echoes of "We."

Then there is Warren Buffet, one of the wealthiest persons in our country, who expresses concern that his secretary pays a higher percentage of her annual income in income tax than he.

I think of St. Francis of Assisi, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King Jr., James Cheney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, Vincent and Rosemarie Harding, and a multitude of others. They learned to say "We" at great sacrifice. Our family had the privilege of welcoming the last three (Michael Schwerner, and Vincent and Rosemarie Harding) into our home in Mississippi in 1964. They taught us to love more deeply, to learn to say "We" more honestly.

I look back at what I have written. Easter this year is especially poignant for me. Just as spring follows the chill of winter, exciting as winter may be, I am especially ready for the new life of spring! I look expectantly for the gentle breezes of humanity that can turn us back from today's tearing apart of the fabric of mutual concern in America. Hopefully we will find new ways to look out for each other in our country.

I am reminded of John Steinbeck's final novel *The Winter Of Our Discontent*. The key character, Ethan Allen Hawley, turned from his ideals of integrity as he tried to recover his lost fortunes. In his mad dash for success he left a number of people gravely wounded in spirit. In despair he decided to take his own life. I will never forget my empathy for Hawley as he tried to turn back from his attempted suicide, hoping it was not too late to leave a legacy of integrity for his daughter.

I refuse to give up hope that the United States can turn from our "Winter of Discontent" toward integrity that believes in and practices the spirit of "We" as well as "I."

—Titus Bender, Fort Defiance, Virginia, is Professor Emeritus, Eastern Mennonite University. He and his family lived in Mississippi from 1958 to 1969. He and Ann led a voluntary service unit in Meridian during which time he also served as Peace Representative in the South for MCC. He received his Ph.D. in social Work from Tulane University and taught at the University of Oklahoma before coming to EMU in 1976. His focus springs from the conviction that all structures (religious and secular) help build (or destroy) everyone around us.

Bridge to the Other Side

Annie E. Wenger-Nabigon

Bridge to the Other Side

Legend tells of land crossed with rivers slow in summer,
Hard in winter, swift in spring with water, twisting, rippling,
Cutting withers of rock and flashing fish.
Settlers came searching for home and haven from cold Europe's hatred,
A hard separation, stubborn thought forbidden,
Righteous steel against soothing water.
Stiff-necked settlers, undaunted, damned rivers
Running so deep you couldn't cross them,
And waded in up to their necks, not seeing it was just a small trickle
Boot prints left on moccasin paths now lead into tenacious mission centuries,
Weaving deep rivers into canyons, into places where wanderers go lost searching
For a way to the cross.
I am bridge and not bridge—launched groundless, flung past railings,
There is no handhold, just skin-scraping grips on hard canyon walls,
Feet wet, watering blood where footholds should be and are not.
Nothing clings safe to solid ground, hooks fast my lines.
A bridge is to be walked on; a bridge builder must grow wings,
It is not yet time to fold them—the canyon is deep.
We learn to tread air or breathe under water.

I remember meals at Grandma's house that were topped off with mincemeat pies and sweet meadow-mint tea. Grandma was tiny, round and soft, with a wicked sense of humor from time to time, and a laugh to match.

I wonder—what would she think of the life I've come to live? Would she like the moose mincemeat pies I make and the hot bannock with wild blueberry jam? Would she understand my husband's humor? How would Anishnaabemowin spoken with a Pennsylvania Dutch accent sound in her mouth? I know my "relatives by marriage" would love to swap recipes with her as they did with my late mother, and have fun joking with her, as they do with me.

It's a far distance to travel to where I am in my life. I'm traversing tricky ground—am I Mennonite, or "Wishnaabe"? Am I like or unlike those I'm related to by blood and those I'm related to by marriage? Am I visible or invisible, or both? Dreams I have at night reveal the interstitial spaces, become the Trickster Teacher taunting and inspiring. Without my dreams I would be lost on this trail. I'm trying to understand my Mennonite identity as a settler descendant on Turtle Island.

There are parts of my story which can only be told with poetry, and for six years it's the poems that parse out my journey, giving voice to my struggle. I have a distinct memory of sitting in the university library, working my way through a pile of books on Canadian Aboriginal history and putting down the book I was reading to write the poetry that started to flow. I had to learn to know myself in a different dimension if I was going to face the growing awareness that my identity was changing, was being changed by what I was reading.

The poetry that started with *Bridge to the Other Side* hasn't stopped, although only a few poems have come before readers' eyes. That poetry and new knowledge has changed me. I can't see the world with the same eyes I had a few years ago, and that's a good thing.

Of course, I don't think I've ever seen the world in quite the same way as anyone else. I've never felt as if I fit in anywhere. When I was a teenager my mother told me that the reason I felt that way was because I had a different brain than other people, but I never knew what that meant.

I did know I felt differently about many things than most people I knew. For example, no one else I knew seemed to be interested in "In-

dian" things. As I learned more about the true history of Native America, I discovered opinions that no one else I knew agreed with. At least not until I found Vine Deloria Jr.'s book, *Custer Died for Your Sins.* Then some things started to make sense for me, and I have been on a long and winding way ever since.

I was born in the mountains of Arkansas, the territory of the Osage peoples. When I was seven, my Mennonite missionary parents moved back to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and I discovered that I spoke the English language incorrectly. I was determined to hide where I really came from, and then maybe the other kids would stop teasing me. It didn't help that I had to dress differently, couldn't participate in the gym period where dance was taught, and had no clue about the television shows that were discussed.

A few students were friendly—the ones on the margins because of the color of their skin, or the poverty evident in their clothes, or the physical handicap keeping them on the sidelines. I learned how to live in boundary territories.

The first school field trip I remember was to the Lancaster Wax Museum. Those displays had quite an impact on my young imagination, and when we stopped in front of the display of the final terror of the Conestoga people slaughtered in Lancaster in 1763 I was stricken. Ever afterward I could see that scene in my mind's eye whenever I saw or heard the word Conestoga. The wax faces float in front of me like a misty overlay when I visit Lancaster.

I think about my ancestor's beautiful farm on the shores of Susquehanna River and wonder if spirits of the massacred people ever visit there. Did my ancestors know the Conestoga people? Does my genetic heritage carry connections to the Paxton Boys who committed that crime?

I think about my ancestor's beautiful farm on the shores of Susquehanna River and wonder if spirits of the massacred people ever visit there. Did my ancestors know the Conestoga people? Does my

genetic heritage carry connections to the Paxton Boys who committed that crime? What does it mean that I am born of people who dispossessed the original peoples of that territory, bought stolen land, and feared the remnants of the disappeared peoples? Now "we" pretend they never existed and are ignorant of contemporary Native life.

It has taken me until my sixtieth year to accept the mantle of my identity as a "settler descendant." When I first encountered that term, something in my heart shrank away from recognition. Surely there were better terms for me to use—Mennonite, professional, wife, mother, advocate, or immigrant. Even a label of depressed, divorced, co-dependent, or any other pejoratively applied term would be more acceptable.

