



ON THE ROAD

Newsletter
of the
**Anabaptist Association of
Australia and New Zealand Inc.**
No.20 September 2003

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Mark Your Calendars
AAANZ Bi-National Conference
21-24 January 2005
Greenhills Centre Canberra

“Duelling, slavery, and ritual human sacrifice are all human institutions which have been dispensed with by law due to a crystallized public opinion. The war method of settling disputes can be dispensed with in the same way simply by the decision to eliminate it from the lexicon of acceptable alternatives.”

- Jeannette Rankin, the lone U.S. Congress member who voted against entering World War II

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On The Road

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COVER SYMBOL: The lamb in the midst of briars is a traditional Anabaptist symbol. It illustrates the suffering Lamb of God, who calls the faithful to obedient service and discipleship on the road. This particular rendition is from *Hymnal A Worship Book* Copyright 1992. Reprinted with permission of Mennonite Publishing House, Scottsdale, PA, USA.

THE VIEW FROM EPHESIANS FOURMARK AND MARY HURST

...to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service

In a letter to friends in the USA, we reported on our recent around-the-world trip with this list (box on right).

Two responses we got to our report were:

"I find it interesting that you kept statistics such as how many cars you borrowed, homes you slept in, ate meals, etc. Pretty neat. Also some pretty obsessive note taking if you ask me."

"I always had a feeling that missionaries actually had it better than poor US church workers and your letter confirmed that. Anyone who can spend \$100,000 in ten days has more money than is good for them."

Well, we didn't spend all of it. We left some with our daughter. Obsessive note takers? Maybe, but we wanted to give people a feel for our trip and stop them from asking, "How were your holidays?"

A number of the articles in this issue of *ON THE ROAD* grow out of our trip. We include articles about the Mennonite Church USA gathering in Atlanta, Georgia and the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Our time in Zimbabwe had quite an impact on us, one we are still processing. There may be more about Zimbabwe in future issues.

The article "Following The Way of Abraham and Jesus" grows out of some preaching we did in churches in the USA and the review of *Captain America and the Crusade against Evil* from the reading we did to try to make sense of the strong US nationalism that was so evident during our stay in the States.

Homosexuality is an issue both here and in North America. We offer some thoughts and resources for your study.

We look forward to your letters, news reports, and articles you want to send our way.

We were

- gone from Sydney for 113 days
 - 3 months in the USA and Canada
 - 10 days in Zimbabwe
 - 10 days in Perth
- had 12 flights
- slept in 18 beds
- used 4 different currencies
 - exchanged US\$40 for Zimbabwean \$100,000
- visited 17 US states and 1 Canadian province
- attended one college graduation
 - Moriah's at Goshen College in May
- spoke in 14 churches (in three countries)
- had meetings with 2 mission boards
 - attended one missions retreat
- attended two church conferences
 - in Atlanta and Bulawayo
- ate at least 40 meals with people while visiting in their homes
- borrowed at least 7 vehicles during our travels
 - returned them all
- attended numerous family gatherings
 - including a 2nd birthday party for Noah, our grandson, and a 50th party for Mark
- dug a driveway, moved sod, shovelled stones, split wood, and trimmed trees and bushes for Mark's parents and sister
 - Mark got poison ivy in the process
- ate food we only get in Pennsylvania
 - sweet bologna, Turkey Hill ice tea, good sweet corn

PRESIDENT'S REPORTROSS COLEMAN

I turned fifty a few weeks ago!! The years tick by don't they? While the outside looks a little older, the inside still feels a lot younger. As part of the birthday celebrations Diane asked guests if they so chose to help pay for a Harbour Bridge climb. The generosity of people allowed both Diane and me to be involved.

I don't particularly like heights but warmed to the challenge. After being briefed on safety issues, we embarked on the climb. I must confess my legs felt very wobbly at times, as we scaled some steep ladders. Standing at the crest of the bridge, I was struck by the great view in all directions. We could see for kilometres making out objects that were never visible at ground level.

I believe it is time we did another type of climb as a movement. And it's this – to climb to a great height and affirm our vision. While we celebrate and affirm our past, it is vital that we set the directions for our future. It is easy to get involved in the day to day 'stuff' and loosen our hold on the bigger picture. The danger for any movement is that it can become a monument. We settle for familiarity and safety. We drift rather than set our sails to catch the wind of the spirit to use another image.

Over the next few months, I am inviting us as an association to revisit our collective vision and pursue the process of shaping our future.

We have come a long way as an association and can be thankful for the foundation laid in previous years. I am thankful for the wise leadership of my predecessor Doug Hynd who ably guided AAANZ at many levels.

I want to invite you to think and share what you think the priorities should be for this movement over the next three years or so. On November 15, a number of people in Sydney will be meeting to begin the process of clarifying our goals and strategies – your input and presence would be welcome. Please e-mail me with your comments. (coleman@ispdr.net.au) You will be notified of our deliberations.

I recall a visit by Stuart Murray-Williams from the UK a few years ago to Sydney. As he discussed Anabaptist approaches to church, mission and lifestyle he asked a formative question which is relevant to us - how is what we're doing "Good News" for the poor? As we seek God may we strengthen our grip on this vital value.

AAANZ is people who are committed to actively engaging with the issues of our world and standing with those most vulnerable locally and globally. AAANZ is an activist movement centred on Jesus, in word and deed. It's not for wimps! Let's continue the journey together.

Following the Way of Abraham and Jesus

MARK S. HURST

We were in the United States several months after the invasion of Iraq and I read with some distress the following in *The Mennonite's* "Readers Say" section:

[The editor] is correct that there is a significant discontinuity between the teaching position of our denomination and the private beliefs of many pew folk. I am a Mennonite and a patriot. But I am not a pacifist. This extreme peace stuff only comes in church discourse when our society is going through tension (like 9/11 and the Iraq war). As usual, the church elite are the only ones pushing the strict Sermon on the Mount construct that is totally unliveable. (Louann Richcreek, Goshen, Ind., May 6, 2003)

In another letter, a writer quotes these statistics:

"...only 40% of ordained leaders and 16% of nonleaders rank peacemaking as a high value."

Another article in the same issue of *The Mennonite* entitled "Bad Theology and government actions" (p.18) asks the question:

"Are we [Americans] destroying Iraq partly to satisfy the beliefs of dispensationalists who are trying to force Jesus to come again?"

The author says dispensationalism has become "the civil religion of the United States" and is about to "function as did the Christian community that was in charge during the Crusades." He encourages those of us with a different theology to speak up.

I will be clear with you from the outset. Mary and I are among those "church elite" who take seriously Jesus' Sermon on the Mount call to be peacemakers. It is a call for all followers of Jesus and it relates to every aspect of our lives – from the personal to the international and all levels in-between. Much of our work in Australia involves teaching people how to be peacemakers – children of the God who is the ultimate peacemaker.

In this article I will compare two ways of being "Christian" in our world today – the way of Joshua and the way of Abraham – and ask which way is most faithful to the way of Jesus. I came upon this contrast from a book entitled the *Rainbow Spirit Theology*, written by a group of Christian Australian Aboriginal elders. In their book they say:

We believe the story of Abraham offers a better way (than the story of Joshua), a way of peace rather than a way of war. Abraham's way was one of sharing, not destroying. For him the

1 Peter 3:8-16... calls us to be *Alternative,* *Attractive,* and *Articulate.*

land is a host country, not enemy territory. Abraham respects the people of the land and they in turn welcome him into their land. (82)

The way of Abraham and the way of Joshua. One a way of peaceful engagement with strangers, the other a way of violent conquering of evil enemies. One a life of being a resident alien, the other a conquering invader. One a respecter of local culture, the other a destroyer of all that is different.

Abraham left his homeland to live as an alien among strangers. He was not an invader or conqueror. He accepted the hospitality of his hosts but stayed true to his God even in a strange environment. He respected his hosts and used local reconciliation practices in settling disputes when they arose. Genesis 21:22-34 describes how he made an agreement with Abimelech, a local king, over a disputed well of water. The end of the passage says: "And Abraham resided as an alien many days in the land of the Philistines." He found a way to be both alien to the society around him and yet faithful to Yahweh, his God.

1 Peter uses this language of being "aliens" when it describes how we are to live. We are to be patient, respectful, and seek peace with those around us. The alternative is to follow the way of Joshua.

Joshua was a conqueror – a crusader. He entered strange and evil lands to take over by force. He destroyed the evil ones who got in his way. He was not interested in peaceful co-existence with local cultures and customs. His was the way of over-powering might.

The Bush administration (and other members of the "coalition of the willing"?) has bought into the way of Joshua. They have a mission to conquer the world for "good" and to destroy all the evil ones who stand in their way. They operate out of a permanent war setting, declaring war on any problem they see – crime, drugs, terror, etc. Listen to the language used in the USA for everything from advertising to sports. It is the language of war.

Many leaders in the US government are driven by a dispensational theology that says certain things have to happen in the world before Jesus will return and they want to actively help in that return process. War in the Middle East is part of the program so peace between Israel and her neighbours is not desirable. We were told by a well-meaning Christian brother that we are working against God by promoting peace in the Middle East.

Much of evangelicalism in the USA also supports a "Joshua" way of doing evangelism. Crusades, winning people to Christ, and aggressive evangelistic tactics all draw on the conquering way of Joshua. Enter the devil's territory and reclaim souls for God!

The authors of *Captain America and the Crusade against Evil* (Eerdmans, 2003) trace the zealous nationalistic stream in the history of the United States. They quote a columnist who wrote this after the September 11, 2001 attack:

We know who the homicidal maniacs are. They are the ones cheering and dancing right now. We should invade their

We believe the story of Abraham offers a better way (than the story of Joshua), a way of peace rather than a way of war. Abraham's way was one of sharing, not destroying. For him the land is a host country, not enemy territory. Abraham respects the people of the land and they in turn welcome him into their land. - Rainbow Spirit Theology, 82

countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity. (227)

This type of “conversion” is what Australian Aboriginals and others have experienced over the Christian centuries. It is Joshua–style conversion and no wonder Aboriginals prefer the way of Abraham.

Conversion on these zealously nationalistic terms has been experienced as cultural annihilation. In other words, converting others in the crucible of purification is simply another way of destroying them. (249)

I think the peaceful, respectful way of Abraham is more faithful to the way of Jesus. Romans 12:21 says that we are “to overcome evil with good”. More evil in the form of redemptive violence won’t do it. You really can’t save a village – or a country - by destroying it!

The way of Jesus is the way of God’s kingdom. It is the way of being salt and light and doing good in the world. It is the way of being resident aliens in a warring world yet patiently and respectfully dealing with those around us.

1 Peter 3:8-16 is a good summary of this way of living. It calls us to be *Alternative, Attractive, and Articulate*.

Alternative – In a world of continual warfare, aggression and violence, the life that Peter calls us to will be an alternative life. “Have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.” Not qualities useful in the war on terror! “Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but on the contrary, repay with a blessing.”

“Keep your tongues from evil...turn away from evil and do good...seek peace and pursue it.” And an important message for our time – “Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated.” Much of the war on terror is being driven by fear, particularly fear of the “other” whether they are our next door neighbour or a stranger. “Be alert, not alarmed!” is a fear-based government campaign. An alternative is to not be controlled by fear but be driven by love.

This alternative life is a disciplined life of peacemaking that involves daily developing these Jesus qualities and practicing them in a way that gets the attention of people around us – for good and bad. Remember, Jesus lived a life of “doing good” and it got him killed. So this takes costly action on our part.

Attractive - Going against the flow will get people’s attention. Living a Jesus lifestyle in a time of war will make you stand out. Verse 15 assumes that people will look at you and see someone who is hopeful in a time when hope is in short supply. They will “demand from you an accounting of the hope that is in you.”

Articulate – That is when you need to be ready to explain why you are different, why you are hopeful and why you don’t go with the war making flow. You need to be articulate about your faith and why it makes you different. But you need to do it in an Abrahamic way – “do it with gentleness and reverence (respect)”. Don’t do it in a Joshua way that overwhelms them.

People don’t like Christians who “Bible bash” them. Don’t give people answers to questions they are not asking. When you lead a life that is alternative and people are attracted to

it, be ready to articulate why you are the way you are. Earn the right to speak to others by the way you live.

The *Mennonite Confession of Faith* says this:

We believe that the church is called to live now according to the model of the future reign of God. Thus, we are given a foretaste of the kingdom that God will one day establish in full. The church is to be a spiritual, social, and economic reality, demonstrating now the justice, righteousness, love and peace of the age to come. The church does this in obedience to its Lord and in anticipation that the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord.

We have enough to keep us busy without trying to manipulate world events to try to force Jesus’ return. Living by kingdom values now is what we are called to do.

Stanley Hauerwas says:

The church must learn time and time again that its task is not to make the world the kingdom, but to be faithful to the kingdom by showing to the world what it means to be a community of peace.

Ours is not a call to conquer and control like Joshua but be faithful like Abraham. We are not ultimately responsible for what the government does, that is not our task. We are responsible though to demonstrate what God’s kingdom is all about.

Clarence Jordan explains it in terms of being a “demonstration plot” of the kingdom. He said this:

...if Jesus could make Simon the Zealot and Matthew the [tax collector] walk down the main street in Jerusalem, holding hands and calling one another “Brother,” the God Movement was here! This was to be a demonstration plot – not so much a preaching platform, but a demonstration plot that the God Movement was under way.

