

Foreword

This issue of CGR is partly thematic, as about half of it comprises a discussion of J. Denny Weaver's notable 2001 publication, *The Nonviolent Atonement*. Papers in this section were presented at a Mennonite forum held during the 2007 AAR/SBL meeting in San Diego. The discussion is introduced by Ted Grimsrud and includes Weaver's response to his interlocutors. The other half of the issue is devoted to an article on the theology of fundraising (CGR may be unique in presenting this particular topic), a reflection on an old but not forgotten hymn, and a spate of book reviews on an array of recent titles. We are confident that readers will find much of interest in this wide-ranging issue.

Future issues are now taking shape. The 2009 Bechtel Lectures, "Ambassadors of Reconciliation: Biblical and Contemporary Witnesses" by Ched Myers and Elaine Enns will soon appear. An issue on "Teaching the Bible" is in the planning stages, as is an issue tentatively entitled "International Justice and Reconciliation: Challenges and Opportunities for the Peace Church Tradition" that will examine the relationship/s of Mennonites to both the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine and the International Criminal Court. See the respective Calls for Papers at the end of this volume.

Readers should note that the CGR website offers all the book reviews published since 2006 and is regularly updated between print issues.

We invite articles and reflections to be submitted for consideration – and we are always happy to welcome new subscribers.

C. Arnold Snyder, *Academic Editor* Stephen A. Jones, *Managing Editor*

APOLOGY

In the Winter 2009 issue, we ran the penultimate version of an article by Jon Hoover, "Islamic Monotheism and the Trinity," rather than the final version. We apologize to the author and to our readers for the error. Thankfully, we note that the final version did not differ substantially from the version we printed. We will gladly send an electronic copy of the final version to anyone requesting it. Contact the Managing Editor at cgredit@uwaterloo.ca.

REFLECTIONS ON J. DENNY WEAVER'S *THE NONVIOLENT ATONEMENT*

Introductory Comments

Ted Grimsrud

J. Denny Weaver's *The Nonviolent Atonement* was published in 2001 by Eerdmans, and has been widely reviewed and discussed. We have the advantage at this point of taking stock after the book has had a chance to "settle" a bit.

At the Mennonite and Friends Forum at the 2007 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature held in San Diego in November, three Anabaptist scholars shared their reflections on Weaver's book. Weaver responded. The following written versions of this exchange capture only some of the liveliness of the conversation. Unfortunately, we do not have a written record of the stimulating discussion that followed the presentations. Hopefully, though, what we are able to provide will help further the on-going task of reflection on how peace theology speaks to issues of atonement and salvation.

Since probably at least some readers of this journal have not yet read the book, I offer the following as a brief synopsis of Weaver's main ideas.

In *The Nonviolent Atonement*, Weaver has identified Christian beliefs about atonement, about how Jesus brings together human beings and God, as a key arena where theology leaves open the door (or perhaps even itself opens the door) for violence as an expression of God's will.

In taking our thinking about atonement in a more peaceable direction, Weaver develops what he calls a "narrative Christus Victor" view of atonement. For this view, Jesus' victory over the powers involves his pacifist and countercultural life and teaching that modeled freedom from the powers, his refusal to retaliate as they conspired to kill him, and, crucially, God's nonviolent raising Jesus from the dead that validated Jesus' way of life as God's way and exposed the powers as rebels against God.

Weaver understands narrative Christus Victor to be clearly in the

Christus Victor family of atonement images, but its biblical foundation makes it their forerunner. It bears some resemblance to the “cosmic battle” version of Christus Victor, but it brings the battle down from the cosmos and locates it first of all in the confrontation between Jesus and the forces of evil embodied, for example, in the Roman Empire that executed him.

For Weaver, therefore, the death of Jesus is not something needed by God; the object of Jesus’ death is not God or God’s law (as in the “satisfaction” view of the atonement) or humanity (as in the “moral influence” view). Narrative Christus Victor differs from the “ransom” view in seeing the opponent from which Jesus frees the believer not in terms of a personal devil but rather – following Walter Wink – as a constellation of principalities and powers.

Weaver’s God is free to forgive without the mechanistic constraints of honor, holiness, or retributive justice. Jesus’ victory is seen not in a violent murder that God needs, but in Jesus’ life of freedom from the powers and his exposure of their true nature and ultimate weakness in his faithfulness unto death and resurrection. Understood this way, the atonement becomes a model for discipleship, for following Jesus in the ways of peace and trusting in God’s victorious love.

Weaver assumes that theology has ethical consequences, and thus nonviolence is an indispensable criterion for evaluating *all* theological convictions and doctrines. He also emphasizes the *contextual* nature of all theology; no theology transcends its own particular human context. Our views of God and Jesus, for example, are to be weighed in relationship to how they are in harmony or in tension with pacifist convictions.

Weaver reads the Bible as a *story*. He finds in the book of Revelation and in the gospels a portrayal of God and salvation presented in narrative form that points toward “narrative Christus Victor,” that is, the story of Jesus’ saving victory won through persevering love.

Weaver has a broader understanding of sin than is found in the satisfaction views. For him, sin specifically includes distorted social relationships, in contrast to satisfaction’s primarily vertical understanding of sin as the violation of God’s commands or God’s honor.

Jesus’ resurrection stands directly at the center of the salvation story Weaver sees in the New Testament. The salvation Jesus brings depends upon

God raising him from the dead, thereby vindicating Jesus' way as the way of truth. This centrality of resurrection contrasts with its apparent marginality in the satisfaction view.

Weaver rejects the satisfaction view because: (1) it is not actually supported by the biblical texts often raised on its behalf (e.g., Paul, Hebrews, Old Testament sacrifices); (2) it misrepresents the God of the Bible as a God who requires an act of retributive violence at the heart of things rather than using thoroughly peaceable means; and (3) it is complicit in the ages-long oppression of vulnerable people (explicitly, in Weaver's argument, African-Americans and women).

Whether or not we agree with Weaver's moves and conclusions, we do have enough evidence from the past few years to support Rosemary Radford Ruether's blurb on the book cover: This is "an important book for contemporary Christological theology." Thanks to Weaver and his respondents for advancing our conversation of this important work.

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Don't Need No Satisfaction: Rolling the Stone Away with J. Denny Weaver

Sharon L. Baker

I

As a recovering conservative Southern Baptist, I am fairly new to the Mennonite Community. So *please allow me to introduce myself*. I am a sinner saved by the work of Jesus as articulated in the penal substitutionary model of atonement. In my mid-twenties, entrenched in a society infiltrated with retributive theories of justice, penal substitution provided me with the inner peace and *emotional rescue* I needed to soften my *heart of stone*. What can I say; a *long, long while* ago that narrative worked for me.

In an article entitled “Communicating the Gospel in Terms of Shame,” Timothy Boyle draws attention to the importance of telling the Gospel story in ways relevant to the socio-cultural and psychological world-structure of those brought up in Japan. The differences between the Eastern shame-based society and the Western guilt-based society figure prominently in effectively communicating the work of Jesus during his life, death, and resurrection. Because of this, Boyle suggests recounting the story of Jesus to the Japanese people in a fashion that interfaces with the Eastern shame-based mindset. For instance, rather than expressing the passion event in terms of sin and forgiveness of sin, Boyle uses concepts of shame, articulating sin as the “original shame” and atonement as the “covering of shame.”¹ Mennonite scholar and minister C. Norman Kraus communicates the gospel for Asian peoples in terms of the vicarious suffering of Jesus who identified fully with human shame. He writes that “[Jesus’] identification with us in our shameful situation enables us to identify with [him] in his realization of the ‘glorious liberty of the children of God’” (Rom. 8:21).²

We see many instances of this story-telling technique in the Christian tradition. Throughout history faithful theologians reinterpret the passion of Christ according to their contemporary situation and their interpretation of scripture. For example, Irenaeus, one of the earliest advocates of the

Christus Victor theory, lived in conflict with the social structure of his day. Christianity was an illicit religion and Caesar was lord. Irenaeus related the earthly conflicts between Caesar and Christianity to a cosmic battle between celestial powers.³ Several centuries later, Anselm communicated the story of salvation by drawing from the feudal social structure common during his lifetime. By providing his hearers with a common nomenclature, an idiomatic metaphor to which they could relate, the satisfaction theory of atonement gained in popularity and became the traditional *modus operandi* for the work of Christ in effecting salvation.⁴

Later, Abelard interprets the atonement according to the notions of “courtly love” and the new humanist culture just emerging in his society.⁵ Eventually, with the assimilation of Aristotle, Aquinas interprets the atonement according to and in harmony with the Aristotelian philosophical categories and ethical principles of his day.⁶ With the growth of the nation state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, judicial power was transferred from the community to the state, which brought about a focus on punitive measures and the popularity of penitentiaries. As a result of being embedded in this culture obsessed with sin, guilt, and penal justice, the reformers, especially John Calvin, interpreted the atonement through the lens of punishment and justification.⁷

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, liberal-minded social theologians reinterpreted atonement according to the Enlightenment’s positive humanistic attitudes and the new scientific discoveries that appeared to undermine faith in an invisible, non-verifiable God. They developed theories of atonement, void of mythic content, that appealed to the intellect.⁸ After the devastation of two world wars, theologians like Karl Barth reinterpreted atonement for a world reeling from profound suffering and disenchantment with humankind. His incarnational theories of substitution and representation combined the two natures of Jesus from the Chalcedonian discussions with the two states of humiliation and exultation in Calvin and Luther. The liberation theologians, concerned with making the Gospel of Christ relevant for the scores of thousands of innocent people oppressed, abused, and murdered by empires, wars, and crooked governments, reinterpreted the atonement for their suffering communities.⁹

The layers of reinterpretation in both the biblical texts and in the history

of Christian doctrine lead to the realization that the tradition *is* to reinterpret the tradition. We reinterpret continually, repeatedly, with a repetition of reinterpretation that preserves the relevance of the living and active Word of God. In contemporary culture, the prevalence of violence executed under the guise of divine sanction is *out of control*. *Too much blood* has been shed. The responsibility to reinterpret the character and heart of God, from that of violent to anti-violent, looms before us as we work toward a theology of peace, reconciliation, and restoration through Jesus Christ.

I realize that connections between atonement theory and social violence cannot be established with certainty, for causes and their effects are often difficult to prove. Yet, if traditional atonement theory lends legitimacy to social and personal violence in any way whatsoever, it must be rethought.¹⁰ We need new metaphors that speak to contemporary issues: metaphors that express the Good News as good news. And, so, to cries of protest that seek to save tradition from sliding, *like a rolling stone*, down the slippery slope of easy grace into the pond of “anything goes,” Denny Weaver attempts to reinterpret atonement theory in his book *The Nonviolent Atonement*. True to his Anabaptist roots, he is taking on the theology of the church where that theology contributes to oppressive, abusive structures and behaviors. He does not come at tradition like *a street fighting man*, desiring nothing other than to *paint it black*, with broad careless strokes of a brush. Rather, he seeks to establish a theological and religious alternative to the established ecclesiastical authority.¹¹

As Weaver makes clear, traditional theories of atonement, especially those of Anselm, Abelard, Calvin, and Luther, provide an image of a violent God, heaven bent on balanced cosmic books. *When the whip comes down* and an innocent Jesus takes a hard *one hit* with the gavel of divine justice, he becomes our *beast of burden* so that God can let us *off the hook*. That's certainly *rough justice*! Though Jesus, through parched, bloody lips, utters in painful triumph from the cross, “*it's all over now*,” it seems the violence has only just begun. We've read about it in the history books; we've seen it happen; traditional atonement narratives, although not promoting it in themselves, allow the church to accommodate human violence. In imitation of God, we have let violence bleed into our notions of Christian piety and influence our actions, manifested for example in the Spanish Inquisition, the

Crusades, the Reformation, the Anabaptist persecutions, the Salem witch hunts, the Troubles in Ireland, the slave trade, the Holocaust,¹² and violence against gays. To counteract the violence rather than to *let it bleed* unebbed, Weaver desires to open the way to envision other potentially appropriate models of atonement that make the accommodation of human violence more difficult.¹³

Weaver reaches back beyond Anselm into the Christian tradition and resuscitates the Irenaeus *Christus Victor* theory of atonement and its notions of defeating the devil. Where Anselm revokes the devil, Denny revives him. This revival does not stem from any *sympathy for the devil* on Weaver's part. In actuality, he breathes new life into the luciferian personality only to defeat *the nature of his game*. With the narrative *Christus Victor* theory, Weaver constructs an alternative metaphor that explains the function of Jesus on the cross. He focuses not on his death but on his resurrection; not on the taking of his life as a payment for sin's debt but on the giving of his life as a protest against systemic evil and violence. Using the Gospels and the book of Revelation, Weaver crafts the story of God's reign coming peacefully to earth to disarm evil, to reconcile hostile principalities and peoples, and to restore harmony to ruptured relationships. Weaver reminds us that, even though the ruling satanic powers that kill Jesus seem to prevail over the compassionate powers that rule in God's reign, God does not *love in vain*. The stone rolls away and a resurrected Jesus reveals the nonviolent victory of the kingdom of God over the dominion of the devil.

As in any theological construction that upsets the traditional status quo, Weaver's narrative *Christus Victor* is not without its critics. True, as Douglas Farrow infers, Anselm with his satisfaction theory was most likely not concerned with practical implications of divine violence and retribution; but that doesn't mean *we* must function wearing the same blinders. Yes, satisfaction theory, à la Anselm, rests on restoration rather than on retribution; but no matter how passionately we try to save it, the theory still depends upon the violence of God in securing forgiveness.¹⁴ I concur with David McWilliams that Weaver's exegetical and historical work is at times selective and forced; but consciously or not, all theologians and biblical scholars hold to their own form of a biblical or historical canon within the canon.¹⁵ Thomas Finger makes a valid case against Weaver by working to

retain the language of substitution; but theologians must also work to re-interpret the notion in a manner that relieves it of its penal baggage.¹⁶

II

These critiques aside, we have much to benefit from Weaver's re-reading, re-evaluating, and re-interpreting the traditional theories of atonement. Our global community needs theologians willing to challenge and to re-work the system in ways that promote peace. Notions of justice prosecuted through violence have us stuck between a *rock and hard place*, which if not changed put us in danger of self-destruction. In the words of Christopher Marshall, "[t]he real challenge is to find ways to understand and articulate the salvific character of Christ's death and resurrection that makes sense to our generation – ways that [stand] in continuity with the rich diversity of images New Testament writers use when they speak of the cross and ways that do not depend on discreditable views of God nor the sanction of violence of any kind."¹⁷

Weaver constructs a creative and scripturally viable model for atonement. In answer to those who arraign his theory for deconstructing notions of justice as punishment, I argue, with him, that narrative Christus Victor provides a more consistent picture of divine behavior. Although theologians holding to traditional penal or satisfaction theories would not articulate it as such, the ramifications of their views lead to an interpretation of God as a loving parent who viciously attacks when provoked and then tells the children to "do as I say, not as I do." The images of the violent retributive justice of God the father and the pacifist reconciling justice of Jesus the son create inconsistencies within the divine nature and in theological constructions. Weaver attempts to harmonize the God who liberates us from sin and evil with the Jesus who loved God and others through peaceful means and who taught *us* to live and love nonviolently.

Although Weaver suffers the critique that his focus on the structural character of sin reduces the gravity of personal sins, he devises a model that takes seriously the evil systems in which individuals are caught up and that operate to encourage personal sinful actions.¹⁸ Narrative Christus Victor reveals the power of God's reign to annihilate corporate, institutional,

social, *and* personal evils that lead to sin on both a cosmic and an earthly level. The crux of Weaver's theological creativity is that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ bear directly on our behavior toward God and others in the flux and flow of daily life. God rolled the stone away from the evil of death and the sin that entomb us, so that in the power of the nonviolent Christ, we too can confront sin and defeat evil, both personally and structurally.

In a roomful of possible critics, Weaver might want me to stop right here. He probably would welcome a response that offers only accolades. But, Denny, *you can't always get what you want*. I am going to put you *under my thumb* for a short time and offer a few good-natured critiques.

First, arguments over the dichotomy between justice and punishment puzzle me.¹⁹ Weaver works hard to expose the weaknesses of a form of divine justice that requires punishment; yet he seems to fail to convince his detractors. Perhaps changing the metaphor might clarify the distinction. Rather than justice and punishment, might we talk about the relationship between forgiveness and punishment? Clearly, forgiveness precludes the need for punishment, does it not? If punishment must precede forgiveness in order to set right an offense, what need is there to forgive or to pardon? That God sacrificially forgives sinful humanity and reaches out to restore us to a love relationship without prior payback, satisfaction, or punishment – even of an innocent person as our substitute – is what makes the Good News good news. In the words of Hastings Rashdall, “forgiveness is an infinitely more convincing proof of love than punishment can ever be, and may, therefore, touch the heart as punishment will seldom touch it.”²⁰

Second, the soteriological content of narrative Christus Victor theory opens itself up to the same critique mounted against Abelard. It is too subjective. Although it conquers the evil powers in the cosmic realm as manifested by the triumph of Jesus' resurrection on earth, salvation from these powers depends upon the seeing and hearing subject. Granted, the addition of the “narrative” component in Weaver's Christus Victor model brings the victory down to earth and makes God's reign on earth visible by confronting evil with love. Still, salvation occurs only when individual subjects, empowered and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, decide to participate in God's reign through continuing the work of Jesus. I understand that

obedience plays a critical role in the Anabaptist tradition and appreciate that aspect of Weaver's thought. Yet, I am left wondering if a more objective component might benefit the theory, one that connects the victory of Jesus with the forgiveness of God.

For instance, how does divine *forgiveness* connect with Christ's defeat of the powers? Are forgiveness and victory two parallel yet separate aspects of God's work of reconciliation? Can forgiveness function as the objective, concrete bridge between victory over evil powers and restoration between humanity and God? Because forgiveness is the essential ingredient for a restored relationship with God, narrative Christus Victor may be strengthened by a more vigorous notion of divine forgiveness on an objective, cosmic level that interconnects with the victory over evil and human participation in God's reign. That is, a noteworthy movement of forgiveness from the minor into the major key equalizes forgiveness and victory in doxological harmony so that they resonate together in sonorous polyphony. God in Jesus conquers the forces of evil *because of* the divine sacrifice of forgiveness. Through sacrificial forgiveness, God in Christ protests the injustice of the powers of evil and of retributive violence that thrive on unforgiveness. God substitutes the unforgiveness with the justice of a love that forgives freely. Divine *love is strong* and God's loving forgiveness is strong enough to redeem even the violent powers of evil and to resurrect the possibility of repentance and total restoration with God.

Third, Weaver indicts and votes to execute the Nicene Creed for ignoring the earthly story of Jesus in favor of a metaphysical articulation of the triune God. I, along with theologians like Michael Hardin, vote to stay the execution. The troublesome miscreant creed and its accomplice *homoousios* can be absolved after all. A simple Aristotelian syllogism may litigate its pardon: If Jesus is of the "same essence" as God, and if Jesus is nonviolent, then God, too, must be nonviolent. Weaver, therefore, can retain the Nicene Creed in order to subvert images of a violent God. Narrative Christus Victor can form a partnership of sorts with the Nicene Creed in order to arbitrate for the anti-violent nature of God.²¹

As a postmodern theologian, whatever that is, I certainly do not want to lay claim to a universal, meta-theory of atonement that supersedes all others. I may not be a Christian were that the case. Because of the escalating

instances of religious violence generated under the guise of God's will, much too often religion, the Christian religion in this case, is considered the wound and not the bandage, the disease and not the cure. It is important, therefore, to construct alternate theories that align with contemporary cultural sensitivities and that maintain their relevance in a world constantly at war. In this regard, J. Denny Weaver's *Nonviolent Atonement* is *hot stuff*.

