

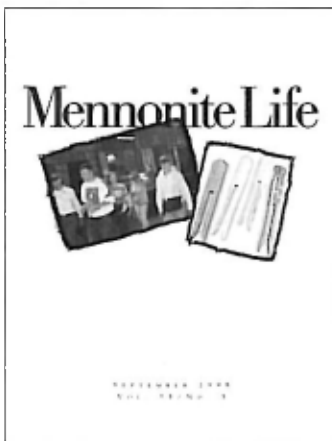
# Mennonite Life



SEPTEMBER 1998  
VOL. 53 / NO. 3

In this issue, our Current Issues section leads with commentary by two members of Christian Peacemaker Teams in Hebron in the West Bank, Mark Frey and Sydney Stigge, both of Newton, Kansas. They both reflect on their CPT calling in the light of early 1998 death threats against CPT workers in Hebron.

## In *this* issue



Our History section consists of a personal reflection revolving around the themes of Mennonite entrepreneurship and the World War II home front. Bob Regier, retired professor of art at Bethel College, presents a first-person narrative by his father, William H. Regier, of Mountain Lake, Minnesota.

Our Arts section includes a review essay by Raylene Hinz-Penner of Julia Kasdorf's new book of poetry, *Eve's Striptease*, and four poems from the book.

Douglas G. Campbell, professor of art at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon, gives us an analysis of the recent art work of Abner Hershberger, long-time art professor at Goshen College (Indiana).

Our Religion and Theology section consists of an article by Gerald W. Schlabach, presented at the recent conference on "Anabaptism and Postmodernity" at Bluffton College in August, 1998. Schlabach teaches history and religion at Bluffton College.

We conclude the issue as usual with book reviews.

**Photo credits:** p. 5, 6, 9, Mark Frey; front cover, p. 11, 13, Sydney Stigge; front cover, p. 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, Bob Regier.

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## Christian Peacemaker Teams in Hebron

Mark Frey

Sydney Stigge

**I**n the following two articles, Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) members Mark Frey and Sydney Stigge recount their personal experiences when CPT workers were faced with death threats in January 1998.

CPT, an initiative among Mennonite and Brethren congregations and Friends meetings, supports violence reduction teams around the world, sending trained peacemakers into situations of violent conflict and areas of militarization to support local nonviolent efforts. As part of that work, CPT has maintained a violence reduction presence in Hebron, on the West Bank, since June of 1995 at the invitation of the Hebron Municipality.

On January 18, 1998, team members in Hebron received a warning via e-mail threatening "swift punishment" if they did not leave Israel within 96 hours. The following day, at CPT headquarters in Chicago, director Gene Stoltzfus discovered a similar warning on the answering machine, advising him to evacuate all CPT workers from Hebron.

They stayed. And they were not harmed. The case has not been solved by agencies asked to investigate, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the State Department, and local police.

At the time of the death threats, Mark Frey was in Hebron, where he continues to serve as a full-time member of CPT. Sydney Stigge was in Chicago training for CPT work in Hebron, which she indeed did pursue, serving there in June of 1998 as a CPT reservist.

### Mark Frey

The phone rang just after Sunday midnight in our Old City apartment in Hebron. I was just ready to crawl into bed—who'd be calling so late? I was up only because I was taking a much-needed day off the next day and was planning on sleeping in very late. "Hi Mark. This is Kathy." Kathleen Kern, a CPT co-worker, was calling from her home in New York. "I just got off the phone with the Chicago office to let them know that we received a death threat from KACH on E-mail that was sent to me. Here, I'll read you part of the text:"

January 18: SWIFT PUNISHMENT — KACH INTERNATIONAL WARNING. It has been learned that three of your members help and assist Arab terrorists in smuggling explosives used in recent bombings of the Hebron Jewish Community in Israel. For their safety, [the] above-mentioned terrorists are advised to depart from the Land of Israel to their own countries in the next 96 hours.

Gene Stoltzfus, our CPT Director, also found a similar message on the answering machine at the CPT Chicago office that added in a very pleasant-sounding voice, slightly accented:

As [a] humanitarian effort to save their lives, we ask you to evacuate them from Israel before Wednesday.



After Wednesday their lives will be in jeopardy. This is a warning. This is a last warning. Bye.

I later listened to the tape, surprised at how polite and normal this person sounded while threatening to kill us, as if this wasn't anything out of the ordinary.

My immediate response to Kathy was an "Huh," and I think I elaborated with something like, "Wow, that's pretty crazy."

"We're not sure how to respond," she continued, "Let's all

be in close contact as we work through this."

"OK," I said, "Thanks for calling."

I thought to myself, "So now what am I supposed to do? Everyone is asleep. Do I wake them up? Tomorrow was going to be my day off and now this crisis hits." In Hebron it's hard to set boundaries between work and non-work, and I was determined not to let "yet another crisis"—even a death threat—stop me from taking some down-time. So I left a brief note on

## Graffiti

painted on steel  
doors of a  
Palestinian shop  
near CPT Hebron  
workers' residence

Mark Frey  
working  
alongside  
Palestinians helping  
to rebuild a terrace



the table for my team-mates explaining what happened and stating that I was still taking Monday morning off to sleep in. Perhaps this was my immediate way of coping with the situation: a refusal to let it alter my personal plans.

After I finally rolled out of bed we met as a team and processed the situation. Our initial reaction was not to make too much of the threat. We'd received many verbal threats from the Jewish settlers on the streets before, but threats from Kach were an escalation of seriousness.

Kach is an Israeli political party founded by the late Rabbi Meir Kahane that advocates the deportation of all Arabs from Israel, the West Bank and Gaza. Kach members have been involved in bombings and other crimes against civilians, and both Israel and the U.S. have classified Kach as a terrorist organization. Even though membership in Kach is against

Israeli law, many prominent Jewish settlers in and around Hebron are affiliated with the organization.

Our Palestinian and Israeli friends thought this was big stuff, so we quickly put together a press conference for the next day. We explained to the media the ludicrous nature of the bomb-smuggling allegations given our fundamental commitment to nonviolence, and we issued a "Statement of Conviction" signed by all team members that described our position, parts of which read:

We reject the use of force to save our lives.... In the event that we die as a result of some violent action, we reject the use of violence to punish the people who killed us.

Should our deaths come as a result of attacks by soldiers, settlers or other extremists/militants in Hebron, we ask that our deaths be regarded as no more tragic than the murders of dozens of Palestinians

who have died here in the last decade... [We] recognize there are certain risks inherent in this work. We believe that until people committed to nonviolence are willing to take the same risks for peace that soldiers are willing to take for war, people will always choose violence as the most viable solution to their problems....

If our deaths promote the sort of soul-searching that leads to a rejection of armed conflict characteristic of this occupation then our deaths will indeed have redemptive value. Following the central tenet of our faith, we do not hate the people who have harmed us (Matthew 5:44-45). We believe that those best able to love their enemies will ultimately emerge the victors in this bloody conflict.

We took the threats very seriously, reporting them to the US FBI in Chicago and to the local Israeli police. I had no doubt the threats originated within the Hebron-area settler community, even though they were delivered by a second party. This meant some people who lived just down the road from our Hebron apartment wanted us dead, people we might even know by name. On four occasions, Hebron CPT members have been physically attacked by the Hebron settlers or their supporters, but without serious injury. One time, four-to-five settlers encircled me and began yelling in my face, "Do you Nazis like to see red Jewish blood run in the streets?" I just stood silently and tried to absorb the palpable hatred directed at me. It is much more common, however, for the Hebron settlers to attack Palestinian Arab men, women and children.

