
Lytta Basset. *Holy Anger: Jacob, Job, Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

Lytta Basset, pastor, missions consultant, and Lutheran Professor of Biblical Studies at Neuchatel, Switzerland, has written a remarkable biographical, exegetical, theological, and psychological study of the anger of four major biblical characters (Cain is not mentioned in the title but receives significant attention) and of the anger in us all.

“God knows what it is to be angry,” Basset says in opening this provocative book, winner of the Prix Siloe in 2003. The rich, multi-layered volume carries on simultaneous conversations with the Hebrew text, the Jewish *targums*, the unfolding history of interpretation, and the wide community of Jewish and Christian commentators. It honors the narratives, stops to do Hebrew and Greek word studies, leaps to explore relational and psychological dynamics, stoops to delve into the soul with careful and critical use of psychoanalytic tools, and then returns to the narrative to rediscover its constant vitality as a mirror of human experience.

Basset finds striking parallels between the Cain-Abel tragedy, the Jacob-Esau rivalry, the Job-God/Satan dilemma, and the Jesus-human evil confrontation. She delves deeply into the biblical sources, then reflects on their psychological depths in an analysis of holy and unholy rage. The positive movement toward a holy anger is seen as an option offered to Cain and rejected, an alternative discovered by Jacob through heroic wrestling, a transcendent possibility for Job reached through anguished suffering, and as a lived reality for Jesus.

Anger that is censored and silenced is Basset’s continuing concern. The responsibility to own, explore, and express the anger within by sharing it in relationship is demonstrated in Jacob, sharply defined in Job, and transformed into holy passion for truth in relationship in Jesus. The author presses her argument for open, authentic, congruent emotional life to the very end.

Fascinating as this is to read, it follows the classic psychoanalytic paradigm demanding the expression and ventilation of anger as requisite to mental health. Most research shows this is valuable for a clinical population – certainly Cain and Jacob could have used some treatment – but not for

everyone. Owning anger can more profitably lead to canceling its demands when not just or appropriate, or to negotiation when fitting, so there is a time for silencing and censoring one's volatility.

The volume is divided into three sections. The first, "Fear of Confrontation," takes the story of Cain as the bass line with Jacob and Job as counter melodies. Cain censures his anger then explodes; Jacob hides, deceives, and at last is confronted; Job gestates, clarifies, then explodes with holy rage. All three offer alternative models for anger management: malignant internalizing, devious manipulating, and clarified confronting.

The second section, "The Human Meets His Match," is devoted to Jacob; the third, "For the Sword to Pass," encounters Jesus. Here Basset focuses more on texts speaking of Jesus' work in bringing separation and division than on those describing his reconciling work or his radical teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

Basset does more careful reading of the Hebrew than the Greek texts. There are breathtaking moments of discovery, such as her identification of Isaac as the first survivor of holocaust (sacrifice) in Jewish history, or her observation that "as Abraham sacrificed Ishmael, so Isaac sacrificed Esau." She puzzles over how Jacob swore by "the trembling of Isaac" in his oaths at his sacrifice on the mountain. Is this a lifelong palsy from the mountain-top trauma at his father's hands, or the trembling when he discovered that Jacob had outwitted him in stealing the blessing? (38)

Interwoven with the exegetical and narrative analysis are conversations with classic psychoanalysis and with the alternative interpretation of religion and violence offered by René Girard and his theory of the scapegoat as the primal mechanism shaping religion from its earliest origins. Basset brings continental thinkers to bear on this study, and they offer fresh ways of perceiving our worlds of rage and our surrounding environment so tormented by violence and war.

I find Basset's work on the patriarchs illuminating, but her approach to Jesus less clear, less balanced, and less integrative of the whole Jesus narrative. In attempting to persuade us that a gentle-Jesus-meek-and-mild Christology is insufficient, she does not fully catch the divine strength and patience of the nonviolent love that passionately confronts and absorbs the most terrifying evil. Basset speaks prophetically of the power of enemy love

and the presence of God in the enemy, but she stops short of fully revealing Jesus as the innocent one beyond all victimhood who surrenders himself to a goal beyond human anger and rage.