Denny, in defending your theory and in the attempt to stem the tide of violence through theological reflection and practice, you may sometimes feel like a victim of the Sisyphean rolling stone. But, you can say with confidence, "*time is on my side*"; our tradition, traditionally, is not stagnant. It is not immune to the advances and fluctuations of time and culture but continues working to ground us in the good of the past, while enlightening us to remain relevant in the present and always encouraging us to reach out toward a better future. And, personally, I don't want no satisfaction. I am glad *I'm free* from the need for an innocent man to suffer for my sin. There's no justice in that. *Gimme shelter* in an objective, unconditional, restorative divine forgiveness, that overcomes the power of evil with the power of love.

Notes

Readers familiar with recent popular music will doubtless recognize certain allusions in this article. – Editor

¹ Timothy D. Boyle, "Communicating the Gospel in Terms of Shame," in *The Japan Christian Quarterly* (Jan. 1984): 41-42.

² C. Norman Kraus, *Jesus Christ our Lord: Christology from a Disciple's Perspective* (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1987), 205-19.

³ Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 116ff.

⁴ Timothy Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 85-219; Anthony Bartlett, *Cross Purposes: The Violent Grammar of the Cross* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 75-81. In addition to the influence of the feudal system, the view of God as just judge in Anselm's day also contributed to the content of his theological construction. Strict penance was expected of those who killed others in war in order to satisfy God. Anselm may have felt "cut off from all notions of a reconciling and loving God, rarely able to forget that one day he would be judged." See Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance*, 86-88.

⁵ The poetic literature and music of courtly love produced a cultural shift that focused more

on the individual, self-examination, and the distinction between self and other that may have influenced Abelard's more subjective theory of atonement with its focus on the love of God. See Gorringer, 105-06. Gorringer explains that "to move from a legal metaphor (satisfaction) to the impact the suffering Christ makes on the soul is entirely in accord with the new sensibility, part and parcel of which is the new stress on human responsibility in sinning, and therefore before the law" (112).

⁶ Gorringer, 118. Aquinas was heavily influenced by Aristotelian natural law and reason, which for him became human reason working simultaneously with the divine law inherent in God's rule where punitive measures restore the balance of divine justice.

⁷ See Gorringer, 128-41; Bartlett, *Cross Purposes*, 89-90; Peter Schmiechen, *Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 315. Weaver, 188. With the rise of the nation state, judicial power changed hands from the local community to the officers of the state, which relied more on punitive justice. Punishment tactics moved from torture to penitentiary and the growth of the workhouse. Crimes were punished savagely. For Luther, rulers are the ministers of God's wrath and have the right to inflict punishment, a theory that found its way into his atonement theory. The divine ruler inflicts the ultimate punishment on sinful humanity through Jesus. Luther rids himself of satisfaction but envisions an extreme model of substitution. Jesus becomes a curse for us; he was made a thief, murderer, etc. He bears all our sin in his body (Bartlett, 90).

⁸ Gorringer, 211-16. The rational optimism of the time led Bushnell and Rashdall to advocate an "exemplar" theory of atonement. Rashdall believed that "[t]he picture of Christ in the gospels appeals to the mind and religious consciousness of humankind. All human love is in some degree a revelation of God." "[T]he incarnation was the atonement, and we should identify with that. Christ's whole life was a sacrifice which takes away sin in the only way in which sin can really be taken away, and that is by making the inner actually better" (Gorringer, 215).

⁹ I realize the simplistic nature of this short summary of social cause and theological effect in Christian history. Of course, the story is more complicated and many other factors are involved. I use this section of the essay for illustrative purposes only.

¹⁰ Gorringer.

¹¹ Christopher Marshall, "Atonement, Violence and the Will of God," in *MQR* (Aug. 1997): 72-73.

¹² James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews* (New York: Mariner Books, 2001).

¹³ Weaver, 96-97.

¹⁴ Douglas Farrow, review of "J. Denny Weaver's The Nonviolent Atonement," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (Jan. 2004): 95.

¹⁵ David B. McWilliams, review of "J. Denny Weaver: The Nonviolent Atonement," *Westminster Theological Journal* (Spring 2002): 218.

¹⁶ Tom Finger, "Response to J. Denny Weaver" in *Atonement and Violence: A Theological Conversation*, ed. John Sanders (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 39-40; Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 306-10; Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin, *Stricken by God: Nonviolent Identification and the Victory*

of Christ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Kraus, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*, 219ff.

¹⁷ Marshall, "Atonement, Violence and the Will of God," 75.

¹⁸ McWilliams, 220. Marit Trelstad, "Lavish Love" in *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2006), 111ff. Of the 53 times Paul uses *harmartia*, 13 instances are singular and 40 are plural. For him, sin is structural; sin is a principle. For Weaver, the concept of sin is structural but his anthropology in soteriological terms is individual. Consistency is needed here.

¹⁹ Weaver, 8, 180-88.

²⁰ Hastings Rashdall, *The Theory of Good and Evil* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1907), 312. See also Gorringe, 214.

²¹ Willard Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). Swartley adds a few lines to the Apostles Creed that take into consideration the life and teachings of Jesus, not merely his ontology of his nature.

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“Who Has Believed What We Have Heard?”
A Response to Denny Weaver’s *The Nonviolent Atonement*¹

Mark Thiessen Nation

I

I believe it was the fall of 1967 when the life of my family began to revolve around Nat’s Tavern. My mother had re-married in January of that same year. By late spring my stepfather, John, was regularly coming home drunk, being verbally abusive, and throwing things at the walls. Joining him at his favorite tavern was my mother’s strategy to place some parameters around his excessive drinking and abusive behavior. Her strategy was only partly successful. Holes in the walls – as well as anxieties, fear, and pain – continued largely to define our home life. My mother had married another man much like her first husband, my father.

A little more than ten years later I would become a child protective services social worker. This job was incredibly difficult and, for me, emotionally draining. It was also painfully educational. Being inserted into the lives of people I would never have interacted with otherwise opened windows onto lives of woundedness, brokenness, and great destruction. It not only taught me much, it initiated a journey whereon I would always want to discourage such abusive behaviors. But of course “discourage” is too soft a word. I want to see such behaviors stopped altogether, and I want healing for the wounded lives that give rise to such violence. I certainly never want the Christian message used to underwrite or prolong violence of any kind.

At least as I read Denny Weaver’s book, his passions are similarly given to ending such abusive behaviors or, put positively, to encouraging lives given to concrete acts of loving and caring. Moreover, unlike some of the allies Weaver has made through his book – but like me – he wants to attach a passion *for* justice and love and *against* abuse to a commitment to nonviolence. Like Weaver, I do not want us to imagine that we can divorce theology from ethics. Since he and I agree on these fundamental points, why

do I find his book largely unsatisfying or even troubling?

First, let me list a set of issues that imply questions I would pose to Weaver. (1) I suggest that some of his views reflect a deficient understanding of the Trinity. I would add that such a critique need not reference some ecumenical “agreement” regarding what the Trinity means metaphysically, such as the views reflected in the Nicene Creed. Rather, what is required is a sufficient realization that the Father and Son are not at odds with each other (as is stated in many ways in the Scriptures in relation to the death of Jesus). The death of Jesus happens *because* of the love of the Father *and* the Son (in a sinful world).² (2) Weaver does not appear to take sin and evil seriously enough.³ Otherwise, why would he not see that precisely because of the pervasive reality of sin in the world Jesus’ death was “necessary”?⁴ (3) Aligning himself with certain views strongly critical of the adulation of those who concretely embody love and thus sometimes suffer horribly has apparently led Weaver to embrace a theology that makes martyrdom unintelligible or even wrong, as well as in general cutting the nerve of a call to costly and sacrificial discipleship.⁵ (4) On a formal level, Weaver doesn’t engage many of the most relevant biblical texts related to atonement (or more broadly, salvation as made effective through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection).⁶ Moreover, he doesn’t engage many of the most salient biblical scholars and theologians who would challenge his views, including importantly those who are pacifist or whose views of the atonement comport with pacifism.⁷ These are some of the particulars I would name.

However, I’ve come to believe that one thing that has gone wrong with much critical reflection on the atonement is a larger concern. As Walter Brueggemann puts it, too often the gospel “is a truth that has been flattened, trivialized, and rendered inane.” He continues: “While my propensities are to value more greatly ideologies of the left, any ideology – by which I mean closed, managed, useful truth – destroys the power and claim of the gospel.”⁸

Repeatedly when I read through Weaver’s book I have a sense that the gospel and other supportive theological tenets are affirmed by Weaver if they are “useful truths,” i.e., useful for the peace and justice to which he is clearly committed. I was reminded of this when I was recently lecturing on one of my heroes in the faith, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was determined not

to let the Gospel simply become a “useful truth” even for his most passionate commitments. Clifford Green’s recent essay wonderfully captures this in regard to Bonhoeffer:

Bonhoeffer’s Christian peace ethic is intrinsic to his whole theology. It cannot be separated from his Christology, his understanding of discipleship and the Sermon on the Mount, his way of reading the Bible, and his understanding of the gospel and of the church. It belongs to the heart of this faith. Accordingly, it cannot be reduced to a principle. It is not a discrete option on a menu of ethical “positions.” It is not a separate interchangeable part that can be removed from his theology and replaced by something else called, perhaps ‘realism’ or even “responsibility.”... [It also] cannot be reduced to the thin principle of nonviolence; rather it is defined by his thick commitment of faith in Christ with its manifold theological and ethical implications. The richness and boldness of that witness remains a critical challenge of Bonhoeffer’s legacy to the church today in a deeply troubling time.⁹

The issues related to Bonhoeffer’s pacifism are complex, as anyone who has tackled them knows.¹⁰ Likewise, with the atonement, matters become quite complicated because there are so many inter-connected theological issues. A number of scholars more steeped in the literature around the atonement than I have already offered important critiques of Weaver’s work.¹¹ I won’t try to repeat what they have done. Instead, I will attempt to offer an alternative way of reflecting on these issues.

I resonate with the words of N. T. Wright: “Perhaps, after all, atonement is at its deepest level something that *happens*, so that to reduce it to a proposition to which one can give mental assent is a mistake at a deep level.”¹² Thomas Long similarly suggests that in relation to atonement “the poetry of proclamation is to be preferred over the hydraulics of explanation.”¹³ Eugene Peterson highlights our need for poetry:

Poetry is language used with personal intensity. It is not, as so many suppose, decorative speech. Poets tell us what our eyes, blurred with too much gawking, and our ears, dulled with

too much chatter, miss around and within us. Poets use words to drag us into the depth of reality itself... Far from being cosmetic language, it is intestinal. It is root language. Poetry doesn't so much tell us something we never knew as bring us into recognition of what is latent, forgotten, overlooked, or suppressed.¹⁴

I am not a poet, but the writer of Isaiah 52 and 53 was. Thus I am framing my reflections around this poem used by Christians since the time of the New Testament as a way of naming what happens through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.¹⁵ N. T. Wright's commentary on the book of Romans prompted me to interact with this poetry through particular narratives. In his comments on Rom. 3:21-26, one of the few passages in the NT that actually uses the word translated "atonement," Wright mentions that part of the backdrop for Paul's use of language there is the Maccabean martyr tradition, a tradition that renders more vivid some of the imagery in this passage.¹⁶ Likewise, I am convinced that seeing contemporary martyrs as at least analogies for the work of Christ may be necessary for many in our day if they are ever to make sense of something as "offensive" and profound as the atonement.¹⁷ Hence my reflections on the redemptive work of contemporary martyr stories framed by the poetry of Isaiah 52 and 53.

II

Beginning, then, with Isa. 52:13: "See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high." That God is profoundly involved, redemptively, in the sufferings of this servant is, as much as anything, what causes offence to many today in relation to the atonement. Some of the language that follows this verse is difficult, even painful. Thus we dare not lose sight of these opening words. Yahweh is speaking. Despite appearances, "the servant" referred to here will "prosper," will flourish; the servant will be "high and lifted up" or "highly exalted." Such language is certainly reminiscent of NT reflections on Jesus (e.g., Phil. 2:6-11). If we forget that opening affirmation we will misunderstand much of what follows in this evocative passage. The affirmation clearly signals that the poem is not going to glorify suffering but rather the suffering servant, which is entirely

different.

Speaking of this One who will be lifted very high, the poet continues. Isa. 52:14-15: "Just as there were many who were astonished at him – so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals – so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate." Seeing what we've not been told! Contemplating what we've never heard! We distort the power of this rich poetic language when literalism is employed to drain it of its ability to astonish, to startle nations, to render kings and rulers mute, to defy comprehension. Instead we must allow this language to remind us that a crucified Messiah is the center of our faith. We know full well, with Paul, that "the message about the cross is foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:18). But we must also remember that "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (1 Cor. 1:25).

Weaver has pointed to this by beginning the description of his own position through the use of the book of Revelation. But then, it seems to me, he has virtually stripped it of the radical nature of its offense: the centrality of a slaughtered Lamb. In the mid-1970s I read *The Crucified God* by Jürgen Moltmann, I heard a dramatic sermon regarding the offensiveness of the crucifixion by Malcolm Boyd, and I read *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* by G. B. Caird.¹⁸ My reading of Revelation would never be the same. I knew that "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" had acted through Jesus in a way that forever transforms our lives and our understanding of God's actions in the world and God's claims upon our lives.

The book of Revelation communicates this, as Weaver suggests, through a dramatic reversal of images. The Christians who first heard this book were likely suffering precisely for their faith. They wanted to be assured that their God was in control. John the revelator offers them assurance throughout the book, centrally defined in chapters four and five. In these two chapters, the scrolls are opened and the seals broken – history is unfolded – through the power of the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, or so the elder announces. But as the revelator looks, he does not see the expected Lion; instead he sees a Lamb. Note the descriptions of this Lamb: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, [because] you were

slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9b). Thousands upon thousands sing: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev. 5.11b). Kings shall indeed “shut their mouths” because of this slaughtered one, the servant who was “marred” “beyond human semblance.” The entire book of Revelation reminds us in dramatic ways of the offence of the cross. Precisely because he has been slaughtered and because he has suffered, the Lamb is worthy, and as he leads us teaches us to know what it means to “walk in the ways of the Lord.”

Isaiah next asks two challenging questions. Isa. 53:1: “Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” I’m a middle-class, educated white male, a citizen of the U.S., the most powerful country in the world, and I’m a Christian theologian. I’m also from a relatively uneducated, non-Christian family from a small, poor, racist county in southern Illinois; some would refer to my extended family as poor white trash. Anyone who knew me at age sixteen would have said I needed redemption. Did my mother have to suffer and did Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jesus Christ “have to die” in order to redeem me? I want to suggest that the answer is yes. I say this because I have now heard and seen the strength of the LORD – and I have believed. (More on this below.)

Continuing with Isa. 53:2-3: “For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.” These pithy two verses are hardly sufficient to account for Jesus’ public life and ministry. However, they do signal that there is a life lived between the birth and death of this servant, and call us to review the Gospel accounts of his life and ministry. I agree with Weaver (and N.T. Wright and Joe Jones, among others) that we can never adequately understand what the Scriptures say about atonement without a sufficient grasp of the story of Jesus as conveyed through the Gospel narratives.

Yet we must resist the temptation to remake the Jesus of these narratives over into our own ideal. As Charlotte Allen provocatively puts

it, we should not imagine that Jesus is “actually a nondenominational [21st-century] therapy-group facilitator whose specialty is ‘enabling [people] to become themselves,’ and whose message is: ‘... Keep down the urge to dominate, to score, to triumph, to fight, and exalt the urge to conciliate, to understand, to value.’”¹⁹ No, he is a Savior precisely because he suffered and is acquainted with infirmity. Wounded and oppressed people identify with him, or, shall I say, they believe he identifies with them because he too was despised and rejected.

My wife lived and ministered in South Central Los Angeles for 18 years. She reminds me often that whatever abuses, rejection, violence, and injustices her friends suffered (even those condoned by the church or Christianity), they knew their suffering was understood and shared by Jesus Christ. Because he carried and bore all suffering on their behalf, they could entrust their griefs to him, cast their cares on him, and exchange their heavy burdens for the yoke that is easy and the burden that is light. She can't define exactly how this happened. She tries but words and concepts can't capture the liberation, release, lightness, and joy of the girls and women who encountered the suffering Servant. My wife's friends loved the next verses.

Isa. 53:4-6: “Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.²⁰ But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” How are we to understand these words indicating that the Servant served as a substitute, as One who carried, bore, was wounded, struck, bruised in order to make others whole? And why do the NT writers refer to this passage time and again?

I believe the film *To End All Wars* offers an extraordinary portrayal of the truth of these three verses from Isaiah.²¹ It is based on a true story of the imprisonment of mostly Scottish soldiers in a Japanese internment camp during World War II. The brutality is horrible to watch. Understandably some of the prisoners decide to escape. Major Campbell, not a particularly admirable character, is the ringleader of the escapees. The escape is planned

for the same night as the “graduation” ceremony for the “jungle university,” a primitive learning system designed by some of the educated captives as a way of carving out space for retaining their humanity. Almost everyone is in attendance at the graduation, with the exception of a few guards. The escapees manage to kill only two of the guards. All the escapees are caught. All except one are summarily executed – one, quick, fatal bullet. However, it appears that Sergeant Ito, the guard in charge of the prisoners, wants to make an example of Major Campbell. His death is to come more slowly; he must suffer a more lengthy humiliation. Only then will he be decapitated.

As the terror escalates, Dusty, a prisoner who has been unusually and consistently wise, kind, and generous (even giving up his meager rations to save another prisoner’s life), steps forward and speaks privately to Sergeant Ito. It soon becomes clear that Dusty has volunteered to give his life in exchange for the Major. Such an offer is most striking because Campbell had disdain for Dusty.

Dusty is nailed to a cross. His death, a mockery of the Bible confiscated by the guards, is to serve as a warning to those who rebel against the system. Everyone knows that Dusty did nothing deserving of death; he died so that the Major, the true “rebel,” the one filled with rage, could live. Dusty was not portrayed as any sort of superficial “saint,” but his Christian faith was known both in word and deed. One could see a continuity between his life and this ultimate act of giving his life in place of Major Campbell. The narrator tells us that Dusty’s death was extremely difficult for the prisoners, leading many nearly to despair. The narrator, however, was reminded of the words Dusty had read from the Gospel of John: “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12.24).²² This fruit becomes evident in one of the last scenes. A truck full of seriously wounded Japanese soldiers arrives at the camp. They need assistance. Because these defeated soldiers represent shame, the Japanese guards, as well as the prisoners, are forbidden to help them. The prisoners refuse to obey the orders. At the risk of their own lives they give aid and comfort to the “enemy.” One of the Japanese guards joins them in this kindness. Perhaps such a costly decision was an echo of Dusty’s death. Perhaps, in a sense, Dusty was “wounded for *their* transgressions, crushed for *their* iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made *them* whole, and by his bruises *they were* healed.”²³

The prophet feels a need to amplify these shocking images still further. Isa. 53:7-12: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away.... For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain.... through him the will of the LORD shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light.... The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Did Martin Luther King, Jr. die for my sins?²⁴ Was this "the will of the LORD"? Was it necessary? It seems to me that King's "slow martyrdom" served as God's act of redemption for the evil and complex realities of American racism.²⁵ How can such a suggestion be anything other than a perverted affirmation, a perversion of justice? I contend that to understand what I'm going to propose is, at least analogously, to understand the heart of atonement theology.