How can I find a bridge between the words *settler descendent* and *ally*? How can I look in the mirror and not feel shame and guilt if I embrace the concept of settler descendent? Would good Christian forgiveness be applied to me, as it was not applied to the original inhabitants of this land when Europeans arrived? Can a bridge emerge from the shadows of shame—the shame of those overrun and the shame of those who participate in a continuing colonial project engraving devastation here?

I know what it is like to feel shame and embarrassment which accompanies exclusion and bullying. My powerlessness disgusted and enraged me as a child and left only fantasy to help me cope. When I think of the Anishnaabe family I've married into, and the exclusion and bullying they have faced from the dominant culture, I think of all the borders that define us. Here in Canada their nation is called Anishnaabe, but in the country of my birth, the United States, the same peoples are called Ojibway.

Is there any difference? Of course, but how can I understand the subtleties that led to that division? My Anishnaabe husband and I share a distant heritage of Scot ancestry—does that mean we are alike, just a bit? How do these genes and stories and borders define us? Can a stable bridge be built across the deep divide to a path of relationship?

I have discovered through my poetry that bridge building can start from either side. I see my job as constructing the bridge foundation on my side of the river and not worrying about what others are doing

on their side of the river. My task is to be honest about all of who I am and realistic about where I stand. I must give up helpless wallowing in assumed shame, guilt and self-pity.

Yes, I am not my ancestor and didn't ask to be born in this time and place (or maybe I did), yet I carry privileges inherited from what my ancestors appropriated. Those privileges require something of me if I am to live a truly authentic life on this continent—this part of Mother Earth where many nations lived and told stories about Her, and some named her Turtle Island before "others" came and imposed a different story called North America, the land of opportunity.

Now I know it was an opportunity for the original peoples to be "disappeared," condemned to disenfranchisement, confinement on small parcels of undesirable land, and myths that misrepresent their true natures. The colonial project, through the use of settlers, stole not only the land and resources, but also cultures, languages, identities, and spirits. Can bridge building help me with a different story in this context?

There's baggage that comes from living in a society with core values shaped by deep foundations in theft, greed, arrogance, genocide, slavery, rape, ongoing economic violence, and simple ignorance. Ignorance is our worst enemy, and I have learned that in many ways, people chose their particular ignorance. It is the beginning of the loss of innocence.

We can't afford any longer to hide behind illusions. I can be sure that my neighbors see quite clearly the baggage I carry, and I need to listen to what they have to say about the nature of that baggage.

How else am I to learn how to sort through and carry it with correct intentions? I am no more capable of a solitary construction of my identity as a settler descendant than I am of getting through life in isolation. I cannot "get it" all by myself; I need help with bridge building

The gifts of my poetry teach me that silence is also a great gift. Listening to the silence of the past opens new places inside of me. I hear my ancestor's voices and feel their tears over the trauma they lived through. Without the gift that came to them on Turtle Island, they would have had no place to live and I would not be alive.

Perhaps because of my professional life, I have an understanding of the silent story of historical trauma that others lack. Or maybe not.

Regardless, any understanding I may have doesn't give me anything special. All that insight can do is open my heart to seeing and hearing the truth of the devastation that has occurred, and continues to occur, on Turtle Island. I must listen and bear witness.

Next month I am moving again. My husband and I are going to live on his Reserve north of Lake Superior, a beautiful place within walking distance of white sand beaches and rolling dunes where his ancestors have lived for tens of thousands of years.

It's never too late to learn to be a bridge builder, to write better poetry, and to create a settler descendant identity that is dignified, loving, and respectful of the Creator's guidance to this place.

I think my ancestors would be happy to know that the hospitality shown to them when they arrived on this continent, ignorant, hurt, and wounded, is still alive despite the hurt this settler project passes on. Maybe if they had learned how to be human beings on this land, if they had given up their fears and compulsions, there might have been a different story—one that came full circle to a holistic space, not a linear, boxed-in space with well-defined yet brittle boundaries.

Maybe the newcomers could have learned an "indigenous" identity instead of forcing Euro-centric identities on everyone else. Then maybe I wouldn't be wearing a backpack labeled "settler descendent."

But it's never too late to heal, even to heal the past. It's never too late to have a happy childhood, learn to play a drum, sing a song in a new language, and learn a dance that tells a new story of letting go of trauma. I've learned to cook moose meat and bannock. Now I'm moving away from an "urban reserve" space to a place where I can learn how to find the best blueberry patches in the bush and canoe on the river that carried my husband's ancestors.

I'm going to learn to tell a different story. It's never too late to learn to be a bridge builder, to write better poetry, and to create a settler descendant identity that is dignified, loving, and respectful of the Cre-

ator's guidance to this place. I think my grandmothers would be happy to know I'm finally getting it when it comes to pie baking, poetry writing, and yes, even bridge building!
"The past isn't dead. It isn't even past."—William Faulkner

—Annie Wenger-Nabigon is enrolled in the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Human Studies Program at Laurentian University, Sudbury, Ontario. Her research focuses on a First Nation model of resilience from an extended family perspective. She lives at Pic River First Nation, Heron Bay, Ontario, with husband Herbert Nabigon and is a consultant in the mental health field and in anti-racism education.

The Gray Afternoon of the Soul

Gareth Brandt

It is a gray afternoon. It is now the twenty-seventh gray afternoon in a row! For those who do not live in the Pacific Northwest, you may not understand this winter phenomenon of continuous damp days. It drives some people crazy, but I find a strange comfort in its consistency. It may not be sunny and happy but neither is it dark and bitterly cold; it is just mild and middling—kind of like my life.

It seems appropriate to live here in this climate during the middle part of my life; it provides an image of my soul. Books have been written about the "dark night of the soul" and many songs urge us to "rise and shine in the early morning" but my life right now is more like a gray afternoon.

Although I like where I am in geography and in life, sometimes my contentment becomes complacency, and that troubles me. I want to grow, but not in the ways I did in my youth. At midlife in the expected life span we are just as

close to death as we are to our birth. It is in midlife that, for the first time, we have as much to look back on as we do to look forward to. That does something profound to the soul. It can kill us or it can rebirth us.

How can the gray afternoon of the soul bring growth and meaning for us?

Our default mode is to just settle into the routines that have buoyed us for the past few decades. We sit comfortably between contentment and complacency and wish for no drastic changes in the weather. How can the gray afternoon of the soul bring growth and meaning for us?

Being out in nature provides us with many analogies for spirituality. I call it the "geography of the soul." Sitting in Heritage Park in Mission, British Columbia, one can see the North Shore Mountains in one direction and the Fraser Valley to the south. The two directions represent for me the looking back and the looking ahead. For the first time in life the look back is just as long as the one ahead.

Midlife

I like this place
I can see both ways
behind me
the grand mountain peaks
of the northern range
(some pretty good hikes)
dark forests
where I got lost a few times
risks and adventure
dissonance, and a few rhymes
I like this place
I can see both ways
ahead of me

thick mist and clouds
but the sun still sees through
(at times)
on green flat fields
hidden peaks?
A river with a bridge
I'm not afraid
birds are all around singing
I like this place
I can see both ways

Sometimes we think that in midlife all of our questions will be answered and life will be easier, but it is not so. In fact, sometimes the questions increase and new questions emerge! But we are also more content to live with the paradoxes and questions.