False rumors about the Hebron team have been circulated by settlers since the beginning of CPT's project. One settler told a *Washington Post* journalist that a CPT member was a Muslim American from Chicago who had come to raise money for Hamas, a Palestinian terrorist organization. One settler spokesperson told a BBC journalist that CPT hides guns in its apartment for Palestinians. CPT was told by an acquaintance in the Kiryat Arba settlement just outside of Hebron that rumors were circulating that two CPTers were deported for trying to smuggle weapons into Hebron.

No doubt some settlers believe these rumors, illustrating the degree to which the settlers misperceive who we are, what we believe and what our agenda is. It illustrates how out of touch with reality the settlers are. They have created a world of fear and perceived insecurity in which all outsiders are the enemy, including their own government and the Israeli soldiers stationed in Hebron to protect them. Understanding this helps me to deal with who they are, and I approach them with sadness and perhaps a small measure of pity for their self-constructed and -maintained prison of fear. It is not an existence I envy in any way.

It is no understatement to say our experiences with the settlers in Hebron have taught us to take Jesus's command that we love our enemies very, very seriously. It is a constant, continuing challenge. The threats forced us in a deeper way to struggle with the radicalness of Jesus' teaching to pray for our enemies.

CPT is not neutral. We take clear stands on issues of justice. In every

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project location, we look at the systemic power structure, find those people who are on the bottom, and work with them. Our analysis of situations is not rocket science. For example, in Israel and in the West Bank, our position is that no one should live under military occupation. The occupation of the Palestinian people is simply wrong. More specifically, Israel's occupation policy of demolishing Palestinian homes violates basic human rights to safe and adequate housing. House demolitions are simply wrong.

CPT is about naming injustice and putting a face on systematic domination, and our work in Palestine is meant to expose only one example of how domination, maintained through violence, is used to oppress one people for the benefit of another. The threats, while shocking, did not come as a surprise. We recognize that there is risk in this work, and that when you push a system of violence-based domination, that system will sometimes respond with real or threatened violence.

We received an out-pouring of support. I counted over 100 E-mail messages sent to our Hebron team. One message provided some perspective by noting that Martin Luther King, Jr. at one time was receiving over 50 death threats a day. With the flood of support messages, we got the sense that if anything ever actually happened to one of us, the response would be enormous. We joked, "These people have no idea who they're dealing with! If they actually harm us, they're going to have lots of prayers and spiritual-energy to contend with!"

We were scared, but we refused to let this fear stop our witness against injustice and domination. We tried to use the threats as a tool to illustrate the often-overlooked right-wing Jewish extremism that exists in this conflict. We recognized that our fear was only a taste of the fear that Palestinians live with every day under Israeli occupation: fear that soldiers might beat them, fear that bulldozers might arrive at their door to knock down their family home. It is also the fear some Israelis have when they walk through Ben Yehuda mall in West Jerusalem, site of a suicide bombing last year. It's the fear that mothers and fathers around the world feel when they send their sons off to war, or Israeli parents have when their children fight in the Lebanon war zone. It's the fear moms and dads in North America have knowing their children might not live through another day in the inner city.

We asked our supporters, family and friends to see this as an opportunity to identify with so many of our global brothers and sisters who live with insecurity every day. My mom LaDeen wrote a "CPT Mom" reflection piece about her motherly anxiety that touches on this. She writes:

I found myself thinking that it felt like I was sending my son off to war — something I, as a Mennonite mom with pacifist sons and daughter, had never expected to experience! Suddenly I had real appreciation for the anxiety of thousands of mothers over the years who have said goodbye to sons going off to confront "the enemy" in wartime.

Mark thought my anxiety about his safety would help me identify with





lots of people in our world who live with the daily threat of violence/oppression against themselves or their loved ones, and that, in his opinion, was a positive thing!! My motherly gut-level response was something like, "But do YOU have to put yourself at risk in order for me to 'wise up' about violence and injustice in our world?? There must be a safer way to get the message across!"

What I am slowly learning as a CPT Mom is that whenever the forces of oppression and domination and abuse are named and confronted, there is resistance from those dark powers; we who desire to be instruments of peace and justice cannot bring God's light of hope unless we are willing to encounter the darkness. We must teach these truths to our children; we must be willing to have our children remind us of them and be our teachers.

Encountering and engaging the darkness is risky business. At times

it is fearful business, and there is no earthly place of absolute physical safety. But if we believe that the light of God's love does indeed shine in the darkness, and that the darkness can never put it out, then we can indeed carry that light in the Spirit of Christ, with courage, confidence, and with ultimate SAFETY, wherever God may lead.

During our initial CPT training, we had careful discussions about our feelings and understandings of death and dying. Before taking a CPT placement, we were asked to have similar talks with our family and to prepare a living will, to share our wishes if something should happen to us. I did these things in preparation for work with CPT, but daily life is unpredictable, our world is dangerous, and I firmly believe that these are conversations that all responsible adults should have with their family and loved ones.

Hebron has a reputation for being a dangerous place—people

**Mark Frey**  
 (second from left) at  
 a "near arrest"  
 following a clean-up  
 of a Palestinian  
 home demolished by  
 Israeli soldiers. CPT  
 workers had assisted  
 in clean-up. Soldiers  
 had declared the  
 area a military zone  
 and had threatened  
 arrests. Man in  
 striped shirt is a  
 Jewish rabbi who  
 assisted with  
 cleanup also.

If a CPTer dies in the Holy Land, it will probably be in a traffic accident.

shooting and throwing rocks at each other. The reality is that, even given the death threats, we face more personal risk every time we step into a taxi to travel to Jerusalem or Bethlehem. If a CPTer dies in the Holy Land, it will probably be in a traffic accident. While I was writing this essay, a young MCCer in Bolivia was killed when the over-crowded bus she was in ran off the road. I said a special prayer for her; here is someone who took personal risk, working and traveling in the developing world with sub-standard roads, for faith-principles she believed in. There is no difference between this and CPT.