Jesus was trying to make a concrete, living demonstration of the God movement...He was not talking about the Kingdom of God in an abstract sense. He was saying, “The Kingdom of God is in your midst.” Where? “Right here. Here they are. Here are the fellows. This is the God Movement – right in your midst – and you are being confronted with it.” The Christian movement resorted more to fact than to argument. Those people were the direct evidence of the “kingdom” – the God Movement. (Cotton Patch Sermons, 61)

In this concrete expression of the kingdom of God that we live out, we have something the world needs. Clarence says:

It seems to me that we Christians have an idea here that the world is tremendously in need of. When we’re tottering fearfully on the brink of utter annihilation, looking so desperately for hope from somewhere, walking in deep darkness, looking for one little streak of light, do not we Christians have some light? Can’t we say “Sure, we know the way. It’s the way of love and peace. We shall not confront the world with guns in our hands and bombs behind our backs. We shall confront the world without fear, with utter helplessness except for the strength of God. (Cotton Patch Sermons, 76-77)

Wally Fahrner, an American pastoring in England’s post-Christendom environment sees that we in the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition have something to offer the rest of the church at this time. He says;

This Anabaptist vision of church...is a vision whose time has come. As Mordecai said of Esther, “Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.” (Esther 4:14b) I have begun to feel that God has preserved this vision

**We should invade their countries,
kill their leaders
and convert them to Christianity.
-Captain America and the Crusade against Evil, 227**

for just such a time. (*Building On The Rock*, 16)

My fear for Anabaptist/Mennonites, like the letter writer I began this article with, is that rather than accepting that we have a special role to play in this post-Christendom, war making environment, we will again slink back into our “quiet in the land” role. Pilgram Marpeck, a 16th century Anabaptist who successfully lived as a resident alien in his time, called the church to resist this temptation:

Pilgram Marpeck was committed to nonviolence...he thought of the church more as an outpost of God's love whose mission was to actively radiate that love out into the world...In Marpeck's understanding, the followers of Jesus would not isolate themselves from the world as if trying to defend a citadel of purity. Rather, they would open the windows and the doors, show forth God's love to the world, and invite unbelievers to come in.” (C.A Snyder, *From Anabaptist Seed*, 46)

We need to get out of our “God Boxes” and model the new life of God's kingdom. Judy Small, an Aussie folk singer, has a song with this chorus:

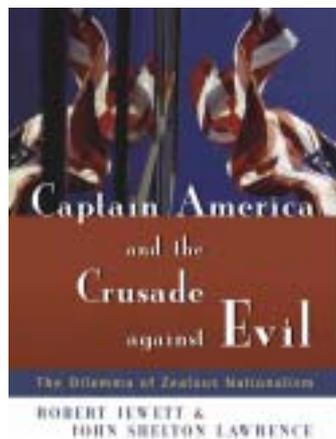
Until the swords turn into ploughshares/ Until the children eat their fill

Until the mansions admit the lowly/ There is no cause for standing still.

We have work to do. Love those around us. Seek peace and pursue it. Live without fear. Do good. Be alternative. Be attractive. Be articulate. AMEN

Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism

**ROBERT JEWETT AND
JOHN SHELTON
LAWRENCE, EERDMANS,
2003**



This almost 400-page tome is not light reading but if you want to understand American civil religion, this is a good place to start. The authors use the September 11 attacks on the United States as a backdrop for examining “the historical development of America's split personality, paying special attention to the spirit of zealous warfare that has so often seized the upper hand in policy and public opinion.” (5) The authors’ “analysis seeks to explain why America...seems so proudly resolute about repeating the errors of the Cold War.”

The authors see “two tributaries that run from the pages of the Bible down through American history...*zealous nationalism* (which) seeks to redeem the world by destroying enemies...(and) *prophetic realism* (which) avoids taking the stances of complete innocence and selflessness...(and) seeks to redeem the world for coexistence by impartial justice that claims no favored status for individual nations.” (8)

The authors see these strands as being “incompatible”. The times we are in have brought the strain between the two to a “breaking point”. They conclude:

We have a choice between redemptive violence and redemptive love

...that prophetic realism alone should guide an effective response to terrorism and lead us to resolve zealous nationalist conflicts through submission to international law; and that the crusades inspired by zealous nationalism are inherently destructive, not only of the American prospect but of the world itself. (9)

In looking at the American story, the authors discover that “the ideas of holy war have been combined with a distinctively American sense of mission in language that fuses secular and religious images.” (5) The authors, both Americans, do not challenge the notion that America has a mission to the world. They just come down on the side of “prophetic realism”.

The United States is uniquely suited by its constitutional heritage to participate in bringing the prophetic vision of a peaceable kingdom to international fruition...Extending this constitutional legacy into the international arena is the direction toward which Isaiah's vision and America's historic sense of mission beckon us...But before we can hope to succeed at such a mission, we must disentangle ourselves from the distortion of our heritage by adherence to zealous myths...We must become the kind of redeemer nation we are called to be, taking up the task of cooperating in world order without self-righteousness, not because we are superior, or somehow have a right to lead, but because we are called to be a servant and a light to the world. This is the vision that should brighten the horizon we will never fully reach...The American sense of mission...needs to be transformed rather than abandoned. (323-324)

And this comment:

Our sense of having been chosen as a nation must be refined and purified in the “furnace of affliction” (Isa.48:10) before we can begin to take up our rightful task of being a light to the nations and a servant of justice. (290)

My Anabaptist ears perk up whenever I hear anyone claiming a special God-given mission to the world for their nation. The church is called to a prophetic lifestyle of living out the peaceable kingdom – not America (or Australia, New Zealand, etc.). But despite the authors’ captivity to the American dream, they do give us an excellent critique of the United States’ zealous nationalism.

They use the comic book character Captain America to illustrate the zealous nationalism mentality – “as a kind of iconic shorthand for this tendency of popular entertainments to carry the zealous mainstream of political sentiment.” The creators of Captain America say this: “Captain America is not a representative of America itself, but of the American ideal – individual freedom, individual responsibility, moral sensitivity, integrity, and a willingness to fight for right.” (6)

Captain America operates outside of the normal legal system that is too slow to deal with real world problems. He selflessly uses redemptive violence to deal with the problem of evil. He is on the side of “right” so his use of power is justified. His crusading adventures are exciting and get the job done. He does not have to wait for the wheels of justice to roll slowly.

The “Popeye Syndrome,” based on the Popeye cartoon, is a form of stereotyping that justifies the hero's violent action:

Violence is golden when it's used to put evil down. - Dick Tracy

The threefold combination of the villain's established evil character, the fact that he attacked first, and his use of dirty and immoral tactics, not only justifies the hero's fighting back, but his complete and total subjugation or annihilation of the villain. (222)

In the words of the cartoon character Dick Tracy: "Violence is golden when it's used to put evil down." (245) This ideology believes "the whole world is to be redeemed by the total destruction of the enemy; lasting peace is to be secured by the application of violence; and the whole world is to be converted to freedom by the successful crusade." (256)

Ann Coulter, a writer who had lost a friend in the Pentagon crash on September 11, called for the following Captain America-like action to be taken:

This is no time to be precious about locating the exact individuals directly involved in this particular terrorist attack...We should invade their countries, kill their leaders and convert them to Christianity. We weren't punctilious about locating and punishing only Hitler and his top officers. We carpet-bombed German cities; we killed citizens. That's war. This is war. (11)

The authors identify six elements of the Captain America complex, "which it shares with Christian and Jewish zeal as well as with militant Islamic jihad":

- Each side views its anger as blessed by the deity, which thereby absolutizes zeal and jihad and eliminates normal restraint.
- Each side conceives of its opponents as members of a malevolent conspiracy, originating from the realm of absolute evil, and thus sees any compromise as immoral.
- The stereotypes of the actors in this conflict are stark and extreme, with all goodness on one side and absolute evil on the other.
- Such opponents must either be killed or converted. Each side believes that its own violence is redemptive, while it deplors the violence of the other side as senseless and unjust.
- To allow oneself to be defeated by the other side is to abandon faith itself, whether in the form of Christianity, Islam, or Judaism, and whether devoutly religious or explicitly secular.
- Every action of one's enemies is perceived to desecrate the holy, and overcoming such desecration is seen as a religious and political imperative whose fulfillment will usher in an era of peace. (24-25)

In chapter three, entitled "Popular Culture as a Bearer of the National Complex", the authors say the "American superhero tale(s) ...reveal themselves as secularized dramas of redemption in which innocent communities are saved by Everyman figures possessing superpowers." (28) These tales "amount to a kind of mythic induction into the cultural values of America."

Marva Dawn warns in her book *Is It A Lost Cause?* that one hour a week in church is not enough time to shape children into Christians when the rest of the week they are being bombarded by anti-Christian messages. The authors of this book agree:

...brief interludes at church, synagogue, or mosque are

far less likely to impart a significant vision of how to cope with the world's conflicts. But as the artistic creators of popular entertainments respond to current events with mythic scenarios, they help to shape the public sense of what is appropriate in confronting the crises of national and international life. (28)

A public entertained by redemptive violence, quick solutions brought about by superheroes, and a distrust of democratic structures is in trouble. This kind of entertainment "has the character of a tranquilizer, exchanging the sense of communal alarm and obligation for the fantasy of an Eden-like resolution achievable only by superhumans. The effect...is to encourage the very centralization of power that democratic theorists have considered to be the greatest potential danger to the political order." (40-41)

It does not only affect Americans. "The most sophisticated, cheapest, and thus most widely dispersed films and television programs come from Hollywood and New York, spreading the message of regeneration through violence across the entire world." (149)

The authors trace the two themes of zealous nationalism and prophetic realism in the Bible and then show how Americans latched onto the zealous nationalistic stream. This ideology gets expressed in songs like "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" that draws images from the Book of Revelation.

The Hymn was written in 1862 and used extensively by the North in the U.S. Civil War. Themes from Revelation are twisted so that "the redemptive task of the Northern soldiers is neatly shifted from annihilating the enemy to altruistically setting people free. The unselfish mission of the suffering, dying servant is incorporated into that of the warrior. The soldier dies – not killing others, but suffering for others." (63)

The Book of Revelation gets blamed for much of the misplaced American zeal. "Revelation stands triumphantly at the end of the canon, submerging the strand of prophetic realism – including the message of Jesus – under a grandiose flood of zealous images and ideas." (53)

It is not just American culture that buys into zealous nationalism. "Every culture has episodes of zealous violence...That is why it is inappropriate at the present to concentrate a crusade against Islamic terrorism...It is far more appropriate for us, while seeking forms of international law enforcement, to probe our own religious traditions...to find resources that might transform zeal and jihad into more responsible and humane dimensions that match our professed political values." (165)

The authors "recommend the cultivation of myths associated with prophetic realism – tolerant myths that make it possible to live with others who do not share the same beliefs...(without which) the entire world could come to resemble the ruins at the foot of Manhattan Island." (166)

The Captain America complex divides the world into two camps – the good and the evil. The authors say our "only hope is to take the realistic point of view that evil and good are so

A public entertained by redemptive violence, quick solutions brought about by superheroes, and a distrust of democratic structures is in trouble.

inextricably mixed in mortals that precise solutions are impossible and consequently that coexistence under law is essential...God alone can separate precisely between good and evil; humans must devise the means to live together in the meantime.” (213) “A new and more humane form of social interaction becomes possible when one discovers the humanity of one’s opponent.” (242)

Hosea is held up as prophet for our times:

Hosea’s insights into the cause and shape of violent decay are highly appropriate for the time of jihad. The power of his ideas, and their systematic neglect by a people that claims to take inspiration from the Bible, are evidence of how firmly rooted zealous nationalism is in our culture. (261)

We have a choice between redemptive violence and redemptive love, the authors say. If we choose the way of:

...redemptive love under the aegis of international law enforcement, then we must repudiate the mystique of violence and its policies once and for all. Hypocrisy merely adds extra flavors of bitterness to the ashes of holy war. These two paths are mutually exclusive, as Hosea demonstrated some 2,600 years ago. It is time for this prophet, whom Judaism, Islam, and Christianity all acknowledge as authoritative, to finally come into his own. (272)

Another trait of Americans that comes under scrutiny in this book is “the desire to be right as well as victorious.” (274) Americans equate being right with winning and being wrong with losing. The authors trace this theme back into the book of Deuteronomy. Francis Scott Key picked up this Deuteronomic principle in the third stanza of “The Star-spangled Banner”:

*Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: ‘In God is our Trust.’* (277)

The authors argue that “a people nurtured on the Deuteronomic dogma will allow the most atrocious acts to be committed in its name so long as they promise to hold off defeat a while longer.” (287)

The antidote is “Paul’s theology of the cross, with its grasp of the tragedy of life, its forthright acceptance of human weakness, and its bulwarks against human pride.” (290)

The authors throughout their book paint a negative picture of the Book of Revelation. For a more positive view go to Nelson Kraybill’s article “Revelation says more about church life today than about how the world will end” (Copyright © 1999 Christianity Today. October 25, 1999 Vol. 43, No. 12, Page 30) at: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/9tc/9tc030.html>.

Also, note the new release from Herald Press in its Believers Church Bible Commentary Series, **Revelation**, by John R. Yeatts.

REVIEWED BY MARK S. HURST

Sexuality and the Church

Social issues come and go. The way they affect the church varies. Sexuality issues have hit church denominations worldwide; issues like homosexuality and the nature of marriage. You only have to read the “Letters to the Editor” in church periodicals to know that people have strong feelings on these issues – and these feelings and views cover a whole spectrum.

Here are some snippets from letters to *Insights*, the magazine of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia, September 2003:

...I am comforted to know that our church has shown the

way by giving comfort to a group [homosexuals] in our midst who have been treated as lepers and untouchables.