Called “a spiritual master” by *Le Monde*, Basset writes with passionate commitment to the right of each person to own, express, and fully embody anger. She hints that this deep urgency springs from the reality of personal suffering. Her previous books indicate a highly sensitive social conscience, and a wide concern for the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized, including those struggling with AIDS.

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John F. Haught. *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2008.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the debate between atheists and religious believers has been carried on, most often, at academic conferences. That has just very recently changed. The New Atheists (Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens) have with their books, radio interviews, and presentations at colleges and universities successfully brought the debate back into the awareness of the general public. What is new about the New Atheists is not the claim that there are natural explanations for religion – these are as old as the Sophists – but the claim that applying a cost-benefit analysis to religion demonstrates it is bad for humankind. Religion preaches love, but practices manipulative and violent hatred, and consequently we should rid ourselves of it altogether. Moreover, because it provides a space for faith, it is a breeding ground for anti-intellectual fanaticism.

Instead of religion, the New Atheists offer a thoroughgoing Darwinism in which we learn to fold in and make normative ways of being that are conducive to human survival and flourishing. Darwinism explains the rise of

religion by suggesting that our belief in God or gods is a residual hangover from the adaptive ability to imagine unseen enemies. It has now become urgent, so they would argue, to pull up the weeds of our imagination.

There are, then, two issues to consider: Does evolution explain religion? And, Is religion bad for us? In *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens*, John Haught responds to both of these issues. Haught responds to the first issue by arguing that theological and scientific explanations are not in principle opposed to each other unless one is an explanatory monist. This is the most important intellectual move to make, and it is central to any successful response to the New Atheists.

Explanatory monism is the view that there is at bottom only one account that can be given to explain a state of affairs and therefore all other accounts are in competition with it. Haught argues instead that multiple layers of understanding and explanation can exist. In fact, almost everything in life admits of a plurality of layers of explanation in which various accounts do not necessarily compete with one another. Haught's example is the page of a book you are reading. Why does it exist? One explanation is a printing press has stamped ink onto a piece of paper, but another explanation is that the author had something to say in writing. These explanations are non-competitive and in fact both are true. By extension, "you do not have to choose between evolution and divine inspiration to account for religion any more than you have to choose between the printing press and the author's intention when explaining the page you are reading" (85).

The author's response to the second issue, however, is slightly weaker. He argues that God is a God of infinite power and vulnerable love, who makes all things new and who can be approached only by way of faith, trust, and hope. This faith by which we approach God is neither simple nor anti-intellectual, as anyone who is familiar with a life of faith and reads theology knows; we are painfully aware of the misuse of the name of God. So the New Atheists are quite simply entirely mistaken in their view that God is monstrous and that followers of God are or become monstrous too. In Haught's judgment, the New Atheists are little more than fundamentalist puritans, and to engage them in discourse does not deepen faith, because their views are simplistic and their criticisms misfire. But this is where Haught could have a more generous reading of the New Atheists; yet I suspect he

cannot allow such generosity because he would have to become a pacifist in order to do so.

That is, he would have to do more than confess painful awareness of misuse of the name of God. He would have to say “No!” not to misuse but to *false* conceptions of God and ways of following God. He would stand to gain if he did so, because it would allow him to turn the tables on the New Atheists more effectively – by saying that their critique is right but hasn’t gone far enough. What we need, Haught could say, is a consequentialist analysis of not only religion but scientific naturalism also. After all, we wouldn’t want to take scientific naturalism on faith, would we?

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Connie Braun. *The Steppes are the Colour of Sepia: A Mennonite Memoir*. Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2008.

The suffering and displacement of Mennonites during the Russian Revolution and its aftermath has been a main theme – perhaps *the* main theme – of Mennonite literature in Canada over the last half-century. Given the scope and intensity of these disasters, the attention that has been paid to them seems natural and right (though in the dismal history of the Revolution and the Stalin era, of course, the Mennonite role is a small part). As time passes, and more and more of the survivors pass on, recording their stories becomes ever more urgent.

The Steppes are the Colour of Sepia, Connie Braun’s memoir, draws most deeply and dramatically on her father’s memories of his family’s long struggle for survival through the revolution, the massive restructuring, collectivization, and famines of the 1920s and ’30s, and the further devastations of World War II. Fleshed out with material from photographs and numerous other literary, historical, and personal sources, this book is a significant addition to this literature of memory.