In our younger years we may have been driven to find answers and success, but in midlife sometimes all that we have built up crumbles around us or we realize that the exterior life was not all it was cracked up to be. Life made more sense when we were younger and issues were less complex. Now it is time to embrace the paradoxes and to live the unanswered questions.

I believe that life is in many ways circular. We return to the dust from which we came. Earthly life begins when we emerge from the darkness and safety of our mother's womb and it ends as we return to the darkness and safety of death, the womb of God. The Bible uses a lot of death and life and rebirth language, and I believe that at death life is reborn in another dimension.

What is death and life after death like? Life on earth is mysterious enough, but the concept of eternal life in other dimensions is incomprehensible. Unanswered questions abound in midlife, but the foundation of faith remains; in fact the questions become an integral part of our life of faith.

The following poem represents some of my midlife reflections on the past, present and future. Life is not the way it used to be in the past, but it has provided a foundation for my present and future.

The Ruins of St. Mary's Mission

The concrete is cracked and crumbling
and not exactly level anymore

What used to be
a shapely profile
with walls and windows dressed
now is stripped and bare
but the foundation still is there

Many years ago it once had
a roof and doors
and you could go inside
now it's all open air
but the foundation still is there

In eighteen hundred sixty one
the structure had a mission
it was even dedicated to God
now stairs are left that lead to nowhere
but the foundation still is there

In its heyday
students sat in rows and regiment
to learn the R's of life
now the grass and trees grow anywhere and everywhere
but the foundation still is there

Now I see tombstones in the distance
with the river flowing by
It's a nice place to take a stroll

In the past life was more regulated and controlled, and we didn't have to worry about our physical health and appearance. Life in our middle years may not seem as progressive as the years that were primarily about earning money and raising children. Sometimes the

stairs we have worked so hard to ascend seem to lead to nowhere. We have experienced pain and loss.

We have new questions. How will we face this second half of life? Will we continue to build our exterior lives even though we find no meaning in it? Will we invest our lives in temporal pleasures—the beaches and golf courses of "freedom 55"?

How will we process and integrate the difficult and disconcerting events of our past? Will we "take a stroll" and enjoy the present moments and loved ones that God gives us? How will we embrace the paradoxes—the unexplainable sufferings of the past and the unanswered questions about the future?

As we move into the gray afternoon of life, we become more aware of the reality of our death and the limitations of our mind and body. It can be depressing to look back and see life vigorous and exciting and then to look ahead and see a crumbling body and eventually death.

Although there is always a fear of death as we contemplate its mystery, there is also a contentedness in realizing that since there is nothing we can do to reverse the journey we can savour and enjoy each moment more fully. Thus we become more alive in life even as our lives draw closer to death. The gray afternoon can have meaning.

—*Gareth Brandt, Abbotsford, British Columbia, teaches practical theology at Columbia Bible College. This article has been adapted from Gareth Brandt's book,* Under Construction: Reframing Men's Spirituality *(Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 2009), see more at http://mensspirituality.com*

Our Faith, Like Margaret's

Brenda Hartman-Souder

There are days when my faith, my belief in a creator who loves and guides me, wanes. I don't like to admit this but I am endowed, so it seems, with a more than adequate dose of skepticism and doubt about many things spiritual. From Margaret, however, I have just drunk a cup of pure, nourishing water on the journey of faith.

MCC Nigeria works with Home Makers by giving a small ($5,000) annual grant. Margaret Ahmed is the energy, the organizing, creative and visionary force behind Home Makers. She leads this small initiative staffed solely by volunteers to teach rural women skills that will help them start and successfully run small businesses.

She founded Home Makers after observing the plight of so many women who want to help provide for their families but have little education or tangible opportunities to do so. Home Makers trains women one Saturday a month throughout nine states in Nigeria.

Margaret and her volunteers teach women how to make bread, doughnuts, laundry soap, hair and body creams, along with how to tie and dye fabric and fashion bead jewelry. Women who exhibit skill, commitment and trustworthiness are given small loans. More than 90 percent are repaid. Home Makers teaches women the basics in bookkeeping and holds seminars on other issues facing women who raise families and operate small businesses at the same time. Home Makers works.

I attend the trainings about once a year, and I love seeing the look of total concentration as women learn to mix simple ingredients for body cream or hearing their astonished exclamations when Margaret opens the simple steel drum oven to reveal beautifully browned, steaming bread. Margaret writes impact stories as part of her regular progress reports, and they are filled with testimonies of real women who moved from desperation and poverty to hope as they improved the lives of their families by these small businesses.

Many women report making a $20-30 a month profit. While not much by our standards, this extra income makes a huge difference in the kind of food mothers can afford to buy and in the quality of schools their children can attend.

But unknown to many, Margaret sacrifices to serve with Home Makers. A skilled, educated woman who has proven herself in successful businesses, she does not take a steady salary from individual donations that, along with the extra trainings she conducts for church groups all over Nigeria, keep Home Makers afloat. Recently, donations have decreased, evidence of the economic crisis taking root in Nigeria too.

In addition, a major church denomination has been wooing Margaret to take a full-time position with them to develop and run their brand new Women's Skills Training Center. To do so would mean a steady salary. The job looked like a perfect fit for Margaret, except that it would clearly distract her from her already full-time work of running Home Makers and ministering to the rural women whom she believes need her most.

Margaret shared this job offer at a recent advisory committee meeting which I attended. You could tell she was struggling with the offer, stating that "All work is God's work, right?"

After that meeting I impulsively wrote Margaret an e-mail. I shared my respect for her and how she and her husband have chosen a very trusting, simple lifestyle so that they could serve Christ.

I asked her though, what she honestly heard God was calling her do. I was troubled that the work of Home Makers, so valuable, would not continue if Margaret's focus and energy were taken by the demands of full-time work with a major church organization. But as I pounded out this email, I had nothing tangible to offer Margaret. In these economic times, MCC could not increase their grant to Home Makers.

A few days later Margaret replied, stating that she knew God wanted her to move forward with training and encouraging rural women and that she had decided to trust God (again) with her life. However, she noted, she had no money to pay for their daughter's school fees, but that she would trust God about that too.

Well, I felt awful. I had encouraged Margaret to go deep and sort out what God was saying to her, but I had had no idea that the sacrifice might be her own daughters' education. My immediate impulse was to send her personal money, but I refrained, knowing this can be problematic in its own way.

I had to sit with my discomfort and frustration not just with my relative wealth but living in an oil-rich country so neglectful of its citizens.

I had to sit with my discomfort and frustration not just with my relative wealth but living in an oil-rich country so neglectful of its citizens. Those with integrity and service born out of love for God often struggle while corruption means others line their pockets and deny Nigerians basic services and rights.

*B*ut during the next few weeks I received phone texts or e-mails from Margaret. "I am in Nassarawa State doing a training for 48 women. I have a peace and joy (about my decision). Greet your family."

Then an e-mail: "My girls are back to school and our house is stocked with enough food to last a year." Women attending her work-

shops had donated the food and given her a love offering allowing her to return her girls in school. A little later Margaret came in to thank me for writing that email of concern. I was speechless. What Margaret taught me deserves far greater gratitude.