...I confess to being confused and I humbly admit I do not have answers to the pain I am feeling in my soul over life in our church at the moment.

...The National Assembly of the Uniting Church has just written possibly the longest suicide note in church history. The process which produced it was disgraceful.

...The last person to detect bad breath is usually the person who has it. Might I suggest that the Uniting Church in Australia has bad breath, at least at the Assembly level...Our decision-making structures urgently need a complete overhaul which should go right to “the guts” of the church. We need more than the mouthwash of “ecclesiastical double speak” coming from our leadership to cover the odour.

...I am delighted to be part of a church that is not content to just cling to the past but is prepared to trust God’s Spirit to continue to bring new insights about how to apply the unchanging gospel of Christ to each succeeding generation of people.

...When looking at controversial issues from every angle, remember – despite sound academically convincing arguments and political correctness – from the beginning SIN was and is always SIN not INS or NIS.

...the educated church leaders seem to be reading a different Bible.

...There are many sins worse.

...The church has forfeited its right to be taken seriously.

...When I am faced with a question like the one about homosexual clergy, I know exactly what I should do. I turn to Jesus. Jesus accepted sinners, lepers, tax collectors, and all sorts. He loves homosexuals – good ones, bad ones, and he especially approves of faithful ones.

And here are some comments from letters in the **Canadian Mennonite**, September 8, 2003 issue:

...pertaining to Mennonite pastors marrying same-sex couples...A marriage in a Mennonite church should be between a man and a woman for a lifetime commitment.

...Opposition to the marriage of two women or two men is merely an extension of the argument against gays and lesbians being members or leaders in the church...This leaves me saddened for the church. The loss through this division, this exclusion, is tremendous...regardless of what the Mennonite Church decides...I have a sincere and truthful connection to God and a sacred commitment with my partner. The church can deny it, but thankfully God’s love is much stronger than human statements.

...do we all need to take a deep breath and forbear with each other as each congregation tries to make its own best way? More clarity is needed.

...But homosexuality is an abomination to God.

Do you find yourself somewhere in that mixture of thoughts and feelings? How do we even discuss these issues? An article in the **Canadian Mennonite** entitled “Let’s make our peace with conflict” by Matthew Bailey-Dick gives some helpful suggestions. You can read it at:

<http://www.canadianmennonite.org/7-16/contents.html>

Sexuality issues are often debated in the church as stand-alone issues. Bible verses are thrown back and forth and little clarity comes from the debates. The two resources listed below put these issues into a larger context. They take seriously all of

scripture when looking at sexuality issues. They also take seriously our cultural setting and how that has affected the discussion.

Sex and the City of God

A narrative theology of sexuality in the context of creation, fall and redemption

GORDON PREECE, ZADOK PAPER, WINTER 2003

This Zadok paper (check www.zadok.org.au for more information on Zadok) is a revised version of a paper first presented in July 2000 at the Ridley College Centre for Applied Ethics conference "Sex and the City of God". Gordon Preece is Director of the Centre at the University of Melbourne and a Lecturer in Ethics and Practical Theology. He is an ordained Anglican minister, author, editor, and member of AAANZ. A recent announcement states that Gordon will succeed Robert Banks as Director and Dean at Macquarie Christian Studies Institute from July 2004 (Melbourne's loss, Sydney's gain!).

Gordon's whole paper (only 20 pages) should be read to get his full argument but I will attempt to highlight some of his thoughts. Preece states:

I offer an alternative, but not like that espoused by fundamentalist Islamic or some Christian family values moralists...I want to stress that misguided sexuality is cause, not for condemnation, but compassion. (1)

The discussion of sexuality issues is so loaded with emotional freight that to even enter the debate, is to be in danger of being labelled. Preece is brave enough to plunge in but tries to head off stereotyping with this self disclosure:

While I can be described as a conservative on sexual, family and life issues, though not on many others, I am uncomfortable with either heterosexist or homophobic attitudes. (3)

He uses the TV show *Sex and the City* as an example of postmodern sex etiquette and finds that "hypermobile postmodern individualism turns love into a form of narcissism and 'all sexual behaviour into a form of masturbation.'" (2)

Against this cultural example of today he places Saint Augustine's *City of God* with its "profoundly biblical narrative theology of creation, fall and redemption." (4) Preece sees in the created order "the pattern of our sexual ecology...creation is in kinds or species (Genesis 1) not just in our minds." (4)

He refutes the kind of thinking that says, "...we must understand relationships in the Christian *koinonia* in terms of each individual's self-understanding" or "perceived sexual orientation".

This is compassion without a moral compass. "God's 'compassion', at great cost, recreates the creature as a creature".

...this created order...includes the basic difference, otherness or more conventionally complementarity of male and female designed to image or represent God to each other relationally and sexually...Homosexual practice is therefore wrong because it is a sexist...rejection of that basic difference, and an overturning of the created order, exchanging natural relations for unnatural ones (Romans 1:26-27ff). (4)

Sexuality's personal and relational aspects need to be emphasized:

Instead of being a form of sexual solitaire, sex is an expression of our personal, relational nature as men and women made in God's relational, Trinitarian image...the essence of sex is for permanent personal union, which then provides the

appropriate personal and permanent context for raising children. (8)

Paul's corporate view of the Christian's body as primarily a member of the body of Christ needs to be recaptured:

There is no such thing as sex being a purely private thing. The personal is political. When we bed people we are representatives of the body of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians chs. 6, 10, 11-12)...Paul and the early Christians were engaged in a form of Christian social and political construction that we need to recapture to regain our integrity and distinctiveness as the body of Christ. (11)

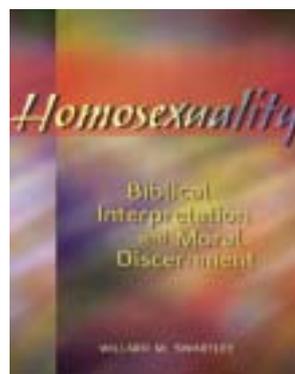
Preece says sexuality issues are discipleship issues. Our Christian faith should be determining our views and not "trendy, inner-city westerners". Our Christian communities should be strong enough to "model Christ-like relationships for our younger people under such pressure to conform sexually." (11)

An hour on Sunday, or once a fortnight or month, is too thin for that. Without such communal structures we will lapse into mere pharisaical moralism, pontificating and making heavy burdens for them to bear through many years from puberty on. (12)

One of the strengths of this paper is the practical discipleship issues that Preece raises. How practically do our young people resist the sex-saturated messages they constantly get from the society around them? How will our churches support them? How do we help them resist "corporate paedophilia and sexual targeting"?

Like the ancient Greeks we need to mentor and apprentice young people, not just boys, into mature, sexual adulthood and citizenship of the city or polis, not in pederastic, homosexual style, as some wrongly claim they advocated, but into citizenship of the city of God as the highest good, even higher than the created good of sexuality.

A full range of healthy relationships needs to be modelled in our church communities, including same-sex and non-sexual opposite-sex friendships. Intimacy needs are there for all of us in the body of Christ and healthy ways should be found to meet these needs.



Homosexuality Biblical Interpretation and Moral Discernment **WILLARD M. SWARTLEY, HERALD PRESS, 2003**

"Willard Swartley's thoughtful and candid book is a significant contribution to the church's larger debate about same-sex relationships. He summarizes much of the recent literature, providing a distinctively Mennonite perspective even as he engages other Christian traditions."

-A. Katherine Grieb, Virginia Theological Seminary

Grounded in a lifetime of biblical study, New Testament scholar Willard M. Swartley takes a fresh look at the Scriptures and what they would teach the church on the current and controversial subject of homosexuality. In a spirit of love and generosity, Swartley presents all sides of the issue, drawing from contemporary scholarship and cultural analysis. He concludes with a model for congregational discernment and suggestions for the path forward.

Willard M. Swartley is professor of New Testament at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Indiana, USA. He has served as dean of the seminary, director of the Institute of Mennonite Studies, and as New Testament Editor of the Believers Church Bible Commentary Series (Herald Press).

From the start of my ruminations on this topic, I have felt that analysis of twentieth-century western cultural forces is needed to help us understand our current moral predicament. (23)

While Swartley sees a role for cultural forces in shaping sexual identity, he does not want to give it too much power.

This does not mean resignation to these forces, but an acknowledgement that we are dealing not only with individual persons, but also with cultural systems that work against God's pattern for human life...and we ourselves have been affected to greater or lesser degrees by these forces. (24)

As an Anabaptist scholar, Swartley takes scripture seriously so a good part of the book is taken up with hermeneutical issues. He agrees with Mauser who said, "it is a fundamental mistake to discuss biblical statements on homosexuality in isolation from the positive ethos of human sexuality in scripture." (25)

While Swartley examines all sides of the interpretive questions when looking at the texts that deal with homosexual behaviour he says:

I believe, however, that the traditional reading of Scripture on this issue is more truthful, since the biblical texts are quite consistent and this position fits the overall scriptural view of sexuality as well. (30)

He also believes that homosexuality cannot be properly examined in the church "without also addressing [the] larger cultural phenomenon of extra- and pre-marital sex." (40) He finds it "striking that in our culture the possibility of freely choosing to be a eunuch in order to avoid violation of the divine will in sexual relationships is rarely considered or mentioned." (42)

As followers of Christ, we are called to be welcoming and hospitable to people of homosexual orientation and practice, regardless of our views on homosexuality. In the debate over homosexuality, it is often mentioned that Jesus loved sinners and spent time with them. But, "Jesus nowhere condoned the sin of the sinners to whom he graciously related. Rather, he empowered them into a transformed status in society." (44) "When Jesus relates to and accepts the marginalized he offers transformation and healing, so that the person is not only accepted but changed." (96)

Jesus did not give up on "holiness" and only act out of compassion. "It is a cheap deal to sacrifice holiness for compassion. Jesus' uniqueness lay precisely in his embodiment of both simultaneously." (44)

This raises questions like "How do we balance biblical justice and discipline?" "How does biblical holiness fit with compassion and inclusion?" "Are inclusiveness and discipline incompatible?"

Swartley quotes Ron Sider who says:

We seem to have confused compassion with relativism and the tragic result is that our sexual practices, divorce rates, and economic lifestyles look more and more like those of the rest of North American society. (96)

Swartley pleads with the church to not get bogged down in the debate over homosexuality and "neglect the church's call

to mission." (47) He argues that "this issue is essentially a pastoral issue, in the pastor's care for members, not a political issue, as it has become in our society and even in the church." (48)

Chapter five, "Analysis of Contemporary Western Culture", provides helpful insights that are not often brought to the homosexuality debate. Here are just a few:

- Homosexuality flourishes in societies of luxury, and thus appears to have a strong link to economics. (78)
- The disintegration of the family is a primary factor behind the sexual revolution that directly bears on the homosexuality crisis of our time. (78)
- The only climate in which homosexuality could become a key cultural factor in personal identity is one in which being "sexually active" precedes a committed relationship that entails marriage and potential family responsibilities. (79)
- The modern view of a homosexual identity is just that – the product of modern culture...interconnected with the forces of modern urbanization...The urban setting provides for freedom and self-realization on individualistic terms, without communal accountability, exactly what is culturally needed for homosexual experimentation in relationships of numerous types. (80)
- The loss of celibacy as an honoured preference is much related to the development of the romantic view of marriage in western culture and the sexual revolution of the twentieth century, with a major shift in understanding regarding the primary purpose for sexual intercourse. (81)
- In terms of population, even within the church, celibacy looms as an issue as important to address as homosexuality. (81)

The Biblical work we do on this issue is important but Swartley says:

Just as we contest the "myth of redemptive violence" that is so much a part of our western culture...we also need to challenge the "rights" and individualistic ethos of our culture, especially when it devalues one's identity in community. (101)

For the Biblical work, Swartley highly recommends Richard Hays and his methodology to assess how Scripture functions for the church in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. Swartley applies Hay's "fourfold task" to this issue in chapter six and comes to the same conclusions Hays does:

The New Testament offers no accounts of homosexual Christians, tells no stories of same-sex lovers, ventures no metaphors that place a positive construal on homosexual relations. (108)

Swartley concludes with "three factors [that] must be central for the church in the journey ahead:"

First, we need to be more explicit on the authority of Scripture, without recycling old fundamentalist-liberal debates. Second, we need to listen to voices from the worldwide church, from brothers and sisters outside western culture...Third, we will need to be proactive in providing pastoral care of all in our congregation, for whatever sexual issues they deal with. (132-133)

The book contains seven helpful Appendices, thorough Notes, a Bibliography that would help anyone looking for current literature on the debate, and handy Scripture and Subject Indexes. Each chapter ends with a prayer and sometimes scripture. This provides an almost devotional tone to the study of a very difficult topic.

AROUND THE WORLD



Reconciliation in Switzerland

An unusual reconciliation movement is underway between Reformed Christians in Switzerland and Anabaptists in North America.

In May, about 50 Amish and 17 Mennonites from the United States travelled to Winterthur, Switzerland, for a conference initiated by Swiss Reformed leaders. It was entitled “Heal

our land—Steps to reconciliation with the Anabaptists.”

The overseas guests were welcomed by almost 1,000 people, including Reformed pastors and Swiss Anabaptists. Local Mennonite leaders presented lectures on the history and current status of Anabaptism.

A Reformed leader made a public declaration of repentance for the atrocities of the sixteenth century. About 50 pastors joined him in asking for forgiveness. These same leaders then washed the feet of the Anabaptists in a moving act of reconciliation.