Braun's grandfather Jakob Letkemann was born in 1893 in the Ukraine. His parents died young, and in 1914 he joined a new Mennonite colony in Slavgorod in western Siberia. He served in the Russian medical corps during World War I, and married Maria Siemens, also of the Siberian colony, in 1918. A pastor forbidden to preach by Stalin's edicts, Jakob moved his family repeatedly between Siberia and Ukraine over the next dozen years, often hiding out to evade the authorities.

Braun's father Peter, born among the famines and collectivization of the early 1930s, began to offer Braun his detailed stories and memories only near the end of his life, and she has done substantial background research. This is not a scholarly book, however; its heart is in its sustained depictions of the daily life of an unassuming family caught up in such complicated and devastating times. World War II brings still more displacements: the family escapes from Ukraine to Dresden, then is relocated to Yugoslavia, where Peter becomes by default a member of the Hitler Youth. With the end of the war they must move again, eventually to occupied Austria (where Jakob dies of cancer in Salzburg), and finally in 1948 to Canada.

Braun recounts these moves, hardships, and daring escapes with consistent sympathy; the family, and the Mennonites in general, are consistently treated as faithful Christians and undeserving victims of both Communist and Nazi brutalities. Some of the most engaging sections describe young Peter's adventures in the midst of war. Here the elderly Peter remembers an encounter with a group of German soldiers who have been "fishing" a stream with hand grenades:

"They made us wade into the stream to collect their fish. It was April, still quite cold. They weren't nice to us, so after gathering up the floating fish, we said we couldn't find any more. They took what we brought out and then left." Father remembers the scene clearly.

In only their underwear, Isaac and Peter creep back into the frigid water, and breathlessly reach down to the stream bed to pick up the rest, fish whose air sacs had popped from the explosion, and sunk to the bottom.

"We took them home – fish for supper." (147)

Yet the author also notes the ironies of war, in which Mennonites were freed from their Soviet domination by the Nazi army, and then the Soviet army liberated Auschwitz: "through the sharp lens of hindsight, I

reflect on how the Mennonites, *Volksdeutsche*, and Ukrainians once viewed the German occupiers as their liberators from Stalin's purges. . . . The faces of oppressor and liberator blur, are indistinguishable. Suffering comes into focus" (144).

While the narrative is generally readable and the dramatic events themselves will keep many readers engaged, the writing is sometimes slow-moving, imprecise, and self-conscious: "His penmanship is indicative of my perception of an officer of the Reich. Precise. Systematic" (112). My advance reader's copy included only two photographs, but the Ronsdale Press description promises twelve in the finished version. A map or two to clarify the family's complex journeys would also have been welcome.

The Steppes are the Colour of Sepia tells an engrossing tale, and makes a worthy contribution to the preservation and understanding of the Mennonite diaspora of the last century. Recommended for all those interested in this time period, and libraries with even modest Mennonite collections.

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Paul Louis Metzger. *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

"The coffee bar and the Lord's table are symbolic: both are symbols that communicate powerfully their use of 'sacred' space" (5). Paul Louis Metzger, professor of Christian theology at Multnomah Biblical Seminary in Portland, Oregon, introduces these symbols as a challenge to the evangelical church dwelling amidst the seductions of a consumer society. The sacred space of the market is infiltrating the church, says Metzger, whose book outlines how consumerism reinforces race and class divisions within society and within the church, and how the evangelical church must respond.

In an age of consumer culture, a relevant though not comfortable gospel calls for a counter-cultural approach. Metzger rightly identifies a crucial disconnect emerging from the evangelical tendency to focus on personal

and friendship evangelism, especially when that tendency is coupled with pragmatism toward social engagement: a fostering of the belief that social-structural problems like racism will be eliminated by changing the hearts of individuals through one-on-one encounters and friendships.

Metzger draws upon theologians, pastors, sociologists of religion, literary works, and scripture itself to build his case. Using sources as varied as Jonathan Edwards, Martin Luther King, Jr., and C.S. Lewis, the author critiques attempts to play to individualistic impulses, like the popular affinity-based model of church growth that depends upon homogeneity and further isolates people of diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds from one another.