I'm not sure exactly how many years after I became a Christian and a conscientious objector I read John Perkins's autobiography, *Let Justice Roll Down*.²⁶ I believe it was about the same time that I first read "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" by Martin Luther King, Jr. and a biography of King.²⁷ This reading transformed me. That Perkins was almost murdered by Mississippi police while I was a junior in high school stunned me. While in the Brandon, Mississippi jail, Perkins was almost "marred beyond human semblance." His son, Spencer, recalled how not long before this, his father had repeated and underscored the line "If somebody's got to die, then I'm ready" in a speech to a jail yard full of people after the unlawful arrest of fifteen children protesting the imprisonment of one of their neighbors.²⁸

Both Perkins and King – and the African Americans they represented – were "oppressed" and "afflicted," horribly so, repeatedly. It was the intensity of the suffering, and their own willingness to absorb the violence inflicted on them and those they led, that magnified the righteousness of

their lives. And it also clarified the horribleness, the Evil, of the racism that had been assumed throughout my childhood. Having read their words and “stared into their faces” through the reading of their lives, it became clearer and clearer that of course King’s death is, in the first instance, simply the culminating act of a pattern of racism – and must be named for the “perversion of justice” it is. However, it is more than that, other than that. For his death is also the culmination of a life given to embodying the love of Christ for neighbors – and more offensively, enemies – even when great cost is involved. This is what distinguishes martyrdom from simple murder and makes his death redemptive. His death can be seen as “necessary” only against the backdrop of the deep and pervasive sin of racism in this culture. Some of us may never have truly known the depth and breadth of racism without the extraordinary lives of King, Perkins, Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer and countless others. King seems to have recognized this necessity. In his words, toward the end of his life:

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of convenience, but where he stands in moments of challenge, moments of great crisis and controversy. And this is where I choose to cast my lot today. There may be others who want to go another way, but when I took up the cross I recognized its meaning. It is not something that you merely put your hands on. It is not something that you wear. The cross is something that you bear and ultimately that you die on.²⁹

I repeat what I asked at the beginning of this section: Could Martin Luther King Jr.’s death possibly have been “the will of the LORD?” One can consider this possibility only if one has grasped the profound depth and breadth of the evil of racism within this country, and has admitted the hold that it has on very many of us. And if one realizes, with King, that embodied love – even of enemies – within this context will likely lead to death.

Perhaps I began to see the suffering and death of King in the light of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; perhaps I knew it was all necessary for our salvation and because of that willed by God, because I know what it means to be in the grip of sin. In the fall of 1970 my life was turned around dramatically. I was not “breathing murder” as the Apostle Paul testified regarding his conversion but I did get drunk and stoned regularly. I

was more than willing to go thousands of miles across the world to kill the North Vietnamese, who had been declared my nation's enemies. I generally lived a reprobate life. Within a year of becoming a Christian I became a conscientious objector. Shortly thereafter I would become a staunch opponent of racism. This was almost unthinkable in my subculture in small-town southern Illinois. But I was confronted powerfully and gracefully by a loving, crucified LORD.

Not long after becoming a follower of Jesus I realized that my mother in her role *as mother* was in some important ways also a model of the sacrificial love to which I was called. It would be years before I would have a fuller understanding of what this meant. I realized that my mother, sacrificing her own desires, had worked at two jobs during much of my childhood. Though she didn't show it, I'm sure that she suffered during those years in order to provide for me and my brother. Over the years I became very close to my mother. It is she, and not my father or stepfather, who taught me what it means to be a parent to my two children. It is she, at her best, who has even helped me to see what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, sacrificing for others out of love for God and them.

She certainly suffered, largely because of men.³⁰ I could never see that as anything but wrong, as sin – that must be denounced for what it is. She also suffered because of love for me and my brother in a world of sin where such embodied love required sacrifice.

Let me return to my opening list of concerns. As concerning the Trinity, it was God in Christ who is our Savior and he will be high and lifted up. Second, extreme sin and evil require an extreme response. Third, costly discipleship, daily sacrifice that includes the potential of martyrdom, is part of our defining narrative. And finally, enemy love is both thinkable and sometimes necessary in order for the liberation and salvation of the world. This is what I have believed, what I have heard, what has been revealed to me. The atonement happens, and it is wondrous to behold!³¹

Notes

¹ J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). I have been reading Denny's writings on the atonement for just about as long as he has been writing them. I have also read several of his recent essays, including "Narrative *Christus Victor*:"

The Answer to Anselmian Atonement Violence,” in *Atonement and Violence: A Theological Conversation*, ed. John Sanders (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 1-29. Moreover, I have carefully read through his book. However, because of the way I have decided to shape this paper and the limitations of time I have elected not to reference it heavily.

² This point is of course related to the charge of affirming “divine child abuse.” There may be views out there that are subject to this critique. But there are many articulations of the atonement, with which Weaver seems unhappy, that do not fit this characterization.

³ If I were to pursue this, I would utilize especially: Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Alistair McFadyen, *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000); and Mark E. Biddle, *Missing the Mark: Sin and Its Consequences in Biblical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005). I would engage these in conjunction with Alan Mann, *Atonement for a 'Sinless' Society* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2005).

⁴ Part of what is required is naming what we mean by “necessary.” I am not referring to some metaphysical necessity or God’s need for punishment that must be satisfied. I hope the reader will see what I mean by the way I use this term later in this paper.

⁵ I don’t know any other way to interpret some of Weaver’s affirmations in chapters five and six. This is not to say there are no genuine concerns contained there. But having said that, Sarah Coakley has well named my own concern: “‘An indiscriminating adulation of ‘vulnerability’ might appear to condone, or even invite such evils.... But what I am suggesting is that there is another, and longer-term, danger to Christian feminism in the *repression* of all forms of ‘vulnerability,’ and in a concomitant failure to confront issues of fragility, suffering or ‘self-emptying’ except in terms of victimology.... Only... by facing—and giving new expression to—the paradoxes of ‘losing one’s life in order to save it,’ can feminists hope to construct a vision of the Christic ‘self’ that transcends the gender stereotypes we are seeking to up-end.” (Quoted in Nicola Hoggar Creegan and Christine D. Pohl, *Living on the Boundaries: Evangelical Women, Feminism and the Theological Academy* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005], 138). I would also resonate with the section in this book from which the Coakley quotation is taken: “Selfishness, Sacrifice, Sin and Self.”

⁶ I was rather astounded at how little Denny deals with the range of the most relevant biblical texts and the scholarship on them. This deficiency is addressed by Christopher D. Marshall, “Atonement, Violence and the Will of God: A Sympathetic Response to J. Denny Weaver’s *The Nonviolent Atonement*,” *MQR* 77.1 (January 2003): 69-92.

⁷ I could name writings that pre-date Denny’s book and that he could have drawn from. Some very recent writings that pose alternatives to his approach are N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), ch. 3 (and other writings on his website); Joe R. Jones, *A Grammar of Christian Faith*, Vol. 2 (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), ch. 8; Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); and Peter K. Stevenson and Stephen I. Wright, *Preaching the Atonement* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005). For looking afresh at Anselm, I especially suggest Peter Schmiechen, *Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 194-221, and Ellen T. Charry, *By the Renewing*

of Your Minds (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 155-75.

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 1, 2.

⁹ Clifford J. Green, "Pacifism and Tyrannicide: Bonhoeffer's Christian Peace Ethic," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 18.3 (2005): 31-47, here 45, 47.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Mark Thiessen Nation, "Discipleship in a World Full of Nazis: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Polyphonic Pacifism as Social Ethics," in *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas, Chris K. Huebner, Harry J. Huebner, and Mark Thiessen Nation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999; reprinted by Wipf & Stock, 2005), 249-77.

¹¹ In addition to Christopher Marshall, I would add John Sanders, ed., *Atonement and Violence: A Theological Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006); and the following reviews: Telford Work (*Theology Today*, Oct. 2002); Douglas Farrow (*International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Jan. 2004); Chris Huebner (*Modern Theology*, July 2004).

¹² Wright, *Evil*, 91.

¹³ Thomas Long, "Bold in the Presence of God: Atonement in Hebrews," *Interpretation* 52.1 (Jan. 1998): 66.

¹⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms As Tools for Prayer* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 11-12.

¹⁵ My reading of Brueggemann on this passage brought me to consider it as a way to frame my reflections. See Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 141-50. To begin to wrestle with the rich Christian use of this passage, see: William H. Bellinger, Jr. and William R. Farmer, eds., *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origin* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, International, 1998); Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, eds., *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, trans. Daniel P. Bailey (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2004); and N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 577ff.

¹⁶ N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans," in *The New Interpreters' Bible*, Vol. X, ed. Leander E. Keck, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 474ff.

¹⁷ In utilizing martyr stories we need to keep the following reflections from Paul in mind: "But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us," and "For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4:7, 11-12; cf. Col. 1:24).

¹⁸ Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966). I don't know if Malcolm Boyd of *Are You Running with Me, Jesus?* fame ever published the sermon I heard.

¹⁹ Charlotte Allen, *The Human Christ* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 310. In the passage from which this quote is taken, she is criticizing A. N. Wilson's portrayal of Jesus.

²⁰ I suggest that "struck down by God" or later "it was the will of the LORD to crush him" is the poet's evocative way to say that God is profoundly, redemptively involved even in unspeakable suffering, transforming a cruel and horrible death – and it must never be seen otherwise – into martyrdom. Any interpretation must keep in mind God's esteem of this servant that is expressed clearly in both the opening and closing of this passage.

²¹ *To End All Wars*, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment DVD, 2002. Directed by David L. Cunningham.

²² A few minutes later the camera is on Major Campbell. “Amazing Grace” had been playing, on bagpipes, in the background. The narrator’s voice says: “I never found out what Dusty said to Ito that day. But I knew I had witnessed the power of forgiveness.”

²³ It was also instructive and important to watch this film with a Japanese couple who were students in our seminary.

²⁴ By naming “my sins” I simply mean to acknowledge and personalize my own complicity in this large, awful reality.

²⁵ The term “slow martyrdom” is drawn from Garry Wills, *Certain Trumpets* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), in his chapter 16 on Dorothy Day. Though of course King was martyred, his life was given as a serious, costly witness for many years before he died; thus his life was a “slow martyrdom.”

²⁶ *Let Justice Roll Down* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1976).

²⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” in *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches That Changed the World*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 83-100. I don’t remember what biography of King I first read; there are a number of good ones.

²⁸ Spencer Perkins, “How I Learned to Love White People,” *Christianity Today* (September 13, 1993): 37. This article is largely a remarkable account of how the witness of his father – his father’s embodiment of a costly love in the face of mean and sometimes violent white people – finally led Spencer to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ and to even to love white people.

²⁹ From a speech, “To Chart Our Course for the Future,” given at a retreat for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, May 22, 1967, Penn Community Center, Frogmore, South Carolina. For the quote, see Martin Luther King, Jr., *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 343.

³⁰ Given the way I opened this paper, it should be mentioned that my mother did not model submission to violent men. Anyone who has known her would never imagine that this strong woman did that. When my father turned violent, and it was practical to do so, she left him. At least after two-and-a-half years, and when it was practical, she told my step-father to leave. By pointing to her “suffering” I am pointing to her self-sacrifice that made it possible for a single mother, making little more than \$1,600 per year, to raise two sons. (And of course there are many more elements of her life that I could mention.)

³¹ I thank my wife, Mary, for her help with this paper. Her substantial editorial suggestions as well as a few specific and helpful additions regarding content are much appreciated.

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Weaver and Nonviolent Atonement: A Response

Tom Yoder Neufeld

I

I'm honored to be one of the respondents to J. Denny Weaver's *The Nonviolent Atonement*. I'm aware that any issues I raise have likely been raised already and much better by others. Weaver himself anticipates a good number of the concerns in his work. But since I have been asked to respond, I will do so, but I will restrict myself to only a brief sample of the issues.

Weaver's project is to oppose an Anselmian (and to a lesser degree Abelardian) understanding of atonement marked by substitution and satisfaction, in which Jesus substitutes for us in taking our just deserts upon himself, thereby satisfying God's demand for justice. Weaver opposes this view for several interrelated reasons. The first is that it casts God and atonement in the vocabulary and categories of violence as the solution to sin. The second is that Anselm's understanding of atonement is both rooted in, and underwrites, a retributive justice system that institutionalizes violence.

In contrast, since Jesus has already in his life and teaching revealed that the reign of God is nonviolent, his death should not be seen in any way as God's act, which would constitute an act of violence, but rather as a demonstration of nonviolence, "making visible the nonviolent reign of God." Most important, it is not the death of Jesus that is efficacious, but the resurrection, the apex of the drama of atonement. Since Jesus models this nonviolent nature of God's reign in his life, teaching, and death, he is to be followed by those who have benefited from atonement. Indeed, that is how they benefit from it; they participate in God's nonviolent reign. Weaver calls this counter-proposal "narrative Christus Victor."

I heartily concur with Weaver's rejection of an atonement that can be accounted for apart from transformed and transforming living. Reducing atonement to a forensic transaction leaving life unchanged, only now accompanied by impunity, is heresy, pure and simple (Bonhoeffer called it "cheap grace"). I agree with Weaver's insistence on placing the atonement

in inextricable relation to both Jesus' ministry and teaching, and into the larger apocalyptic drama of the remaking of creation. I applaud his efforts to bring resurrection into the discussion, sorely missing from too much of Anabaptist theology in recent times. Incidentally, I also applaud his refusal to allow the resurrection to serve as no more than a cipher for indomitability. Resurrection is not simply a symbol of hope for Weaver; it is the decisive cosmos-altering act of a gracious God.

I deeply appreciate Weaver's passionate commitment to nonviolence, which suffuses his efforts to rethink the atonement in light of it. (More about my accompanying discomfort with this shortly.) I was heartened by his efforts to place his thinking into conversation with circles not usually a part of Mennonite conversation: Black, feminist, and womanist theologians. It's not clear to me how deeply they inform his thinking so much as he wishes to bring his convictions into a wider circle of discernment, and for that I commend him.

II

As much as I affirm Weaver's commitment to getting it right, as it were, and as much as I reject together with him a simple forensic calculus of atonement, I am deeply restless with his project. Much of that restlessness is related to what happens to the biblical story in light of Weaver's desire to recast atonement in line with nonviolence.

For one, it appears that methodologically his starting point is less the story or narrative the Bible tells than a criterion of nonviolence which comes to serve as a canon over the canon. The logic with respect to atonement, in particular the cross, is fairly straightforward: punishment cannot possibly be a part of atonement since punishment is violence, and God has been shown by the ministry and death of Jesus to be nonviolent. Jesus' death can therefore only be the work of his enemies and not in any sense an act of God, however atoning, since that would make God violent.

But that is not how the Bible narrates the relationship of God to humanity. In the story the Bible tells, in both testaments, to be sure, God is a gracious, law-giving, protecting, and liberating creator and covenant partner, but also a fiercely angry judge and warrior. Humanity is depicted

as sometimes faithful, but far more often unfaithful, grieving its maker, incurring the “wrath” of God, and therefore in urgent need of mercy and grace. God responds in anger and also in unimaginable mercy. The biblical narrative reflects this in all its searing pain and startling wonder. Suffusing the narrative are attempts at atonement and reconciliation, both on God’s part and on the part of errant humanity. Human efforts come via confession, repentance, and sacrificial offerings, born out of a sense that sin, oppression, and rebellion have shattered the wholeness of shalom. A debt has been incurred that must be paid in order to re-establish the divinely willed equilibrium of wholeness (note the re-pointing of *shalom* as *shalem* and *shillum*: requital).¹ The law provides a means by which to measure indebtedness, the full amount of which will be exacted at the final judgment. God the judge is to be feared. For those who have suffered innocently at the hands of oppressors, God can be trusted to make things right, even if only after death or at the end of the age: that is what resurrection promised Jesus’ contemporaries.

Forgiveness makes sense only within such a construal of moral reality; forgiveness presupposes indebtedness. Witness the Lord’s prayer, in which the forgiveness of debts and trespasses are virtually interchangeable.² To put it crudely, the fact of sin requires that something be made right. And the Bible gives witness to that in myriad ways, including punishment, judgment, restitution, repentance, and forgiveness.

Weaver is right to point to the apocalyptic framework of New Testament understandings of atonement. But that framework, as understood in Judaism, does not dispense with but, if anything, accentuates the judgment of God on sin and sinful humanity. The reign of God is typically to be feared by all except by the innocent remnant.³ Interestingly, the followers of Jesus were very much at home in this apocalyptic narrative and frame of reference. Both John the Baptist and Jesus came announcing the reign of God with an urgent summons to repentance. In Jesus’ parables the warning about not being ready, about the dire consequences of saying no to the kingdom, is everywhere present; but so is the offer of reconciliation to those who turn around, who repent. At no point is the offer of mercy and forgiveness lifted out of this moral universe.

If I understand him correctly, Weaver offers what amounts to a counter-narrative, one in which judgment as punishment is absent, or, lest God be

accused of violence, present only as the inexorable outworking of cause and effect. While I share his discomfort with this aspect of the biblical narrative, I'm not sure what this recasting of judgment solves, since within the context of human life the effects or consequences of sin are as often as not visited on the victims of sin, not the perpetrators – hardly a nonviolent judgment by a loving creator, let alone a fair form of judgment. It is for exactly this reason that the issue of theodicy emerges in the Bible. The answer to why the wicked prosper and the innocent suffer is that consequences within the “normal” course of events are not the final word on sin. God responds with judgment, both liberating and punitive judgment; the resurrection is the final word of vindication for those who have suffered unjustly.

That much would not have come as news to either Jesus' companions or his detractors. What was not anticipated was that the divine judge and warrior would shock his enemies by turning their most intense rebellion into God's own means of reconciliation. Their murder of Jesus became God's love offering. Their murder of God's messenger and son became God's own sacrifice on their behalf. This is truly “news,” very good news, *euaggelion*.

How else, given the biblical narrative of rebellion and brokenness of sin, can the wonder and surprise of that miracle of grace be articulated than that Jesus died “for us” as the “lamb of God,” vicariously offered on our behalf – not *by* us but *for* us, by the aggrieved One? Perhaps Anselm's vocabulary of “substitution” is clumsier than the biblical narratives of atonement, but does it not point to exactly that feature of the biblical narrative? To Weaver's question as to whether the death of Jesus was necessary as a means of atonement, I think the answer is yes; it was “necessary” for those who killed him. Jesus “died for” his murderers. The cross reveals the full nature of human treachery and rebellion; precisely because of that it also reveals the full extent of divine love.