An account in the *Sunday News*, Lancaster, Pennsylvania describes it this way:

Reformed pastors in their clerical robes washed the feet of the Amish delegation and then stood and removed their clerical collars to give them to Ben Girod, an Amish bishop, as a sign of their desire to be reconciled. Thirty Reformed state church pastors knelt on stage before the Lancaster Mennonite and Amish leaders and tearfully asked for and received a verbal affirmation of forgiveness from every Anabaptist leader and his wife. Reformed pastors lined up across the front of the auditorium, receiving prayers of blessing from individual Anabaptist representatives. Water spilled out on hands all over the auditorium, as Reformers and Anabaptists asked each other to wash their hands in a symbolic cleansing of guilt and repentance.

The president of the Reformed state church read a statement of apology from the Grossmunster church in Zurich, where many “guilty” verdicts had been brought against the first Anabaptists who were executed and, for the first time in history, an Anabaptist preached from the pulpit of the Grossmunster.

At Trachselwald castle, where many Anabaptist ancestors had been incarcerated and tortured before being taken to execution, a leading government official of the region and a brother in Christ, Markus Grossenbacher, publicly asked forgiveness on behalf of the government of the Trachselwald region for the sins done there.

In Schaffhausen, Sabine Aschmann, a Reformed pastor, sensed God asking her to return a part of what had been stolen from the Anabaptists. In response, she gave as a gift of restitution to the Lancaster Mennonites, her family’s rare and priceless copy of a Froschauer Bible.

The Bible, printed by Sabine’s family in 1538 for the Anabaptists, had been confiscated during the persecution years. It remains as one of a few copies of these Anabaptist Bibles that exist today.

This reconciliation effort began in August 2002 when some Swiss Reformed leaders attended a “Watchmen for the

Nations” conference in Prince Edward Island, Canada. Watchmen (<http://www.watchmen.org/index.html>) is a Christian ministry that helps church leaders in various nations come to “the biblical understanding that when the past sins of a nation or people group are addressed, a renewed sense of God’s presence and authority may be realized.” The movement is led by David Demian, an Egyptian physician who is now a Canadian citizen.

At the 2002 event, Reformed participants met some Amish leaders and shared experiences of their past. “It became clear that the time had come to take some steps toward dealing with past sins and seek the Lord for reconciliation and healing,” said one participant.

In the fall of 2002, three Amish couples from the U.S. visited Reformed leaders in Switzerland. In January 2003, Swiss church leaders paid a return visit to Amish communities in Montana and Idaho.

Also in January, Andreas Keller from Switzerland and two Amish leaders met with Mennonite leaders in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. They visited the Long Barn, a site where reconciliation between Reformed and Anabaptists had been attempted in 1767. At that time, Anabaptists were not able to receive the Reformed brother who wanted to reconcile.

Now in 2003, on the anniversary of the first re-baptisms in Switzerland (January 21, 1525), the Anabaptists warmly welcomed the Reformed brother into their midst and the group had communion together.

Dale Gehman, Eastern Mennonite Missions photographer, wrote this after attending the May “Heal Our Land” conference:

This was the most incredible event I’ve ever covered or participated in my life. This is a very significant spiritual turning point for us Anabaptists. We have been the “Quiet in the Land” for hundreds of years as a result of the years of persecution. Our forefathers sinned, by becoming angry and bitter. This sin caused generational curses that have been passed down from generation to generation. We also needed to ask the Reformed State church for forgiveness for our sins of anger and bitterness. (Note: Not all Anabaptist have experienced these generational issues. I for one had!)

If we Anabaptists can accept the offered forgiveness, we can pick up the fire of the earlier Anabaptists, reaching the world for Christ.

—From reports by Albert Zehr

<http://www.canadianmennonite.org/7-14/contents.html>

Janet K. Richards <http://www.jdweaver.com/forgiven.html>

Dale Gehman <http://www.churchandmedia.org/news.asp?issue=1604&art=08>





Atlanta 2003 Mennonite Church USA Convention

The theme of the Mennonite Convention was “God’s Table, Y’all Come!” This is based on Jesus’ words in Luke 13:29, “The people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.”

Nearly 8,000 Mennonites gathered in Atlanta, Georgia, July 3-8 for the inaugural convention of the

new denomination Mennonite Church USA. This national gathering, held every two years, is organized around two conventions that occur simultaneously—the youth convention (5,043 registrants) and the adult/young adult convention (2,459). Separate conventions for children (234) and junior high youth (220) provided high-quality activities for the children of youth group sponsors and adult delegates.

Each church wide convention develops a life and culture of its own. Much of the culture that emerges is shaped by the city and facilities in which the convention is held. The same was true with this one.

In a city central to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the convention focused repeatedly on race relations and the long way the church has yet to go to become a truly antiracist church. The facility also shaped the convention experience. Even with 8,000 participants, the convention rattled around a bit in the mammoth Georgia Congress World Center and required extensive walking from venue to venue.

But finally, the purpose of such a gathering was to do the work of the church. That included the actions taken in delegate sessions as well as powerful worship experiences that continue to function as a time of spiritual renewal for many church members. The work of the church represented by the youth convention focused on calling youth to make a first-time commitment to Christ or a recommitment. Hundreds responded.

The shape of future conventions may change, however. While enjoying the first-ever convention for members of Mennonite Church USA, doing the work of the church without Mennonite Church Canada sisters and brothers made Atlanta 2003 significantly different from previous conventions. Consequently, it appears that the adult convention in the future will need to choose between meeting with the youth convention or with Mennonite Church Canada. Apparently, it is not possible to accommodate all at the table because doing so makes the cost prohibitive and limits the locations possible for such an event.

Atlanta 2003 didn’t celebrate its historic achievements with many fireworks. Instead, it was devoid of the levels of anxiety and contentiousness that had generated plenty of sparks at past conventions during the process of merging the Mennonite Church (MC) and General Conference Mennonite Church (GC) into Mennonite Church USA. Other than one report from the denominational Executive Board, the long-time twin troubles of church membership and homosexuality were largely absent.

Atlanta 2003 was the first time that former MC congregations and former GC area conferences could send delegates to the denominational assembly. Previously the MC delegate assembly was composed of area conference representatives, while GC assemblies were composed of congregational representatives. The Mennonite Church USA assembly includes both congregational and conference delegates, with about 85 percent of Atlanta delegates coming from congregations.

Two of the conference highlights were hearing former US president Jimmy Carter speak on the opening night and singing hymns with over a thousand other singers in the Centennial Olympic Park, the site of the bombing during the Atlanta Olympics. For news articles on these events and others at the conference, the resolutions passed and photographs of the event go to: <http://www.mennoniteusa.org/atlanta.htm>

Africa Tops Anabaptist Membership List

Africa now has more baptized Mennonite, Brethren in Christ and related church members than any other continent. According to census figures released in June by Mennonite World Conference (MWC), membership in Africa stands at 451,959, slightly more than the 451,180 members in North America.

With an increase of 45,980 members since 2000, Africa has for the first time moved ahead of North America, where growth in the same time period was 7,262.

Total estimated membership in the 200 Mennonite-related church bodies in 65 countries now stands at 1,297,716, up from 1,203,995 in 63 countries in 2000.

Methods of counting vary widely, but MWC attempts to treat reports as consistently as possible. Churches are included in the directory if they are rooted in the Anabaptist-Mennonite stream of church history or have direct fellowship with churches that are so rooted. New listings in the 2003 directory include churches in Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal and South Korea.

—From MWC release

WORLD MEMBERSHIP NUMBERS

BY CONTINENT

	2000	2003
Africa	405,979	451,959
Asia/Pacific	184,049	208,155
Central/S.America/ Caribbean	112,128	133,150
N.America	443,918	451,180
Europe	57,921	53,272

BY COUNTRY

United States	323,329	Tanzania	50,000
Congo	194,119	Germany	31,677
Canada	127,851	Kenya	31,556
India	127,348	Zimbabwe	29,213
Ethiopia	98,025	Paraguay	27,693
Indonesia	71,302		

TOTAL MEMBERSHIP: 1,297,716

MWC World Assembly



Editors' note: The Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe is difficult to capture in one article. We are sharing several from Mennonite writers who attended the Assembly. For more go to MWC's website: <http://www.mwc-cmm.org/>

Zimbabweans' Hospitality

Mennonite Church USA Executive Board delegates to Africa 2003 discovered that just as the Zambezi River rushes over Victoria Falls, so does suffering spill into Zimbabwe with widespread death from HIV/AIDS, food and fuel shortages, a collapsing economy, high inflation and 70 percent unemployment.

But just as the magnitude of Victoria Falls fills people with wonder, the Africans' joy and generosity struck the delegates with amazement. How could people with such great struggles extend such great welcome at Mennonite World Conference's Assembly Gathered in Bulawayo on August 11 through 17?

Grappling with this mystery left no easy answers in the stark contrast between North American material abundance and Zimbabwe's needs. But forging new relationships in Bulawayo showed delegates that it's not how much one owns but how much one shares that most impacts the global Anabaptist family of faith, delegates said.

Their African brothers and sisters modelled this spirit, expressed in the Assembly theme, "Sharing Gifts in Suffering and Joy." Relationships are being shaped by the sharing of gifts and needs across and between continents and churches rather than driven by prior north-south mission relationships.

"Even though Mennonite Church USA is one of the largest denominations represented in MWC, when I look at our relationship in light of how many people from so many different places are here, I see how small we really are," said delegate Duane Oswald, moderator of Mennonite Church USA.

"I think it's easy for North Americans to think that we are at the centre of the universe and that we are the be all and end all. But we have a lot to learn from other parts of the church — particularly those in Africa. One thing they're showing us is tremendous hospitality at a time when they have nothing."

Delegate Miriam Book said she was struck with how people with scant physical resources have a lavish dependence on God that's harder for North Americans to attain because of their more secure lifestyles.

"MWC staff say that even though the organization doesn't have an abundance of wealth, it has an abundance of faith and uses the phrase, 'we do what we can with what we have,'" Book said. "MWC identifies with local people who said that even though other North Americans told us not to come during this uncertain time, we needed to come by faith. By coming, we are expressing solidarity and standing with them in faith that God provides."

Book joined about 6,300 Mennonites and Brethren in Christ (BIC) from churches across Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe and North America. The BIC Church of Zimbabwe at the Zimbabwe International Trade Centre hosted the gathering.

MWC General Council

Mennonite World Conference (MWC) reconfirmed a direction for the future when its General Council adopted a new model for operations. The Council also added a subtitle to its name.

Dubbed the "communion / community model," the operational plan calls for MWC member churches to become mutually accountable to each other and grow in common identity. MWC is to facilitate this process by helping member churches develop a common set of core convictions and common ways of living out these convictions.

The model calls for MWC churches to act as a worldwide body, not just as independent churches doing things together. For example, member churches will be encouraged to intentionally submit to the scrutiny of other MWC churches to learn how what they do might affect other members.

In a final session, delegates agreed to retain the name Mennonite World Conference but add a description subtitle to the organization's designation: "a community of Anabaptist-related churches."

Generating even more discussion than a name change was a report on Mennonite-Catholic dialogue in which MWC has participated over the past five years.

The report and recommendation were especially troubling to Latin American delegates, who spoke of intimidation and abuses by the Catholic Church in their countries. In the end, Latin American delegates joined those from other continents in approving all parts of the recommendation on Mennonite-Catholic dialogue.

General Council also heard pleas from several African women theologians for more equality in how they are treated as leaders in the church. They told of preferential treatment for male leaders in such things as educational scholarships and church positions and asked MWC to make the treatment of women leaders a priority for its work in the future. The General Council agreed to do so.

Feeding The 7,000

Among the many miracles at Africa 2003, surely the greatest was the feeding of the nearly 7,000.

Just how does one provide two nutritious, tasty meals a day for that many people or more for seven days in a country with a severe food shortage, amid a serious economic crisis, in a facility lacking commercial kitchen equipment?

With ingenuity, meticulous planning, an army of workers and the implacable faith of chief planner Thoko Ndlovu, who began working on the food program two years ago.

Each day, assembly goers consumed 1,200 kg of mealie meal (the basis of Zimbabwe's staple food, a maize porridge called sadze), the beef from six to eight cattle, 1,200 kilograms of potatoes, 500 kg of rice and 7,500 oranges or other fruit - plus tonnes of fresh and cooked vegetables and salads, juices and tea. And all cooked in the Zimbabwean traditional way for big feasts: in gigantic cast-iron pots over open fires.



Procuring such quantities presented unique challenges, with drought and the economic crisis forcing nongovernmental organizations to provide food aid to millions in particularly hard-hit southern and central Zimbabwe.

In spite of the challenges, “I’ve always been positive,” Ndlovu said. “I think it was really God’s guidance we were able to procure that food.”

Negotiations many months earlier with the grain marketing board in the northern part of the country, where food is more plentiful, ensured that there would be enough maize to fill the assembly needs. Chickens were ordered months in advance from a Brethren in Christ poultry farmer. Contracts were struck with small market gardeners in the area around Bulawayo to grow a variety of vegetables, including carrots, butternut (squash), cabbage and a leafy green vegetable called chomolier, specifically for the event.

Forty beef cattle were provided by the Wanezi mission station some 80 km from Bulawayo, which were shipped live, hygienically butchered and refrigerated in a city abattoir until needed to ensure healthiness.

These special means of procurement ensured that assembly goers needn’t worry they were taking food out of the mouths of hungry Zimbabweans, Ndlovu said. In fact, for many poor and rural participants, some of whom paid the equivalent of only \$1 U.S. to attend, the luxury of eating meat daily made this a special celebration.