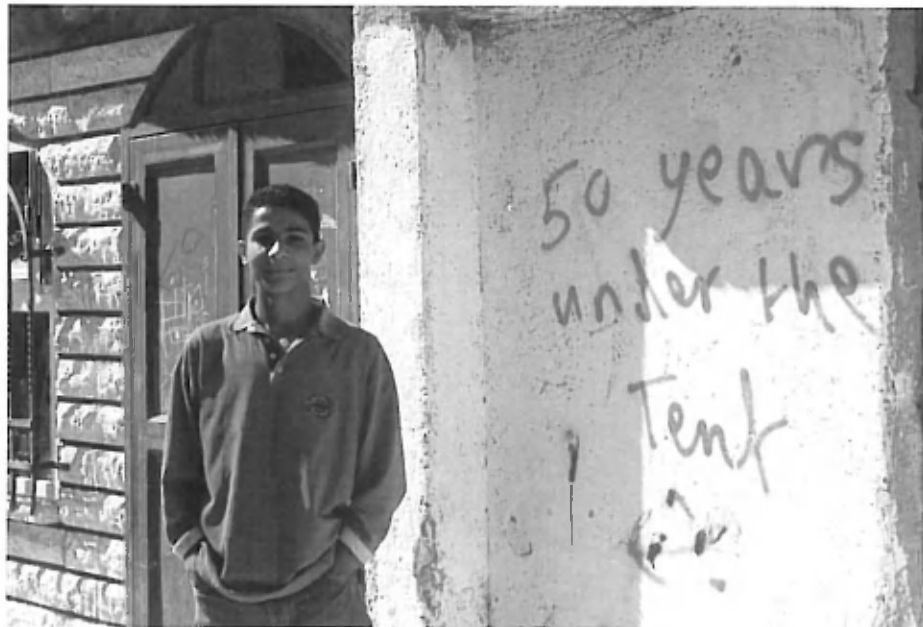
Yet the death threats pushed all of us in Hebron to grapple in a concrete way with the principles we have embraced, and the risk that our commitment entails. The natural question was, "Am I willing to die for this cause?" I know the emotional pain my death would have on my family and friends; tears come to my own eyes if I imagine harm coming to my parents, my brother or my sister. But in the end the unsweetened answer to the question is "Yes." The cause is standing up for justice against domination. Until we're ready to die for this, domination and violence will always win because they will kill those who oppose them.

We voiced another question: "OK. We are doing good work, but isn't it time to leave now?" Even to pose such a question reveals our privilege as North Americans. Most people in the world, such as West Bank Palestinians, don't have the luxury of asking these questions. For them, getting out is not an option. As an act of solidarity, we simply could not—and still cannot—leave.

## Sydney Stigge

As I rested in the comforts of a neighborhood Chicago church, the death threats came to the Chicago office. It was January 19, two days before I completed my CPT training. The team in Hebron had also received threats and was reacting with sincere caution. On the day before Martin Luther King Day, I had performed my first act of civil disobedience, or "divine obedience," as fellow CPT trainees refer to it, and news was spreading fast to my family and friends back home that I had been arrested. While the Newton community was already aware that the Hebron team was receiving threats, they did not yet realize that Chicago too had been threatened. The news of arrests and death threats was what eventually caused a reluctance for my family and friends to accept my potential involvement in Christian Peacemaker Teams.

Since my study abroad experience in the Middle East from January through late April, 1997, I had been anxious to return to the land, customs, religion, and people of the Arab world. Also, my years at Bethel College had convinced me to enter into a life devoted to peace, justice, and non-violence. Thus, the CPT Hebron team seemed to be the perfect blend of both of my passions. Since June of 1997 I felt called to do CPT work. I use the word "called" because I felt an overwhelming drive to be a part of CPT's work and vision. While a student at Bethel College I had been planning to become involved in Mennonite Voluntary Service, but was beginning to feel that I lacked any specific skills useful in finding a



## Palestinian youth in a refugee camp

placement. My gifts, however, could work well with CPT—sensitivity for Middle East customs and religions, worship leading, public speaking, writing, listening, observing, positive thinking, and a passion for justice were all necessary qualities for CPT work. Additionally, I knew I would be challenged to develop the skills I lacked: assertiveness and courage to defy oppressive authority.

So I felt called to CPT work; I seemed to fit the CPT model; and I felt community support for my plan, especially from Julie Hart, one of my Bethel professors and a CPT reservist. Thus, I knew that I was going to be a part of Christian Peacemaker Teams.

I returned to Kansas after the CPT training and death threats to find that my family and many of my friends were having difficulty coping with my prospective involvement with CPT. I had left Chicago telling CPT I was ready for a full-time, three-year commitment following my May

graduation. They, in response, gave me the assignment of conferring with my family regarding the possibility of death, and encouraged me to think about making a living will. My immediate family greeted this with many tears, questions, and periods of silence. I was frequently asked, “Isn’t your life worth living?” “Don’t you value your worth and your gifts enough to live and share them?”

Prior to the intensive CPT training, I thought nothing was going to interfere with my plans for CPT involvement in Hebron. That was where God was leading me, where God had put my heart and my passions, and had prepared my talents. As for the concerns of my family and friends, I had decided they were not going to impede my work. My boyfriend was quite worried about me, and that, coupled with his regular school stress, affected him with physical distress. My friends too were concerned for my life. My mother and

Just as  
 Palestinian  
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sisters were anxious and confused over the potential danger this work could involve. They tried to restrain their feelings, but it pained them to do so. A cousin scolded me that I was not keeping my whole family in mind, that I was being selfish. My grandmother confided with my cousin that she worried that my grandpa might pass away while I was overseas—my absence at the time of death would be an immeasurable source of pain. As I heard from close friends, family members, and neighbors, I realized that I had overlooked the full effect of my CPT involvement on my family. Just as Palestinian families fear separation and yearn to keep their family members together, so too did my American family.

Joining CPT cannot happen in a vacuum. Joining means involving my family and close friends—anyone committed to me. This can be tremendously challenging and important—to lead people where they would not have chosen to go alone. I was finally forced to consider this—consider them, not just myself. Were they ready? How could I justify traveling overseas to try, in my own little way, to heal other people, yet cause immense strain and suffering to my own dear family and friends? But more importantly and disturbingly, why was I being torn between CPT—a Christ calling—and family and friends?

At times and questions like this I turn to God. But I felt so confused. Where was God leading me? Was this a test like Abraham had with Isaac in Genesis? Did I love God enough to sacrifice family? What of Jesus's words in Matthew 10:35-38, saying that he has come not with

peace, but with a sword to divide families: "For I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother... whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

Or perhaps my test was the other way. Perhaps I was to choose family and love above activism. It seemed like an either/or situation. I could not have both.

At my CPT training in Chicago one participant differed tremendously from the other trainees. The only way to describe Rick is to say that he is a prophet, far beyond most of us. He has vision; he is in communication with God. He accepts the responsibility of his vision and is not afraid to act on it, unlike most individuals. And like many prophets before him, Rick was rejected by most around him. His life story is one of exclusion, beatings, rejection, and suffering. As a radical justice-seeker and Christian activist, he sought out CPT. However, CPT staff concluded during training that Rick and CPT did not make a good "fit." This hurt Rick considerably. He was hoping that CPT would finally be the family and group that he could connect with. Now he was once more rejected and put out—homeless.

What Rick failed to realize was how much the other trainees loved him. He was blind to this Christian, spiritual love. We respected him, and we learned from him, yet he did not realize it. I was extremely frustrated by this. I listened to him explain how



## CPT Team in Hebron;

Kerry Saner, Pierre Shantz, Julie Hart, Liz ?, Sydney Stigge

he still had no family, and I wondered, why couldn't he see the love around him?

Then I returned to Kansas, to my family, boyfriend, and friends. Just as I was frustrated with Rick because he could not see that people loved him, so too were my family and boyfriend frustrated with me for not seeing that their love for me matters. When I did realize this, I thought long and hard about what God wanted me to do. Was I supposed to take up my cross and join CPT Hebron? Or was I supposed to stay close to my family and boyfriend—give them my love, energy, and attention?

The hard decision has never been whether to commit my life to justice. The hard decision was whether to actually do CPT or not—to choose where and how I would fight for justice. Many of my great role models are not "activists" in the traditional definition of the word. Rather they are housewives or grocery-market tellers, or grandparents. And they change lives with their love. Did I want to

confront injustice in Hebron only, or here only, or both?