This book will be helpful for leaders and members of predominantly white congregations seeking to become multiracial, particularly churches located in areas with little racial or ethnic diversity. It is narrowly focused for readers who may not have theological or sociological analyses of oppressive systems, and it points to other works (primarily by other evangelicals, both black and white) that can assist with such analyses.

Metzger sticks primarily to the language of overcoming barriers and multiculturalism, rather than pointing towards the task of understanding how oppressive structures work and dismantling the system of racism. To be fair, Metzger knows his audience, noting in the introduction that he is an evangelical writing to/for evangelicals. He calls upon them to “be intentional about creating diversity groups that include members from different ethnic and economic subcultures in order to nurture sensitivity and build understanding and reconciliation among these groups” (66).

Drawing on the theology and ethics of Jonathan Edwards, Metzger makes an argument for evangelicalism to focus on the work of the spirit in order to foster a “proper relationship of transformed hearts to righteous acts.” The righteous acts will transform lifestyles from those of a consumer spirit into those of mission-mindedness. Re-ordering the church will begin with re-ordering the church’s space.

Consuming Jesus will not likely offend readers hungry for encouragement and direction towards recreating church structures that transcend boundaries of race and class.

Readers not seeking a reason to transgress boundaries, especially

in the context of church life and practice, may be offended as Metzger critiques the leaders and ministries of prosperous megachurches like Rick Warren's Saddleback and Joel Olsteen's Lakewood Church in Houston. For example, Metzger recounts that members of his own congregation expressed concern for the safety of the church's children after he preached a sermon calling upon the congregation to reach out to those in need within the local community, including the homeless. Other readers will say this book does not go far enough. The word "racism" rarely appears; the author prefers "racialization" and phrases like "racial reconciliation."

Metzger does introduce the language of powers and fallen powers, including those of empire. Jesus is the example of how the tables are turned on fallen principalities and powers, including the challenge to consumerism. Metzger in turn challenges the contemporary church's dearly-held doctrine of a God-given right to choose or select what it wants, including churches, based on preference and taste. The author recommends shaking up stagnant structures that impede the potential of the church, a shaking up that calls for a balance of the personal (changing the heart, calls for reconciliation and forgiveness) and the structural (rethinking the way church is done).

Sunday school classes and small groups will find this book a useful catalyst for discussions about church growth and congregational identity. It would also be a helpful addition to a seminary ministry course, especially if paired with a companion text written by a person of color addressing similar themes.

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Ted Grimsrud. *Embodying the Way of Jesus: Anabaptist Convictions for the Twenty-First Century*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007.

How can one articulate a vision for contemporary Christian life that stands in an authentic historical and theological relationship with 16th-century Anabaptists and can therefore legitimately be called “Anabaptist”? Examples of the attempt to do so include Tom Finger’s *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004) and J. Denny Weaver’s *Becoming Anabaptist: The Origins and Significance of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, 2nd ed. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2005, orig. ed. 1987).

The appropriation of an “Anabaptist vision” for contemporary life is itself a controversial enterprise among Anabaptist historians. (Ted Grimsrud feels comfortable applying *Anabaptist* both to its sixteenth-century expression and to the “on-going ideals rooted in that movement” [109].) One problem is that Anabaptist history has been overly generalized and even romanticized in service to a contemporary vision, as in Harold S. Bender’s *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1944) and Franklin Littell’s *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958). A second problem has to do with the validity of applying a theological emphasis from one historical context to a contemporary one that is inevitably quite different. A third problem is whether “Anabaptism” properly consists of *distinctives* or a *larger theological construct*, some of which could historically be assumed. However challenging the enterprise, I applaud Grimsrud and others for the attempt.

Chapter one, which was “pre-printed” in *MQR* (July 2006), and chapter two (“Whither Contemporary Anabaptist Theology?”) were “written specifically” for *Embodying the Way of Jesus* (3). The rest were drawn from Grimsrud’s academic and pastoral work. The book consists of six parts, each of which contains two to four chapters. Part One is Getting Oriented; Two, Bible; Three, Tradition; Four, Experience; Five, Vision; and Six, Church.