And how else, if one is to stay within the narrative of the Bible, can this miracle of grace be depicted other than that the warrior intervened to save and not to wipe out his enemies? Interestingly, Weaver's choice of “Christus Victor” for his atonement proposal recognizes the importance of that narrative strain in the Bible. Weaver restricts it, however, to the resurrection, since he has removed the cross from the realm of God's agency. He thus misses an opportunity not lost on the author of Ephesians, for instance, to

talk of Christ as “murdering hostility” by means of the cross. That is the language of agency, not victimhood. Better said, amidst the victimhood of the crucified one is the strong agency of God.⁴

Such an account of the death of Jesus and its meaning for atonement requires, of course, that both human and divine agency be recognized and acknowledged as fully present. Pervading Weaver’s proposal is an inability or refusal to allow for that interplay in the story. In Weaver’s tight logic, since God is nonviolent, we cannot see God’s agency in what is clearly a violent act, namely the torture and execution of Jesus. But the conviction that a sovereign God’s agency is enmeshed in a world in which people do terrible evil is not only not a problem for a first-century Jew but rather a source of wonder and hope that pervades the biblical narrative from start to finish. Weaver’s refusal to see God at work in the death of Jesus, to reduce the issue to a matter of violence, means that he is unable to distinguish the grace of a surgeon’s scalpel from the brutality of a mugger’s switchblade. But the gospel writers narrate the death of Jesus as both – at the same time – and thereby point to the fathomless persistence and inventiveness of divine love in the face of human rebellion and violence. What early believers in Jesus learned from the cross is that God will take the greatest evil and turn it into the greatest good.⁵ God will take the sword of human brutality and beat it into a plowshare of atonement. That is why the narrative is called “gospel” – news.⁶

III

Weaver does not read the biblical story as a complex and in the end unfathomable interweaving of true human agency and true divine agency, a mixture that informs the narration of the passion of Jesus in particular. By melding nonviolence with a refusal to see God redemptively at work in what are patently human acts of evil, Weaver must expunge large parts of the biblical narrative from his own narrative, or alter them to fit his criterion of nonviolence. This forces a choice for him, and one he urges on his readers: between, on the one hand, a narrative in which God and his messenger are victimized, thereby demonstrating the nonviolence of God, a narrative in which the resurrection moves to center stage; and, on the other hand,

a satisfaction/substitution model that makes violence an intrinsic part of atonement, and moreover has no necessary place for resurrection within it. Weaver is clear that the only choice faithful to Jesus is the former. Weaver's narrative of divine agency thus becomes rather slim, and his atonement largely cross-less. In such a Bible, the covers virtually touch each other.

Is it perhaps in the very nature of the mystery of atonement, the mystery of how God is redemptively active within sinful human life, that getting atonement right at the level of theory might just elude our grasp? I suspect so, unless "getting it right" means finding the wherewithal to give voice to our gratitude by means of metaphors drawn from the experience of humanity. Much of the biblical vocabulary of atonement presupposes such settings as court, captivity, ritual, and covenant, reflective of the rich narrative of human experience the Bible contains, and thus employs metaphors such as ransom, manumission, liberation, sacrifice, mercy seat/expiation, scapegoat, and debt remission, and, yes, substitution. I take such metaphors not as theories or formulas of atonement so much as poetic attempts to point to the depth of what came and still comes as surprise, and what was and always should be heralded as news. I take "poetic" to mean that these metaphors for atonement are by their very nature not precise and definitive, but also that they are always witness to and evocative of much more than they can "say."

We should, in my view, avoid restricting ourselves to any of these metaphors.⁷ Atonement is bigger than all of them, and bigger than all of them together, because the ingenuity of God's love knows no bounds. The various efforts, including "substitutionary death" and Weaver's "narrative Christus Victor," are at their very best poetic efforts to capture this wonder in some fashion and should be respected as such. These images and metaphors are the means by which we attempt to grasp the reality of atonement and the love of God that goes beyond being grasped (e.g., Eph. 3:19).

They are never "just" metaphors. In addition to being vessels for our grateful worship, they also have the capacity to educate us. Some of the metaphors, perhaps especially those emerging out of the courtroom, can inform us whose sense of the awful holiness of God or of our own sinfulness is faint of the costliness and undeservedness of atonement, thus opening us anew to the experience of wonder and gratitude.⁸ Others of us with too keen a

sense of God as a condemning judge, for whom Christ has to run interference on our behalf, are informed by the multiplicity of metaphors that atonement is finally always God's initiative, emerging out of the Creator's fathomless love; it is always God's immeasurably costly effort to reconcile and restore humanity. This is a God whose justice is "satisfied" only by reconciliation and the rebirth of humanity in relationship with its creator.⁹

There is so much, in my opinion, that is right about Weaver's effort to articulate the meaning of atonement: his rejection of atonement as the appeasement of a vengeful God; his stress on the Jesus' ministry as a whole within the account of atonement; his emphasis on resurrection and its finding realization in the life of believers; and, finally, his emphasis on discipleship as participation in atonement. But I am deeply troubled with some central features of his attempt. While I see the images of substitution and satisfaction reflected in some important ways in the biblical accounts of the meaning of Jesus' death,¹⁰ I am less concerned about whether we continue to use satisfaction or substitution language than I am with *how* Weaver wishes to expunge it, namely, by what looks to me like a truncated reading of the Scriptures by means of a hermeneutic that seems to be driven ideologically, even if it is called Anabaptist and its center piece is nonviolence. The cross was from the beginning a scandal, or as Paul puts it, "foolishness."¹¹ The mystery of that divine "idiocy" should not be "solved" by removing the cross from God's agency.

If I have misread my brother, I regret that deeply, and look forward to his correction.

Notes

¹ I stress this point of indebtedness and the need for repair not because it is the most important feature in the biblical narrative of atonement, but because it is one element that may provide some context for later "satisfaction" understandings of atonement.

² Compare the Lord's Prayer in Matt. 6:12 and Luke 11:4.

³ Hence, for example, the despair in 4 Ezra 7 at the effects of the "gift" of the law on humanity, that, apart from a very few, will fall victim to judgment. There is no opportunity here to take up the pervasiveness of the theme of judgment and wrath that marks virtually every document in the New Testament, from the Gospels to Revelation. But to ignore it takes away the context in which mercy is mercy and not impunity, grace is gift and not a right, and forgiveness always a recognition of the cost borne by the one offering it.

⁴ In Paul's way of saying it, the cross is the power of God for liberation or salvation (1 Cor. 1:17-25).

⁵ Not for a moment do biblical writers of either testament take this melding of human and divine agency to exculpate human beings with respect to their own violence and oppression. This is reflected in the way in which Jesus' passion and death is narrated at the same time as a story of human treachery and the abuse of an innocent man and of God at work saving that treacherous humanity. This same mode of narration is present, for example, in Isa. 53 and in Rom. 9-11.

⁶ I am reminded of Paul's words at the end of his lengthy rehearsal of God's ingenuity at redemption in Rom. 11: Who could give God advice? Who can trace God's ways? News is precisely not the "necessary" outcome of a calculation, and for the most part the biblical record does not rehearse it that way.

⁷ John Howard Yoder makes exactly this point in his *Preface to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002), when he cautions against choosing among biblical images of atonement on the basis of "taste, feel, or history," arguing instead for accommodating them all (288).

⁸ For many it is this that is learned via the metaphor of substitutionary atonement, even in its penal satisfaction mode (see Sharon Baker's opening remarks).

⁹ It is instructive, for example, that in the classic text which refers to Jesus' death as God having presented him as a *hilasterion* (mercy seat, expiation) this is described as the work of God's justice (Rom. 3:21-26). It is mercy and redemption that are the full face of God's restoring justice (v. 24). And that merciful justice comes to full expression in "faithfulness of Jesus Christ" (vv. 22, 26) that is in his "blood."

¹⁰ Rom. 5 is surely one of the most striking, where Christ dying "for us" is depicted as the enactment of God's love for enemies, not as a solution to God's hatred of enemies. At the same time, Christ dying "for us" – and, to be sure, living "for us" (Rom. 5:15-17) – is said to save us from "the wrath" (Rom. 5:9).

¹¹ 1 Cor. 1.

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Response to Reflections on *The Nonviolent Atonement*

J. Denny Weaver

I

I am grateful to the organizers of this forum for making it happen. I am honored that folks think enough of the book to discuss it. The fact that we are discussing a book published in 2001 indicates that it has gained some traction, which I appreciate greatly. And since the development of ideas is never finished, I am indeed grateful for this opportunity for further learning. My response in this paper circles around two foci: the supposed violence of God and issues related to the intrinsic violence of satisfaction atonement, which is a subcategory of the violence of God.

I begin with a brief autobiographical comment. I am a “recovering nonresistant Mennonite.” I grew up in the tradition of absolute nonresistance, where Jesus’ words “resist not evil,” Matt. 5:39 in the King James Version, meant a completely passive response – to do nothing in the face of evil.

One example: I was growing up during the civil rights struggle of the 1950s and ’60s. I was vaguely aware of prejudice against African Americans, I knew the name of Martin Luther King, Jr. and I had heard of marches and lunch-counter sit-ins. But what I knew most of all was that King and those African American marchers were wrong – wrong because they were resisting. My/our belief about what they were supposed to do was to keep suffering. It did not seem fair to me, but in order to be faithful to Jesus they just needed to keep suffering rather than resisting what white folks were doing, even if the deeds of white folks were wrong.

A second example: I was growing up during the Korean War and the Cold War and the supposed communist threat to our way of life in the United States. As a nonresistant member of a nonresistant church, I would never have consented to be part of the military. But along with a lot of other nonresistant Mennonites, I was glad for the U.S. army that operated in the God-ordained kingdom of the world to protect our country from

communism. I had a vague sense that it was not right to be glad others were in the army committing the sin of killing, but that was just what it meant to be a nonresistant Christian.

Both these examples involve sanctioning violence by someone else in the process of defending our own nonviolence as a nonresistant church. Although I have followed a long route with plenty of detours, one dimension of my career in theology has been about providing better theology than these violence-accommodating answers of the church of my youth. The material in *The Nonviolent Atonement* is a part of that “better theology.”

Mennonites have a love affair with violence. It fascinates us. We stare deeply into its eyes and are mesmerized – so that we either cannot or do not want to get away from it. As much as we say that we are a peace church and oppose violence, we want to keep it around. Of course we don’t like it, but it has its place and on occasion it seems useful. Besides, it is obviously “biblical.” In their papers [in this CGR issue], we see Mark Thiessen Nation defending the violence of redemptive suffering and Tom Yoder Neufeld extending the practice of violence into Godself. But I dispute both their conclusions, as I dispute the violence-accommodating theology of nonresistance from my youth, and for the same reason: they all put a divine sanction on violence.

II

Yoder Neufeld identified one of my important beginning presuppositions, namely the logic which indicates that if God is revealed in Jesus and if Jesus rejected violence, then we should understand God as nonviolent. I have come to believe that Jesus’ rejection of the sword demands we understand that God is nonviolent. Yoder Neufeld disagrees. His refutation of that starting point seems rather straightforward: just read the Bible and discover the violence of God the “fiercely angry judge and warrior,” along with God the “gracious, law-giving, protecting, and liberating covenant partner.” But I beg to differ, and I also read the Bible.

Of course we find stories of violence and claims of divinely sanctioned violence in the Bible. But there are other strands that Yoder Neufeld barely acknowledges. Start with the creation myths of Genesis 1 and 2. When

these stories are read over against the Babylonian account in the Enuma Elish, it is clear that the Bible begins with an image of a nonviolent Creator. Some stories of the patriarchs reflect conflict avoidance or nonviolent conflict resolution – Isaac walking away from fights over wells, Abraham dividing the land with Lot. There is exegetical and archaeological evidence to suggest that the conquest was by immigration and osmosis over against the stylized accounts of massacre in Joshua 1-12. There is Gideon's rout of the Midianite army with a small band, using trickery and confusion rather than massacre. 2 Kings 6 contains the account of Elisha's defanging of the threat from the Arameans: Elisha got them confused, led them into a kind of ambush where the king of Israel begged to kill them, but told the king to feed them. After they feasted, the Aramean force returned to their king, and the story concludes "And the Arameans no longer came raiding into the land of Israel" (2 Kings 6:23). Jump to Jeremiah's counsel that the captives should "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile" (29:7) and the stories of nonviolent cultural resistance of Daniel and his three friends. Such nonviolent narratives throughout the Old Testament also claim divine sanction.

I suggest that the OT has an ongoing conversation about God and how God works. Parts of that conversation visualize a violent God, while other parts present other images of God and place divine sanction on other ways of acting. Christendom's centuries-long sanctioning of violence has mostly obscured this latter side of the conversation. But it is still important to ask, which parts of this conversation most truly reflect the character of God? I do not think that we can answer that question by putting our finger on one or another of these accounts. However, we have a criterion for answering it. If we are Christians, that criterion is the story of Jesus, in which the narrative of the OT finds its fulfillment. If we take seriously the confession that God is revealed in Jesus who is the culmination of the story that began with Abraham, I consider it very questionable that we should be vigorously defending the idea of a violent God on the basis of OT narratives.

This means, of course, that Sharon Baker is correct in pointing out that Nicea's linking of Jesus to God links the nonviolence of Jesus to the character of God. Nicea's calling Jesus *homoousios* with the Father is certainly correct if one wants to describe the continuity of God to Jesus in that Greek philosophical category and lodged in a fourth-century cosmology.

I would only add that there are other categories for discussing the continuity of Jesus to God, as when John Howard Yoder told us in an Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary class more than 30 years ago that we live in a different world view and use a different philosophical system than the bishops at Nicea, and that perhaps for us the category of continuity might be “ethics or history.” And for Mark Thiessen Nation’s benefit, without further elaboration, I will call attention to the fact that deriving the character of God from the story of Jesus is also an application of trinitarian theology.

As Baker reiterated, traditional theories of atonement, and in particular satisfaction atonement, are intrinsically violent with the “image of a violent God, heaven bent on balanced cosmic books.” Its image of divine violence is one reason I reject satisfaction atonement. When Yoder Neufeld began his paper by disputing my view of God, he actually made a roundabout affirmation of an important aspect of my understanding of atonement theology. More than an analysis of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, atonement is about our understanding of God.

There is an application of Trinity that seeks to absolve God of the charge of divine child abuse, or of having Jesus killed. It is this application that Nation had in mind when he accused me of having a deficient view of Trinity. This argument is that since God was identified with Jesus, as Nicea and Trinity doctrine proclaim, it could not be that God was abusing Jesus, that Jesus on this side was suffering to offer something to God over on that side. Rather than Jesus suffering to supply a need to God, the argument goes, God was actually suffering and dying with Jesus on the cross in order to supply the divine need. This particular argument does supply one kind of answer to the charge of divine child abuse. However, it does not remove the intrinsic violence of satisfaction atonement, it merely gives it a different look. God is now pictured as having Godself beaten up in order to supply the death needed to balance the cosmic books. The image is still that of a God whose *modus operandi* employs violence.

Arguing that God suffers with Jesus is one effort to defend satisfaction atonement against the charge of “divine child abuse.” A related defense is to acknowledge that there “may be” “some views ... that are subject to this critique,” but then suggest that many are not. Penal substitution and the Protestant Reformers are the frequent culprits, with the defender of satisfaction atonement then referring us back to the real Anselm or a

specific emphasis within Anselmian atonement. Thus one finds the emphasis shifting from restoring God's honor to restoring the order of creation to restoring obedience. There is a denial that Anselmian atonement involves any economy of exchange at all, with the claim that Jesus' death restores true worship of God.

I keep wanting to ask, "Will the real Anselm stand up?" In each case, there is an effort to say that the particular version being advocated avoids the problems of the previous suggestions. But we do not need to provide a definitive answer as to the real Anselm in order to see that none of these shifting answers successfully avoids the problem of the intrinsic violence of satisfaction atonement. That is easily seen when one poses a couple of simple questions to any suggested version of satisfaction atonement. Who needs or benefits from the death of Jesus? And the answer is God. And then ask, Who is the actor with agency in the equation? Who arranged the scenario to supply the death that God needed? Again, the answer is God. With God arranging the scenario to supply the death, it is clear that no version of satisfaction avoids its intrinsic violence.¹

For another look at why the shifting emphases do not and cannot absolve the satisfaction motif of its intrinsic violence, consider the many potential defenses of capital punishment. It is not about killing, one can argue; it is about doing justice, or upholding the rule of law, or doing something for the family of a murder victim. But when one asks how those various goals are met, the answer is always, "by killing a person." In a satisfaction motif, the answer to how the variously defined divine goals are met always returns to "by killing Jesus." Baker's observation is most certainly correct when she says that even if the emphasis in Anselm shifts from retribution to restoration, the motif still depends on the violence of God in securing forgiveness.

Nation suggested that my approach does not take sin seriously. Apparently that charge comes from the fact that I do not see God as orchestrating the death – the killing – of Jesus as the way to satisfy the divine need, that is, God as sanctioning violence to get God's due. I can comment on sin in the category of what I have sometimes called "restoring Anselm's deletion." Anselm removed the devil from the salvation equation, and made sinful humans directly responsible to God. My atonement motif restores the devil, but understood as the evil powers represented by Rome.²

Reintroducing the powers/the devil into the equation makes clear the source of the evil that killed Jesus, and it takes sin most seriously because it makes us responsible. In fact, to be sinful means to be in league with the powers that killed Jesus, and that we are in fact guilty of participating in Jesus' death. Killing Jesus is our human doing, not God's doing.

Salvation occurs when we switch sides, from the side of the powers arrayed against the rule of God to the side of the reign of God. This switch in sides engages our own responsibility. It is represented by Jesus' call, "Follow me," which is presumed in the Anabaptist emphasis on "discipleship." On the other hand, as many traditions emphasize, we cannot save ourselves, we cannot successfully oppose the powers of evil on our own. We need help. That help is the transforming action of God to grab us and change us to the side of the reign of God in spite of ourselves. To put that in trinitarian language, this transforming action is the Holy Spirit transposing us to the side of the reign of God. This would be an application of John Howard Yoder's description, many years ago in an AMBS class, of the Trinity as a time problem – understanding that the God of Israel is the same God who raised Jesus and is the God who is still immediately present to us today.

The idea that we cannot successfully oppose the powers of evil on our own most certainly takes sin seriously. The idea that we are individually responsible yet move to the side of the reign of God only through an act of grace is an expression of Paul's paradox of grace: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them – though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (1 Cor. 15:10).

III

Yoder Neufeld is comfortable projecting an image of a God who resorts to violence. This God responds in anger and exercises violence to restore divinely willed equilibrium. Final judgment is the place most of all where this judgment will be enacted. This final judgment smacks down the perpetrators and offers vindication by resurrection for those who suffered. It is in the context of this violent judgment that he suggests forgiveness makes sense. Although Yoder Neufeld does not say it quite this way, God can forgive

freely and fully because God has first balanced the cosmic account through the violence of punishment on Jesus and in anticipation of the violent punishment of final judgment. This view of atonement presumes a God who has exercised, and will exercise, violence as the means of righting wrongs.