While intellectually struggling and scared, Margaret still trusted the call of God for her life. She chose to stay the course; she knows at a deep level it is clearly marked for her. She is quietly continuing her unique calling with dignity and joy. She trusts God to provide the food on her table, the rent, her daughters' school fees. She trusts God for everything and she believes in abundance flowing - that somehow there will always be enough to go 'round.

I think of Margaret now on days when I wonder why I am in Nigeria and how it is that God called me here. Or when my writing seems dull and useless. Or when the office tasks seem chaotic and unfocused. Or when I worry about our future after MCC or road risks or another violent crisis being triggered.

Along with other friends, both here and in North America, who share their gut-wrenching concerns right along with their deep belief that the Spirit of Life leads and loves them, Margaret helps keep me on course. She helps me trust that—even while sometimes and necessarily questioning and doubting—I am doing what I am uniquely asked to do, right here, right now.

—Brenda Hartman-Souder, Jos, Nigeria, serves as co-representative of Mennonite Central Committee Nigeria and, along with spouse Mark, as parent of Valerie and Greg.

On Crazy Institutions

Alan Soffin

Like many Americans, I have been troubled by the grievous misalignment of our institutions and our ideals—including many of our religious institutions (see *Rethinking Religion*: *Beyond Scientism, Theism and Philosophic Doubt,* Cascadia Publishing House, 2010). So, when an academic ex-colleague of mine asked me to come up with criteria for what some social scientific writers have referred to as a "crazy" (institutional) system, I responded.

Crazy Systems

I had no idea that my attempt to identify institutional or system "craziness" in a fundamental way would lead from social science to spirit—to issues of *incarnation*, *sin* and the notion that religious institutions might support institutional sanity by virtue of their *standpoint* on life (not their *doctrines*).

What follows is a journey from the secular to the religious conducted by a religiously concerned non-believer

For me a "crazy" system is a system turned against itself. The main criterion of a crazy system lies in the incompatibility between its in-

For me a "crazy" system is a system turned against itself. The main criterion of a crazy system lies in the incompatibility between its incentive structure (that which motivates people) and the ends on the basis of which the institution is defined or *specifically justified*.

centive structure (that which motivates people) and the ends on the basis of which the institution is defined or *specifically justified*.

So a journalistic institution, such as the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*, has its justifying end in the presentation of relevant, important information and sound opinion. But I have heard students and adult professionals repeatedly describe the *end* of newspaper work as "increasing circulation" or "selling newspapers"—thus reducing the end of journalism to the end of a newsstand.

A newspaper goes crazy when it falsifies or exaggerates or omits relevant and important truths—which it tends to do when, as competition grows, sales (a necessary) means becomes its end. (Think of *engineers* that "have to" design big SUV's—crazy in a time of global warming, crowded roads, and little or no off-road activity.)

When journalistic work is conducted in a structure whose justifying end is no longer the end that earns the name of *journalism*, the journalist is turned not only against journalism but also against his/her ideal self—provoking guilt and the aggressive production of self-justifying B.S: "there's no such thing as objectivity," "newspapers are a business."

Such situations instance the famous "*fallacy of the commons*." Action tuned to *individual advantage*, to *concrete* specifics (status, admiration, deferential behavior, money, power, love, goods, land) has little time for the *goodness* or the *rightness* of an institution's actions. As the means for action eclipse action's *justifying* ends, systems and per-

sons (commons and commoner) lose hope of personal and institutional integrity.

Personal Craziness

Personal and institutional craziness share the same structure. Just as the activities of institutions (journalism, law, history, science) have their own defining and justifying ends, so *human*—as distinct from *animal*—activity has its unique and justifying end. For the unique capability of human activity is the ability to see what is true and thus do what is good and right.

The ability to seek and realize this end justifies whatever rights we claim and obligations we have with respect to other living things. It is why we are not simply "mammals" or "organisms." The *end* of acting for that which *in truth ought be done* is what *defines* the "*human*" as against the "*animal*" and the "*person*" as against the "*creature*" or "*thing*."

In *personal craziness* the incentive structure is tied to the pursuit of concrete particulars—*factual conditions* of one sort or another. The child, for example, is curious about the world, is open to the *true*, the *good*, the *beautiful*, but schools in time turn the child from worldly exploration and inquiry to "grades" and (later) to the cash value of "doing well."

The "American Dream" too often makes an *end* of "wealth." Survival, power, security, acceptance—which can be *means* to right thought and action—become ends in themselves, thereby reducing *uniquely human* ends to the ends of animals (as journalism's end became that of the newsstand).

Where psychological problems are unresolved ("craziness" or "neurosis") the mind is incentivized to treat the solving of past problems as current ends, losing sight of what is needed in current situations. Ironically, the development of one's *identity*—while essential and unavoidable—poses by its very solidity a standing problem for our *unique human end* since the pursuit of what is true, right, or good will sometimes challenge what we suppose—and thus ask us to be in some way different from what we are.

The Synergy of Craziness

Institutional craziness and personal craziness are interwoven and mutually reinforcing. Take sports. Institutionally, sports are "big business"—as much a focus of "research" universities as elementary and secondary schools. Individuals ansorb incentives from these institutions. Celebrity coaches teach that "winning isn't the thing, it's the *only* thing." Ask someone the aim of sports and they'll say, "winning."

But propose they play basketball against a sick or physically impaired opponent and they will demur. *Underneath*, not entirely lost, is the knowledge that *sport* is an ideal competitive experience—a physical and mental test of achievement. Winning (like the rules) is but a *means* to that end.

But in our culture, the means has become the end, so in "sports," successful fouling is a skill, a weak opponent is a gift and, together, schools and players seek in each other an actor whose only aim is wins.

Incarnation and Sin

An object or situation that *ought* to be a certain way is an *ideal* end—an end not yet become a *fact*. The good or right that we *imagine* must be *realized* through *actual* (concrete) thoughts and arrangements. Seldom remarked, however, is that the movement from the ideal we have in mind to the means of its realization is a movement from *one kind of world to another*.

Institutions and persons represent the conversion of a *non-physical* vision of the good into a specific *physical* form. How *mind* does this cannot, in my view, be explained (over-simply: science can't explain why a thing is good or right). The transformation of what *ought to be* into *physical* fact—is *incarnation*. The process is one of embodiment, but as it is the embodiment of an *ideal,* it is the embodiment of spirit, *if "spirit" has any meaning more serious than either ghostliness or vivacity.* incarnation is a natural miracle—a uniquely *religious* fact.

As animals cannot do this, the transformation of the physical world in accordance with the *normative* or good (the divine) may usefully speak to the question, What is the meaning of (human) life?

Still, what I have argued is that the good or the spirit, once *bodied*, once made concrete, is subject to "the ills of the flesh." The problem for institutions as for individuals is how rightly to incarnate non-

physical ends. In a sense our psychological identities and institutional rules are idols, and the problem is to keep them from falling into *idolatry*. Consider how the *means* of "the free-market" is treated as an *end* (rather than "the common good") or how often one's ethnicity or nation is an end (more than one's humanity).