In Part One Grimsrud lays out what he sees as the Anabaptist vision. It has four “central characteristics.” It is (1) a free church, (2) (largely) pacifist, (3) anti-clerical (i.e., rejects hierarchies and top-down leadership),

and (4) a sharing church. Grimsrud challenges Finger (and A. James Reimer) for adopting mainstream Christianity's tendency to articulate its theology primarily in *doctrinal* terms, rather than *practice-oriented* terms. Grimsrud includes here his essay "Is God Nonviolent?" that appeared in *CGR* in 2003. He argues that God is nonviolent despite the abundant biblical evidence that God is nonviolent like most *Christians* are nonviolent (i.e., *most* of the time, with peace as the goal but not necessarily the means). Furthermore, since we "need" a God who is nonviolent, Grimsrud suggests that we understand God in that way, though this comes perilously close to the definition of idolatry, in my opinion.

Grimsrud emphasizes three Anabaptist principles with regard to biblical interpretation: the hermeneutics of obedience; hermeneutical privileging of the poor; and the congregational context. The author recognizes the hermeneutical challenges and articulates an approach informed by Hans-Georg Gadamer that is largely liberationist in character. The theological unity of the Bible is provided by "God's healing strategy."

As others have done, Grimsrud skips over centuries two to fifteen as irrelevant to Anabaptist tradition theology. Tradition begins with the sixteenth century. His tracing of the story from Anabaptism's radical origins through its mutation to the "quiet in the land" is cursory, as he covers 500 years in 16 pages. This reviewer wonders how one might more perceptively critique natural sociological shifts in theological terms.

Part Four (Experience) is a bit of a catch-all category in which Grimsrud explores the significance of Civilian Public Service for understanding Anabaptist pacifism, considers the nature of Anabaptist participation in politics, and develops what has become known as the "Neo-Mennonite" perspective in which he aligns with J. Denny Weaver and C. Norman Kraus against Reimer and Finger. Part Five (Vision) contains an excellent articulation of what Grimsrud calls "ethical eschatology." In chapter 13 ("Theological Basics: A Contemporary Anabaptist Proposal"), he offers an outline of theology in which he uses standard categories: Jesus Christ, revelation, God, Holy Spirit, human beings, the church, and our final end (i.e., eschatology). Finally, Part Six explores the nature of the church.

Embodying the Way of Jesus is full of valuable insights and articulations of various themes (among many that could be cited here, see his

comments on nonconformity and ethical eschatology). Despite its disjointed construction as a compilation of sermons, lectures, and essays written for various contexts, it represents a valuable contribution to contemporary discussions about what Anabaptism looks like in the twenty-first century.

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Diane Zimmerman Umble and David L. Weaver-Zercher. *The Amish and the Media*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

If you want to avoid being in the media, try not to be too different from the surrounding culture: don't wear unique clothing, don't eschew technology and, for heaven's sake, don't have an aversion to being photographed or filmed. That, at least, seems to be the lesson of the Amish, especially for those living in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. For this unique member of the Anabaptist family, a desire to be separate from the world – and ignored by it – has resulted in a torrent of attention through books, articles, TV, movies, and tourists, and on the World Wide Web. At the same time, it has required members of that community to develop a certain kind of media savvy to cope with the ongoing fascination many North Americans have for their culture.

The goal of *The Amish and the Media* is to explore the complex and complicated issues raised by the telling, and selling, of the Amish story. This collection of 11 scholarly essays grew out of a 2001 conference titled “The Amish, Old Orders and The Media,” sponsored by the Young Center for Anabaptist Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College. The submissions, written by experts in areas such as film and media studies, American studies, poetry, anthropology, and history, provide valuable insights into not only how the media interpret the Amish, but also how the Amish themselves seek – to greater and lesser degrees – to mediate and influence the interpretation of their lives.