The idea that God kills is pervasive in popular culture, although it usually goes by another name. Among many, many such easily accessible examples is a comment in the midst of a story in *Sports Illustrated* about Mike Coolbaugh, the first base coach in a minor league baseball game, who was hit in the head by a line drive and died almost instantly. According to the family, "God plucked him."³ Recall the line-up of violence by Christians mentioned by Baker. Think of the many instances of statements like "God needed an angel" when someone is killed by a drunk driver. Recall the debates after 9-11, the tsunami in southeast Asia, and Katrina – debates about who God was punishing. Common to all these debates is the assumption that God kills.

I appreciate Baker's affirmation that it is important to construct a nonviolent image of God. I cannot prove in quid pro quo fashion that the image of a God who resorts to violence results in violence by human beings. However, there are significant correlations. Read Timothy Gorringer's book on the correlation between satisfaction atonement and the exercise of punishment in the practice of criminal justice.⁴ Think of the recent research on how violent video games impact children, and put that with the continual references to a God who exercises violence. Recall what we know about advertising – how through repetition and projection of images it works to create a need we did not know we had – and then consider what it does to have before our minds the image of God, who encompasses all-in-all and who resorts to violence when things will get really serious about dealing with evil. I suspect there is a reciprocal relationship between imaging a God who uses violence and human resort to violence.

Incongruities accompany this view of God who uses violence. I already indicated that God's forgiveness under this system is not really free and unbounded; it happens because God first got the equation balanced through violence. The "miracle of grace" happens because God has already extracted the retribution that balances the scales of divine justice. Further, Yoder Neufeld and Nation both struggle to explain why the killing of Jesus is a heinous deed but also a good thing. Nation suggested that the killing

of Martin Luther King, Jr. was somehow within the will of the Lord to convince him (and the rest of us) of the evils of racism. But killing Jesus in order for God's justice to be restored required people to wield whips and drive nails into him, as we saw in *The Passion of Christ*. For Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death to be redemptive and within the "will of the Lord," as Nation suggested, it required a trigger man, whether James Earl Ray or the shadowy Raul that Ray ended up blaming, to do the deed. These remind me of the sinful killing performed in accordance with God's will for the kingdom of the world that was fully blessed by the nonresistant church in which I grew up.

Regarding human violence reflecting divine violence, think of Yoder Neufeld's statement that the innocent need not fear the apocalyptic, violent judgment that ends up in the reign of God. The uncomfortable thought that crossed my mind was the claim of the current [Bush] administration in Washington that we need not fear wiretaps and secret surveillance if we are innocent. Or the God who is patient with God's sinful creatures until such a time as final judgment, when God's patience ends and they are crushed – parallel to parents whose famous words are "I've warned you, and now ...," and all manner of other changes from patience to outbursts, including the claim that our patience has run out and we are now forced to use military means to deal with weapons of mass destruction.

And then there is Yoder Neufeld's suggestion that we distinguish between the cutting of a surgeon's scalpel and that of a mugger's switchblade. For me, that analogy comes uncomfortably close to the standard arguments asking us to choose between good violence and bad violence – such as Hans Boersma's critique of my atonement theology in which he suggests that rejection of violence is one of my basic problems; I should just join the modern world and recognize that violence can be and is useful and a form of hospitality.⁵ Baker is correct, I think, when she says that a God who uses violence, the penal God of satisfaction atonement, presents an "interpretation of God as a loving parent who viciously attacks when provoked and then tells the children to 'do as I say, not as I do.'" But children do end up modeling the behavior of parents, and human beings do act in ways parallel to the violent actions described for God.

The argument is made that the word of divine love can "take any evil and use it for good." To me, this is uncomfortably close to something

like the old argument that although slavery was evil at least it enabled the transported Africans to encounter the gospel. I think that we can learn from evil, we can learn from the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., without claiming it is the “will of the Lord.” God is revealed in the death of Jesus without saying God’s agency is behind – engineering – that death to meet a cosmic requirement for justice.

There is a sense in which I can say that “God willed” the death of Jesus. Jesus’ mission was to live his life as a witness to the reign of God. Since the confrontation with the powers of evil was an ultimate struggle, fulfilling his mission meant being faithful even unto death. It was “God’s will” that Jesus be faithful even unto death, which is also our model. But the death understood in this way is not redemptive, and it does not satisfy a divine need of restored honor, a restored order of creation, restoring worship, or obedience to God, or meet any other divine need.

The major portion of Nation’s response focused on suffering and its potentially redemptive character. Apart from three formulaic mentions of the “life, death, and resurrection” of Jesus, his response did not include resurrection in any meaningful way. This focus on suffering is the counterpart to a God who engineers the death of Jesus for divine purposes, a death to which Jesus obediently submits.⁶ Following this passive Jesus, who undergoes redemptive violence, puts Nation in the neighborhood of the focus on redemptive suffering that is objected to and rejected by feminist and womanist writers. These writers object to theology that consoles suffering people in their suffering or considers suffering redemptive through comparison with Jesus’ suffering.⁷ These writers may include a critique of Martin Luther King, Jr., whom Nation used as an example of redemptive suffering. The response of feminists and womanists is to develop theologies that empower victims to develop strategies of resistance to the powers that oppress.

Yoder Neufeld suggested that a nonviolent image of God forces a choice between God and his messenger who do not fight back, or satisfaction atonement with no place for resurrection. Nation stated that I align myself with theology “that makes martyrdom unintelligible or even wrong, as well as in general cutting the nerve of a call to costly and sacrificial discipleship.” Both these statements are just wrong. Narrative Christus Victor is intrinsically

an ethical motif that calls people to experience salvation by living within its story of Jesus. The Jesus in this motif confronts assertively but nonviolently the powers that opposed the reign of God. It resulted in his death. To be a disciple, to live in Jesus' story, is to accept and live with that same risk of death. This is explicitly a statement of willingness to face martyrdom, and it is anything but a passive messenger who does not resist. It is a Jesus who empowers victims to resist – to resist nonviolently – a Jesus who supports the demonstrators of the civil rights movement rather than telling them they were wrong.

Yoder Neufeld wrote that he is “deeply troubled” with some features of my argument. I am “deeply troubled” with these efforts to weave violence into, to use John Howard Yoder’s expression, the “grain of the universe.”⁸

IV

We have mentioned reinterpretations of the tradition and the task of projecting some new ways to think about atonement theology. As Baker suggested, this is a momentous time in the development of theology. The demise of Christendom and of the so-called “mainline” churches opens vistas and raises questions in ways that are unprecedented since perhaps the fourth century of the Christian era. When historians a hundred years from now point to our epoch – perhaps 1975 to 2025, to give a round number – it is quite possible they will identify a reshuffling and restructuring of theological lines in surprising new alliances and with ramifications as great as the reformation of the sixteenth century. Since we are in the midst of this time, we cannot see fully how it will shake out. Stick around, and see how the historians a hundred years from now say it comes out.

Meanwhile, some respond to this reshuffling by trying to refurbish the inherited tradition. I am with those who see new opportunities as we articulate the meaning of Jesus Christ for our generation. I certainly hope Baker is right that time is on my side, as this will mean that those are being heard who critique the violence of inherited theology and who seek to construct theology that makes visible the nonviolence of Jesus and the God revealed in Jesus. Of course Baker *is* right that these new efforts will not

get everything right the first time and will need some adjustment as we go along. But that is why we keep working at the task of theology, and why our conversation in this forum is important.

Notes

¹ In his notes, Mark Thiessen Nation recommends Peter Schmiechen's recent refurbishing of Anselm, *Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). In my view, Schmiechen's book is an example of attempting to solve the violence problem by shifting emphases within a satisfaction orientation. Posing the questions suggested in this paragraph reveals that several of his ten theories of atonement are actually variations on satisfaction, and retain the problems of violence identified here.

² My understanding of the "powers" follows Walter Wink's exposition.

³ S. L. Price, "A Death in the Baseball Family," *Sports Illustrated* (Sept. 24, 2007), 57.

⁴ Timothy Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996).

⁵ Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004); Hans Boersma, "Violence, the Cross, and Divine Intentionality: A Modified Reformed View," in *Atonement and Violence: A Theological Conversation*, ed. John Sanders (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 47-69. This latter item also contains rejoinders between Boersma and me.

⁶ Underscoring the focus on the suffering and death of Jesus, Nation emphasizes that in Revelation we have a "slaughtered Lamb." Revelation figures prominently in my construction of Narrative Christus Victor. Here there is space only to emphasize that the slain lamb in Revelation is a living, a resurrected lamb, from the vision of Christ in chapter 1 to the vision of the church as the New Jerusalem in chapter 21. The church living in the midst of empire, envisioned as New Jerusalem, has "the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" as its temple, and it needs no external sources of light because "the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (21:22,23).

⁷ Some examples are Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World?" in *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 1-30; Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 55-57; Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 60-83, 161-67, 178-99.

⁸ John H. Yoder, "Armaments and Eschatology," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 1 (1988): 58.

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Theology and Fundraising: How does Current Canadian Mennonite Praxis Compare to the Apostle Paul's Collection for Jerusalem?

Lori Guenther Reesor

Why ask the question raised in the title? I have been a fundraiser and a pastor, and my experiences have convinced me that thinking theologically about fundraising is important for the future of Mennonite institutions.¹ Theological studies are often supported by fundraising, and I believe theology can and should contribute to the study of that activity.² The short, un-nuanced answer to the question posed in the title is: Mennonites are generous people who value efficiency and respond to familiar causes based on need. When the apostle Paul collects money, he strives to promote unity and equality among fractious believers and relies on grace to motivate donors. He facilitates giving among believers who disagree with each other about culture and theology, and he devotes considerable effort to explaining that giving is part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. While much has changed in two thousand years of church history, I believe Paul's collection for Jerusalem is still highly pertinent today.

Donors are the living texts of Mennonite praxis. I began my research with donor interviews because I am a practical theologian and want my biblical exegesis to address the current issues of believers. I also talked to four Mennonite fundraisers who confirmed many of the trends from the donor interviews and gave a fundraiser's perspective on Mennonite giving. I present much abbreviated interview results here as the necessary background to the exegesis that follows.³ Through focus groups and referrals from Mennonite Foundation Canada, I asked twenty-five donors the same questions:

1. What is your favorite charity?
2. Where did you get the idea that giving money away is something that people do? What is your earliest memory of giving/receiving?

3. How do you decide which charities to support?
4. Is giving money connected to being a Christian? How would you explain this to a Sunday School class of ten-year-olds?
5. Do tax receipts matter? Why or why not?
6. If you could talk to a professional fundraiser, what would you tell them? How would you like to be asked?

Questions 1, 3, 5, and 6 helped to explore motivations for giving. Questions 2 and 4 were very much related in donors' answers. I heard amazing stories of generosity from people who had begged for bread as children and grown up to become donors. Early modeling of giving in families and/or through Sunday School was unanimously offered as an answer for question 2. Question 5 showed that tax receipts matter, both as a means to increase giving and evidence that the charity is accountable to the government. The results raise a number of issues about church structures, accountability, and individual versus communal giving.

Here I must interject a note about Canadian and American Mennonites. This study interviews only Canadians, although my original thesis also references the Mennonite Church USA giving survey conducted in 2005. In a conversation, Marty Lehman from Mennonite Church USA noted that a concern for saving money for retirement and possible healthcare needs may be affecting giving patterns.⁴ However, I believe the findings below are applicable to North American Mennonites generally.

Talking to Mennonite donors reveals individual giving spread in many directions – Mennonite,⁵ Christian, and secular – and resulting from various motivations. One representative anecdote comes from a donor who cites MCC as a favorite charity, though she talked most about a child sponsored through a charity that advertises on television. Many donors list their home church as their favorite charity, but not necessarily the most fun or satisfying cause to support. Giving often results from a sense of obligation or duty, and as a compassionate response to need, but donors are also inspired by an organization's vision and sense of purpose. Familiarity influences giving, whether from television or through shared beliefs and involvements. The communal discernment of the church plays a lesser role in giving decisions

than in earlier times. Giving decisions that used to be made by the church are now made by individuals.

Donors recognize the spiritual component of giving, with tithing and Jesus' model of sacrificial giving both cited as models. Some donor comments suggest giving as a spiritual practice: that one is only as "yielded" as one's checkbook. This "yieldedness" recalls the Anabaptist practice of *Gelassenheit*.⁶ Many donors felt professional fundraisers were acceptable, but some felt fundraisers neglected the spiritual aspects of giving. For their part, fundraisers view both giving and fundraising as ministry activities.

It is with this background that I examine the biblical texts which are normative for the Mennonite church. The apostle Paul's collection from among his Gentile churches for the poor in Jerusalem provides the best documented example of fundraising within the primitive church. A large delegation of representatives from the contributing churches delivers the money to Jerusalem. It is a joyfully inefficient model intended to promote unity among believers. I focus my exegesis on issues raised by donors and fundraisers which largely concern how and why donors give. A remarkable number of concerns are common to the contributors to Paul's collection two thousand years ago around the Mediterranean, and Canadian Mennonite donors today. Accountability and motivations for giving are two significant examples.

I begin with a brief outline of some methodological concerns. The primary texts describing the collection are Rom. 15:25-32, 1 Cor. 16:1-4, and 2 Cor. 8 and 9.⁷ Like most scholars, I think there were tensions between Paul and the church at Corinth between the writing of 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians 1-9.⁸ I introduce the collection as a voluntary expression of ecumenical unity, and then proceed to examine why and how Paul collected money for Jerusalem.

Collection as Voluntary Expression of Ecumenical Unity

The collection project involves multiple Gentile churches voluntarily contributing funds towards the saints in Jerusalem, with representatives from supporting churches forming a delegation to deliver the funds. The origin, purposes, and outcomes of the collection all demonstrate Paul's concern for unity, despite the cultural divide between Gentile and Jewish believers.

Galatians 2:1-10 relates the origin of the project. Paul and Barnabas are in Jerusalem meeting with James, Peter, and John. These “pillars” recognize the grace that had been given to Paul and they shake hands as partners in ministry. However, they do have theological differences: the Jerusalem churches saw Torah observance as integral to a belief in Jesus but the Gentile churches did not. Still, Paul responds eagerly to a request for the latter to remember the poor in Jerusalem. Some scholars view the collection imposed by Jerusalem as a condition for Gentiles’ acceptance in the church,⁹ and see a more hierarchical authority structure implicit in the collection.¹⁰ However, I interpret the evidence as indicating that Jewish Jesus-followers and Gentile Jesus-followers had a peer-to-peer relationship.¹¹ If the collection is a mandatory levy, then it becomes something akin to taxation, deceitfully packaged by Paul as a voluntary donation.¹² However, Paul is a free actor and not under compulsion from Jerusalem.¹³

When the Gentile delegation arrived in Jerusalem carrying the collection for the Jewish Jesus believers, it must have presented a striking vision of the future of the church, united in Christ.¹⁴ Paul’s “ministry to the saints” (2 Cor. 9:1) intends more than material relief (Rom. 15:27, 2 Cor. 9:12) for the Jerusalem believers.¹⁵ The collection both demonstrates and facilitates the ecumenical unity of the early church (2 Cor. 9:13-14).¹⁶ Paul devotes much energy to the collection: it becomes a very ambitious and theologically significant undertaking.¹⁷ N.T. Wright argues that Paul “must have seen it as a major element in his practical strategy for creating and sustaining the one family of God redefined around the Messiah and in the Spirit.”¹⁸

Did the collection achieve its purpose? I see a modest ecumenical success,¹⁹ because church history shows that the Gentile church did not succumb to Marcionism²⁰ and sever its Jewish roots.²¹ Despite disastrous results when the collection arrived, the Christian movement retained a connection to the “one people of God” and the Jewish roots of its faith.²² However, Paul’s project did not promote closer ties with Gentile believers for the Torah-observant Jesus believers in Jerusalem but rather quite the opposite.²³

Promoting Unity and Inclusiveness in Corinth

The collection promoted solidarity, not just with the Jerusalem church but within Paul's congregations. We must not romanticize the early church: Paul chooses to promote unity among believers where it is fragile. 1 Corinthians 11 and 12 urge unity in the body of Christ and address ecclesiological problems at Corinth,²⁴ some based in differences of social status among believers.²⁵ Paul's vision for unity in Christ is expressed through the arrangements of the collection. The delegate selection structures in these Gentile congregations promote both unity and inclusiveness.

Churches appointed delegates to oversee the collection (2 Cor. 8:19, 1 Cor. 16:3) to demonstrate its integrity (2 Cor. 8:20-21), "just as cities chose envoys of virtuous reputation to carry gifts for the temple."²⁶ Paul explains that the money is neither administered nor collected by him²⁷ but is the responsibility of Titus (2 Cor. 8:16-17, 23), who had likely been chosen by the contributing congregations.²⁸ Paul wants everyone possible to be included in collection. He rejects the patronage model and encourages all believers to participate.²⁹ The process of choosing a representative also reinforces his inclusive model.

While the patronage model of asking only the rich would be more pragmatic,³⁰ Paul presents a less efficient but more inclusive model. John K. Chow notes that by asking people to save up, Paul includes both rich and poor. He wants everyone to participate if they can, rather than honoring a few "rich leaders" as benefactors.³¹ He would rather decline funds³² and risk resentment from prospective patrons³³ than accept money and become someone's client.³⁴ Such benefaction would have distorted the model of the entire church participating and choosing delegates. Hans Dieter Betz writes that *χειροτονεῖν* (2 Cor. 8:19), usually translated as "appointing," describes "the process of electing envoys by the raising of hands in the assembly."³⁵ This delegate selection might be Paul setting an example for the strong in the church – another encouragement towards inclusivity,³⁶ suggests Chow. Everyone in the congregation, weak and strong, must participate in making a decision.³⁷

Paul uses the collection as a tool to foster social unity within the Corinthian church, a church subject to threats from within and without. The pooled individual resources from rich and poor are both an expression of

unity and a means toward it. The joint project within the Corinthian church also increases the members' connection to the roots of the Jesus movement.³⁸ It is a sign of prayerful solidarity with fellow believers in Jerusalem,³⁹ the source of the gospel. Money received from a congregation, rather than from individuals, becomes an expression of "fellowship in Christ," an act of worship.⁴⁰ Paul's ecumenical vision for the collection highlights that the "interdependence of the body of Christ is not limited to relationships within individual congregations."⁴¹

An Alternative to Extortion: Paul's Suggestions on How to Give

Accountability is a crucial concern, as opponents were suggesting that Paul was enriching himself from funds he had collected.⁴² He makes it clear (2 Cor. 8:20-21) that he and his fellow workers are taking precautions to avoid being discredited in administering the generous gift. They promote fiscal accountability in collecting and donating the funds. The Corinthians are encouraged to give joyfully, voluntarily, regularly, and proportionally, and to have the funds ready upon Paul's arrival rather than to give to an emotional appeal when Paul comes.

JOYFUL AND VOLUNTARY RESPONSE

Paul does not demand participation but encourages a voluntary and joyful response; he is not commanding but giving an opinion (2 Cor. 8:8-10). Betz asserts that "a collection of this sort depends by nature on the voluntary cooperation of the contributors."⁴³ No one is obligated to contribute, although Paul vigorously encourages participation. The voluntary aspect helps him defend against accusations of enriching himself.