The independence of fact from ideal brings risk of embodiments ruling over what is right. For me, this ever-present danger is the most basic, defensible meaning of "original sin" or the "weakness of the *flesh*."

Religion

The rules and incentives of institutions court idolatry when they become disconnected from *reflection on their relation to the good*. As the world changes, the meaning and effect of embodied life changes (self-reliance in an agricultural America couldn't have the same form in industrial America). The means for achieving the good must be *continually* subject to critical reflection.

While this is a matter of maintaining *continuous* interaction between institutional adaptations and higher education, journalism and democratic processes, it is also a matter, in my view, of bring our identities and social arrangements into the sphere of religious meditation.

For religious institutions are unique in asking us to reflect on our lives in the light of our eventual deaths. They are the goads to *ultimate seriousness*. Religion brings each of us to the question, What is the meaning of my life?—What difference has it made that I lived?

To this non-believer, the struggle over fixed, specific doctrines smacks of means-end reversal. Surely, the *end* is to cleave to the meaning of being human. If so, perhaps various doctrinal formulations are but means aimed at achieving it. In any case, the *standpoint* of religion—the spirit of the retreat—must be brought to institutions and to persons if sane institutions are our goal.

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Remembering the Civil War

Daniel Hertzler

Upon the Altar of the Nation, by Harry S. Stout. Viking, 2006.

Mennonites, Amish and the American Civil War, by James O. Lehman and Stephen M. Nolt. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

Books on the Civil War proliferate. I got the first of these from a remainder house and found the second listed on a brochure promoting tourism in Amish country. About all the two books have in common is the war. Their purposes and development are quite different. But taken together they provide grist for reflection.

Stout, who sees himself as a just warrior, has set out to develop a thesis. He evidently operates within the prevailing Calvinism of our American culture: violence and war are necessary if regrettable. He does not quarrel with the Civil War as such but with the conduct of the war when it went beyond what he considers the rules of war.

Lehman and Nolt have a different agenda. They wish to inquire what happened to descendants of the Anabaptists who were persecuted for their beliefs and who declined to defend themselves. These immigrants had never felt completely at home in the American system. What would they do when the unity of the system broke down and the separate sections fell upon each other? The book is based largely on diaries, letters, and newspaper accounts. Not many church statements were available from this era.

This much should be said on Stout's behalf: He goes beyond the level of the typical reenactment with uniforms and guns where no one gets hurt unless he slips in the mud. The book delivers what it promises. It documents how each side in this bloody conflict was absolutely convinced that God was on its side. If either side's soldiers won a battle, it was a blessing of God. If either side lost, this was a lesson for it.

Stout reports that most of the generals on either side had been classmates at West Point. They began with an intention to observe the rules of war. As time went on and the issues became more desperate, they bent the rules by persecuting civilians, foraging, and destroying property in most wanton fashion. Also, some of the battles involved what could only be described as butchery when a general threw his men into an impossible assault.

I was aware of Sherman's campaign from Atlanta to the sea which devastated the countryside. Stout reports an angle I had not understood: Sherman separated from his supply line and turned the troops loose to forage from the land. Destruction was a strategic necessity.

Some 620,000 soldiers died in the war. More died from disease than from bullets. A summary on page 447 provides these details:

Killed in action and died from wounds:
Union: 110,070
Confederate: 94,000
Died of disease
Union: 249,458
Confederate: 164,000
Union dead: 359,528
Confederate dead: 258,000
Total: 617,528

Despite all the foolishness and ruthlessness he describes, Stout continues to defend the just war. The book is dedicated "To the memory of my father, Harry Stober Stout (1923-2009) a warrior sailor in a just war. And to my grandchildren. . . . It is to the coming generation and the moral conclusions they reach that this book is ultimately dedicated." The "just war" Stout has in mind is, of course, World War II, considered by some the "good war." Numbers of us believe there is no such thing.

Stout asks whether the 620,000 Civil War dead died in vain. He cannot believe that this would be so and indulges in what I consider questionable theologizing.

Stout asks whether the 620,000 Civil War dead died in vain. He cannot believe that this would be so and indulges in what I consider questionable theologizing. "Just as Christians believe that without the shedding of blood there can be no remission for sins, so Americans in the North and South came to believe that their bloodletting contained a profound religious meaning for their life as nations" (459). Whether or not this is his own perspective, he does not appear to object to it.

What he does object to are the immoralities committed by leaders. "Americans don't want to concede the unforgivable wrongs committed by the likes of Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, Lee, Forrest, Early and Davis. . . . The web of lies, suppression and evasion that developed in the Civil War not only shock but also bear witness to the power of war to corrupt, especially at the top. . . ."

In the end, Stout states his case. "Judging the Civil War is not a brief for pacifism. Rather it is an endorsement of the just war. There are no ideal wars. . . . In a less than ideal ideal world, however, in which we sometimes labor under a moral imperative to war, we cannot do less than demand a just war and a peaceful outcome" (461). I find Stout's analysis of the Civil War useful—but not his shallow perspective on war.

As the American occupation of Iraq was winding down, it was reported that more than 4,000 American soldiers were killed and some 32,000 injured along with an estimated 100,000 Iraqi civilians killed. It would appear that a majority of Bush's Methodist Church and Obama's United Church of Christ generally supported this war although some years ago the UCC declared itself a "peace church."

Lehman and Nolt have a message but it is more subtle than Stout's. They want to tell a story. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Mennonites and Amish were not accustomed to making public statements, although a notable exception was "The Sonnenberg Petition," which appears in their book as Appendix A on pages 235-236.

One useful learning from the book is to account for the perspective on the relation between a peace church and the dominant culture which I experienced when I was growing up. We were wary of getting too close to the political system, and numbers of Mennonites did not vote. The book shows how this point of view was developed and became for a time the dominant position for our church. In later generations, it has been modified pragmatically and theologically, for example, in John Howard Yoder's *The Christian Witness to the State* (Faith and Life Press, 1964; Herald Press, 2002).

Lehman and Nolt observe that "large majorities of Mennonites and Amish found resources in their faith to resist complete identification with Union or Confederate causes" (7). But this response was not uniform and was only developed over time. It is particularly helpful to learn that the dynamics involved in seeking to be faithful to the Anabaptist tradition varied in different geographical contexts. The experiences in three of these are described: eastern Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the Midwest. The political relationships for these peace churches were different in each of these three contexts.

In eastern Pennsylvania, Mennonites were politically active and received support from certain politicians. Pennsylvania Governor Andrew Curtin and Congressman Thaddeus Stevens are mentioned. With such friends in high places, Mennonites were able to negotiate special status for conscientious objectors.

These negotiations were also affected by their place in the Pennsylvania Dutch culture. "In many ways Mennonites and Amish

found a comfortable ethnic niche, since Pennsylvania German culture could set them apart from the American mainstream without entirely isolating them" (23).

Mennonites in the Shenandoah Valley faced a different culture. "Virginia was influenced by values rooted in both English and cavalier society and rough-and-tumble backwoods life, both of which differed from specifically Anabaptist and broader Pennsylvania German orderly ideals" (25). They were to face the problems without political friends. Mennonites generally objected to slavery and secession, although these objections were not completely uniform.