That 2001 conference might have provided the foundation for this book, but the tragic shooting of ten Amish girls at their schoolhouse in

Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania in October 2006 is the catalytic event that underscores it – and makes this book all the more relevant and important. The outpouring of worldwide media attention that followed the tragedy thrust the Amish into the limelight as never before and led to an examination of the complicated relationship between the Amish and the media by people on both sides, with some of the Amish wondering if they had gone too far in cooperating with reporters, and some reporters wondering if their profession had gone over the line at times in pursuit of the story. This event, which will likely be of highest interest to most readers, is given a detailed and illuminating exploration by Umble and Weaver-Zercher in their chapter, titled “The Amish, the Media and the Nickel Mines Shooting.”

The book also explores how the Amish have been portrayed in movies such as *Witness* and *Amish in the City*, in documentaries, poetry, and non-fiction, and through tourism. It also takes a look at the ways the Amish produce and consume media themselves – they may not permit TV-watching or the Internet, but they like to read and many subscribe to Amish-affiliated newspapers like *The Budget* and *Die Botschaft*.

The book itself raises an interesting question, and one that is lightly touched upon by the editors themselves: What is the role and responsibility of the writers and scholars in mediating the Amish to the world? Scholars are mediators too – in the classroom, in articles, and when they are interviewed by reporters about a group of people who prefer not to talk about themselves at all. What is their responsibility to the Amish, who would just as soon not be the subject of a report, but also to the media, who have a job to do and who will do it, whether or not they are aided by experts? That’s a question that anyone who works in media relations for religious or international development or North American anti-poverty organizations also wrestles with; it could be an interesting subject for a future conference.

This book will be of interest to anyone who is interested in the media portrayal of the Amish, and to those who want to know more about the issue of religion and the media in general – as seen through the lens of this media-shy yet highly visible group of people.

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Ronald J. Sider. *I am Not a Social Activist: Making Jesus the Agenda*. Waterloo: Herald Press, 2008.

This book is a selection of 44 columns written by Ronald Sider for Evangelicals for Social Action's *Prism* magazine, of which he is the publisher. They are undated but appeared between 1993 and 2007. The columns cover a variety of topics, but the repeated message is a call to live in ways that are faithful to Jesus and the Scriptures.

Sider addresses the book's surprising title by saying, "I'm not a social activist. I'm a disciple of Jesus Christ, the Savior and Lord of the universe" (21). For him the greatest question is "How can I live more like Jesus?" (14). Thus his motive for social activism is faithfulness to Christ, and although social change from our actions may come slowly, if at all, we can be confident that "the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our risen Lord" (19). As Myron Augsburger says in his foreword to the book, Sider "holds together evangelism and social responsibility" (11). His evangelicalism promotes not merely a private personal relationship with God but also a transformed society and creation.

Sider passionately urges the church to resist the seduction of surrounding cultures and the forsaking of biblical norms for sexuality, justice, and enemy-loving. He just as passionately urges the church to advocate for the poor, racial justice, women, peace, the civil rights of gays and lesbians, and the environment. Sider eschews the political labels of right and left, and urges Christians to unite in a common political agenda. One step in this direction was the adoption in 2004 of the statement "For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility" by the National Association of Evangelicals in the United States. Another step was taken in 2006 as five families of Christians (Catholic, evangelical, mainline Protestant, Orthodox, and African-American) launched a new ecumenical organization in the US called Christian Churches Together to strengthen their mutual understanding and common public witness.

As with his books on peacemaking, in three essays on this topic Sider asks the vast majority of Christians who espouse a "just war" theology whether war was indeed the "last resort." He gives several examples of nonviolent alternatives having succeeded despite the church's hesitation to

embrace this approach in any substantial way. Jesus taught his followers not to kill, and his final word is resurrection. Sider therefore challenges the church “to live what we preach” (178) by serious training and deployment for nonviolent peacemaking.

On a more personal note, Sider writes tenderly about his family, particularly his devotion to his wife, the dying days of his father, and the birth of his first grandchild. In a world of pain and misery, there are still hundreds of millions of spouses who love each other and parents who love their children just as the Creator of the galaxies loves us. The author sees a conflict between stable families and individual freedoms, and says “we must transcend both conservative patriarchy and individualistic feminism” (55) and “self-centered male irresponsibility” (57). More marriages based on self-sacrifice plus self-fulfillment would be an inspiration to the world.