In 2 Cor. 9:7, Paul reminds the Corinthians that "God loves a cheerful giver." ("Joyous" is another translation of *hilaros*, "cheerful."⁴⁴) Joy cannot be forced. The Macedonians' giving comes from an "abundance of joy" despite their poverty (2 Cor. 8:2, 5). The collection is not membership dues⁴⁵ or a mandatory levy, but money freely given (2 Cor. 9:5).⁴⁶ The focus on a gift willingly given helps to explain the "not affected by covetousness" in the verse just cited. C.K. Barrett translates this phrase as "not as something wrung from you."⁴⁷ If the gift is ready in advance (1 Cor. 16:2), Victor Paul Furnish notes that then the Macedonian envoys arriving with Paul will see

the Corinthian gift as a gift of love, like their own. But if Paul has to beg for the money, it could seem like extortion from reluctant donors.⁴⁸ He urges the Corinthians to seize the opportunity to give out of joy, not compulsion. If “joy is a saving gift from God,” then joy is seldom far from Paul’s reasoning.⁴⁹

REGULAR GIVING

For the Corinthians to have money ready in advance, disciplined giving is in order. Participation in the project is strong and ongoing because money is regularly set aside for Paul’s collection.⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians 16:2 is key: “On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.” (The “as he may prosper” is discussed below.) The collection project is ruled out as an *ad hoc* appeal to be conducted upon Paul’s arrival.⁵¹ His instructions about regular weekly giving bolster accountability: they serve to avoid any accusations or possibility of fraud, and to suggest a measure of donor accountability. Barrett translates the verse as “Let each one of you set aside *for himself* [italics mine]” in contrast to “contribute to a church collection” in order to avoid misappropriation or the possibility of accusations thereof.⁵² I presume that worship served as a reminder; believers kept the money at home⁵³ in preparation for Paul’s arrival,⁵⁴ since the collection was not part of worship at that time.⁵⁵ There were no banks: who would have kept the money? The most fiscally prudent plan was for believers to regularly put aside money at home.

A weekly contribution would also add up to a more sizable gift, as many commentators have noted.⁵⁶ But Paul desires more than an impressive gift; he wants to strengthen the Corinthian church. Giving is not simply a spontaneous response to need or to an emotional appeal upon his arrival but a regular component of Jesus-follower praxis. Given the type of budget shortfall, year-end appeals to which donors today are routinely subject, Paul’s emphasis on disciplined, voluntary, and joyful giving is still relevant.

PROPORTIONAL GIVING

Paul changes the fixed giving amount⁵⁷ of the temple tax model to become proportional to income (1 Cor. 16:2). In this way rich and poor can participate equally. Proportional giving is within everyone’s means, but Paul’s language

needs deciphering if we are to appreciate the full inclusivity of his thinking. The word translated as “prosper” is a rare term.⁵⁸ Most commentators recognize proportionality in the phrase: Charles Talbert suggests “as he may prosper,”⁵⁹ while Craig Keener has “if one should prosper.”⁶⁰

This is not a legalistic agreement whereby everyone gives the same percentage of income⁶¹ but giving “to the extent that God provides more than what one needs to live on.”⁶² Paul clarifies this in 2 Cor. 8:12-14: “For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality.” His goal is not that the Corinthians become impoverished⁶³ but that they give according to what they have, which presumably for most is an abundance.⁶⁴ The teaching of proportionality emphasizes that the willingness to give matters more than the size of the gift.⁶⁵

Present-day fundraising often stresses regular giving of pre-set amounts through pre-authorized bank withdrawals. Paul is suggesting something much more radical. Perhaps a parallel is individual donors specifying a minimum bank balance for necessities and giving the surplus away every week. Some people might not be able to give at all in some weeks, while others might give sizable amounts. The exact methods for collecting monies from individual donors are not known. However, it seems reasonable to assume that the people collecting could gauge whether the gift resulted from proportional, regular giving.

DIRECTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY: DESIRED OUTCOMES OF THE COLLECTION

Most donors I interviewed were concerned about directional accountability: how donations will be spent and what influence donors will have on that spending. In Paul’s project, directional accountability is largely entrusted to God. Paul assures the Corinthians that the Jerusalem church is not becoming rich at their expense (2 Cor. 8:13), but little is recorded about how the funds would actually be used. Believers may already have been familiar with how benevolences operated in the community of faith. The desired outcomes Paul outlines to his donor churches are prayer and praise to God, and increased recognition of his ministry (Rom. 15:31).

In 2 Cor. 9:12-15 Paul makes it clear that this ministry is “not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.” The final outcome is praise to God; the physical

giving of money is an intermediate step. “Both the givers and the receivers honour God.”⁶⁶ Giving demonstrates both generosity and faith,⁶⁷ as many Mennonite donors have also observed. Paul tells the Corinthians that the recipients will praise God on their behalf. Closely related to praise is prayer: those aided will respond with intercessory prayer.⁶⁸

Paul trusts that the collection furthers God’s purposes, and on that basis, he embarks on a risky undertaking: “if grace propelled the collection, it was faith and trust that sustained it.”⁶⁹

Motivations for Giving and Theology of Asking

A rich primary text⁷⁰ for motivations for giving is 2 Cor. 8-9. Below I will compare three areas as a means of illuminating motivations, both Pauline and present: giving as grace; beyond duty and need (expanding the boundaries of sharing); and the example of Jesus.

GIVING AS GRACE

Paul emphasizes that God’s grace enables giving and that the grace of giving builds community. Grace permeates Paul’s eloquent theological discussion of the collection⁷¹: he uses the term *charis* ten times in 2 Cor. 8 and 9.⁷² *Charis* can indicate “grace,” “gracious work,” or “gift”; James Dunn suggests it sometimes conveys a sense of “engracement” – lived grace as a response to received grace.⁷³

Giving is utterly dependent upon grace. Paul realizes that without the grace of God, the collection project could not happen and that unfettered grace could make it as successful in Corinth as it had been in Macedonia.⁷⁴ He explains how God’s grace operates: “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed” (2 Cor. 9:8). One present-day donor affirms Paul’s confidence and reflects on decades of generosity: “The amazing thing is that whatever I have given, I have never ever missed it.”

The grace of giving strengthens the community of believers. “Grace, we might say, had only been truly experienced when it produced gracious people.”⁷⁵ The very communal nature of the collection and delegation serve to promote grace as a gift to the community. Grace flows from God to humans, through humans as gracious action, and back to God as thanks.⁷⁶

Paul's sheer boldness in comparing one church's giving to another's (2 Cor. 8:1-5; 9:2) contrasts with contemporary reticence. For example, Al Rempel of MC Canada says such comparisons are done confidentially and only upon request.⁷⁷ However, Paul can compare one church to another because he is confident that God's grace will move the Corinthians just as it empowered the Macedonian churches.⁷⁸

BEYOND DUTY AND NEED

The motivations that Paul does *not* primarily appeal to – but that emerged from my donor interviews – are obligation/duty and need/empathy. The way he discusses his collection serves to expand the boundaries of sharing among believers. Both material and spiritual blessings are shared, blurring any distinctions between donor and recipient. Believers with whom one disagrees are also included in the sharing, something that contrasts with the many Canadian Mennonites who cited familiarity as a motivation for giving. Paul's thinking moves far beyond an obligation to help the less fortunate.

We have already examined the voluntary nature of giving. Giving is not a duty, although Paul stresses it is important to finish what one starts (2 Cor. 8:11; 9:5). Julette Bassler explains that because of the grace of giving, “external compulsion was unacceptable” and unnecessary.⁷⁹ Paul's use of the term *leitourgia* (2 Cor. 9:12) incorporates the ideas of giving as voluntary public service and as an act of worship and thanksgiving.⁸⁰ The word's connotations of priestly ministry⁸¹ reinforce the spiritual and the material connection.

Nor is the collection strictly in response to need: the situation is more complex and interdependent than need and response. Empathy is not a motivation for giving: Paul does not desire pity but equality (2 Cor. 8:13-15). He does not offer a “tear-jerking sketch” of conditions in Jerusalem.⁸² When he mentions “their present need,” he also talks about their resulting abundance as a supply for the Corinthians' own need, which puts the focus on equality. In the same spirit of equality, Paul deliberately underplays the poverty in Jerusalem so that the Corinthians will not expect the Jerusalem church will become obligated towards them.⁸³ Those with an abundance share with those who have less and “can expect reciprocation if the roles are reversed.”⁸⁴ Paul does reverse the roles: in Rom. 15:27 he describes

the Gentiles as being spiritually indebted to Jerusalem. Bassler talks about “the exchange of material blessings” in response to the “prior exchange of spiritual blessings.”⁸⁵ Believers who share God’s grace and God’s Spirit also share in relative prosperity,⁸⁶ with neither a distinction between sharing spiritual and material blessings nor a hierarchy of donor and recipient.

Paul uses the term *koinonia* (partnership, sharing, communion) in 2 Cor. 8:4 and 9:13, and in Rom. 15:26.⁸⁷ *Koinonia* reaches “across the ocean” to the church in Jerusalem with whom Paul and the Gentile churches had theological differences regarding Torah observance.⁸⁸ *Koinonia* extends not just to people one loves but to those one may not even like.⁸⁹

EXAMPLE OF JESUS

Because the sacrificial example of Jesus was explicitly cited in my donor interviews, 2 Cor. 8:9 merits special attention. Here Paul views the collection project as a response to Jesus’ incarnation. However, he is not advising the Corinthians to become materially poor like Christ but to respond as those enriched by Christ’s gracious giving.

Fred Craddock argues for a less economic and more theological interpretation of the poverty of Christ: believers do not become rich⁹⁰ and the condition of poverty is not to be exalted.⁹¹ Christ’s poverty consists of his incarnation, his complete identification with the human situation.⁹² Paul is making a case against the separation of the material and the spiritual, a real temptation for the pneumatically minded Corinthian believers. In Rom. 12:13, he lists “contributing to the needs of the saints” as a spiritual gift. Betz notes that the collection “presented the perfect opportunity to respond appropriately to the example of Christ.”⁹³ All believers have been enriched by the grace of Christ,⁹⁴ and all believers, rich or poor, can contribute to the project in response to Christ’s gift.

In Praise of Inefficiency: A Large Delegation Proclaims the Gospel

A deliberately large delegation of representatives from contributing churches accompanies the collection in order to fulfil Paul’s ecumenical purposes.⁹⁵ It includes a preacher, because the process of delivering the collection is ministry rather than a means to an end. In fact, Paul declares in Romans that the delegation itself is a gift. Delivering the collection *together* was a tangible, deliberate sign of the unity of the various churches. The delegation

was unexpectedly large,⁹⁶ likely at least ten men. Some scholars suggest that a large sum of money⁹⁷ or optimal eschatological impact⁹⁸ account for this size, but an expression of unity is the most likely reason.

A series of delegations arriving in Jerusalem would be a practical way for delivering funds, and that may have been Paul's initial plan (1 Cor. 16:3). The large delegation promotes relationships within the "entire ecumenical community of Christ."⁹⁹ Believers would likely develop new friendships and connections with other believers, and the impact on local churches when delegates return home would be magnified. The delegation both promotes and expresses unity.

In addition to the delegates' roles in promoting ecumenical unity, maintaining fiscal accountability, and participating in the outcomes of praise and thanksgiving, Dieter Georgi proposes an additional role, namely explaining the collection en route. "With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel," says Paul (2 Cor. 8:18, ESV). This well-known preacher could defend the project's fiscal integrity and testify that "the congregations had agreed to [the collection] for reasons of the gospel and that the economic aspect of the affair was only secondary."¹⁰⁰ Explaining the collection and preaching the gospel are compatible activities. I highlight this point because many Canadian Mennonites are reluctant to see charities devote resources to such donor-oriented activities as preaching and explanation.

The delegate's fame "for his preaching of the gospel" (ESV, RSV) is a less common translation of 2 Cor. 8:18, but it captures better the proclaiming connotations of *euaggelion*. The substantive usage "describes the act of proclamation: [...] praise at the preaching of the Gospel."¹⁰¹ The phrase signifies that the delivery of the collection is a tangible proclamation of the gospel. The delegates are integral to the project.¹⁰²

Ministry does not start when the money arrives in Jerusalem. Believers offer themselves to God through their giving (2 Cor. 8:5), which some Mennonite donors also mention. Paul makes this offering explicit in Rom. 15:16, where he explains that God has given him grace in order "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that my *offering of the Gentiles* may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit [*italics mine*]."¹⁰³ The Gentiles themselves become a gift. Thus, the delegation participates by both carrying an offering and being an

offering.¹⁰⁴ The delegation does not seem unnecessarily large when taken as a sign of the outpouring of God's Spirit; it demonstrates grace more than efficiency.

Comparing Pauline and Mennonite Theology and Praxis

The biblical texts carry normative weight for Mennonite donors, and the findings from Paul's collection for Jerusalem could inform Canadian Mennonite praxis to a larger extent than at present. Precise parallels are not possible, as the primitive church did not have denominations or parachurch institutions as such; in Paul's collection, the delegation functions as the intermediary organization. However, asking for money from church members is still present. It may help the reader to refer to the following summary chart comparing Mennonite and Pauline theology and praxis. I want to compare:

- Secrecy around giving: talking about money could transform Mennonite stewardship ("Noteworthy" items at bottom of the following chart)
- Fiscal accountability: Paul's model of communal discernment facilitates greater accountability than current Mennonite praxis ("Fiscal Accountability")
- Directional accountability: Paul's approach provides a valuable corrective to needs-based and individualized giving ("Directional Accountability")
- Motives for giving: examining unity, grace, and equality ("Motives for Giving," "Theology of Fundraising," "Use of Professional Fundraisers"). Applying Paul's motives for giving to Mennonite praxis would have widespread repercussions from congregational to international church relations.
- Familiarity as a motive for giving: Paul's appeal to become more inclusive of believers with whom we disagree challenges the familiarity motive commonly expressed by Mennonite donors ("Familiarity as Motive for Giving").

**MENNONITE THEOLOGY AND PRAXIS and
PAUL'S COLLECTION FOR JERUSALEM**

	MENNONITE THEOLOGY AND PRAXIS	PAUL'S COLLECTION FOR JERUSALEM
Motives for Giving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duty/tithing, obligation, empathy • Involvement, relationship, community • In response to need • Example of Christ • Joyful celebration of God's abundance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary expression of ecumenical unity • Equality • In response to grace • Example of Christ • Joyful celebration of God's abundance
Familiarity as Motive for Giving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity (value alignment and TV) leads to wide dispersal of Mennonite giving to many causes and contributes to lack of common causes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give even to those believers with whom you disagree to build <i>koinonia</i>
Fiscal Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong concern for fiscal and administrative accountability • Paradox of fiscal accountability – transparency costs money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong concern for fiscal and administrative accountability • Regular giving expected • Delegation of representatives from contributing churches
Directional Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donors value influence in how donations are spent • Paradox of directional accountability – donors are not accountable for giving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How Jerusalem will spend funds not stressed • Anticipated outcomes of praise and thanksgiving to God
Ecclesial Structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing emphasis on individual discernment as opposed to communal discernment • Minority of donors seeking mutual accountability • Need for improved communication between Mennonite institutions and constituency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide participation through large delegate model • Emphasis on inclusiveness and unity • Proportional giving means everyone can contribute • Collection is part of the good news, preacher travels with delegation
Theology of Fundraising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Us/them" paradigm for donors and recipients contrasts with integrative model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrative model for donors and recipients – all have received God's grace
Use of Professional Fundraisers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraisers appeal to "baser motives," neglect spiritual component 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul is not shy about asking for money or reminding the Corinthians of their previous pledges
Noteworthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple living to facilitate giving • Willingness to break taboos about discussing money 	

Money Talks; People only Whisper

Canadian Mennonites need to break the code of silence around money. Secrecy around giving prohibits a joyous celebration of generosity and is incompatible with seeking counsel. Mark Vincent writes that “[w]hen we make decisions about generous and grace-filled living, we who received the Holy Spirit are inspired to seek the counsel of the church.”¹⁰⁵ He addresses the left hand/right hand conundrum (Matt. 6:3-4) by noting that Jesus condemned the false spirituality of those who pretended they were righteous because they gave. “Totally private giving can present the same dangers – letting us pretend we give even when we do not. Battling false spirituality is the point . . . far more than telling us to give in private.”¹⁰⁶ If churches could be more open about money, then people could “help each other to make proper decisions,” as one donor phrased it. Talking about money also means church members can encourage one another in living simply, in order to facilitate giving.

Paul’s collection for Jerusalem presumes that talking about giving and asking for money are ministry activities. Giving remains an individual decision, but the collection would not have happened if Paul had not asked for money. When the Corinthians volunteer to participate, he follows up. He invests significant time and energy in encouraging them to give by sending ministry associates and writing a letter before his own visit. His comparison of the Macedonian and Corinthian churches illustrates how strikingly forthright he is. However, this particular section of Scripture is not enshrined in the Mennonite canon.

I sensed frustration among some generous donors who could not talk openly about their giving. Unlike other spiritual gifts, the gift of giving is not celebrated in their congregations. Paul’s model of proportional giving enables everyone to give, regardless of circumstances. Some Canadian Mennonite donors are already quietly living this model. The seemingly small detail of proportional giving could transform the practice of Mennonite stewardship.

Fiscal Accountability

Canadian Mennonite donors and the Pauline churches share a common concern for fiscal accountability. However, there are two significant

differences. First, there is no paradox of accountability in Paul's collection project. Second, the communal giving and delegation model of the Gentile churches makes accountability an easier, more holistic process, one that includes "narrative accountability," which simply means putting words together to explain the connection between gospel, grace, and generosity.

The paradox of accountability in Canadian Mennonite giving is that financial transparency and donor communication cost money, while donors are concerned about minimizing such costs. Paradoxically, MCC was lauded for its efficiency by many donors who also support charities advertising on television that spend more money on communication. In Paul's collection project, churches appoint delegates to supervise and participate as fiscal and narrative accountants who oversee and give an account of the gospel motivations for the collection. There are not two tiers of participants, ministry and administration, as present-day charities are sometimes structured. For Paul, hiring an auditor is not wasteful. He does not hesitate to send advance representatives to verify the Corinthians' giving levels. Giving, accounting, and preaching are all ministry.

Ecclesial Structures

This active delegate model does not fit well with one in which individual church members give, or do not give, as they see fit. With individualized giving, everyone is his or her own delegate on an individual journey and there is reduced accountability for both donors and organizations. This contrasts with Paul's model, where regular giving to a common cause beyond the church is expected. Greater accountability is possible when church giving is based on communal discernment and someone from the congregation can participate in how the money is administered. The delegates will also carry the accounts of prayers and thanksgiving among the recipients back to their home churches. The delegation model is unworkable without a common cause to support, and in my view Canadian Mennonites are rapidly losing any common causes.

Directional Accountability

Paul knows that the collection for Jerusalem will supply a need, but the outcomes he emphasizes are unity and equality within the church, as well

as prayers and thanksgiving. He tells stories of giving and stories of grace, although the need must have been known. In contrast to donor interview results, directional accountability (influencing how the money will be used) is not stressed but is entrusted to the receiving church and to God.