Amish and Mennonites from Ohio to Iowa faced a context different from each of these and their responses developed from this context. They were less protected than eastern Pennsylvania and less vulnerable than Mennonites in Virginia.

Of course in all of these areas responses to the military option varied. Some young men signed up right away. Pictured on page five is Gideon M. Nice (1844-1916), who "was reared in a Mennonite home but donned a Union uniform. Nice saw combat at the Battle of Gettysburg."

After the draft began, alternate options included a commutation fee, generally $300, or hiring a substitute. Either of these seems like less than a clear-cut testimony against war. A third option followed by some was to flee to Canada. Quakers were of two minds. Some were ready to fight against slavery while others tried to get complete exemption for persons whose convictions would not permit them to kill.

The authors observe that the problem of hiring a substitute "was ethically ambiguous for some peace people, who wondered if it represented too proximate a position with the military" since it "contributed directly to war-making ability." Some also were reminded of the war's violence when their substitute was killed. The authors cite the experience of John S. Stoltzfus (my great-grandfather) who "still kept as a tragic reminder the uniform his draft substitute had worn before dying in battle" (88).

Since the war came only marginally and temporarily to Pennsylvania except for those in the areas near Gettysburg, the issues were less urgent and direct than those facing Virginia. "Now three possibilities

lay before them: accept forced service against conscience, face court-martial (and perhaps death) as deserters, or go into hiding" (57). Both the first and the third were practiced, but the account indicates that "apparently threatened court-martial never happened" (58).

The well-known story of Christian Good is included. According to the report, he was drafted and went into battle but refused to fire his gun.

The well-known story of Christian Good is included. According to the report, he was drafted and went into battle but refused to fire his gun. "Incredulous, the officer asked if Good was not able to 'see all those Yankees over there' to which Good is said to have replied 'No, they're people; we don't shoot people'" (58). However, some were able to get exemptions. Appendix B provides a list of "Men exempt as of October 1, 1863."

Hiding and attempting to get away to Union territory were common responses. John Heatwole is reported to have "walked backwards up a mountain in the snow so as to baffle scouts on his trail" (69).

Although Mennonites and Amish in the Midwest lacked the political clout of those in eastern Pennsylvania, they were to provide more articulate peace writing. One notable feature was "The Sonnenberg Petition," included in the back of the book as "Appendix A." The Sonnenberg Mennonites of Wayne County, Ohio, were recent immigrants from Switzerland. They called a special meeting and produced a statement which "the church presented to the Wayne County Military Committee, who in turn forwarded it to Gov. David Tod" (235).

The final paragraph in the statement is as follows: "We shall endeavor to do our duty toward God and our Government, and hope that we will not be compelled to do any thing which to avoid we would, and are resolved to, suffer the penalty of the law rather than to violate our faith, but that we will be allowed to satisfy the demands of Government by Commutation instead of doing Military Service" (236).

Two other responses were to have ongoing significance for Mennonite ethical thought. First was that of John F. Funk, a Mennonite lumber dealer in Chicago who taught in a Presbyterian Sunday school. The authors report that Funk had been "an enthusiastic patriot at the time of Fort Sumter's fall. . . . He hesitated to go as a soldier, though in 1862 his reasoning was ambiguous. . . ."

Then "Funk's feelings about war began to shift in October 1862." He went to Elkhart, Indiana, where "he heard the powerful preacher and bishop, John M. Brenneman, who expressed concern for how peace principles were playing out among Mennonites" (175).

By 1863 Funk had begun to write a statement entitled "Warfare: Its Evils, Our Duty" and in July that year he had 1000 copies printed. This tract of 16 pages "did not rely on explicitly religious rationale, but instead used graphic word images to portray the senselessness and inhumanity of killing. . . . Yet the message also developed an unmistakable theological center around Jesus, who provided the message and model for peaceable living" (178).

Brenneman also would write a peace statement, "Christianity and War." It was three times as long as Funk's tract, and he published it anonymously, perhaps in fear of negative attention. He took an opposite approach from Funk's, beginning with "the essence of Christianity" and he "wrote at length about the nature of repentance and selfless contrition that led believers to 'deny ourselves, to take up our cross.'"

In contrast to Mennonites of eastern Pennsylvania, Brenneman called for separation from the political system. "'Is it not enough for us to be Christians?' he asked. 'Or must we also be called, or call ourselves, after a worldly name—a Democrat or a Republican? Surely we ought to guard against this evil'" (179).

In another year, Funk would begin to publish a magazine, *Herald of Truth* which for more than 40 years would provide a gathering place for Mennonite thinking on ethical issues. Thus Funk's work "would cast peoplehood in more clearly theological and ideological terms" (231). As time went on, "A two-kingdom people in a world of multiple identities, Mennonites faced the challenges of faithfulness and relevance, and formulated divergent responses to that tension" (233).

The authors observe that "the war had demonstrated the lack of

consensus, coordination, and systematic communication among Mennonite and Amish Americans. . . . If the war had not formally divided Mennonites and Amish (as it hadn't Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians and Episcopalians, perhaps it was because there was too little real unity to begin with" (231).

In wars following the Civil War, peace churches have found it necessary to contrast the conflict with their values and seek to forge a response. Support for the young men in World War I was later deemed inadequate. They were inducted into army camps and persecuted for their position. My father-in-law, Eugene Yoder, found the experience so painful that it was reported he wished to have no sons. As it happened, he had only two daughters.

Before World War II church leaders negotiated Civilian Public Service, which was set up to provide work of national significance at no pay for the conscientious objectors. Some considered it as a compromise, but the experience provided opportunities for young men to sharpen leadership skills and numbers of them later served with distinction as leaders in the Mennonite Church.

The Korean War and the Vietnam War followed, but today the American military is able to function without a draft. This puts people of peace in an odd—and potentially dangerous—position. As long as they order their lives quietly no one is likely to bother them.

The book closes by quoting Vincent Harding, an African-American historian who wondered whether American descendants of the Anabaptists may have "'forgotten what it is to rejoice in suffering for Christ's sake, forgotten our comradeship with the outcasts, forgotten how it was to be fools for Christ's sake?'"

The authors conclude that "The heirs of those who fought and those who refused to fight in the 1860s, along with all who probe the moral dimensions of human conflict, still live with such questions" (233).

Indeed, we do.

—Daniel Hertzler, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, is an editor, writer, Sunday school teacher, and instructor for the correspondence course, Pastoral Studies Distance Education.

A Great Idea

Noël R. King

It was time to do something with all of the ideas I had lying around. They were taking up space in my head and home, and I thought that maybe someone less fortunate than I, someone who had far fewer ideas, could greatly benefit from my old castoffs.

So I contacted my neighbors and cousins to ask if they wanted to add their unused ideas to my old dusty pile, where I would then pack them up and take them to the local secondhand shop.

You would be startled at the number that ended up in my driveway! I have to admit that I pawed through all of them myself when I thought nobody was looking before I loaded them up in my pickup truck to take to the Goodwill.

As I furtively rummaged through the pile, I saw that one of my neighbors had snuck in a few of his old dreams along with his old ideas, probably thinking I would not notice. But I did, alright, because he had the audacity to hide an old recurring nightmare underneath them all.