The pots were hired from a local company and borrowed from community clubs. Ndlovu herself donated the use of reusable plastic plates, cups and eating utensils for 7,500 people. Truckloads of firewood were brought in to stoke the dozens of small fires over which the food was cooked.

But finding the goods was only part of the job.

“To set up a menu for the whole week for different nations, and make sure that food was acceptable, was really the greatest challenge,” Ndlovu said. “We tried to make it as simple as we could so that at least we were able to serve almost everybody with everything that we prepared for the day. After the first two days we could see that it seemed to be working.”

Most meals consisted of rice, sadze, a flavourful meat stew, a vegetable and a salad, with fresh fruit. The food was traditional Zimbabwean, but from recipes developed in Ndlovu’s “hobby” - catering to large functions such as weddings and funerals, for which she has fed up to 3,000 people at a time. But never for so many, for so long.

Assembly participants who wandered into the cooking area tucked behind the main dining hall were amazed to see dozens of pots of food simmering in the open air, being stirred with large paddles. Though the means might seem very basic, Ndlovu said, being able to produce perfectly cooked food in such quantities involves practiced technique.

The day before the assembly began, Ndlovu received a call at 6:30 p.m. saying that 100 Zambians had just arrived, tired

and famished from a day on the bus without food. Could she help?

Quickly, she went to the assembly site to gather food, rounded up her sister and daughters, started the cooking fires in her own yard and began to prepare a meal. By 10:30 p.m., the food was ready, delivered and being served to the grateful Zambian group in their lodgings.

“They really welcomed our gesture to assist them,” Ndlovu said modestly about a feat that would have defeated most cooks in countries with many more resources at their disposal. In Zimbabwe, the welcoming “Woza” - “come” - was never experienced more heartily than at the table.

MWC ‘Core Convictions’

Anabaptists around the world will study a new statement on beliefs they have in common over the next three years.

The new statement is not a confession of faith, but it might be used by those of MWC’s 90 member churches in 54 countries that do not have one, council members said.

The document’s seven points describe basic beliefs held in common with most Christians, such as salvation through Christ, as well as beliefs Anabaptists emphasize, such as nonviolence.

Nelson Kraybill, president of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana (USA) who helped draft the statement, said it could be used to define who belongs to the Anabaptist family. Tom Finger, a U.S. theologian, said the statement could be useful for defining Anabaptism to others.

The statement lists the following points:

1. God is known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator who seeks to restore fallen humanity by calling a people to be faithful in fellowship, worship, service and witness.
2. Jesus is the Son of God who showed in his life and teaching how to be faithful, and through his cross and resurrection redeemed the world.
3. The church is a community of those whom God’s Spirit calls to turn from sin, acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, receive baptism upon confession of faith and follow Christ in life.
4. The faith community, under Holy Spirit guidance, interprets the Bible in the light of Jesus Christ to discern God’s will for our obedience.
5. The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all areas of life so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice and share our possessions with those in need.
6. The faith community gathers regularly to worship, to celebrate the Lord’s Supper and to hear the Word of God in a spirit of mutual accountability.
7. We seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God’s grace by serving others, caring for creation and inviting all people to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

MWC Statement on Zimbabwe

The Brethren in Christ Church (Zimbabwe) hosted more than 6,200 Mennonite World Conference Assembly 14 registrants with grace and generosity despite living under great hardship due to difficult political and socio-economic conditions.

"It has become clear that it is inappropriate to come and say nothing about the situation in Zimbabwe," said Larry Miller, MWC Executive Secretary, to the newly elected General Council on August 17.

Miller also noted that the MWC General Council had issued statements on the situations in Colombia and in the Democratic Republic of Congo at its last meeting in 2000, and that other world communions frequently addressed troubling situations in the world in light of Christian convictions.

The statement, approved by the General Council, is being published simultaneously as a purchased advertisement in newspapers of different persuasions in Zimbabwe. It is also being released to MWC member churches and international church media.

The Mennonite World Conference (MWC) is a communion of Mennonite, Brethren in Christ and related Christian churches in 54 countries. The General Council, the governing body of the MWC, composed of delegates of member churches, met in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, August 2003, together with more than 6,200 participants in the every-six-year Assembly. Representing members worldwide, we reaffirmed our unity in the body of Christ, and our solidarity with one another, using as the Assembly theme "Sharing gifts in suffering and in joy" (1 Corinthians 12).

As believers in God who wills the well being of all, and as followers of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, we lament situations of poverty, oppression, injustice, violence and war that exist in many parts of the world.

Recognizing Zimbabwe's resilient people and rich natural resources, and having experienced the warm welcome and gracious hospitality of the hosting Brethren in Christ Church, we especially grieve and deplore the current situation of suffering in this country:

- The fear and brutality that result from political oppression and conflict, excessive police powers and arbitrary arrests, and legislation that curtails democratic expression and free assembly.
- The hardship and exploitation that result from economic breakdown, profiteering and corruption, shortages of all kinds, unemployment and endemic poverty.
- The malnutrition and death that result from a humanitarian crisis of major proportions, caused by mismanagement of the economy, drought, massive shortages of food, medical supplies and services, and the scourge of HIV/AIDS.

At the same time, as a global community of faith, we affirm with great joy and deep gratitude:

- The commitment of all parties to the current mediation talks, trusting they will address the key issues of concern, including people's needs, fears and hopes.
- The prophetic voice of the church for justice and peace and the courageous role of its leaders in efforts to resolve as well as to transform the crisis.
- The tenacity, passion, endurance and non-violent action of Zimbabweans in the face of deep distress.

"Sharing gifts in suffering and joy," we will carefully monitor developments in the next weeks and months, and together with the local Brethren in Christ churches will continue, with increased commitment, to support ongoing advocacy for justice and reconciliation, to provide emergency food resources to the hungry, assistance to the generations at risk from HIV/AIDS, and fervent intercession before God that justice will flow like a river to bring healing and hope to a weary land (Isaiah 58; Amos 4).

Dr. Nancy Heisey Dr. Larry Miller
President (2003-2009) Executive Secretary
Dr. Mesach Krisetya,
President (1997-2003)

Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, 17 August 2003

Global Youth Summit

"Anybody can count the number of seeds in an apple, but only God can count the number of apples in a seed."

With this image, Ronald Lizwe Moyo, member of the Global Youth Summit Committee, welcomed delegates and participants to the first ever Global Youth Summit (GYS) in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. More than 220 young people from 28 different countries gathered here August 7-10 to discuss the challenges facing Christian youth and young adults today. (Moriah Hurst represented Australia.)

It's not easy being young. Living in the Philippines, for example, means living amidst poverty, unemployment, crime, political corruption, injustice and disintegration of moral values. The media and entertainment industry have a "money and power can buy you happiness" perspective, and modern technology bombards with confusing philosophies and ideologies.

Fortunately, MWC church leaders provided a space for youth to learn, to grow and to share with brothers and sisters from all over the world and "we have found a voice of our own," said a delegate.

The GYS began with a survey phase a year ago to discover challenges facing youth all over the world and how the church and youth can address these issues. About 1,500 respondents participated in the survey.

The second phase, discussion and discernment, took place in Bulawayo. The Filipino delegate was surprised to discover that other Asians, Africans and Latin Americans encounter economic, educational and political situations similar to hers while youth from Europe and North America struggle with getting the "best" job, becoming successful and trying to remain strong Christians in a pluralistic world.

Delegates from each continent prepared worship services with songs, dances, plays, testimonies and Bible studies, providing a glimpse into the richness of each other's cultures. They felt deeply the theme, unity in diversity, as nationality and language barriers were torn down by bridges of love, openness and compassion.

After two days of discussions, five delegates, representing each continent, reported concerns and proposed action to the MWC General Council. Young observers cheered silently as the General Council received the report and invited youth to attend its final meeting.

In the closing GYS session, delegates identified actions for youth, local churches and the MWC. The youth committed to serving

local churches, to disciple young people, to work hand-in-hand with and follow local, continental and global leaders.

They suggested that local churches engage in more inter-generational programs such as mentoring and include youth on church boards and leadership bodies. MWC was tasked with continuing the GYS and strengthening communication among youth worldwide. This is phase three, the action component.

A high level of energy and enthusiasm characterized the gathering. The youth shared a sense of purpose, as well as anticipation that this event could bring about positive changes in the church and the world. They now had a greater appreciation for belonging to a global church, and had made many new friends from other countries.

AIDS Workshops

Some people don't believe Ephraim Disi has HIV. He is a Brethren in Christ pastor and he looks healthy and energetic.

"I've gathered the courage to speak openly about my status," Disi, of Malawi, told about 200 people August 16 at a workshop on AIDS during the Mennonite World Conference assembly.

"I ask God, 'Can you keep me for another five years, for another 10 years?'"

Disi, 45, was diagnosed with HIV, the AIDS virus, in 1996. He was infected by his wife, who has since died. He said she must have been infected by a medical accident.

Now, he is contributing to the fight against AIDS by setting an example of openness about the disease and by teaching moral behaviour.

"I encourage parents to take the role of teaching their own children," Disi said. "The message to youth must be abstinence."

The tragedy of AIDS in Africa - where the disease claims 6,500 lives a day - was the subject of several seminars at the MWC assembly.

Participants told how African Anabaptists and foreign workers are offering compassionate ministries and moral teaching in response to the AIDS pandemic.

In Ethiopia, the Meserete Kristos Church, the nation's Anabaptist denomination, strongly encourages engaged couples to get tested for HIV. The MKC will not marry a couple if one member is HIV-positive, said Samson Estifanos, national director of the church's AIDS prevention program. The MKC has 475 AIDS orphans among its families, Estifanos said. An AIDS orphan is defined as a child who has had at least one parent die of an AIDS-related illness, or whose wage-earning parent cannot work due to AIDS.

Nationally, Ethiopia has one million AIDS orphans, Estifanos said.

"We are looking at a future of dysfunctional adults who do not know how to be spouses or parents," said Ruth Thiessen, a Mennonite Central Committee worker in Botswana.

For some families, the problem of AIDS orphans is overwhelming.

"I met a woman who has 30 orphans to care for," Thiessen said. "What will happen when she dies?"

Easter Siziba, chair of the BIC Church AIDS project in Zimbabwe, said one in three Zimbabweans is infected with HIV. Life expectancy has fallen from 67 to 27 since the early 1980s. Thirty percent of those who are 15 will not live to be 30.

The Zimbabwean BIC Church has a program of home-based care for AIDS patients, Siziba said. The church stresses sexual abstinence before marriage and faithfulness within it.

Poverty is an obstacle to AIDS treatment, said Esther Kawira, a doctor in Tanzania who said she had not found one AIDS patient able to afford antiretroviral drugs."

MCC has eight workers in Africa serving specifically in HIV/AIDS ministries, said Sarah Adams, MCC's HIV/AIDS coordinator, who helped lead the workshops.

"AIDS is a global emergency," said Swana Falang of Congo. "I am ready to fight against AIDS to save humanity."



Children See God's Hand in Full Plates

Susan Sibanda's greatest joy when coordinating the children's activities at Africa 2003, the Mennonite World Conference Assembly Gathered, was the generosity of people who donated massive amounts of biscuits for snacks. What may have been one of the greatest joys for the children - who sometimes go hungry at home - was that there were any biscuits at all.

More than 700 children and youth, ages 3 through 15, participated in the activities, held at Zimbabwe's International Trade Fairgrounds. They got worship and Bible study time, jumping castles (like trampolines), pony rides, games and field trips to a game park and a museum.

They also got two square meals a day. This feeding of the 700 amazed Sibanda, of Bulawayo, and the Zimbabwean children, whose country suffers from food and fuel shortages.

"My greatest joy was all the donations that came from locals and internationals, including toys, crayons and the huge box of biscuits," said Sibanda, who had about 50 volunteer helpers from Zimbabwe and other countries. "We served them tea, lunch and supper and the kids were getting platefuls of food-sadza (boiled maize), meat, rice, chicken and salads.

"It's amazing to have all this abundance. Not even the kids here thought that this event would work. This is all strange for Zimbabwe, the platefuls of food and buses taking them back and forth. They are used to food shortages and not seeing buses run."

But not even shortages of food and fuel held back God's generosity, she said.

"This event, with its theme of 'sharing gifts in suffering and in joy,' taught me that people cared enough to come and be with us in our suffering," Sibanda said. "It has shown me, and the children, that God is great, that nothing is too hard for him."

While nothing was too hard, feeding and supervising so



many children from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m. was lots of work for Sibanda, a teacher in special and physical education and director of a preschool for about 165 children, and the many volunteers.

The children's cooperative spirits most impressed Mary Hurst, a mission worker in Australia, who said that many times she saw older children playing with the younger ones and Zimbabwean children and the few international children mixing well.

"In one case, a 7-year-old Zimbabwean girl took a 5-year-old girl, whose parents work with Mennonite Central Committee in Angola, under her wing," Hurst said. "The smaller girl tended to wander away a lot, and the older girl took her to ride the ponies, and helped her get back in line."

"At another time, I saw two little girls, one African and one white, walking arm in arm. There they were, no walls between them, enjoying each other's company."

The children's attitudes and spiritual enthusiasm also impressed volunteer Theodore Lehman, a student who attended the assembly with an Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia (USA) cross-cultural program. He's been a camp counselor and found some differences in children from Zimbabwe and North America.

"Sometimes American children complain about the food, but the Zimbabwean children seem very thankful and eat what they're given," said Lehman. "They are very patient."

"I'm really enjoying these children," he said. "Their singing is so enthusiastic, and they're so well behaved and hospitable. Even though we've been together for a couple of days already, they still treat me as a special guest."