Perhaps the approach taken by Paul provides a valuable corrective to needs-based and results-based motivations for giving. Would it have mattered if the Jerusalem parties held a celebratory banquet rather than prudently stockpiling grain and oil? Both hypothetical outcomes would fulfil Paul's purposes: the church would be strengthened and prayers of thanksgiving rendered to God. In the delegation model, there is no paradox of directional accountability where individual donors desire institutional accountability yet are accountable only to themselves. Donor and delegates can influence the gift of one's self, becoming a gift to God and showing God's grace through their generosity. They are an encouragement to the receivers, to churches along the way, and to their local congregations.

Motives for Giving

Paul conveys a deep concern for the unity of the church that pervades the motivation for giving he urges. The three most applicable motives are unity, grace, and equality.

UNITY

Paul has a vision and a passion for involving all members in the unity of the church. Mennonite donors are also concerned about "vision," which is congruent with his approach to fundraising. However, Paul's emphasis on participation in a shared goal is not congruent with the efficiency-oriented, budget-driven model of contemporary Mennonite fundraising. Paul stresses that everyone regularly set aside money as they are able, rather than rely on a few major donors persuaded to balance the budget at the last minute.

Paul is more concerned with broad participation than with the amount collected, although the two goals are related. Mennonite churches often measure donations received against the budgeted amount rather than measure participation. Paul advocates regular and proportional giving among all members of the community of faith, not just the richer ones. Mennonite institutions, like most charities, increasingly solicit from individual donors,

in effect bypassing the local congregation. It is more efficient to ask fewer well-off people for money than to cultivate many new donors who may not have the habit of giving. But the efficiency model means that the majority of funds may come from a minority of church members.¹⁰⁷ Recall that Paul rejected the more efficient patronage model. If he were preaching today, he would have donors and fundraisers squirming in the pews with his view that giving is for everyone, rich and poor alike. However, it would be a liberating contrast to the efficiency model to celebrate and encourage everyone's giving.

Paul's vision for the unity of the church definitely fits with a narrative budget model, where congregations describe the ministry they want to engage in and then give to an opportunity rather than a budget.¹⁰⁸ Some Mennonite donors feel it is not terribly exciting to give to a budget. Paul's ecumenical passion matches these donors' desire to be part of a vision and to strengthen community. A narrative budget model could also foster communal giving, which facilitates church unity at the congregational level and beyond.

GRACE

Paul's churches are places of costly abundance. They are completely dependent upon the gracious abundance of God, which has come at a tremendous cost through Jesus' sacrificial offering of himself. Although God enables material giving, believers can be generous not because they have become rich but because they "have been enriched by the grace of Christ."¹⁰⁹ God's grace is a costly abundance, because it resulted from Jesus' sacrificial self-giving and because responding to God's gracious activity with an offering of money is costly.

While some Mennonite donors were concerned that professional fundraisers neglect the spiritual aspect of giving, Paul stresses that aspect above all. Generosity is not about meeting budgets or responding to appeals but a fundamental question of spirituality.¹¹⁰ Grace produces joy and joy overflows into generosity (2 Cor 8:2). Generosity is not compulsory and cannot be forced, but flows in response to God's gift of Christ, in the same way that love for others flows in response to God's love. In keeping with Paul's letter to the Corinthians, and a minority of Mennonite donors surveyed, giving is a joyous celebration of God's grace.

Generosity costs money: Paul expects believers to honor their pledges and to give as they are able on a regular basis. He celebrates the generosity of other churches and holds them up as a model for believers in another place. Like the donor who reports “satisfaction in being a regular contributor,” giving occurs not only in response to emergency appeals. Other donors express what I call “Giving as *Gelassenheit*”: giving is part of living in response to God’s grace. One is only as yielded as one’s checkbook. Some donors also note that giving as a spiritual practice is difficult when it is taboo to discuss money. For Paul, giving as response to grace is not strictly a private matter: he can celebrate the generosity of one congregation and encourage another to follow suit. Grace leads to joy, and joy to generosity. It is an abundance of grace, not an abundance of resources, that leads to giving. With such a model, Paul would not be able to keep quiet about giving.

EQUALITY

In his grace-based giving model, Paul stresses an equality of believers. All have received the grace of God and share in both material and spiritual blessings. Pursuing equality as a motivation for giving has staggering implications. First, a goal of reducing economic disparity would require considerable change to patterns of Canadian Mennonite giving. Second, a realization that believers are not intrinsically divided into donors and receivers would change how fundraising operates.

Paul’s collection for Jerusalem provides a valuable model of giving to believers far away. Mounting such an undertaking in response to a request from a community of believers exceeds the scope of most Mennonite giving patterns. Moving towards economic equality among believers in, for example, Ontario and Zaire, is a very radical vision, and tithing is likely to be an inadequate vehicle. Talking about money and living simply would likely be necessary before even considering such a goal. Also, this type of grand project can only be communal, not individual. The current pattern of increasingly individualized and often localized giving would need to be reversed in order to focus on the larger community of faith.

Recognition that donors and receivers all belong to the circle of God’s grace might help to counter an “us/them” mindset that views spending money on donors as overhead and not as ministry. This may seem contrary

to the previous point about economic equality. However, Paul was prepared to devote considerable resources to encouraging the relatively prosperous Corinthians to support the church in Jerusalem because he valued unity and equality above efficiency.

The delegation model was inefficient in economic terms, yet it strengthened the church's "social capital." The controversy about donor trips to visit projects overseas provides a pertinent example. Is it wasteful and self-indulgent to send one's 17-year-old daughter to a service project in Nicaragua for two weeks? The country will not be transformed, but the teenager might be, especially if she returns to a community equipped to incorporate that experience into a life of discipleship and faithful giving. Paul focuses on building just such communities. Perhaps a similar shift in thinking could help MCC and other institutions to invest resources in cultivating generosity among donors and potential donors. While such efforts would likely address MCC's declining market share in Mennonite giving, the primary goal should be unity and equality: a recognition that donors and receivers are all part of the circle of God's grace.

Beyond Familiarity as a Motive for Giving

Paul includes believers with whom he differs theologically in the circle of grace. This is a significant difference from the finding that donors tend to support local and familiar causes. Paul collects money for Jesus-believers in Jerusalem who require circumcision and have other practices with which he disagrees. Moreover, he promotes such a collection as a vehicle for unity among the fractious Corinthian believers. His passion for promoting unity amidst local and ecumenical theological diversity poses a challenge to Mennonite giving.

I completely agree with Mennonite fundraisers who suggest improved communications among their constituency will facilitate generosity and strengthen unity within Canadian Mennonites. I speculate that for some churches, a gift to Mennonite Church Canada would demonstrate giving to an organization with which they disagree on matters of theology and praxis. Denominational unity poses challenges very similar to those facing a congregation trying to agree on which charities to support in the church budget. My research suggests that this category of church benevolences

is increasingly left to the discretion of individual donors, where there is less accountability. When Mennonite congregations and individuals support organizations that have a different understanding of the gospel than Mennonite doctrine upholds, they likely do so because they find that theology more familiar.¹¹¹

The challenge to communal generosity despite diverse theological understandings also reverberates on an international scale. Until we Canadian Mennonites can share with those with whom we disagree theologically, won't we have a difficult time organizing ourselves to support our Mennonite brothers and sisters elsewhere? One is tempted to answer yes, but this is not Paul's response. He encourages the Corinthians to give to the collection for Jerusalem to strengthen their own fellowship of believers as well as to promote a broader unity and equality within the church. God's grace flows to everyone and, in an odd equation, abundance leads to equality.

Exuberant Inefficiency: A Case Study

An example from Steinbach Bible College (SBC) in Steinbach, Manitoba captures some of the joyful spirit of Paul's collection.¹¹² In recent years, SBC has raised seven million dollars for a building project. The first steps in the campaign were consulting pastors from affiliated conferences and obtaining pledges from faculty. This was a community undertaking, not a legacy from one or two individuals. Gord Penner emphasized that SBC was about relationships and not about buildings.

The most memorable part of the fundraising project for Penner and the SBC community was a bike trip. In the middle of the campaign, when SBC staff was weary, Penner organized a bike trip to Leamington, Ontario, which is part of the supporting constituency. Six professors cycled for six days for a total distance of 2,002 km. (approx. 1,250 miles). The trip raised only about \$20-\$25,000 (at most 0.35 percent of the total donations), but people in Steinbach still remember this event five years later. Participants were on the radio, which boosted campaign awareness. To quote Penner, "It was crazy fun!" It was tangible. Participants also made a funny Low German video and talked to churches along the way. The trip strengthened community and created camaraderie among participants.

This bike trip exemplifies exuberant inefficiency. It suggests some of

the joyful inefficiency of sending a preacher along with the large delegation to Jerusalem. Was it necessary that six professors ride? They would likely have raised more money by spending six days talking to the richest members of their supporting constituency. However, efficiency was not the point. This effort showed SBC faculty giving themselves to the project, and it encouraged church members to do the same. The delegation of cycling professors was a tangible gift to SBC and to the constituency.

Conclusion

The biblical texts deal with many of the same fiscal accountability issues that the Mennonite donor interviews mention, but Paul does not distinguish between accounting and ministry, as some Mennonite institutions do. His fundraising efforts for Jerusalem stress measures to avoid perceptions of fraud. Churches choose representatives to accompany the money to Jerusalem.

The delegation model ensures accountability and facilitates ecumenical unity. At least one preacher makes the journey, to provide an account of the collection's integrity and to underscore the collection's origins in the gospel. The delegation is a gift, a lived response to received grace which unifies all believers, Jew and Gentile.

The biblical texts about Paul's collection demonstrate that it is acceptable to ask for money and to invest in encouraging generosity. I have emphasized that giving is so essential that it needs the collected wisdom of gathered believers. Paul encourages regular and proportional giving in response to grace, rather than needs-based giving in response to an urgent appeal, which might look like extortion. Regular giving, rather than giving in response to need, presents a challenge to Canadian Mennonites.

Paul encourages joyous giving as an expression of unity and equality among believers. Canadian Mennonites need to break the taboo on talking about money in order to follow his leading towards joyous generosity. Paul extends the ambitious goal of equality even towards those with whom one might disagree. In an even greater challenge to Canadian Mennonites, he sees giving towards a common purpose as a unifying strategy for congregations, such as those in Corinth where there are tensions among believers. Amazingly, Paul's collection for Jerusalem shows that God's grace can operate even in

such difficult circumstances. Paul's wisdom on the theology of fundraising is as applicable now as when he first penned his words.

Notes

¹ In the sense that Mennonite institutions play an important role in the stewardship of Anabaptist thought.

² I am using a practical definition of "theology." Theology describes how one thinks and sees the world in light of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

³ For a small sample of anecdotes from donor interviews, note a radio interview online at Mennonite Church Canada: "Fundraising, Stewardship, and the Church," *Church Matters* <www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre/ResourceView/5/9915>.

⁴ Marty Lehman, telephone conversation with author, 19 June 2007.

⁵ I am using "Mennonite" as a shorthand for Mennonite-Christian.

⁶ *Gelassenheit* refers to individual yieldedness and obedience to God.

⁷ I treat these chapters as only one letter, although that is not essential to my arguments. For contrast, see Hans Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 141, with Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 425; Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 146-51. See Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 431-33 for a detailed comparison.

⁸ Jouette M. Bassler, *God and Mammon: Asking for Money in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 98-99. Bassler and many others see 2 Cor. 10-13 as a separate and earlier letter.

⁹ L. Cerfaux, *La Théologie de l'Eglise Suivant Saint-Paul* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1965), 115.

¹⁰ K.F. Nickle, *The Collection: A Study in Paul's Strategy* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 60; Cerfaux, *La Théologie*, 115, 221; Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 41.

¹¹ Günther Bornkamm, *Paul*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 38. Contra Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 145.

¹² Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, trans. F. Clarke (London: SCM Press, 1959), 288.

¹³ Larry W. Hurtado, "The Jerusalem Collection and the Book of Galatians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 5 (1979): 57. Also Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 42, 53; Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 124; Munck, *Salvation of Mankind*, 289; Bornkamm, *Paul*, 92. For an argument that non-judicial does not mean voluntary see Holmberg, *Paul and Power*, 41.

¹⁴ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 426.

¹⁵ Bassler, *God and Mammon*, 92-93; Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 118; C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (London: Adam & Charles

Black, 1971), 386.

¹⁶ Cf. N.T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 167; Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1977), 31; Munck, *Salvation of Mankind*, 290.

¹⁷ A very accessible treatment of the collection appears in Bassler, *God and Mammon*, 89-115.

¹⁸ Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 167.

¹⁹ I am taking an approach between the extremes of successful and catastrophic outcomes for the collection. Nickle, *Collection*, 72-73, asserts that the collection promoted reconciliation between churches, whereas Holmberg, *Paul and Power*, 43, interprets Acts' "merciful" silence on the matter to mean it was "something of a missionary and diplomatic catastrophe." So too Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 110; Bornkamm, *Paul*, 101.

²⁰ Marcion emphasized the radical disconnect between Christianity and Judaism. He did not include the Old Testament in his canon and taught that Jesus was not the same as the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. John J. Clabeaux, "Marcion," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1996).

²¹ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 485. See also Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 19.

²² Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 110.

²³ James D.G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1990), 257. Of course, Paul's collection was only one factor among many in the loss of this group of Jesus believers.

²⁴ John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study in Social Networks in Corinth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 176.

²⁵ Cf. Dahl, *Studies in Paul*, 28, for a discussion of the problem occurring at the Lord's Supper, where the rich eat first and there is not enough left for the poor who come later.

²⁶ Keener cites Philo, Special Laws 1.78 in *1-2 Corinthians*, 209.

²⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 414.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 422. Cf. Nickle, *Collection*, 84, on protecting against allegations of pilfering temple tax. For fuller treatment of Titus' relationship with the Corinthian church, see Murray J. Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 571-72.

²⁹ I am informed by Chow's *Patronage and Power*, which illuminates the contrast between Paul's approach and the patronage structures that pervaded society.

³⁰ A focus on major donors is often how present day fundraising operates.

³¹ Chow, *Patronage and Power*, 185-86. So too Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 315.

³² But cf. Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 66: 1 Cor. 16:6 and 2 Cor. 1:16 suggest Paul received help with travel expenses.

³³ Timothy L. Carter, "'Big Men' in Corinth," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 66 (June 1997): 64.

³⁴ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 419.

³⁵ Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 74.

- ³⁶ Chow, *Patronage and Power*, 186-87. Contra Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 75.
- ³⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 315.
- ³⁸ Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 52-53. The collection acknowledges the ongoing theological importance and salvation-historical role of Jerusalem: Larry Hurtado, lecture on Pauline churches, Jesus devotion, and Jewish monotheism, St. Paul's Theological College, Brisbane, Australia, 18 July 2007. Cf. Holmberg, *Paul and Power*, 51.
- ³⁹ Hurtado, Lecture 18 July 2007.
- ⁴⁰ Dahl, *Studies in Paul*, 35.
- ⁴¹ James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 709.
- ⁴² Munck, *Salvation of Mankind*, 173. Bassler, *God and Mammon*, 98-99, outlines the Corinthians' initial support for the collection, then the disruption caused by rival apostles who accused Paul of embezzlement, Paul's subsequent letter, and letter of reconciliation. Cf. Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 76-77, who surmises that the crisis referred to in 2 Cor. 8:20 was "a charge of fraud made by this man against the apostle."
- ⁴³ Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 59. So too Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 576; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 205; Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 427.
- ⁴⁴ "Dictionary and Word Search for *hilaros* (Strong's 2431)" in Blue Letter Bible website.
- ⁴⁵ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 136.
- ⁴⁶ In contrast to the temple tax, Paul makes the Jerusalem offering a one-time voluntary collection (2 Cor. 9:7) instead of an annual legislated levy. Nickle, *Collection*, 79, 91-92; Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 40.
- ⁴⁷ C.K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1973), 235. See Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians: Volume II, Commentary on II Corinthians VIII-XIII* (London: T & T Clark, 2000), 571-73.
- ⁴⁸ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 439.
- ⁴⁹ For a detailed discussion of Paul's concept of joy, see Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 71.
- ⁵⁰ As per the temple tax. Nickle, *Collection*, 80, 89.
- ⁵¹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1324.
- ⁵² Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 387.
- ⁵³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 315.
- ⁵⁴ Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 387.
- ⁵⁵ D.E. Aune, "Early Christian Worship," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1996).
- ⁵⁶ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 315.
- ⁵⁷ Half-shekel. Nickle, *Collection*, 92.
- ⁵⁸ It occurs elsewhere in the NT only in Rom. 1:10 and 3 John 2. W. Michaelis, "εὐοδόω," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume 5*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 112. Hereafter *TDNT*.
- ⁵⁹ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, rev. ed., (Macon, GA: Smyth and Hewys, 2002), 131. The Greek term likely originates in the

Septuagint. “In some 40 instances God is directly or indirectly the one to whom true success is ascribed.” W. Michaelis, “εὐδοῶ,” *TDNT* 5, 112. The *TDNT* states that in 1 Cor. 16:2 the sense of “as you may prosper” is “as much as possible” and that the idea of success is linked to saving, which each is to accomplish with genuine weekly sacrifice.

⁶⁰ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 136. Contra Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 65.

⁶¹ Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 587, argues that this would have been an excellent opportunity for Paul to promote tithing but Paul chooses to urge proportional giving instead.

⁶² Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 139.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁶⁴ Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 590.

⁶⁵ Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 66.

⁶⁶ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 214.

⁶⁷ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 451.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 452.

⁶⁹ Bassler, *God and Mammon*, 113. See Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 658.

⁷⁰ Dahl, *Studies in Paul*, 37-38, provides an excellent summary of how Paul talks about the Collection in “Words and Phrases referring to the Collection.” Also Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 554-55.

⁷¹ Bassler, *God and Mammon*, 101.

⁷² Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 707-08. See Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 559-60 for a summary of how *χάρις* is used in 2 Cor. 8-9. Also Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 319-23 for how Paul uses the term in his writing.

⁷³ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 707-08.

⁷⁴ Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 560.

⁷⁵ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 707.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 708.

⁷⁷ Al Rempel, phone conversation with author, 16 August 2007.

⁷⁸ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 452.

⁷⁹ Bassler, *God and Mammon*, 111.

⁸⁰ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 428.

⁸¹ Dahl, *Studies in Paul*, 37.

⁸² Ernest Best, *Paul and His Converts: The Sprunt Lectures 1985* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 98.

⁸³ Sze-kar Wan, “Collection for the Saints as Anticolonial Act,” in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation – Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl*, ed. Richard Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 2000), 210-11.

⁸⁴ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 206. See also Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 67.

⁸⁵ Bassler, *God and Mammon*, 94.

⁸⁶ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 709.

⁸⁷ Dahl, *Studies in Paul*, 37.

⁸⁸ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 709.

⁸⁹ Cf. Matt. 5:46-48.

⁹⁰ Fred B. Craddock, “The Poverty of Christ: An Investigation of II Cor. 8:9,” *Interpretation* 22 (April 1968):165,168. So too Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 62.

⁹¹ Craddock, “Poverty,” 162, writes that “such exalting of the condition of poverty as a most blessed state, as though a man’s life consisted in the abundance of things he did not possess, has had a long and widespread acceptance in the church.”

⁹² Craddock, “Poverty,” 166. Contra Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 292.