If I had not been careful, I could have been bitten by it. As it was, it gave me quite a shock, and I jumped back just in time as I pulled up the edge of the old childhood blanket that he had wrapped it in and saw the nightmare lying in wait for me there in a deep, dank corner beneath.

You better believe I marched right on over to that particular neighbor's house and demanded that he DO SOMETHING with his old nightmare, like take it to a psychiatrist's office immediately and dump it there.

He sheepishly said that he would do that, as he gingerly corralled the nightmare and forced it into a wild animal trap that he had pulled out of the back of his garage. I took note that this did not seem to be the first time he had had to handle a nightmare with his own bare hands.

After that nasty business had been taken care of and I had returned to my house and carefully washed my hands—I did not want my own dreams to be infected that night—I returned to the business at hand, of sorting through the ideas piled on my driveway.

I separated out all of the I'm-going-to-write-a-novel-someday ideas (they are a dime a dozen and practically useless), and I decided regretfully to throw away a few promising political ones outright because I feared that the Department of Homeland Security would label them "terrorist" ideas: they were rough and unformed around the edges and oozed foreign accents. Too bad, but some ideas are not worth dying for.

The biggest thrill by far was finding a 100-year-old thought of Albert Einstein's, stuck like a piece of tape to some old great-aunt's cookie recipe idea.

The biggest thrill by far was finding a 100-year-old thought of Albert Einstein's, stuck like a piece of tape to some old great-aunt's cookie recipe idea. I couldn't really understand the Einstein idea, but who could? I carefully pulled it free of the cookie recipe and rinsed it

off with a little bit of fresh alcohol. I have found that a smidgen of alcohol freshens things up, but more than that ruins an idea, so you have to be careful.

Once I held Einstein's freed idea in my hands, it felt like it was going to leap right out of my tenuous grasp and into the sky above me if I weren't careful, it was so light and lively. I can't imagine what it would be like to have such amazing ideas rocketing around inside my own head, but I sure bet it feels great!

I won't go on and on about my ideas-collecting project, seeing as you probably get the general idea by now—haha! But I will say this: If you have any fresh ideas, whether they are old or not, take good care of them, because the market is red-hot right now.

—As circumstances warrant, through her Turquoise Pen column Noël R. King, Charlotesville, Virginia, reports on strange and wonderful or worrisome things, including how to handle great ideas.

Families: Where Torment and Transcendence Mix

Michael A. King

The death of both my parents amid journeying with various friends and colleagues through complex family dynamics has made me want to zoom out to bigger-picture reflections. What keeps coming to me is this: *Families are where we primally and intimately experience torment and transcendence.*

I hasten torecognize that *torment* probably isn't how those blessed with sunnier family experience would put it. And *transcendence* may not compute for those who have known primarily ways families maim.

So let me simply report why I think of both torment and transcendence.

Torment because I've seen so much of it in family layers going back generations. And in communities, often church-related, I regularly participate in. The torment can range across mental illness;

the pain such illness inflicts on sufferers and those who love them; suicide; amid inability to navigate inherited shadows passing them on to others; divorce and its trauma for those separating as well as children, relatives, friends. I know a family in which attempts of children to grow up lead to being literally disowned; there is torment here for those disowned even as surely the acts of disowning flow from their own prior wells of anguish.

I could go on—and on—but my point isn't to belabor the torment. I simply want to name it plus offer the severe mercy of acknowledging that the torment is not rectified by being Christian but accompanies us as Christians. No example I've offered flows from non-Christian family life. I don't blame Christianity—but those of us in Christian families can empower shadows through believing there must be something non-Christian about them, hence we may take our church selves to church, sequester our family hurts at home, and in so doing often deepen rather than heal them.

I've seen this dynamic in relation to suicide and its frequent companion, depression. Many of us were formed within an understanding that suicide was sin and depression a sign of spiritual failure. Suicide has been viewed as so grievous we can even tell of suicidal loved ones whose bodies congregations wouldn't allow in cemetaries. Seeing association with depression or suicide as shameful has made us reluctant to talk about such matters, to make them part of our church lives or faith journeys, to trust that rather than God's judgment added to the depressive's or the suicide's torment, grace even here, and maybe especially here, can sorrowfully and tenderly abound.

When families are able, imperfectly though truly, to confront their torments, they can become zones of amazing grace.

And maybe that takes us to the cusp of transcendence. Because when families are able, imperfectly though truly, to confront their torments, they can become zones of amazing grace.

Not cheap grace. Any family who has walked through the worst of the worst knows grace is costly, bought by tears, sleepless nights of reliving nightmares, choices to grow even when one's family soil seems too shallow to offer nurture, turning to mentors and therapists and friends and sometimes our own family members with readiness to keep loving even when it hurts like we imagine hell itself to hurt.

Recently a friend I'm in touch with only on Facebook, but with whom I share roots going back to our growing up together as children of missionaries, posted that a giant of our missionary youths had entered hospice care. This stirred us to share memories.

My friend remarked of the dying missionary and his wife that they "were probably the first people I met—as a young child—that were very very much in love and full of creative, imaginative energy. I'll never forget them running across a field, hand in hand. I was very young and there is no photograph of that moment, but it is engraved in my mind."

Chills. Tears. That is a picture of transcendence. Family can carry us beyond our worst to miracles larger than we achieve in isolation. Hand in hand across a field. So classic a film-like image as to be almost a cliché but in the best sense of cliché—though we risk cheapening it by repetition, the reason we're thus tempted is that it's so primally and powerfully true.

I think of the day a dying mother, amid a family's shadows, embraced a child. And in that embrace said to one who was long an adult yet also a child tremulous still, "I love you as you are." Transcendence.

Again I could go on. Because could we with ink the ocean fill, we wouldn't exhaust the love, of God or for each other, that allows us to turn scripts of even family torment into narratives of transcendence.

—Michael A. King, Telford, Pennsylvania and Harrisonburg, Virginia, is Dean, Eastern Mennonite Seminary; and publisher, Cascadia Publishing House LLC. This column was first published in The Mennonite *(Oct. 2011).*

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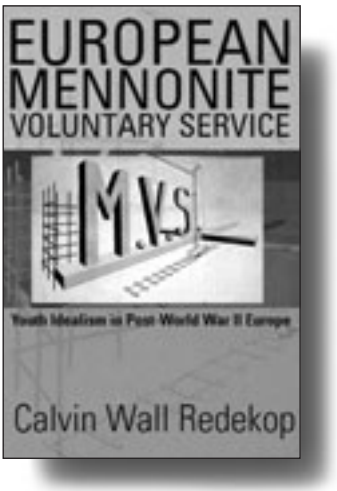

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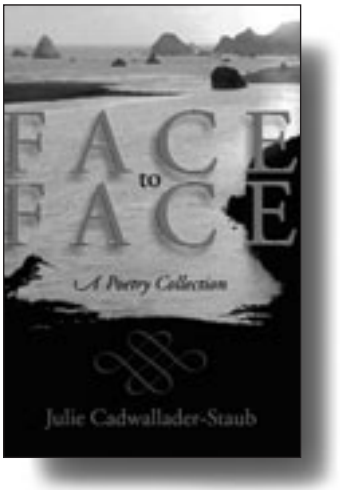