Representatives of Anabaptist Centres and Networks from around the world met in Bulawayo. Countries represented were Australia, Great Britain, South Korea, France, and Argentina.

Hope Springs Eternal Amid Middle East Terror

BY LINFORD L. STUTZMAN

I returned last month to the United States after spending a semester in the Middle East with a group of 30 students from Eastern Mennonite University. We divided our time between the West Bank and Israel.

In the West Bank, the students stayed with Palestinian host families. They received outstanding hospitality and heard their gut-wrenching stories of suffering, longing for justice and their deep opposition to Palestinian terror.

One day, a spokesman for a terrorist group from a nearby refugee camp talked to us. An articulate host, he explained why terrorism is inevitable in the face of increasing repression, humiliation and violence directed against the Palestinians.

"It is our only weapon, he said. "The world will ignore us if we do not do this. We have no other options." The students vehemently challenged the assumptions, but he remained adamant: "Even women and children are the enemy. The Israelis started this, and we will only stop when they change, leave their settlements, withdraw their tanks, allow the refugees to return. But now, regretfully, terror is our only effective weapon."

We left the West Bank shortly thereafter, with our Palestinian host families worried about our safety in Israel and fearful that we would forget them, their shattered world and their dreams of justice.

Several weeks later, just across the valley within sight of Bethlehem and the refugee camp, we visited an Israeli settlement, a clean, prosperous, heavily guarded community.

Our hosts were also convincing as they outlined their desire for peace, of buying land from their Palestinian neighbours for the settlement, of their attempts at being good neighbours. "However," they said, "terrorism gives us no choice but to fight back, to take drastic measures. We are sorry that innocent people get killed, but they started it. If they would stop, so would we. As long as terror persists, military responses are our only effective weapon."

The students pointed out that the Palestinians had said the same thing, and that both sides now live in armed communities contorted by fear, hatred and hopelessness. We said goodbye and left the settlement with our hosts worrying about our safety, again fearful of the possibility that we might forget them, their insecure world and their dreams of peace.

I wish every American politician, every news reporter and pundit who is enthusiastic about our own war on terrorism would have the opportunity to see the tragic failure of fighting the evil of terrorism with violent reprisals, including using weapons of mass destruction.

Several days later, a Palestinian couple invited us to their once beautiful home located directly across the street from the former PLO headquarters in Bethlehem, reduced to a pile of rubble after being bombed by Israeli gunships. It was a "precision" bombing, but the blasts damaged all of the surrounding homes, making them uninhabitable.

Because thieves had stripped everything from the house before it could be made secure following the bombing, the house was completely empty except for shattered glass, a torn, unfinished colouring book, and a framed picture of the Madonna neatly broken into two pieces at the neck.

Our hosts told us of their suffering, loss and desire for peace. We had heard the story before, repeatedly. But as they spoke, we began looking at them in amazement. For instead of the haunted look of bitterness and fear to which we had grown accustomed, they radiated joy. Instead of rage and pain, they spoke of their gratitude for God's protection in their and their children's lives.

"We do not hate the Israelis," they said, standing amid their shattered world. "An Israeli mother cries when her son dies, just as a Palestinian mother cries when her son dies. Didn't Jesus tell us to love our enemies? Forgiveness is our only hope if we want to live together in the future."

I wish that every Christian in America who supports returning evil for evil would live out their faith in such a way.

Linford Stutzman is associate professor of culture and mission at Eastern Mennonite University. He and his wife Janet Stutzman led 30 EMU students on a Middle East cross-cultural seminar for the fall semester 2002. The Stutzmans lived in Perth 1986-1990.

First-ever Joint Study of Anabaptist Martyrs by Mennonites and Catholics

A group of prominent Mennonite and Catholic scholars met July 15-17, 2003 at St. John's Abbey in Minnesota (USA), to begin an unprecedented joint historical study of 16-century Anabaptist martyrs. Entitled "The Anabaptist Martyr in an Ecumenical Context," the conference was an indirect outgrowth of the international Mennonite-Catholic dialogue that has taken place under the auspices of the Mennonite World Conference and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity.

In welcoming remarks, Abbot John Klassen of St. John's cited the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu on South Africa's Commission for Truth and Reconciliation: "For forgiveness to occur, the past must be reconstructed and acknowledged." For Mennonites and Catholics," said the Abbott, "an analogous process is utterly essential."

Ivan Kauffman, a Catholic writer in Washington, D.C., gave opening reflections, agreeing that the time had come to take the rapidly developing Catholic-Mennonite dialogue to the historical root of the division between the two traditions.

Brad S. Gregory, a Catholic historian at Notre Dame University in Indiana, presented the keynote address. His study of Protestant, Anabaptist, and Catholic martyrs in the 16th century is entitled *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Harvard Univ. Press 1999).

Professor Gregory argued that truly understanding the motives and beliefs of the 16th century actors requires putting aside the modern position condemning religious persecution. "Persecution" would have been viewed by the authorities as "prosecution of dangerous religious criminals." Diversity in religious practices was seen as a real threat to each community member's chances of salvation. Prosecution "was born of a dogged pastoral concern."

Professor Gregory's remarks stimulated a lively discussion. Re-examination of historical events and theological perspectives was a recurrent theme among the respondents

Neal Blough, director of the Paris Mennonite Centre and a participant in the international dialogue, reported that Catholics

in the international dialogue had asked the Mennonites to account for the impact of the early, militant Anabaptists.

Peter Nissen, Dean and Professor of Church History at the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands and a Catholic participant in the international dialogue, observed that historical methodology would continue to incorporate a divergence in traditions, because every community needs its "collective memory," which reinforces group identity. Nevertheless, each community also needs to purify its memory - to eliminate false memories - so that a growth of shared memories is possible.

John Roth, a Mennonite professor of history at Goshen College in Indiana and editor of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, suggested that the tenacity with which Anabaptists embraced the martyr stories was related to the authorities' efforts to suppress dissent on the validity of the prosecutions.

Margaret O'Gara, a Catholic theologian at St. Michael's College of the University of Toronto, cited Pope John Paul II's statement that the church's "ecumenical commitment is irreversible." The first step in resolving differences, she suggested, is repentance - a change of heart. This can lead to a change of mind based on discoveries gained through dialogue, making an exchange of gifts possible. "Honouring the Anabaptist martyrs' devotion is fundamental," she said, to "our dialogue of conversion."

A. James Reimer, a Mennonite professor of theology at Conrad Grebel University College of the University of Waterloo, Ontario (Canada), argued that the "act of prosecution and the authorities' theological doctrine cannot be easily distinguished." Continuing reflection, he suggested, could focus on whether something was wrong with the authorities' theology.

The conference also heard from Helmut Harder, professor emeritus at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, on the work of the international dialogue.

Pandora Press will publish the conference papers. Another conference in July 2004 will address how martyrs are defined and recognized and the role they play in their religious traditions.

For further information see the Bridgefolk web site <http://bridgefolk.net>.

Indian Church Leader Envisions Mennonite Ashram

Into the volatile climate of interfaith tension in India, a Mennonite pastor dares to breathe a vision of peace. Jai Prakash Masih, a graduate of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, is laying plans for the construction of a Mennonite ashram.

"In India, there is an atmosphere of religious conflict," Masih said. "The words 'mission' and 'church-planting' are threatening. We need a shift in ideology from traditional ways of doing mission to methods that are more culturally appropriate."

As part of the ancient school system of India, ashrams were traditionally located in the mountains. Kings would send their children to an ashram to learn the wisdom and skills necessary for administration. "Ashrams are also places of meditation, self-learning and shelter for the homeless, much like the biblical cities of refuge," Masih said.

Masih envisages The Indian Anabaptist Centre as an ashram where the educational aspect will predominate. "The Anabaptist Centre will concentrate on leadership-building and on

guiding the church in a missional direction,” Masih said. “We will encourage the church to move beyond the status quo and be forward-looking.”

“There are other Christian ashrams that go along Gandhian lines of nonviolence,” Masih said. “Remembering, of course, that non-violence wasn’t Mahatma Gandhi’s idea. He learned his non-violence from Jesus. Our Indian Anabaptist Centre will be more biblical, more Anabaptist in its essence. We need a more proactive peacemaking.”

The ashram will seek to serve the six different Mennonite conferences of India in training leaders and organizing seminars for the lay leaders. Masih foresees three institutes under the ashram umbrella. The first institute will emphasize Anabaptist ecclesiology, Mennonite church polity and administration; the second, worship, biblical understanding, preaching skills, computer training and mission strategies.

The third institute of peace and conciliation will be the first of its kind in the newly formed state of Chhattisgarh. This institute will seek to cooperate with other denominations to promote peace education. Masih hopes that a peace curriculum can be developed for use in schools and that some of the materials will be translated from English — the language of higher education in India — into the Hindi language to reach a broader audience.

According to Masih, many factors point toward Raipur as an ideal location for The Indian Anabaptist Centre. Raipur is centrally located and accessible by public transportation. The city is a regional educational centre with a university. Perhaps most importantly, there is a strong Mennonite congregation that enthusiastically supports the vision of a Mennonite ashram. The Raipur Mennonite Fellowship is a flourishing congregation that has volunteered both financial support and personnel to help construct the dream.

MCC Helps Rehabilitate Iraqi Schools

BY EDWARD MILLER

DIWANIYAH, Iraq — As U.N. inspectors scour Iraq for weapons of mass destruction, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is rehabilitating schools and distributing school kits to help build a compassionate, more peaceful relationship with the Iraqi people.

“These school kits are ‘weapons of mass instruction,’” said Menno Wiebe, MCC co-representative for Iraq and Jordan.

About 70 percent of schools in central and southern Iraq are in need of rehabilitation, according to UNICEF. There is a chronic shortage of basic school supplies and teaching aids. As well, given the economic stagnation in Iraq, schoolchildren are more likely these days to avoid classes to search for work. Twenty percent of Iraq’s young children are not in primary school, with nearly twice as many girls staying out of school as boys.

Despite the poor state of education in the country, MCC with its partner Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA), supports positive efforts to counter the deterioration. MCC has over the last year rehabilitated four schools and is providing 28,000 school kits to needy students.

A year ago, broken windows, chipped plaster and fading paint on dirty walls characterized the Al-Fatua Primary school located in Diwaniyah, south of Baghdad. With the support of

MCC, the school has been transformed.

During a visit to the school this past summer, school principal Sa’ad Dakhil was markedly optimistic. New cement was drying nearby and bright walls reflected the sunlight as Dakhil expressed gratitude and talked excitedly about MCC’s rehabilitation of the school. He showed off the re-paved playground, painted classroom walls, new windows and refurbished school toilets, previously unuseable. Approximately 600 boys attend the school. During the school year, two shifts of classes move through each day. Education is free in Iraq, but two wars, 12 years of economic sanctions and nationalist government policies have depleted the country’s resources and wilted the infrastructure.

Standing with the principal were a group of Al-Fatua students who live nearby. One, Nassir Hassan, talked about his dream of being a doctor.

Sa’ad Dakhil said that Nassir is an exceptionally good student and could go on to further studies at Qadisiyah College or elsewhere, depending on how supportive and financially secure his family is. The principal explained that many families in the area live in poverty — parents are traders or soldiers but many still cannot afford to buy clothes for their children.

“These children are poor,” said Sa’ad Dakhil, indicating the students. “Some don’t have shoes.” The government gives these children some textbooks, but pens and stationary remain inaccessible for many.

Because of the highly-developed school system that existed in Iraq before 1990, members of the older generation are often well-educated. In fact, said Sa’ad Dakhil, “many teachers are over-qualified.”

It has not been easy supporting these teachers, he said. A sanctions-era teacher’s salary of 10,000 to 20,000 dinars (\$7.50 Cdn/\$5 U.S. to \$15.40 Cdn/\$10 U.S.) per month is not terribly encouraging. According to the principal, some teachers leave the profession to start shops or get other jobs, though many do stay out of a sense of duty.

With the additional provision this year of MCC school kits to school-age children, Iraqi educators like Sa’ad Dakhil hope simple gestures of solidarity and peace will motivate students and teachers alike, re-igniting a passion for learning.

Edward Miller is MCC program coordinator in Iraq. This article was written before the latest war in Iraq.

Mission Educators in Korea

ELKHART, Indiana (Mennonite Mission Network) Many travellers with an Asian destination had cancelled their flights, frightened by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome. But Alan and Eleanor Kreider, educators with Mennonite Mission Network, were not among them.

The Kreiders spoke to a cumulative 3,500 people and attracted the attention of the national media as they taught in six major South Korean cities in April, giving 33 presentations in a three-week period.

Speaking in churches, universities and seminaries, the Kreiders were enthusiastically received, according to Tim Froese, co-director of the Korean Anabaptist Center (KAC). “In numerous instances, Alan and Ellie were the first Anabaptists to speak at those institutions,” said Froese, “They had receptive audiences and had opportunity to speak to most of the major denominations in Korea as well as to those in the independent



Alan and Eleanor Kreider, mission educators for Mennonite Mission Network. Photo courtesy of Korea Anabaptist Center

church movement.

“They were extremely gracious guests, loved by all, sensitive to each audience and much appreciated. We are grateful to Mennonite Mission Network, the churches [of North America] and to God for the gift of their presence in Korea,” Froese said.

One professor emeritus was so moved by the Kreiders’ presentation that he stayed up all night reading church history books to find out more about the early Anabaptist church and its martyrs. He expressed regret at not having heard about the Anabaptists earlier in his life.