What of my responsibility to my sisters? I, at 9 and 11 years older than they, have always been their role model. What role did I want to enforce—desert your family, become an activist?

Eventually I made the decision to join CPT as a reservist, rather than as a full-time member. Serving on a part-time basis offered middle ground between my calling, and my family and friends. I am now a CPT reservist, offering one month of service in Hebron this year and in each of the next two years. Also, I am getting married to my ever-supportive boyfriend and will be living in Houston, Texas. There I will continue to volunteer with peace and justice projects and offer reports about the work of Christian Peacemaker Teams.

During this time I learned important lessons—that I needed to weigh heavily the feelings of my loved ones before I committed to the CPT organization, and that we are all interconnected with others.

## The Clothespin Famine

William H.  
Regier  
and Bob Regier

*My father, William H. Regier, was a contractor and builder for many years. Dozens of homes and barns in the Mountain Lake, Minnesota, vicinity were built by the crew that he directed. In 1941 he began his final building project. In collaboration with a local brick mason, the Bethel Mennonite Church in Mountain Lake was constructed. This project barely survived the quickly developing scarcity of building materials created by the onset of World War II.*

*With the church completed and the crescendo of the war increasing week by week, continuation of construction projects was no longer an option. So he retreated to his small shop, hoping to scratch together enough lumber and hardware to produce kitchen cabinets, windows, and other millwork. But work was slow, a sharp contrast from the construction years. Then, toward the close of the war—and quite by accident—the clothespin phenomenon emerged. It waxed and waned quickly, but before the dust settled it created a remarkable amount of local talk and regional notoriety.*

*I remember those days very well. My after-school responsibilities focused*

*on sorting out defective pins from the production of the day, or shoveling the day's sawdust into a trailer that I then hauled to the local dump. As a young fifteen-year-old driver, I was quite proud of the skills developed in backing a trailer hitched behind the family car.*

*Dad never left the shop after the clothespin experience. Other, younger builders had filled the niche he vacated. And he sensed that these builders, profiting from the renewed postwar activity in construction and remodeling would create the need for the cabinetry and millwork that Dad enjoyed producing. So the shop remained his workplace until failing health forced him to close its doors. He died in 1964 at the age of 67.*

*Shortly after the clothespin chapter was over, my father wrote up the experience, hoping that someone might publish it. He failed in that pursuit, and the story has rested in my file these fifty-some years. Anyone who has ever read it has been quite intrigued. So here it is...in Dad's own words. He would be quite pleased if he knew it was finally being shared with a wider audience.*

Bob Regier  
North Newton, Kansas

## Regier Millwork

shop, summer 1943;  
left to right: Elbert  
Koontz, Bob Regier.



## The Clothespin Famine

It was another Christmas and another family gathering. On this Christmas day in 1945, the afternoon activities were again the usual exchanging of gifts, accompanied by the excitement of the children as well as that of the adults. One of the children had received a package of toy wooden clothespins, and it was the exact duplicate of the large kind that mother uses. Being a woodworker, I was attracted to this neat little toy, and after having examined it, I remarked, "I believe I could make a pin like this."

Little did I know that this casual comment would give birth to an unbelievable chain of events.

"Why don't you, you could sell a lot," came a reply from one of the women in the room. I was not especially impressed by the statement. In our home we had never run out of clothespins, to me at least it seemed, they were never used up. However the reply did provoke some curiosity and so I asked her to give a reason for her opinion. "I have not been able to buy any for over a year," she said. Others in the room agreed that to be the case. This included my brother-in-law, owner of a general merchandise store in our town. I was already having visions of an unlimited market for this item. Here was one store without pins. There must be many more like it.

I began to experiment. There was time for it. Winter months were slack months and the war made it difficult to get materials for other products anyway. I decided to make a trial batch and arranged to display

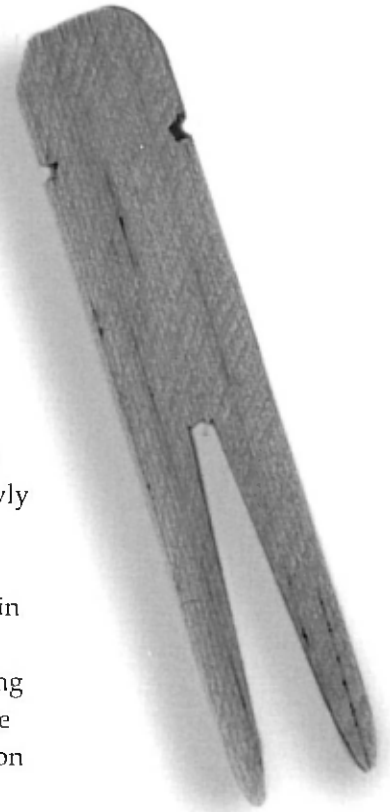
them in my brother-in-law's store. Meanwhile, I spoke to others about the possibility of supplying a need. Reactions, however, were negative. "You can't make money at it." "You need special, expensive machinery." "It won't be long and large manufacturers will be back in civilian production."

The fact that large manufacturers were not in civilian production was the reason, of course, for the shortage. Shortage is a rather mild way of stating it. It looked more like a famine.

It is commonly known that a famine in food supplies can cause normally stable people to behave in a strange manner. But it was a revelation to me that the lowly clothespin could cause similar results. Later experiences substantiated a news item carried in a Minneapolis daily. "If you see Minneapolis home makers clutching at the clothes line or rescuing white linens from the ground—blame it on the clothespin shortage. The shortage, while it isn't as glamorous as the cigarette shortage, is nearly as acute and when a shipment does come in, provokes almost as fierce runs in department stores, sales people report."

Well, the trial batch was finally produced, a bushel of straight, square sticks with a slot. They could hardly be called clothespins, but I gathered them in a box and went to the store. It was an awkward experience and I wasted no time in getting back to the shop.

I stared in unbelief when several hours later my brother-in-law made



### The first pin.

"...square sticks with a slot. They could hardly be called clothespins."

an excited appearance in the shop with an empty carton under his arm, gasping, "Hurry Bill, we need more—now. People are actually standing in line waiting for them."

It was certain now that there was a shortage. The fact that such a crude, home-made looking product would sell was convincing proof.

The news that clothespins were available spread quickly. The local demand increased and calls came from neighboring towns. Spurred by these developments, I began to give serious consideration to the development of my project.

Two things needed to be done. The product must have a commercial look and an application for a price must be made to the Federal Office of Price Administration, the war time guard against profiteering. The first was not too serious a problem, but the skirmish with the O.P.A. practically annihilated my budding venture.

Having had no previous experience in making an application for a price, I confidently went ahead

to send in my manufacturing costs, thinking that after the proper authorities had checked these and were satisfied that no exorbitant profit was being included, I would have their approval soon. To my dismay I discovered, it was not as simple as all that. My application made the rounds from the district office in St. Paul, to Washington, D. C., to the regional office in Chicago, and finally back to the St. Paul office, with the explanation that this office was in the best position to process my application.