⁹³ Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 61.

⁹⁴ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 418.

⁹⁵ The temple tax precedent provides a legal way to transport money to Jerusalem. Paul employs a similar large delegation model, which provides security and represents the community in Jerusalem. Nickle, *Collection*, 83, 88.

⁹⁶ See for instance Holmberg, *Paul and Power*, 38.

⁹⁷ Munck, *Salvation of Mankind*, 303; Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 123-24; Murphy-O’Connor, *A Critical Life*, 346.

⁹⁸ Munck, *Salvation of Mankind*, 303-04.

⁹⁹ Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 75.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 73-74. Contra Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 174, who suggest the man will serve “as some sort of accountant.”

¹⁰¹ Gerhard Friedrich, “εὐαγγέλιον,” *TDNT* 2, 729. Translating *en tō euaggeliō* as “a preacher of the good news” (NLT) or “proclaiming the good news” (NRSV) is consistent with how Paul uses the word to describe himself (2 Cor. 2:12, Rom. 1:9), and himself and his companions (2 Cor. 10:14). With Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 208; Thrall, *II Corinthians VIII-XIII*, 548. Contra Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 601, who cites Rom. 1:9, Phil. 4:3 and 1 Thess. 4:2; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 422.

¹⁰² Contra Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 133, and V. George Shillington, *2 Corinthians* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1998), 183, who see a lesser role for the messengers.

¹⁰³ I hold to the traditional interpretation of the “offering of the Gentiles” as a genitive of apposition and not a subjective genitive. Contra David J. Downs, “‘The Offering of the Gentiles’ in Romans 15:16,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29.2 (2006): 173; John E. Toews, *Romans* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2004), 352. With Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed., trans. Edwyn C. Hoskins (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), 530; Hurtado lecture, 18 July 2007. Paul could also be referring to the gift made by the Gentiles (Wan, *Paul and Politics*, 206) although I prefer to think it is the Gentiles and not the money which the Spirit sanctifies.

¹⁰⁴ “Paul’s offering turns out to be the Gentiles themselves, evidenced to be so because they have been ‘sanctified by the Holy Spirit.’” Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: the Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 626.

¹⁰⁵ Mark L. Vincent, *A Christian View of Money: Celebrating God’s Generosity* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1997), 90.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁰⁷ From my own fundraising experience, I would argue this is not just possible but extremely likely.

¹⁰⁸ Al Rempel, phone conversation with author, 16 August 2007.

¹⁰⁹ Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 418.

¹¹⁰ Jeff Steckley, phone conversation with author, 6 June 2007.

¹¹¹ Further study on Mennonite giving to the American charity *Focus on the Family* would be instructive here.

¹¹² Related by Gord Penner, phone conversation with author, 31 August 2007.

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REFLECTION

“Müde bin ich, geh’ zur Ruh”: The Story of a Children’s Prayer

Margaret Loewen Reimer

The children’s prayer, *Müde bin ich, geh’ zur Ruh*, is dear to the heart of many Mennonites who grew up in German-speaking homes. A recent request for an English translation sent me on a quest to discover what was available. The translations I found were unsatisfactory, and so I resumed work on my own translation, which I had begun years ago. Meanwhile, I decided to trace the origins of this classic little prayer. The search uncovered a surprisingly rich story.

Müde bin ich first appeared in a songbook for nursery school children compiled by Theodor Fliedner in Kaiserswerth, Germany in 1842.¹ That is why the tune is sometimes identified as “Kaiserswerth” or “Fliedner.” It is likely that the melody is based on a popular folk tune, as are many familiar hymns.

The words were written by Luise Hensel (1798-1876), a widely-read religious poet and hymn writer, and a woman who led a remarkable life.² Hensel’s father was a Lutheran pastor in Brandenburg. Her brother, well-known painter Wilhelm Hensel, was married to Fanny Mendelssohn, sister of Felix. After the death of her father in 1809, Luise moved to Berlin with her mother. Here she captured the attention of several remarkable men. Romantic poet Clemens Brentano acknowledged her influence on his poetry and apparently shared with composer Ludwig Berger an unrequited love for Luise. Another poet, Wilhelm Müller, was also attracted to her. Today, Müller is remembered for his *Waldhornisten* poems, which Franz Schubert set to music in his song cycles *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*. Another friend, Ludwig von Gerlach, who would later become a teacher of Otto von Bismarck, drew Hensel into the upper ranks of the Center Party, a political force in Germany at the time. These activities apparently conflicted with her

religious feelings, however, and in an emotional crisis she joined the Roman Catholic Church in 1818.

From then on, Hensel led the life of a pilgrim, moving from place to place as a religious teacher and writer. She was head teacher at a school for girls in Aachen for six years, until ill health forced her to return to her brother's home in Berlin. (In Aachen she turned down a proposal of marriage from Clemens August Alertz, who later became personal physician to Pope Pius IX.) After her mother's death in 1835, Hensel again wandered from school to school until finally settling in a convent in Paderborn, a city in the North Rhine-Westphalia region of Germany. Here she died at the age of 78. There is a monument to her memory in Paderborn.

Hensel's poems consist mostly of pious verses composed for special occasions. Some of her poetry, freely altered by Brentano, appeared in an 1829 work entitled *Geistlicher Blumenstrauss* (Spiritual Bouquet). Poems by Hensel and her sister were published in 1857 under the title *Gedichte von Luise und Wilhelmine Hensel*, and a compilation of her letters was published posthumously. *Sämtliche Lieder*, which includes *Müde bin ich*, her most popular song, was published in 1869.

The man who first published *Müde bin ich* in his songbook for children was himself a fascinating character. Theodor Fliedner (1800-1864) was a German Lutheran pastor in Kaiserswerth, now part of Dusseldorf, who was deeply concerned about the poor and needy in his parish, including prisoners who lived in appalling conditions. During a trip to Holland, he "observed Mennonite congregations that frequently were served by deaconesses who looked after the women and children and assisted the sick, needy, and poor."³ Shortly after, in 1836, Fliedner founded the first "Deaconess Mother House" to train nurses and deaconesses for work in parishes, among indigent groups, and in foreign missions. By 1864, the Kaiserswerth movement had 30 mother houses and 1,600 deaconesses. Protestants in many other countries, including Mennonites in North America, adopted Fliedner's model: "Almost all the first North American deaconess programs took as their inspiration the work of Pastor Theodor Fliedner . . . and his wife Friederike . . . in Kaiserswerth, Germany."⁴ The most famous deaconess associated with Kaiserswerth is Florence Nightingale. She spent time there in 1851, observing the program and gaining her first nursing experience. That year she wrote *The Institution*

of Kaiserswerth on the Rhine, for the Practical Training of Deaconesses, her first publication.⁵

Mennonite Use of the Hymn

Müde bin ich has found its way into many Lutheran and Mennonite hymnals, in addition to being passed down through family lore. (I recently saw fond mention of it by a Jew raised in communist Yugoslavia who learned it from a German-speaking grandmother.⁶) Although I did not check European Mennonite hymnbooks, I found this children's prayer in a number of North American hymnals, both German and English. The 1942 *Gesangbuch der Mennoniten* (General Conference Mennonite Church) places it among the *Abendlieder* (evening songs) and identifies the tune simply as *eigene Weise* or "own tune." (*Lieber Vater, hoch im Himmel*, another popular children's prayer, is with the children's songs.) The 1965 *Gesangbuch der Mennoniten*, published by Faith and Life Press in Newton, Kansas, includes it in the children's section, with the tune identified as "Kaiserwerth, 1842." In the Mennonite Brethren (MB) tradition, the song appeared in the *Heimatklänge* (Sounds of Home) collection brought over from Russia, which became part of the *Drei-Band* (three-volume) hymnal. It was not in the MB *Gesangbuch* of 1952 or later English hymnals.⁷

The 1902 *Church and Sunday School Hymnal* (Mennonite Publishing House), edited by J.D. Brunk for Swiss Mennonites, includes the words of *Müde bin ich* in its *Deutscher Anhang* (German supplement). The *Deutsches Lieder und Melodienbuch* (Mennonite Publishing House, 1926), based on an 1895 hymnal, includes the prayer in its *Abendlieder* section, but with an entirely different tune!⁸ Ontario Swiss Mennonites I spoke with did not know *Müde bin ich*, but a man who grew up in the Amish tradition remembered singing it, perhaps because the Amish retained the German language longer.⁹

Neither *The Mennonite Hymnary* of 1940 (General Conference) nor *The Mennonite Hymnal* published jointly by the General Conference and (Swiss) Mennonite Church in 1969 include *Müde bin ich*, even though both have some German hymns. *The Youth Hymnary* (Faith and Life Press, 1956) has an English translation by someone identified only as H.J.L. The same version is found in *The Children's Hymnary* (Faith and Life Press,

1968) with the translator listed as Lester Hostetler. In *The Youth Hymnary* the melody is entitled “German folk tune,” while *The Children’s Hymnary* identifies the tune as “Kaiserswerth, 1842.”

Variations and Translations

Luise Hensel’s hymn appears in several German variations. In some versions, the second line reads “Schliesse beide Äuglein zu” (close both little eyes) and the seventh line says “Jesu Blut” instead of “Christi Blut.” Some versions use “treuer Gott” (faithful God) instead of “lieber Gott.” The fourth verse has the most variations. (I remember only three verses from my childhood, so I chose a fourth one I thought most in keeping with the rest.) The version that appears with Hensel’s biography on Wikipedia has this fourth verse: *Kranken Herzen sende Ruh, / Nasse Augen schliesse zu, / Lass den Mond am Himmel steh’n / Und die Stille Welt beseh’n* (Send rest to ailing hearts / Close weeping eyes / Let the moon stand in the heavens / And overlook the silent world).

The 1942 Mennonite *Gesangbuch* closes the song with lines that strike a different tone than the rest of this gentle prayer: *Lass, die noch im Finstern gehn, / Bald den Stern der Weisen sehn* (May those still wandering in darkness, / Soon see the star of the Magi). These German lines also appear in the *Youth Hymnary* and *Children’s Hymnary*. In the 1965 *Gesangbuch*, the last two lines become *Hab auf alle gnädig acht, / Schenk uns eine gute Nacht* (Watch favorably over all, / Send us a good night), which seem more in keeping with a children’s hymn. I also came across a whimsical fifth stanza that would surely appeal to little ones: *Jedem Tierlein überall / Gieb ihm Schutz and gieb ihm Stall. / Jedem Blümlein seinen Traum / Wiege leise jeden Baum*. (Loosely translated: Give every little animal protection and shelter, every little flower its dream; gently rock each tree.)

A number of English translations of the prayer exist, but none, in my opinion, measures up to the lovely childlike quality of the original. Most translations rely too heavily on the diction of sin and atonement, thereby altering the original’s tone and theological “simplicity.” The second stanza, especially, illustrates the shift. The German version simply asks God to ignore or “not to notice” any wrong (*Unrecht*) that might have been done today. The reassuring last line of that stanza, difficult to translate within the

given meter and rhyme scheme, conveys the comforting image of a God who undoes all injury or harm (*Schaden*) and makes everything better again (“kissing it better” comes to mind).

Mennonite translators, undoubtedly influenced by the subjective language of American evangelicalism, transform this notion of external wrong into a confession of personal guilt. For example, a translation in *Prayers for Everyday* hardens the tone by rendering *Unrecht* and *Schaden* as “evil” and personalizing the need for redemption: “Have I evil done today, / I pray, dear Lord, do not repay.”¹⁰ Lester Hostetler’s second stanza emphasizes personal salvation even more: “All my guilt Thou dost forgive, / Through Thy mercy Lord, I live.” He ends the fourth verse with an equally “unchildlike” sentiment: “Weary travelers in the night, / Lead them to eternal light.”

An 1869 translation by Frances Havergal, the British hymnwriter who wrote “Take my life and let it be,” remains close to the original meaning of the second stanza: “Jesus, Savior, wash away / All that has been wrong today.” (I prefer her emphasis on “washing away” the wrong to Hensel’s use of “Christ’s blood” to imply that idea.) In the rest of her translation, however, Havergal departs substantially from the German original. Havergal’s version, found in Lutheran hymnals, can be characterized as warm piety with a moral tone. Opening with “Now the light has gone away,” she closes with this fifth stanza: “Thou, my best and kindest Friend, / Thou wilt love me to the end. / Let me love Thee more and more, / Always better than before.”

In my own translation, I tried to capture the “non-pietistic” sense of the original, with its lyrical, simple diction and rhyming couplets. In the second stanza, I found “Christ’s blood” impossible to rhyme, so I used “Christ slain,” admittedly not a very childlike or simple sentiment. In the third stanza, I substituted “sheltering arm” for the image of resting in God’s “hand,” again because of rhyme. The last part of the third stanza, *Alle Menschen, gross und klein, / Sollen dir befohlen sein*, also proved difficult to capture within the limits of the verse. Literally it says, “All people, great and small, shall to Thee commended be.” The word “commended” hardly seemed suitable for a children’s prayer, so I focused on the sense of refuge in God. One translation that appealed to me was “All Thy children, great and small, / Let Thy love surround them all.” I opted, however, to keep

the word *sollen* (shall), which can express both certainty and hope, and to reiterate the sense of safety evoked by the “sheltering arm.”

Below is the German version I learned as a child (plus a fourth verse), and my English translation.

Müde bin ich, geh' zur Ruh

Translation by Margaret Loewen Reimer

*Müde bin ich, geh' zur Ruh,
Schliesse meine Augen zu.
Vater, lass die Augen dein
Über meinem Bette sein.*

Weary now, I go to rest,
Close my eyes in slumber blest.
Father, may Thy watchful eye
Guard the bed on which I lie.

*Hab' ich Unrecht heut' getan,
Sieh' es, lieber Gott, nicht an.
Deine Gnad' und Christi Blut
Macht ja allen Schaden gut.*

Wrong I may have done today,
Heed it not, dear God, I pray.
For Thy mercy and Christ slain
Turns all wrong to right again.

*Alle die mir sind verwandt,
Gott lass ruh'n in Deiner Hand.
Alle Menschen, gross und klein,
Sollen dir befohlen sein.*

May my loved ones, safe from harm,
Rest within Thy sheltering arm.
All Thy children everywhere
Shall find refuge in Thy care.

*Kranken Herzen sende Ruh,
Müde Augen schliesse zu.
Gott im Himmel halte Wacht,
Gib uns eine gute Nacht. Amen.*

Send Thy rest to hearts in pain,
Close the weary eyes again.
God in heav'n Thy vigil keep
Grant us all a restful sleep. Amen.

Kaiserswerth, 1842

1. Mü - de bin ich, geh zur Ruh, schlies - se
 2. Hab ich Un - recht heut ge - tan, sieh es,
 3. Al - le, die mir sind ver - wandt, Gott, lass

mei - ne Au - gen zu; Va - ter, lass die
 treu - er Gott, nicht an! Dei - ne Gnad und
 ruhn in dei - ner Hand; al - le Men - schen,

Au - gen dein ü - ber mei - nem Bet - te sein.
 Je - su Blut macht ja al - len Scha - den gut.
 gross und klein, sol - len dir be - foh - len sein.

Notes

¹ According to the *Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal* (1942), the song first appeared in the *Liederbuch für Kleinkinder-Schulen* (Kaiserswerth, 1842).

² Biographies of Luise Hensel are available on the Internet, including the online *Catholic Encyclopedia*. She is also in the *Dictionary of Hymnology*, Vol. 2, edited by John Julian (New York: Gordon Press, 1979), first published in the 1890s. *An Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers* by Katharina M. Wilson (Abingdon, UK: Taylor and Francis, 1991) provides references for further study.

³ Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2006), 822. The deaconess ministry among Mennonites goes back to the Anabaptists, but Fliedner's homes initiated a "professional" nursing order for women, imitated by German and Russian Mennonites who brought the practice to North America. In 1898, the Bethesda Hospital in Goessel, Kansas, inaugurated deaconess work. Bethel Deaconess Hospital was dedicated in 1908, followed by other Mennonite deaconess hospitals in Kansas and Nebraska. For further details, see the "Deaconess" entry in the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO).

⁴ Ibid. A biography entitled *Life of Pastor Fliedner, the Founder of the Kaiserswerth Sisterhood of Protestant Deaconesses*, was translated from the German in 1867 by Catherine Winkworth, a British hymn writer. Winkworth is best known for her translations of well-known German hymns such as "Now thank we all our God" and "Jesus, priceless treasure." *Hymnal, A Worship Book*, used by Mennonite Church Canada congregations, includes thirteen of Winkworth's translations.

⁵ See "Florence Nightingale" entries in *Encyclopedia Britannica* and on Wikipedia online.

⁶ See Zdenka Novak's online memoir, "When Heaven's Vault Cracked – Zagreb Memories," detailing Jewish life during World War II. Viewed in 2008. See also Zdenka Novak, *When Heaven's Vault Cracked* (Braunton, UK: Merlin Books Ltd., 1995).

⁷ The Mennonite Brethren did, however, pick up another hymn by Luise Hensel: *Immer muss ich wieder lesen* ("Ever would I fain be reading / in the ancient Holy Book"). This hymn was included in the 1952 *Gesangbuch der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde* and its English version, *The Hymn Book*, published by the Canadian MB Conference in 1960. This hymn also appears in *Evangeliums-Lieder*, an 1891 German translation of gospel songs (*Kernlieder*) compiled by Americans Walter Rauschenbusch and Ira D. Sankey, which was used in Mennonite Brethren churches and on occasion in the Berghthaler Mennonite Church in Manitoba, the church of my childhood.

⁸ Unidentified in *Deutsches Lieder und Melodienbuch*, the tune is a slight variation of "Mercy," the tune of "Holy Spirit, Truth Divine" (# 508 in *Hymnal, A Worship Book*).

⁹ From a conversation with Ferne Burkhardt, an Ontario Swiss Mennonite who is currently News Editor for Mennonite World Conference. Burkhardt also told me that *Müde bin ich* was on the lips of Frank H. Epp, Mennonite historian and editor, as he lay dying in 1986. The Menno Singers, a choir founded by Swiss Mennonites in Ontario, learned the prayer so they could sing it at his funeral.

¹⁰ Elaine Sommers Rich, compiler, *Prayers for Everyday* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1990). According to Rich, the first two stanzas were translated by Marlin Jeschke, former philosophy and religion professor at Goshen College, and the rest taken from *The Youth Hymnary* version.

Margaret Loewen Reimer, a Waterloo, Ontario writer and editor, has written extensively on Mennonites and the arts. Her most recent book, One Quilt, Many Pieces: A Guide to Mennonite Groups in Canada (Herald Press, 2008), grew out of her work as managing editor of Canadian Mennonite.

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 Württemberg; 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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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 Württemberg; 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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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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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.

Loren L. Johns, Associate Professor of New Testament, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, IN

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.

John Longhurst, Director of Communications, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, MB

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.

Doug Pritchard, Co-Director, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Toronto, ON

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.

Dan Epp-Tiessen, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, MB

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 Württemberg; 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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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.

David Augsburg, Professor of Pastoral Counseling, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA

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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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.

Regina Shands Stoltzfus, Adjunct Professor, Goshen College, Goshen, IN

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.

Loren L. Johns, Associate Professor of New Testament, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, IN

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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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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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 Württemberg; 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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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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