More than 10 congregations have indicated their desire to be more closely affiliated with the KAC since hearing about Anabaptism. Some have pledged financial support. “The [centre] welcomes these gestures and views them as an answer to prayer,” Froese said.

Sheldon Sawatzky, Mennonite Mission Network’s director for East Asia, said, “[The Kreiders’ visit] was a very significant event for the Korea Anabaptist Center and has had a significant impact on the church in Korea.”

During the first two weeks, the KAC hosted the Kreiders. They spent the third week three hours northeast of Seoul, near the demilitarized zone, with the Jesus Village Church in Chun Chon.

The KAC — created in 2001 to promote discipleship, the training of Christian leaders and peacebuilding — has already made a significant impact in South Korea. “We believe this [impact] will grow appreciably in the years ahead,” Alan Kreider said. “We were struck by the quantity and quality of the work done in a tiny office.”

Largely funded by Korean churches and individuals, the KAC, is also supported by Mennonite Mission Network, Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Church Canada Witness.

The Jesus Village Church, an alternative to the institutionalized megachurches of South Korea, strives to rediscover the vibrancy of the early church and take discipleship seriously.

Of the topics presented, the Kreiders reported that the early church and Anabaptism generated the most interest. The Kreiders spoke on the early church’s growth, its worship and its approach to war and peace.

“Some Korean Christians are frustrated with church life

here, and long for fresh approaches,” Eleanor Kreider said. “The two of us have taught about early Christian life and worship in many cultures now, and we have always found people excited and moved by what they have learned. Our Korea trip confirms us anew in our sense that the early church is a potential source for renewal for the global church in many denominations.”

According to Alan Kreider, Anabaptism is a new and, sometimes unsettling tradition, in Korea. Many consider it a cult. “Anabaptism will have to earn its way step by step, as fears are disarmed and trust is built,” he said.

The Korean translation of the Kreiders’ book, *Is a Peace Church Possible?*, appeared just before their visit. Another publication, *Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom* written by Alan Kreider, was released just after his departure.

Also coinciding with the Kreider visit was the war in Iraq. The Iraq crisis heightened interest in thinking about war in a broader context, Alan Kreider said. “Previously all discussions on war were apparently dominated by the ongoing threat of war between the two Koreas.

“The standoff with North Korea, which has threatened to begin producing weapons-grade plutonium, had become increasingly tension-filled in the weeks prior to our arrival. South Koreans long for reunion with their relatives in the north; but they feel threatened by North Korean conventional weaponry — its artillery could destroy Seoul — to say nothing of its potential nuclear arsenal.

“The peace church seems a very new idea here,” Alan Kreider said. “The Jesus Village Church people have been challenged by our seeing peace in a much broader framework than politics and war; [we also emphasized] peacemaking within congregations, families, schools and work places.”

Alan and Eleanor Kreider worked in England for more than 25 years with Mennonite Board of Missions, a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network. Their experience in helping to organize the London Mennonite Centre and establish a network of Anabaptists throughout the United Kingdom made them useful resource persons to the developing KAC.

“The personnel of the Korea Anabaptist Center are very gifted, but since there are only four staff members and they have so many possible fields of ministry, they are trying to establish priorities,” Eleanor Kreider said. “Since all Anabaptist centers have certain things in common, we helped them to look at what profile they want.”

In South Korea, as in other countries where denominations proliferate, Mennonite Mission Network has chosen to work at church unity rather than to plant Mennonite churches.

“We observed Anabaptism functioning in Korea as it does elsewhere in the world, as a ‘sectarian’ Christian tradition that provides a surprising place of ecumenical meeting. It gave us joy to see this,” Alan Kreider said. “We have been delighted to be short-term participants in the remarkable development of Anabaptism in Korea.”

... the early church is a potential source for renewal for the global church in many denominations.

RESOURCES/REVIEWS

Herald Press Releases

• *Some Fruits of Solitude: Wise Sayings on the Conduct of Human Life* by Eric K. Taylor

"I can hardly wish you anything better than seriously considering what you do with your time. Using time well is the greatest wisdom and work of life." -William Penn

As a Quaker preacher, minister, and missionary in the late 17th century, William Penn was imprisoned for his faith many times. After being falsely accused of treason, Penn was forced into hiding. During those three years of imposed solitude, he had time to think, reflect, and re-evaluate. *Some Fruits of Solitude* is the product of that solitude. In it, Penn distills the essence of his spiritual idealism, combining it with practicality and common sense. Translated into today's English by Eric K. Taylor, Penn's wisdom is even more accessible to the contemporary reader. In this new edition, Penn's voice can once again be heard in its simplicity and timelessness-sharing his fruits of solitude.

William Penn, born in 1644 to an English Admiral, embraced the Quaker faith while in his early 20s. Penn spent his life preaching and writing for the Quaker cause, working for freedom and toleration in the areas of faith and conscience, and establishing Pennsylvania as a refuge for the persecuted and oppressed. About the Editor . . . Eric K. Taylor works as a technical writer and teaches English as a Second Language (ESL). His first book, a teacher resource on using folktales for language teaching, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2000.

• *Revelation*, by John R. Yeatts

(The latest volume in the Believers Church Bible Commentary Series)

"Both a helpful guide to the content of Revelation and a challenge to contemporary Christians to live out the non-violent faith of Revelation's central figure, Jesus Christ." -Nancy R. Heisey, Eastern Mennonite University

The message of Revelation speaks to Christians for all times, and historically has especially encouraged persecuted groups. Today Christians in many parts of the world are also at opposition to the worldview of the time. Revelation gives strength to those who are oppressed, and John R. Yeatts' new commentary attends to themes of martyrdom, suffering, service in the world, hope, the triumph of Christ, and the role of the church in bearing witness to the triumphant Christ. The commentary includes clear biblical commentary, relationships between various portions of Scripture, and applications drawn from the Anabaptist tradition and the larger Christian community.

This readable commentary is for all who seek more fully to understand the original message of Scripture and its meaning for today-Sunday school teachers, members of Bible study groups, students, pastors, and other seekers.

About the Author . . . John R. Yeatts is on the faculty of Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania, currently teaching psychology and religion in the School of the Humanities. Yeatts began his professional life in pastoral and denominational ministry, serving the Brethren in Christ denomination as Christian education staff.

• *The Making of The Upside-Down Kingdom 25 Years Later*

It began one summer in the mid-seventies when Donald Kraybill was pinch-hitting for a teacher of an adult Bible class on two days notice and had been reading John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*. Sociologist Kraybill decided to take the class on a five-session tour of Luke's gospel, which Yoder had used extensively.

Kraybill recalls: "Midway through Luke's story, a class member exclaimed with enthusiasm and exasperation, 'Everything is so upside down!'"

Since its first release in 1978, Donald B. Kraybill's book, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, has challenged Christians to faithful discipleship. It has been read around the world and translated into six language editions. Twenty-five years later, Kraybill has completely revised and updated *The Upside-Down Kingdom* for an all new third edition published by Herald Press.

Readers of *The Upside-Down Kingdom* find an intense study of the kingdom of God in the Gospels. In this 25th Anniversary Edition, Kraybill continues in the tradition of the previous editions by offering his sociological insight into ancient Hebrew culture. Kraybill further incorporates the most recent New Testament scholarly analysis in a style that is accessible to lay readers in the church.

For a book which teaches some suspicion of human praise, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* has earned its share of praise including the National Religious Book Award for Best Religious Book. David W. Virtue, president of Evangelical Partners in Mission, says: "It decisively challenges our public stances and social mores, our ambitions, our fears, our politics and professions." A reviewer on Amazon.com raved that it is an "absolutely stunning book with great insights into the gospel of peace and the spirit of jubilee."

According to Kraybill, worldly authorities seek power and prestige, but Jesus' counter-cultural message is a clear call to turn the social ladder upside-down. Jesus demonstrates radical opposition to the dominant culture by making friends with social outcasts and rebelling against authorities. Kraybill says, "I write as a confessing Christian. A close encounter with the life of Jesus takes me to the heart of Christian faith and the very nature of God. For me, Jesus provides the clearest and the fullest disclosure of God's will."

Although used in college, seminary, and university classes, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* has not wavered from its humble beginnings as Sunday school lesson material, where it is still used in small group Bible studies or book clubs. Whatever the setting, *The Upside-Down Kingdom* is sure to spark a lively discussion. To accompany the 25th Anniversary Edition, Herald Press has released an online study guide. It is available at www.mph.org/studygds.

Kraybill is a professor of sociology at Messiah College (PA) and a senior fellow in the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College (PA). In addition to serving as a pastor, Kraybill has held a variety of leadership roles with Mennonite and Church of the Brethren organizations.

Widely recognized for his scholarship on Anabaptist communities, Kraybill is the author/editor of more than fifteen books on Anabaptist faith and life, including *The Amish: Why They Enchant Us* and *Where Was God on September 11?*

• *Extreme Virtues: Living on the Prophetic Edge*

by David Fillingim

"David Fillingim, bringing us into the spirituality of the prophets, and especially Isaiah, is bringing us into the tradition of Jesus." -Glen H. Stassen, Fuller Theological Seminary

How can we be extreme in our faith commitment? The biblical prophets call us to nothing less than radical living. Their message insists that we develop godly characters consisting of extreme virtues: sacrifice, responsibility, steadfast love, justice, hope, courage, and peace. As a seven-session Bible study, *Extreme Virtues* is an invaluable resource for small group and personal reflection on living virtuously on the prophetic edge.

“Sounds a clarion call for radical discipleship. With a strong grounding in the Old Testament prophets, *Extreme Virtues* educates and inspires Christians hungry for biblical and theological resources for social actions. In such turbulent times, may we be satisfied with nothing less than extreme commitment to walk in the steps of Jesus.”

-Michelle Tooley, Berea College

About the Author . . . David Fillingim teaches religion and philosophy at Shorter College in Rome, Georgia, and is a former pastor and hospital chaplain. He received his Ph.D. in Christian Ethics from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

• ***The Dogmatic Imagination: The Dynamics of Christian Belief*** by A. James Reimer

“With wisdom and wit, Reimer explores the big questions of our faith. I wish this book was available when I was a pastor teaching catechism!” -Arthur Paul Boers, seminary professor and author

Can members of our churches today speak intelligently on divine will, the sacraments, or the Trinity? Or has the modern and post-modern church largely forgotten its creeds? And does it even matter?

A. James Reimer believes that it does matter, and that the church ignores these discussions at its own peril. In these short, engaging essays, Reimer approaches the dogmas of the Christian faith with humour, insight, and imagination. Here basics such as heaven, hell, prayer, and judgment are explained with historical insight and contemporary application. Anabaptist Mennonite priorities emerge but with appreciation for the churches wider historical context and traditions. Reimer refuses to consider these topics too controversial or too boring. Rather, he images exciting encounters with the mysteries of faith.

“Not afraid to tackle tough questions, Reimer succeeds in making the Christian faith tradition relevant once more. He comes up with fresh twists of interpretation that will intrigue the postmodern thinker and prompt a re-examination of belief.”

-Marlene Kropf, director of congregational life, Mennonite Church USA

About the Author . . . A. James Reimer teaches religion and theology at Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo, in Ontario. He is also on the faculty of the Toronto School of Theology and is Director of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre.

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e-mail: pbsorder@mph.org

As the children left for school, I would say to them, ‘Remember who you are!’ I never said it without feeling a quiet joy, grateful for knowing something about who I am. And I said it thinking that perhaps our children would also be reminded that they are ‘somebody’- somebody with a special history, with an identity worth celebrating. . . . As I reflect on why I would remind our children of this, I think I was inviting them to call to mind several aspects of their identity. I was reminding them to remember . . . that we belong to a distinctive community of faith, a community that shares a special history of pain and hope, recognizable practices, and a confession of faith. . . .”

—Sara Wenger Shenk, in the Preface

Cascadia Publishing House

• ***Anabaptist Ways of Knowing: A Conversation About Tradition-Based Critical Education***

by Sara Wenger Shenk, Cascadia Publishing House, Telford, PA (co published with Herald Press)

The conversation about education recorded in this book grows out of a concern that practices which shaped faith communities in the past are rapidly being discarded and replaced in a haphazard, unexamined way. Shenk contends that by revitalizing core practices and the powerful substratum of knowledge they provide, educational endeavours can renew the wellspring of community life.

Here is a resource for any who care about the recovery of faith-based educational practices that are part of a church-school-family ecology. Shenk’s aim is to present a strong rationale for tradition-based, critical education that incorporates core practices for strengthening faith communities into its theorizing. The book offers a viable proposal for the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith community often featured in the discussion. And it serves as a model for reflecting on educational theory from any particular Christian tradition.

“Tapping the wisdom of Plato, the early Anabaptists, and contemporary thinkers, this superb study shows how daily habits shape our personal and communal character. A major, groundbreaking contribution to Anabaptist understanding and practice. A must read for parents, pastors, and educators.”

-Donald B. Kraybill, author of *The Riddle of Amish Culture* and Senior Fellow, The Young Center, Elizabethtown College

“Sara Wenger Shenk invites us to a dinner table set with the best. The crisp linens come from the gospel narratives. The china is imported across centuries of time and many cultures, a different plate at each place, representing great thinkers about knowing. The silver awaits its function as a tool for selecting the best thoughts for the right task. The goblets glisten with the wine of the resurrected Christ whose knowing and loving are one. Together, this table offers us elements of Anabaptist identity for which many of us have been waiting. Come and dine!” — Shirley Hershey Showalter, President, Goshen College

THE AUTHOR: Sara Wenger Shenk, Harrisonburg, Virginia, is Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Christian Education at Eastern Mennonite Seminary. An author of four books on themes related to family spirituality and culture, she is a frequent speaker on educational themes. Shenk’s negotiation of much cultural change has contributed to her reflection on the intentional shaping of a wholesome,

identity-forming culture. She grew up in Ethiopia and, with her husband, began a family while studying and working with theological education in the former Yugoslavia. She is founding pastor of Immanuel Mennonite Church in northeast Harrisonburg, a multi-ethnic congregation with significant neighbourhood ministries.