Sider also reflects on the runaway success of his 1977 book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. It began with a sermon idea for a “graduated tithe,” which begins at 10 percent of income, and the percentage tithe grows as one’s income grows. The book eventually sold 400,000 copies in nine languages and became integral to his public identity. Yet, in a chapter entitled “They’re Still Hungry; We’re Still Rich,” he both expresses gratitude for the book’s success and prays personally for “the grace to live faithfully to whatever in the book is biblical and true” (155).

This book is an engaging mix of short essays on a variety of contemporary topics, consistent with Sider’s earlier books on these topics, and suitable for individual browsing or group discussion. While the author claims in the book’s title that he is not a social activist, he has devoted this book and his life to calling the church, and evangelicals in particular, to more social action in order to transform the world in biblical ways.

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John L. Thompson. *Reading the Bible with the Dead: What You Can Learn from the History of Exegesis That You Can't Learn from Exegesis Alone*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

John Thompson, a professor of historical theology at Fuller Theological Seminary who specializes in the history of biblical interpretation, is convinced that “we don’t fully know what the Bible *means* until we know something about what the Bible *has meant*” (11). Contemporary interpretation of scripture is most insightful and faithful when “the teachers and preachers of the early church, the Middle Ages, and the Reformation era – are invited to join us in a conversation” (216).

To illustrate these convictions Thompson focuses on some of the Bible’s problematic texts of violence, vengeance, and abuse (especially of women) that are typically omitted by our sanitized lectionary and sermons but were of great concern to earlier interpreters. Because “members of our own churches bear many of the same scars and open wounds as the characters in the Bible’s hardest tales” (5), attending to these characters can be a pastoral act of honoring and addressing the woundedness in our own midst.

The bulk of the book consists of nine free-standing chapters bearing provocative titles such as “Hagar in Salvation-History: Victim or Villain? Symbol or Saint?,” “Psalms and Curses: Anger Management, on Earth as It Is in Heaven,” and “Gomer and Hosea: Does God Approve of Wife Abuse?”

Each chapter summarizes why a text or topic is problematic, surveys how pre-critical commentators dealt with it, and concludes with reflections on contemporary implications for faithful interpretation. One of the more fascinating chapters is “Patriarchs Behaving Badly: How Should We Follow Saints Who Lie, Cheat, Break Promises, Commit Insurrection, Endanger Women, and Take Extra Wives?” This chapter explores how interpreters have grappled with the “sins” of key biblical characters often championed as exemplars of the faith.

Some of the proposed explanations include these: God granted Abraham special permission to lie about Sarah not being his wife; Jacob’s deceptive acquisition of the blessing intended for Esau was appropriate

because he was only taking what God had promised him; Lot's offering of his daughters to the depraved men of Sodom was not sinful because Lot knew that divine providence would intervene. Interpreters struggled with two competing impulses, not wanting either to condemn the heroes of the faith or to encourage copycat offences.

Problems resulted when the latter impulse was relaxed. Based on the precedent of polygamy among biblical patriarchs, Martin Luther reluctantly approved the bigamy of his patron Prince Philip of Hesse, who threatened to withdraw his political support for the Protestant Reformation.

The contemporary lessons Thompson draws from this discussion are that: not all of the Bible is a model for us; there is no need to fabricate hidden scenarios to let biblical heroes off the hook; when the actions of biblical characters clash with the teachings of the Bible, then the latter should prevail; and interpreters must avoid the mistake of Luther and others who made special concessions to people in power and allowed political concerns to determine interpretation. While these are valuable lessons, I am not totally convinced that we need lengthy discussions of the history of interpretation to arrive at what are fairly common-sense insights in our time.

In the concluding chapter "On Cultivating the Habit of History: Reading the Bible in the Presence of the Past," Thompson encourages Christians to nurture a sense "for how the essentials of the gospel have come to us already much considered and much digested, through centuries of reflection and controversy within the Christian church" (215). Surely this is a valuable insight for us contemporary Christians prone to amnesia about our forebears in the faith and thus tempted to act as if we are the first generation of believers. Thompson suggests that a pastor imbibe history in small doses by consulting what older commentators say about the text the pastor is studying in preparation for preaching or teaching. To facilitate access to such resources Thompson provides a finding guide of printed and electronic versions of old commentaries.