All this time the pressure for clothespins was getting greater and my patience was stretching to the breaking point. Finally, after several telephone calls in which the extreme urgency was pointed out, I had my price. But, I said, there must be a mistake. Why, this price will not even pay for the lumber. There it was, black on white, clear instructions, not to charge more. Momentarily, my dreams were shattered. Now I faced the problem of what to do with about ten thousand feet of lumber I had purchased, because I got it at a reduced price, due to the fact that it was so badly warped that it could be put to no other use. I had to get rid of this material.

My courage and my ambitions had sunk to a very low ebb. Something must be done though. Still, not being willing to let go such a promising market, I decided to do a little experimenting in production costs. I could at least get something for this worthless lumber. I therefore improved my methods and discovered that it was possible by volume production to produce a low priced pin.



## A gradual refinement.

Seven million pins were made between March 1945 and November 1946



I did finally arrive at a point where I could break even and use up the lumber. I learned a few things during this time of experimentation which led me to believe that a product could be manufactured and would be acceptable for wide distribution. My only dilemma was that I could not get the price down low enough to show a small margin of profit. From all appearances, this was the finish.

While on the street one day, some time later, a friend stopped me with the query, "Did you hear the report on the radio that the government was removing the ceiling price on certain scarce items?" He added, he thought he heard clothespins mentioned. This was terrific news to me, and only a little later another source gave me the same information. The fastest way to the telephone was the only thought in my mind now. I wanted to get a long distance call in to the O.P.A. office to verify the report. Shortly, I had the answer and it was just "No." In other words, "as you were," and I did not like it. I did however make another contact by mail, and to my astonishment I was informed that the ceiling on clothespins had been removed and I was at liberty to establish my own selling price. Certainly, happy days were here again. From now on it seemed the days were far too short to meet the great challenge ahead.

My aim was to put out a quality product, made from the best material, at a reasonable price. Judging by the complimentary remarks, we felt that to some degree this goal had been attained.

By this time we were drawing

**REGIER'S**   
*Wash Day Friends*  
**«THE PERFECT CLOTHES PIN»**  
 STRONG—SMOOTH—SNAGPROOF—GOOD GRIP  


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**Polished Hard Maple Clothes Pins**  
**10 Dozen for \$1<sup>00</sup> Postpaid**  
 Your Money Back if Not Satisfied  
 CASH WITH ORDER  

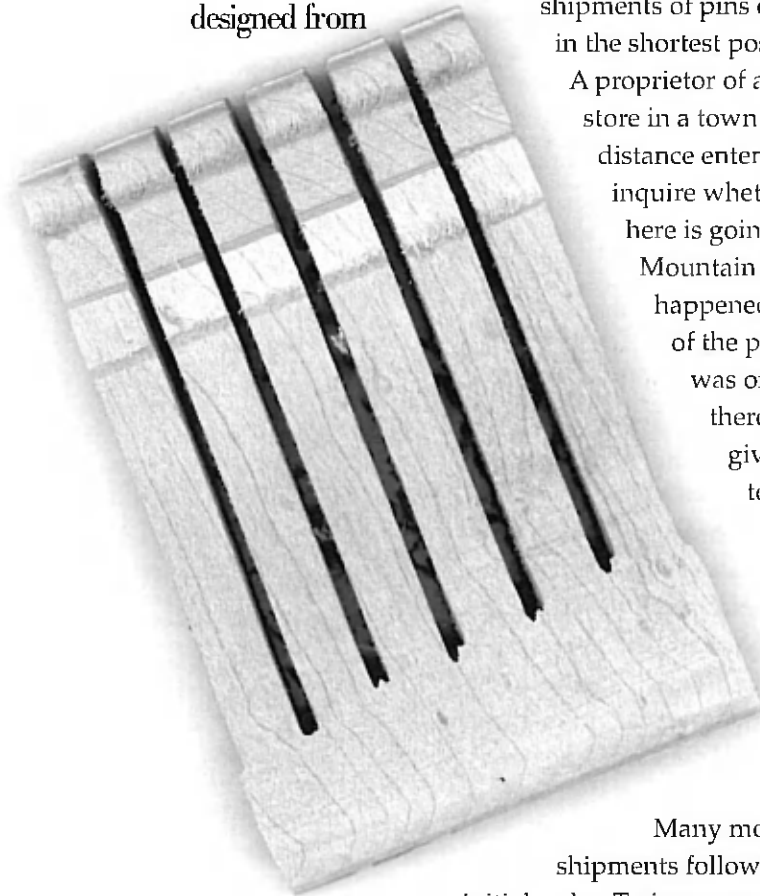

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**REGIER MFG. CO.**  
 MOUNTAIN LAKE, MINNESOTA

quite a little attention from far and wide. Our local printer became interested and inserted a little news item in his paper as to what was going on. The Associated Press picked this up and as a result one paper after another passed along the story that, "William Regier solved the clothespin shortage by making them himself. Now that he has taken care of the local demand, he plans to expand to supply a wider market." This resulted in a flood of mail. Letters such as, "I am a serviceman's wife and have six children and have only two dozen clothespins." Another, "I have three small children and no pins, I find it hard to borrow from neighbors, please send some." Another, "I hear you are making clothespins, and believe me, if anybody needs them, I do. My husband being a dentist and with a lot of towels to wash and a new baby's large wash, I am in dire need of pins." Another lady writes, "I have tried all over to buy clothes pins and am unable to buy any, I don't have enough to hang up the family wash and it's very inconvenient. Will you please let me

## Machinery for the task

was adapted or  
designed from



scratch. Blocks of wood were shaped, slotted, sliced into individual pins, and then placed in a large tumbler where several hours of tumbling action produced a smooth pin.

have some." So, on and on went the letters.

During this time our dealer list was growing fast. Most unorthodox things were done to get shipments of pins on the way in the shortest possible time.

A proprietor of a variety store in a town at some distance enters the bus to inquire whether anyone here is going to

Mountain Lake. It so happened that one of the passengers was on the way there. Please

give this note to Mr.

Regier of the pin factory and tell him to rush the shipment.

Many more shipments followed this initial order. Train men going through our town sent word, they would like to sell our clothespins on the train. One dealer from a distance writes, "Thank-you for the prompt shipment of pins, this town is surely starved on clothespins." Others write, "They are selling faster all the time." One dealer from Nebraska sends a blank check with his signature and the request to ship all I can spare, and you may fill in the right amount on the check. Jobbers call by telephone and come in person requesting our entire output. One large wholesaler sends its representative with the information

that they service 110 stores in several states, and would take all they could get. We were being regarded as big time manufacturers, in spite of the fact that we were making these pins in a small work shop, hardly larger than a two car garage.

Our volume of production was steadily increasing, until shipments were going out into Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, South Dakota, North Dakota, Nebraska, and Minnesota.

All this resulted in offers to buy me out, inquiries as to how to get started in a similar business and others looking over the so-called factory with the intention of starting one too. Travelers going through town would stop to see this much publicized pin factory.

Our list of accounts was growing to include butcher, baker, and candlestick maker and many more. Drugstores, grocery stores, variety stores, plumbing shops, lumber yards, hardware stores, and machinery equipment dealers. All found it profitable to sell clothespins. I have a faint suspicion that some were governed by the desire to make their friends and customers happy by supplying an item that meant so much to the housewife.