* Explore this book and see order options at <http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com/awk/awk.htm>

• ***Peacemaking: Practicing at the Inersection Between Law and Human Conflict***, by Douglas Noll

In his large and ambitious project, Noll weaves many strands of academic thinking about human conflict into an integrated view of why people fight, how they fight, what they fight over—and how they can instead make peace. Joining ancient philosophical views with the most modern revelations of the neurosciences, PEACEMAKING engages the nature of humanity and the conflicts it faces from a broadly multidisciplinary approach.

“Noll in succinct clear synthesis covers everything in the fields of mediation and conflict resolution from philosophy to technique, from game theory to justice. A great introductory text that covers much ground with practical ideas.” —John Paul Lederach, Professor of Peacebuilding, University of Notre Dame; Distinguished Scholar, Eastern Mennonite University

THE AUTHOR: Douglas E. Noll, Clovis, California, a lawyer, peacemaker, and educator, tried complex cases for many years before turning to mediation and peacemaking. Listed in the Registry of Pre-eminent Lawyers, he works with business and professional conflicts when litigation is a poor option.

* Explore this book and see order options at: <http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com/pm/pm.htm>

• David Weaver-Zercher, Editor, ***Minding the Church: Scholarship in the Anabaptist Tradition***, <http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com/mtc/mtc.htm>

• J. Denny Weaver, ***Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity***, <http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com/atf/atf.htm>

• Susan Biesecker-Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast, eds., ***Anabaptists and Postmodernity***, <http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com/apm/apm.htm>

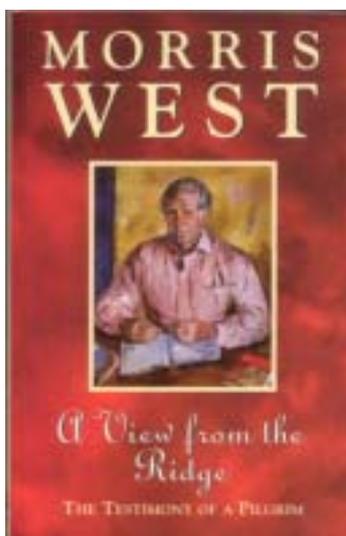
• Ted Grimsrud and Loren Johns, eds., ***Peace and Justice Shall Embrace***, <http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com/paj/paj.htm>

• Christopher Marshall, ***Crowned With Glory and Honor: Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition***, <http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com/cwg/cwg.htm>

• ***Dreamseeker Magazine***, <http://www.CascadiaPublishingHouse.com/dsm/>

Web Resources

- Links for non-violence resources http://www.theotherside.org/resources/nv/nv_links.html
- Check out the website for the Anabaptist Network in Great Britain and particularly their new Study Packs: *Becoming a Peace Church*, *After Christendom: Following Jesus on the Margins*, and *Taking Jesus Seriously* <http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/>
- MennoLetter from Jerusalem for a good source of news on the Middle East <http://mennonitechurch.ca/news/jerusalemletter/>
- Daily Dig from the Bruderhof Communities. “Start off your day with a jolt - a pithy quote from the likes of Arnold, Blumhardt, Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Romero, Sundar Singh, Tolstoy, and others, waiting in your inbox every morning. Think of it as caffeine for your conscience.” http://www.bruderhof.com/us/free_stuff/index.htm
- “You can bomb the world to pieces but you can’t bomb it into peace” Song by Michael Franti available at: <http://www.spearheadvibrations.com/index.htm>
- “I am not at war with anyone” Song by Luka Bloom available at: http://www.lukabloom.com/audio_video.asp
- “A Place at the Table” Song by Lori True available at: <http://www.giamusic.com/scstore/P-535.html>



A View from the Ridge *The Testimony Of A Pilgrim*

BY MORRIS WEST,
HARPERCOLLINS, 1996

I was saddened by the death of Morris West in 1999. I remember reading somewhere in the late 1990's that he felt his storytelling days were finished. He felt his stories were for a different time. I must belong to that time because I always enjoyed his books.

I had the privilege of hearing him speak once. He impressed me as a man of deep faith who spoke his mind and was not cowed at all but those in power – in the church or government.

While on our recent visit to Perth, we were graciously hosted by Noel Vose. While looking through his books I discovered *A View from the Ridge* and on Noel's recommendation, I decided to read it. I was fortunate a few weeks later to find it on a sale table.

The book is not an autobiography, West refused to write one, but “The Testimony Of A Pilgrim.” He writes as “an elderly man standing on the ridge and looking across the dark valley into eternity.” (110)

West was a lifelong member of the Roman Catholic Church. His struggle with his church comes through clearly in the book. But he covers topics that are common to all of us, not just Catholics. His thoughts on evil and violence are particularly good.

I couldn't help but think about the prisoners in Guantanamo Bay and the recent discussion in some news magazines about the need for torture at times to save the rest of us from terrorists when I read these lines:

This is the real terror of modern torture. It is designed by intelligent beings to achieve the total degradation of a human person, the annihilation of dignity and will, by an exercise of cruelty based upon supreme indifference and illusory omnipotence. (76-77)

West always stood up for the lone individual against the power of organised evil:

The rights of the shabbiest persons must be those most strongly defended. We must never forget that tyranny begins by a deliberate diminishment of dignity. The political prisoner is stripped before the interrogators. The function of the torturer is not only to hurt but to debase. The function of the propagandist is to create scapegoats by caricature...The tragic matter is that all these evils are abetted and condoned by good people, for good causes: the stability of the state, doctrinal orthodoxy, traditional morality...I have come to the conclusion that institutional power distances men and women from their own humanity. They forget that men and women are the subjects and objects of salvation, not institutions. (102-103)

What is to be done?

...this is how the battle of good against evil always begins: one small voice raised in the crowd, proclaiming that the king has no clothes, that the new gods are hollow plaster, that the new masters in the land are crooks and charlatans. Until that voice is raised, the tyranny will continue. Once it is heard, courage, like crime, proves contagious and the tattered banners are raised once more against the ancient adversary. (82)

Morris, your voice is missed but not forgotten. Thanks for speaking up.

For more on West and his books:

<http://www.bastulli.com/West/WEST.htm>

REVIEWED BY MSH

The Missing Peace The Search for Nonviolent Alternatives in United States History

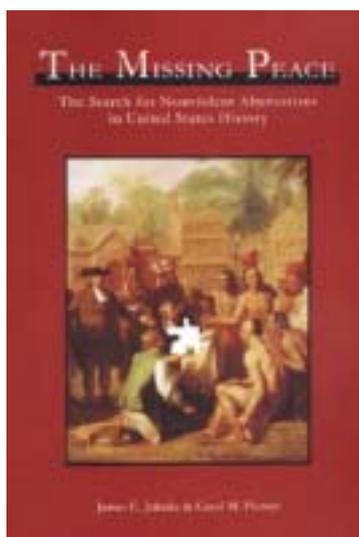
**JAMES JUHNKE AND
CAROL M. HUNTER**

Pandora Press co-published
with Herald Press, 2001

Options. What makes a peacebuilder frustrated these days is when, at an international or local level,

politicians say there are no options but to use force. Knowing that addictions lead to lessening creativity and vision for the way forward, it follows that an addiction to violence would cause a myopic view of options beyond violent solutions. A narrow view of current events also breeds a tunnel vision view of history.

Most history is written from the perspective of the victor, the powerful, or those who 'win' at war. These histories add to the myth that leaders took the correct path, a path of destiny.



Thus, most history books of the United States of America read like a succession of wars and conquests with a few misadventures reluctantly sprinkled in to temper the triumphal spread of Democracy.

When a history book arrives on the scene to challenge the normative violent view of America's past I sit up and take notice. Howard Zinn wrote one of those called *A People's History of the United States; 1492-Present*. When a historian tackles US history, from an Anabaptist perspective, looking for alternative paths to some of the countries defining moments, it's a MUST read.

James Juhnke and Carol Hunter have published a book that takes a serious look at peaceful alternatives to those events which Americans have, for so long, seen as unquestionable in the way they have played out. Juhnke and Hunter dive right in and tackle the tough issues related to peaceful alternatives to the American War of Independence, US Civil War, World Wars I & II and the Cold War. They also take a serious look at political events between such defining moments and decisions made that set the course toward violent conflict. Juhnke and Hunter uncover interesting alternatives available to American politicians that would have produced more peaceful and ultimately more just solutions to national/international events.

For people seeking peace, this book gives historical credence to alternatives. It stimulates the thinking by offering examples where the course of history could have been changed. It counters conventional wisdom in redemptive violence. It assumes that events are interrelated and a choice in one area affects choices made elsewhere. The challenge to readers is to posit these learnings forward so as to untangle the fiasco of current US foreign policy.

REVIEWED BY JON RUDY, MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE ASIA
PEACE RESOURCE, DAVAO CITY, PHILIPPINES

The author makes connections that need to be made, and paramount among them is that the personal is the political. How we tend our gardens and fields and how much fuel we consume has a direct relationship to the quality of life on the planet. How we deal with people who are homeless, hungry, and otherwise disenfranchised, and who is given "a place at the table" in our society, have a direct connection to the quality of our humanity.

- a review of Barbara Kingsolver's book *Small Wonder* in *Fellowship*, March/April 2003, p20

AROUND THE NETWORK

Anabaptist Alpha Yoder-In-Perth

BY NATHAN HOBBY

Over twelve weeks from May to August, WA members of the AAANZ ran an 'Anabaptist Alpha' program. Each week, after an agape meal of bread and soup, a simplified summary of one chapter of John Yoder's *Politics of Jesus* was presented, followed by a guided discussion.

For those who don't know the book, it draws on recent scholarship to set out a resistant reading of Jesus' life and the biblical contexts to show that we should take Jesus' life and words seriously as models for behaviour, and that his life and the life of the early church were deeply concerned with social ethics.

I hatched the plan in April with WA state representative Brad Schilling and his wife Marina. The *Politics of Jesus* was a book that influenced me so much in my theology studies that I had been wanting to find some place to share its insights thoroughly. My conservative AFES campus group proved not to be that place. My moderately radical Church of Christ was open to the line of thinking, but I finally worked out that monthly sermons from the pulpit were not adequate to try to instigate a massive and intellectually demanding reshaping of a congregation's perceptions of Jesus. Something like an Alpha course which involved extended weekly meetings and participatory discussion was a much better model.

Our aims were a little vague; but we hoped to make strong connections in the loose circle of Christian ex/post/progressive evangelicals in Perth who had especially come together around the anti-Iraq War movement as well as TEAR activities, Lesmurdie Baptist, the January urban ministry camp with Dave Andrews, and the Christian Centre for Social Action. We saw and still see the Anabaptist tradition as both a source for renewal and prophetic critique within existing churches and an excellent model for new congregations.

We held the evenings at the centrally located Christian Centre for Social Action. Attendance was erratic; and there were low points in the middle of winter where it was down to four of us and it seemed that we couldn't go on. However, we usually had between seven and ten, and the final weeks were uplifting gatherings of thirteen and seventeen respectively. Anabaptist stalwarts, Ian and Ann Duckham, were faithful participants, as was my brother Joshua, and Christian activist James Patton, who lead the session on a favourite topic of his, Romans 13.

Over the course, we had thirty different people attend, as well as many others ask for copies of the notes. This included a Jesuit priest and a Christian Brother; friends Christian and non-Christian, a majority of participants being in their teens or twenties. There were some sharp disagreements and there were some bored faces; but there were also moments of realisation and deep fellowship.

The course was timed to culminate with the visit of Mark and Mary, and indeed their Saturday night talk saw the course participants help bring in forty people.

We're not entirely sure of all the consequences. I am most of the way through editing the summaries as a simplified study

The Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand Inc.

The purposes of the Association are:

- To nurture and support the Christian faith of individuals and groups in Australia and New Zealand who identify with the Anabaptist tradition.
- To network and link individuals, churches and groups of Christians who share a common Anabaptist understanding of the Christian faith.
- To provide religious services including teaching, training, pastoral care, mediation, and counsel to its members and others interested in the Anabaptist tradition.
- To provide resources and materials relating to the tradition, perspectives, and teaching of Anabaptists to both the Christian and general public.
- To convene conferences and gatherings which provide opportunity for worship, teaching, training, consultation, celebration, and prayer in the Anabaptist tradition.
- To extend the awareness of Anabaptism in Australia and New Zealand assisting individuals, churches and groups discover and express their links with the Anabaptist tradition.
- To provide an opportunity for affiliation for churches and groups who wish to be known in Australia and New Zealand as Anabaptists.

What is Anabaptism?

Anabaptism is a radical Christian renewal movement that emerged in Europe during the sixteenth-century Reformation. Whilst Anabaptism was a grassroots movement with diverse expressions in its early development, its enduring legacy usually has included the following:

- Baptism upon profession of faith
- A view of the church in which membership is voluntary and members are accountable to the Bible and to each other
- A commitment to the way of peace and other teachings of Jesus as a rule for life
- Separation of church and state
- Worshipping congregations which create authentic community and reach out through vision and service

AAANZ

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