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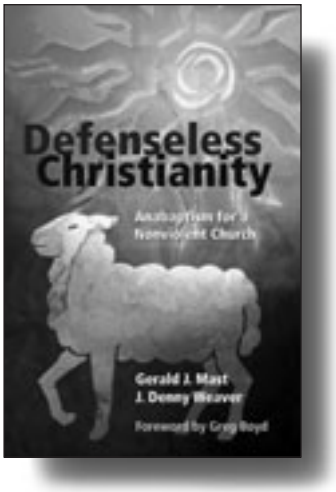

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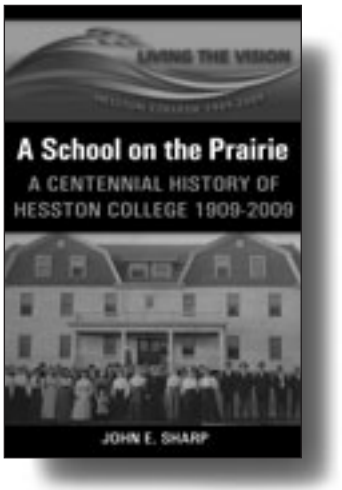

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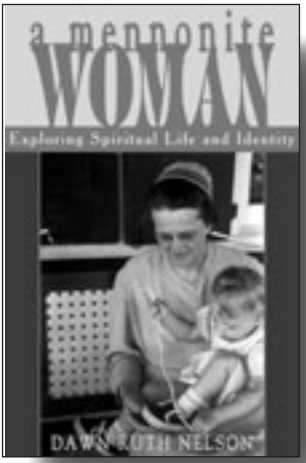

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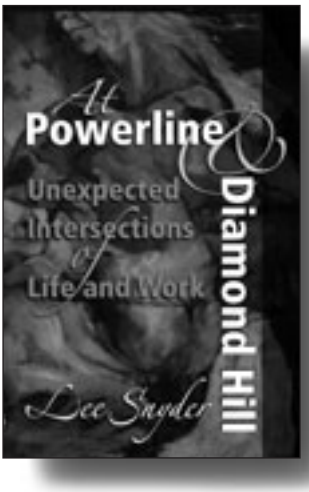

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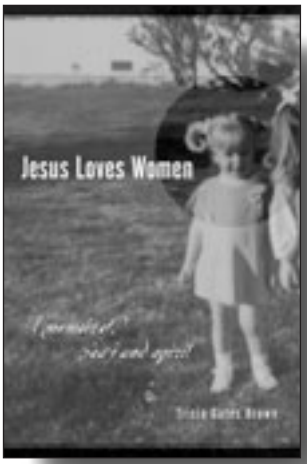

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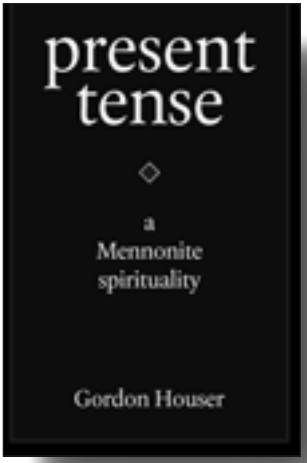

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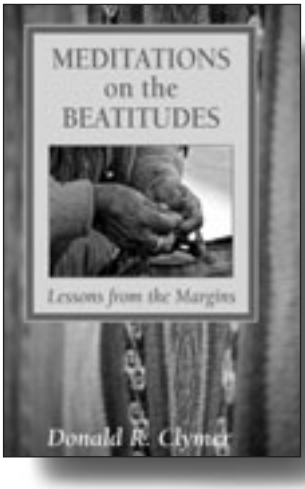

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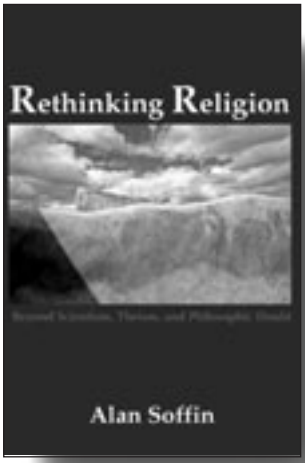

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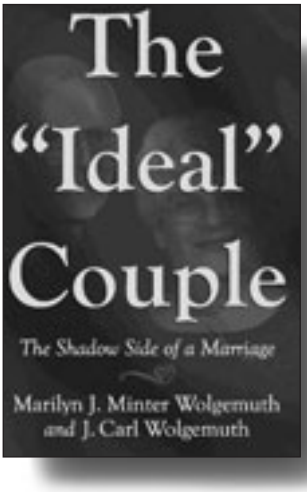

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Grade Eight

I dream of Jason swinging his arm around my shoulders,
whispering something wonderful.
At thirteen he throws away his violin
and jingles girlfriends like loose change.

At recess my friends and I make fun of all the popular
girls with their highlighted hair and pierced ears.

In the hallway Jill and her new breasts
eclipse talk of football.
And flat chested Annie is still in the cool crowd
but slipping.

When Rob complains his balls itch and
wonders if one of us girls would like to scratch them
Cathy looks puzzled and asks, *You have more than one?*

At lunch I try to make my dreams come true
reciting the alphabet, twisting my apple stem,
forcing it to break at J,
the first letter of my true love's name.

Biking down Fifth Avenue, I wonder what life is like
inside those houses the size of banks
with bonsai trees shaped like geometry lessons
and white fenced backyards with turquoise pools.
Susan says she has no tan lines.

For grade eight graduation I stand far away from Susan
whose dress is exactly like mine
but she looks like Farrah Fawcett
and I some wanna-be.
I ask Bobby LaRue to dance,
he declines, he's some odd religion and isn't allowed.
I don't believe him. I gulp the gym air, squeeze my eyes shut
and in my mind cross myself like a Catholic would for luck.
I ask Jason, when he looks at me I feel like math homework.
Sure, he says, *let me finish my Coke.*
I sit, silently humming Stairway to Heaven,
the song almost gone when he nods.

—*Cheryl Denise grew up in Elmira, Ontario. She earned a nursing degree at Conestoga College in Guelph, Ontario. This poem is from her newest collection,* What's in the Blood *(DreamSeeker Books, 2012). For three years she worked as a volunteer through the Mennonite Church as a public health nurse in La Jara, Colorado. Now she and her husband live in the intentional community of Shepherds Field in West Virginia. The community raises Jacob sheep and a small flock of chickens. They produce and sell lambs, yarn, and soft, beautiful wool blankets. Cheryl works as a nurse supervisor for in-home care services for elderly and disabled persons. Her poetry collection,* I Saw God Dancing*, was the winner of the 1998 West Virginia Writers Poetry Competition. Her poetry has appeared in various literary journals and publications including the anthologies* Wild Sweet Notes: Fifty Years of West Virginia Poetry 1950-1999 *(Publishers Place, Inc., 2000) and* Coal: A Poetry Anthology *(Blair Mountain Press, 2006).*