Since clothespins were a war time scarcity, it was well for me to keep in mind that in the not too distant future an ample supply would again be available from former suppliers, and my little business venture would have to fold up. Consequently we watched the trend closely and began to taper off on production when the signs of the times appeared. Our business lasted eighteen months and then it was all over except the shouting. People are still talking about it.



During this time, we shipped out seven million clothespins made of Wisconsin hard maple. It was a wonderful experience and also profitable. I have never enjoyed anything more. To top it all, my mail was coming in addressed to the "Clothespin King." What an ending, with the gracious good will and help of our good American neighbors. America—the land of opportunity.

It warms my heart when now and then people will stop at my shop and ask, "Are you still making clothespins?" The answer of course is "No." But they will tell me that the pin we made was a good one and leave the sentiment with me as that expressed in a letter written in pencil by a lady from a distance, "I shall be glad to tell others if you wish to sell a lot more, for it is people like you in small towns who are ready to help in a time of need."

**Regier  
Millwork shop,  
1950; left to right:  
Bob Regier,  
William H. Regier.**

## *Eve's Striptease*

by Julia

Kasdorf

Review Essay by

Raylene

Hinz - Penner

Julia Kasdorf. *Eve's Striptease*. Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998. Pp. 86. ISBN 0-8229-5668-3

Good poets know to write their obsessions. Julia Kasdorf has concerned herself in her first two books with secrets, in the first, *Sleeping Preacher*, with the secrets which were harbored in the community, and now in her second, with her own private secrets as girl-child. The concern of Julia Kasdorf's second book, *Eve's Striptease*, appears in the first poem:

*Aging,  
our bodies collect wrinkles and scars  
for each place the world would not give  
under our weight.*

That initial poem, "First Gestures," ends by unveiling the book's artistic strategy—

*She's too young to see that as we gather  
losses, we may also grow in love;  
as in passion, the body shudders  
and clutches what it must release.*

Frequently the poet relies upon images of lovemaking and human desire for understanding loss.

If Kasdorf's first book, *Sleeping Preacher*, embraced the ways of the community, explored its actors and influences, its mores and secrets, this one pulls inward to explore personal desire, marriage, family, and as is characteristic of Kasdorf's work, always the pain of loving. The personal secrets include the violations to which a female child is vulnerable, and the hauntings visited upon the adult woman, told

here as a kind of purging. "Ghost," a poem about the fear of violation, the curse and the blessing that is sexual desire, is especially powerful. In it the poet wrestles too with her own complicity—"the vulnerable socket/I cannot gouge out of this body."

In the title poem, there is discovered amidst the swirl of desire the secret that anchors the book:

*The tiny bird she set loving in me must  
keep on, batting the bars of its cage  
in a rage only matched by my cravings  
for an ample pantry and golden  
anniversary.*

Wild desire is somehow anchored by those ancient communal values which serve as balance, security—here described as rather typical traditional Mennonite values of security—the ample pantry and the long-term marriage. The curious final gesture of the poem is an interesting fusion of the poetic voice with Adam, and Eve:

*She let me learn for myself all the desires  
a body can hold, how they grow stronger  
and wilder with age, tugging in every  
direction  
until it feels my sternum might split  
like Adam's when Eve stepped out,  
sloughing off ribs.*

Here is a strong image for the rage of human passion, a literally bone-shattering swelling out of the flesh, (Eve being birthed), but interestingly, the poet's voice here is aligned with Adam, giving birth to this passion. Eve, herself, the original woman, is "stepping out" of the "cage," passion released, but the poet is also, with

Adam, being ripped open by this birth. Much of this book is about the tension here represented between Adam and Eve, containment vs. release ("sloughing off ribs"). There follow poems on the algebra of marriage, a lovely sonnet to the loneliness of separation, and paeans to domesticated love: moving to a new place, the unknowable husband, the in-laws, living together in contentment—which, following the raging desire poems do seem a bit of a human miracle!

In the second half of the book, "Map of the Known World," the poet works that original thesis, the way age collects scars, in both theme and tone. In "The Use of Allusion," "love collects in us like trace heavy metals," and Kasdorf cannot help herself; despite the pains chronicled, love surmounts the scars, love binds the human race (in the Turkish and Russian baths), and finally, it is love she inherits: Her mother's coat "feels inconspicuous, indestructible/ as so much I stand to inherit." This is a wonderful wistful line, for what the poet seems to discover here is that what lasts (as long as a golden anniversary, for example!) is probably not conspicuous and flamboyant, but something inconspicuous. That is the sadness and the mellowness of aging, and maybe the result of the cathartic first section.

Finally the book is about love—between a man and a woman, a daughter and parents, for women who suffer abuses, for the nurturing received in a certain tradition, and equally about aging, mellowing, an appreciation for the fact that "as we gather losses, we may also grow in love."

## Ghost

*In stories brought back from brief deaths,  
ghosts hover above frantic doctors,  
hoping they will not find a way to pull  
souls back into wracked bodies.  
One of those ghosts slipped out  
when I was a child and a man caressed  
the cleft in my panties. In all memories  
I see the scene from three feet away.*

*Later, the ghost sat in a backseat  
admiring my boyfriend's face  
as it shifted in a kiss,  
his hand drifting across a shoulder  
to a breast. Even in marriage, the ghost  
taunts from above the bed: Is it good?*

*Walking home late from the train,  
I press a key between each knuckle of my fist.  
(Why don't I think it would help me to scream?)*

*and I rage against the vulnerable socket  
I cannot gouge out of this body.*

*To keep the ghost in place, I lift weights,  
strain against that good force  
binding me to earth. Mine, I instruct  
my brain, my strong arms, my fists,  
my sweat, the ache of myself in my calves.  
And I straddle my love like a bench,  
pressing hard so my thighs bulge up  
into all their beautiful shapes.*

*I take the sun like a lover, lie naked  
under its radiant gaze, finally safe,  
as when a young man faces me on the train  
and begins to sketch my crossed legs.  
Can I take the touch of his eyes  
tracing an ankle, moving up my black tights  
from five feet away? All flesh is grass.*

*The priest gently lifts my bangs  
and strokes a cross of ash on my forehead,  
Remember, from dust you were made.  
By morning, it's soot in my pores.*

## EVE'S STRIPTEASE

*Lingerie shopping with Mom, I braced myself  
for the wedding night advice. Would I seem  
curious enough, sufficiently afraid? Yet  
when we sat together on their bed, her words  
were surprisingly wise:*

*Whatever happens, remember this—  
it keeps getting better and better.  
She had to be telling the truth. At ten,  
I found a jar of Vaseline in her nightstand,  
its creamy grease gouged deep, and dusting  
their room each week, I marked the decline  
of bedside candles. But she didn't say lust  
is a bird of prey or tell me the passion  
she passed on to me is no protector of borders.  
She'd warned me only about the urges men get  
and how to save myself from them. Though  
she'd flirt with any greenhouse man  
for the best cabbage flats, any grease monkey  
under the hood, she never kissed anyone but Dad.  
How could she guess that with Jesus Loves Me  
on my tongue, constantly suffering crushes  
on uncles, I would come to find that  
almost everything gets better and better?  
The tiny bird she set loving in me must  
keep on, batting the bars of its cage  
in a rage only matched by my cravings  
for an ample pantry and golden anniversary.  
She let me learn for myself all the desires  
a body can hold, how they grow stronger  
and wilder with age, tugging in every direction  
until it feels my sternum might split  
like Adam's when Eve stepped out,  
sloughing off ribs.*