Thompson's passion for the history of biblical interpretation is infectious, and the author has a gift for bringing together academic study of history and pastoral needs of the contemporary church. Pastors and others interested in the history of interpretation will find this an engaging book. Those not yet interested in such history will do well to read it also, as a way

to develop an appreciation for both the wisdom and the short-sightedness of those who have gone before, and to learn practices to imitate and pitfalls to avoid.

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Waldemar Janzen. *Growing Up in Turbulent Times: Memoirs of Soviet Oppression, Refugee Life in Germany, and Immigrant Adjustment to Canada*. Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2007.

Waldemar Janzen is no stranger to many across Canada and beyond, given the decades that he spent on the faculty of CMBC (now part of Canadian Mennonite University). He has now added to an already rich legacy as a respected scholar and teacher with this absorbing account of, essentially, his life before Winnipeg. The book's title is apt, as Janzen did live in turbulent times during his earliest decades, for how else to describe a life shaped by Stalinist repression in the 1930s and the terror and carnage of World War II?

Indeed, if there is anything to quibble about in this book, it may be its designation as a memoir. It is often a memoir in some places but not in others, and this adds to the considerable richness of the whole. For Janzen was also a diarist and faithfully recorded much of his life in his *Braunes Büchlein* (followed by his *Schwarzes Büchlein* after 1950).

Now, years later, he often engages with both of these diaries as he writes his memoir. This allows him to be a memoirist at times and a historian at other times, and it is to his great credit that he can move back and forth between these roles with ease. For example, Janzen decided to enroll at Waterloo Lutheran College in the early 1950s in order to study theology. He first recalls this memory (238); then he produces his diary account of the momentous decision; whereupon he reflects on what had made it the logical next step in his life. The same interchange occurs in a moving account of his twentieth birthday and the intense loneliness that enveloped him on that

day (219). Once again, the memory is told in dynamic engagement with his recording of the day in his *Büchlein* (for one more instance, see 156).

All of which points to another strength of this study, and that is its candor. Thus we encounter Janzen's first moment of "sex education" (20), followed by recollections of his earliest religious education (21). He lets us into what a Chortitza Christmas looked like for refugees far from their homeland (132). He beautifully evokes the splendor of walks in the hills of Germany (112, for example), but expresses his amazement to learn years later that most Canadians struggled to know anything of the natural world beyond "the maple tree, the beaver, and the buffalo" (245).

Janzen's study is also delicately understated, as when he wonders how his exiled father is present in young Waldemar (28-29). Even his first contact with his father after many years is subdued beyond the exclamation marks (158) with no mention – for instance – of his mother's reaction. This is not to say the entire work is written with a certain reserve. Indeed, there are moments when Janzen appears almost overwhelmed, as in recalling the hospitality shown by women at the *Gasthaus* in Schlüsselfeld (105) or in his evocative reflection on Scheinfeld at the point of departure (166).

There is a way in which the refugee trek from the Soviet Union to Canada is only one of the journeys described in Janzen's "memoir." No less important, it seems, is the author's existential journey of faith, starting with his recollection of his first Bible stories (21). In time, his questions would grow, as in his critical and honest engagement with the Anabaptist notion of pacifism (250-51), which he does come to embrace.

It may interest readers to learn how much this seemingly most Mennonite of professors was profoundly shaped by Catholic and Lutheran influences and how these were at the core of his faith development and eventual baptism (148). It seems clear that the road that took Janzen to CMBC and (back to?) the Mennonite church was largely shaped by the writings of the church fathers and later Lutheran theologians (see 252-53).

There is much more that one could say, including the fact that Janzen divides his work into four discrete sections: childhood in Soviet Ukraine; two years in West Prussia and Mecklenburg; almost three years in Bavaria and Würtemberg; and a final section that includes memories associated with Waterloo and Chicago. He ends his reflections in 1956, with CMBC just

around the corner.

The tone of this study is best captured by its dedication to Janzen's two parents: a long-separated father who emerged from the camps only to die in Kazakhstan in 1957, and a mother with whom he traveled throughout the pages of this lovely work. It is a fitting dedication, and all the more so as it begins a remarkable memoir – one surely worthy of their memory.

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