interpretations or conclusions. The work would lend itself well to a study on atonement in an upper-year university course, perhaps alongside works with a similar theme such as J. Denny Weaver's *The Nonviolent Atonement* (a book which is addressed at the end of the first section in a coda entitled "The Cross, Atonement, and Nonviolence").

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Alan Soffin. *Rethinking Religion: Beyod Scientism, Theism, and Philosophic Doubt.* Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2011; John Suk. *Not Sure: A Pastor's Journey from Faith to Doubt.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011.

Those enthralled with the intellectual life like to think that we follow the evidence, that we seek truth for its own reward. Both Jon Suk and Alan Soffin are comfortable enough in their own minds to admit that the circumstances of their lives have affected their quest for understanding. Suk's *Not Sure* and Soffin's *Rethinking Religion* are exercises in sense-making. Suk's confidence in the Reformed tradition, his ecclesial home since his youth, was eroded by exposure to other traditions, years serving as a lightning rod—pastor and editor of a denominational publication—and travel to parts of the world where humanity's frailty and viciousness are less shielded by wealth. The thought lines of Soffin's book serve as the *coup de grâce* to a scientific naturalist perspective the author once held. For Soffin the struggle was prompted by the premature death of a spouse and subsequent passing of friends.

Readers will sense the respective authors' attempts to assess the significance of their lives. Both writers look back on views they previously held, in some cases views predicated by institutional location and culture, and forward towards some sort of individual actualization (or social fragmentation). But to say these books are biographically driven would be a disservice, for neither can be fairly reduced to brooding melodrama and neither is without substantive intellectual reflection. The two volumes are quite different: Suk's a spiritual memoir and a narration of the place of faith

in Western culture, Soffin's a work of analytical philosophy optimistically intended for a general readership.

Rethinking Religion is a tightly linked argument extended over almost 400 pages. The author beckons readers from the far side of a river, asking them to step from one rock to the next, each easy enough, until, whether they intended to or not, they stand at his shoulder, "religion" rethought. The arc of this book is polemical scattershot, though its thesis is clear. As its full title suggests, it seeks to move beyond the unworkable approaches of scientism and traditional theism. Soffin also abhors skepticism but uses it to demonstrate the miraculous character of knowing: to be human is to possess something philosophically inexplicable—knowledge. As material beings, noetic humanity represents a hypostatic union of another order. The moment humans possess knowledge rendered as meaning is the instant the world comes to be, for creation is a foil, albeit one destined to be rethought. The far bank, then, is religion reconstructed: a land where God is the way things are and God's substance is necessity. For all the linear logic and rationalist assumptions, it is "a love and respect for the substance of things," an attitude Soffin finds common to both "Confucian and Native American" perspectives, that serves as the book's concluding note (381).

Suk's *Not Sure* is a two-paneled tableau. On one panel is sketched the author's spiritual journey. Suk stretches the borders to include his pre-modern ancestors, modern theological formation, postmodern fellow graduate students, and his recent experience of the allure of the web. He aims to show the genealogy of his own destabilization and the origins of his doubt, and to etch a line of connection to the second panel, where he attempts to describe the major periods of Western culture and the meaning of each for faith. The narrative is marked by references to communication theory and the effects of technological development on popular spirituality. The result is Western history divided into several epochs: oral, literate, postmodern, and the present, described as a return to orality. Each panel is laid out in installments. Most of the first four chapters are hinged together in this way. The final chapters explore faith in the present tense. Suk concludes that faith is the act of keeping on, even when one is unsure the path still leads anywhere.

One delightful thing about both books is their skewering of silly but

popular theological notions. Suk, for instance, takes pleasure in pointing out the obtuseness of the idea that being a Christian is mostly about having a "personal relationship with Jesus." More painfully he shakes up common views on prayer, and makes it clear that many Christian denominations are preoccupied with self-preservation. For his part, Soffin attacks the idea that theists can defend God's existence by affirming human incompetence to grapple with big questions under the guise of championing "faith." More perceptively he contends against several iterations of the ontological argument.

Ironically, most Mennonite readers may identify more with Suk's book, published by a press with roots in Reformed soil, than with Soffin's volume, championed by Cascadia. Mennonite institutions have had little time for philosophy, and the modern, comprehensive ambition of *Rethinking Religion* will do little to change that. But Mennonite readers of Suk's *Not Sure* will find much that is familiar, such as an ethnic/cultural church worried about assimilation and struggling to keep its youth. They will know from experience the predictable in-house conversations, church politics, and trophy-making of the idiosyncratic convert that Suk describes.

Neither book, however, should be recommended uncritically. The early chapters of *Not Sure* read as though two book ideas were combined as an austerity measure. Suk's cultural history is at its best when discussing technology and literature. It is markedly weaker when trying to explain the relationship between elite intellectual trends and downmarket cultural realities: see the hazardous use of the term "postmodern." Also, inane phrases like "rocks my world" should not have leaked into the published volume (4).

Though the writing in *Rethinking Religion* is remarkably clear for the genre, few will want to attempt crossing so much rough water in one volume. The author's argument would have benefited by avoiding the term "religion" altogether. It is rarely clear what it refers to, and this vagueness allows Soffin to avoid dealing substantively with any religious tradition. It is no surprise, then, that his resulting argument tips in favor of the secular. The term "theism" is similarly unhelpful. The author seems to think it can encompass all traditions that affirm creation and deny the eternality of matter. In these ways the essentialist strains of this form of argumentation are obvious. For example, even though Soffin surely means to include

Christianity in his analysis, even relatively unschooled believers would reject their way of life being described as a "religion." Those trained in theology know that the drama of Christian doctrine is not centrally about creation. Early theologians fingered the issue to insert distance between themselves and the Platonists, but it is not the dramatic heart of Christianity. That title belongs to re-creation. In addition, the inclusion of a superficial sixth chapter called "Responses" undercuts the seriousness of Soffin's work: the three contributors scholars are unclear about their assignment and fail to engage Soffin's philosophical analysis. The fault may lie with an editorial decision to turn a monograph into a prosaic dialogue.

Doubt and the reconceptualization of religion are topics with a certain currency today. In this light both these books make a contribution. However, for younger readers educated outside parochial institutions and immersed in a wider culture awash in doubt and rethinking, the pathos driving these two volumes bespeaks the struggles of a previous generation.

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Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld. *Killing Enmity: Violence and the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011.

Violence. Peace. There may be no more pressing issue in our times than violence, no greater need for our world than peace. Accordingly, there may be no matter of greater relevance for the church than learning to interpret violence in the Bible as we strive to live the gospel of peace as a light to the nations. Hence the urgency and import of Tom Yoder Neufeld's fine new book.

There would seem to be no sharper opposites than violence and peace. Yet, as Yoder Neufeld observes, the New Testament confronts us with violence in the very creation of peace. On the cross, Jesus "murders hostility"