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**EVE'S CURSE**

*To the beautiful student, as her blue eyes glaze  
and brighten in their brine, I cannot say,  
Yes, it will be as you suspect. This work  
will drive you away from us; it will make  
you strange in the end. Though you were raised  
in Pennsylvania, the state which retains  
more of its natives than any other,  
the only state that contains all the letters  
you need to write "live," you will leave.  
Because these sweet limestone fields sustained  
you and all of us before this, your curse  
will be to ache as you've never imagined:  
your limbs will long for the scent of this ridge  
as Eve's curse was to crave for her husband.*

---

## Thinking of Certain Mennonite Women

*When I think I can't bear to trace  
one more sorrow back to its source,*

*I think of Lois those summer evenings,  
when, supper dishes done, she'd climb*

*a windmill and cling beneath its great blades,  
drawing water from under her father's fields.*

*She'd stay there until the sun went down  
on barn roof, garden, and the one paved road*

*pointing toward town. When I am afraid  
to set out once more alone, I see Julie*

*pumping her legs so hard she believes  
she will fly off the swing set and land*

*gently on the lawn. I see her let go,  
braids streaking behind, then see her knees*

*shredded on gravel, stuck to stockings  
each time she kneels to pray at a pew.*

*When I can't tell my own desire  
from the wishes of others, I remember*

*my mom, too young to know or care better,  
flinging her jumper, blouse, socks, and slip*

*into the wind, dancing for flower beds  
until her mother discovers. When I wonder*

*how I should live this only one life,  
I think of how they tell these stories:*

*honestly, without explanation,  
to whomever will listen.*



**P**ast and present are never as separate as our history books have led us to believe. Our personal pasts influence each step we take because the events, people, thoughts, and feelings of our pasts have led us to the present where we determine either actively or passively which path to follow or which step to take next. Abner Hershberger, in his recent artwork, which he has titled the "Heritage Project," acknowledges the impact of his personal past and that of the community that did much to form his approach to life. I could walk you through each of Hershberger's artworks and tell you what I think each image means. I could make a good case for the meanings I find within each artwork, but I have chosen not to do that. Instead, I would like you

to draw your own conclusions. For I believe that these images have a complexity and ambiguity about them that allows each viewer to derive additional insights with a second or third viewing. Instead, I will provide you with some information that can provide or provoke additional insight for the understanding of these images and let Hershberger speak about them himself.

Images can provide powerful connections to the past; they can speak at times when words fail us. Abner Hershberger's recent artwork draws heavily on the images from his past, from his life as a boy on farms in Nebraska and North Dakota. Hershberger's father and mother, cornfields, tractors, quilt patterns, images from the *Martyrs'*

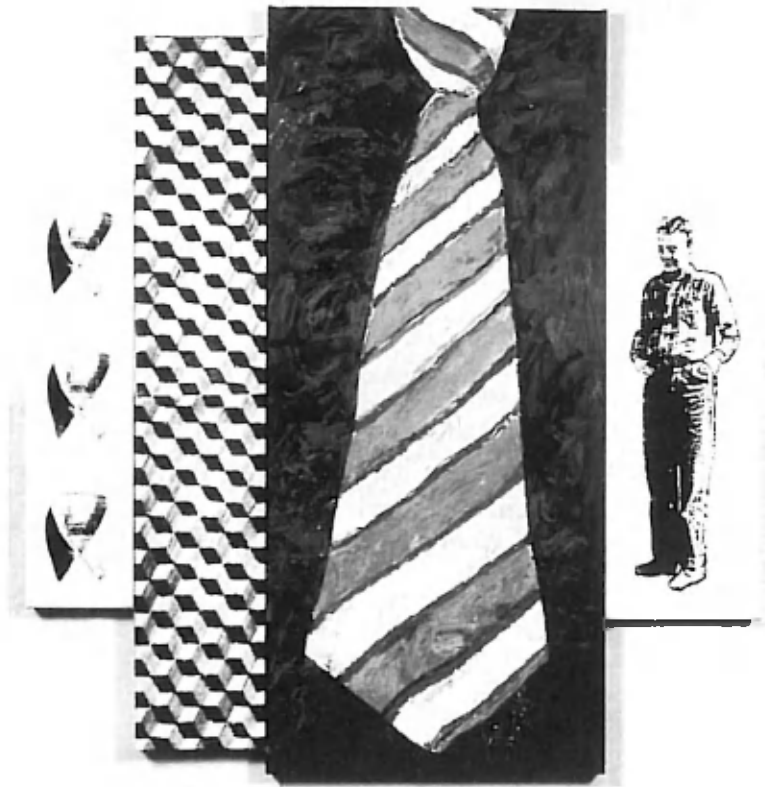
## Abner Hershberger's Heritage Project: Images of Community

Douglas G.  
Campbell

## Mennonite Preacher

1996





## Red Necktie

1997

*Mirror*, and tractor treads confront us. These images, primarily taken from family photographs, enlarged and screen-printed on canvas, cannot be easily written off like those more generic images found in historical museums. For unlike those sequential museum images, along with the obligatory text, that create a straightforward narrative that we can follow step by step, it is clear that Hershberger's images, though they reflect his experience of community, also point to a very

independent perception of life within that community.

Anyone familiar with Hershberger's art is aware immediately that the "Heritage Project" marks a change in direction. Instead of expressively colorful paintings, informed by the tradition of the Abstract Expressionists, instead of planes that refer to wide expanses of space and fields divided by fences, Hershberger has turned to realism. Unlike his emotionally expressive and more theatrical abstract paintings which suggested rather than depicted recognizable objects, these new paintings are filled with clearly representational imagery. What has brought about this change in direction? The change began four years ago. It was triggered by a request to do a collaborative project with Hershberger's nephew Kevin Garber, an artist and contract printer for Washington University in St. Louis.<sup>1</sup> A third artist, Ezra Hershberger, Abner Hershberger's uncle, was also a participant. Abner Hershberger described this project:

We collaborated on a large three-panel piece that was contained by a single frame and represented three different artistic styles. An art critic viewing this work described my uncle's style as a traditional representational style of tree forms, my work was characterized as modernist in depicting an abstract landscape view, and my nephew's images of oil-drenched birds in a threatened environment were considered to be post-modern. It

was a little disconcerting to hear that, and somewhat shocking to see our three styles locked into a single format at first. But the more we worked at trying to make disparate styles come together, the more intriguing the over-all effect seemed to be aesthetically. The results of this communal effort seemed to offer permission to explore this approach to composing art in greater detail. On one of my trips home from St. Louis where our collaboration took place, I pulled to the side of the highway and began sketching "heritage project" images, beginning with my father which later became the *Mennonite Preacher*.<sup>3</sup>

The juxtaposition of styles and images in this collaborative work became the organizational method underlying these new pieces that have come to make up the "Heritage Project." *Mennonite Preacher*, one of the larger art works, is dominated by a black and white image of Hershberger's father dressed in traditional clothing. His father's image is placed adjacent to monochrome images of the tumbling block quilt pattern and cornstalks. There is a harshness about these juxtapositions that reflects the isolation of rural North Dakota, the stark contrasts in weather, and the structure of community. But this harshness is mitigated by oversized images of lilies and a dove, and the domesticity of the quilt patterns. Hershberger's boyhood life and his image of his father the preacher avoids the severity of either a detached critique or over-sweet

nostalgia of straightforward sentimentality. These images reveal the symbols of the Mennonite community in which Hershberger lived. He confesses that he is "intrigued with the iconography of Mennonite life... I'm curious partially about the plain coat that my father wore and that was so important, and that I found to be a sacred garb."<sup>3</sup> Hershberger acknowledges the existence and role of sacred objects within a community that disavowed them.

Other images focus on issues of dress. In *The Red Necktie* Hershberger reflects on his personal reaction to restrictions on dress. Images like those found in *The Red Necktie* are significant as powerful symbols, but Hershberger is not merely assembling evocative and personally significant symbols. The choice and manipulation of media are as important as the images in the communication Hershberger presents.

The red panel in this painting is given prominence by its center location as well as scale dominance in relation to the side panels to characterize for me as a teenager the attractiveness of the "world" and the many offerings I concluded would enrich my life. Therefore the configuration of images, scale relationships, stylistic treatment of each image, and location of individual panels are important to the whole. The expressiveness, i.e. the vehicle which carries the communication, relies on the sum total of all its parts. Screened ink on raw canvas

suggests a bond, union, and simplicity which seems less complicated than the heavily charged canvas of a built-up surface of brightly colored paint. The seductiveness of paint application in one panel is contrasted with quietness and simplicity of adjacent panels in an attempt at expressing the full sense of conflict, unity, and authenticity.<sup>4</sup>

In *The Red Necktie*, the largest panel, with its painterly brush strokes, is in color. To the immediate left is a panel screened with the tumbling block quilt pattern. Further to the left is an even smaller panel with three repetitions of a tie-less shirt collar. In the right hand panel we see a screened image of Hershberger as a youth, not wearing the seductive but forbidden tie. The lushly painted tie contrasts with the stark screened black and white panels. Here the artist is remembering his struggles as a youth within his community. This painting reflects the questioning of community standards from within the community.

Another painting, *The Boy with the Milkweed Pod*, focuses on an earlier instance of a conflict brought about between the artist's own personally derived values and communal values. Hershberger as a young boy is seen to the left. Dividing the piece from top to bottom is a taller panel with the tread of a tractor tire. To the right are two images. The upper image is of a milkweed pod; the lower image is of a dove and its nest. "I had to go against both the church and my

parents,"<sup>5</sup> for a World War II project to collect these seed pods used to make life preservers for the military. "It just seemed to me that one should not be locked into a particular answer to all matters as it relates to any given subject. In this case war. I thought that each of these issues needed to be determined on its own merit. So I participated in this project."<sup>6</sup> In secret he collected the milkweed pods that would, as he saw it, save lives. Hershberger went on to connect this divergence from community standards to his life as an artist: "I would say that this has characterized much of my life. And certainly with art making it has had to step outside the usual pattern of behavior. And I have tried to do this in a diplomatic way and not upset the community particularly."<sup>7</sup>

Other pieces reflect both the personal and communal aspects of life in a rural Mennonite community. The largest piece, *A Day in the Life of JD 436*, depicts the repeated image of the John Deere tractor that was an integral part of farm life. Other pieces include images of the rafters from a barn's interior, farm animals, harvest time, and women quilting. When these images are seen together, they provide, quilt-like, images of an overall pattern of life held together by the thread of community values and rituals. The intensity of painted colors against screened black and white reproductions of photographs and objects viewed from different perspectives are drawn together to suggest recollection. For usually when we remember, our recollections do not come to us like videotapes or movies of the past. In

actuality, some memories are clearly and brightly imaged—larger than life—while others are faded or less imposing. Traditional realism would fill in too many of the fissures that separate the pieces of our pasts, build a picture too seamless to be true to memory. Hershberger's approach with its juxtapositions of panels, patterns, images, and techniques presents the past with all of its gaps, from the viewpoint of a boy growing to manhood.

One of the most telling pieces of the "Heritage Project" is *Self Portrait with a Dove*. This piece is clearly not devoted to a rural Mennonite community life. At its center is a screened image of a recent photograph of the artist. In this artwork, Hershberger's image does not resemble that of his Mennonite father depicted in *The Mennonite Preacher*, except that they are both black and white. Instead, Hershberger looks like a seated artist wearing his beret and holding his palette. In *Self Portrait with a Dove* we are brought again to the present. Instead of an image of a young boy in primary school or an image of a teenager, we see the mature artist who chose to follow a path that diverged from what was normative. Hershberger chose art over farming, but he did not separate himself completely from the Mennonite community, for he has taught at Goshen College for more than thirty years. It is clear that Hershberger's path has led him to think independently while also retaining his connections to his faith tradition and community. Unconditional acceptance has not been the response of his community. Hershberger has



## Boy With the Milkweed Pod

1997

Self Portrait  
With a Dove  
1997



often felt that this communal response reflected “more an attitude of tolerance”<sup>8</sup> than encouragement or acceptance.

Yet even though his relationship to his faith community may have been one of questioning, he did not abandon it. In fact, *Self Portrait with a Dove* is an affirmation of the two major elements of his past. Images from *The Martyrs Mirror* fill the vertical panel to the right. These represent his Mennonite lineage, those martyrs from his Anabaptist past, and connect him firmly with his faith community.

The left side of this painting is made up of images from a Manhattan Westside Catholic church in which the sculptures spell out the events of the old and new testaments. I wanted to acknowledge the larger universal Christian heritage and its influences in my life. This influence came by way of an artistic heritage received from art history, and from art professors referencing the masters, a forum in which sacred imagery was seen in the larger context of religious history. It seemed to me that a grave injustice was done to people of God by minimizing the role of art in lives of humankind. The absence of a theology which embraces art in our Anabaptist heritage has caused a void in the faith community. All members of that community, in some sense, are diminished as a result.<sup>9</sup>

These two side panels, the artistic panel longer than the

Mennonite or Anabaptist panel, are brought together in the artist himself. The split between the artistic and Anabaptist traditions “started when Reformation-era Anabaptists stripped churches of their icons and whitewashed their walls.”<sup>10</sup> And Hershberger has sought throughout his career as an artist to help bring art back to the Anabaptist community, to heal this breach:

(The *Self Portrait with a Dove* symbolizes the conflict by representing opposing sources of light noted by the shadow directions seen in the head and foot.) I conclude this painting with a dove and a baptismal font which represent the two lineages of my heritage: peace and simplicity and the rich aesthetics found in early Christian basilicas through present day churches. A study of these artistic structures reveals the human capacity for rich imagination and the need to express spiritual concepts through tangible forms. The “Heritage Project” attempts in a small way to address issues of restrictive biblical literalism that at times became an obstacle in living one’s faith. Instead, I have tried to provide through the instrument of painting a sense of affirmation and joy in our spiritual linkage to the Divine.<sup>11</sup>

Though visually assertive and confrontational, the collected images contained within the pieces of Hershberger’s “Heritage Project” provide a balanced view. Tradition and the community of faith are shown as combining both the

positive and negative, the juxtaposed memories of good times and difficult times. Hershberger makes it clear that life within a faith community cannot be one of unquestioning conformity.

Community life does not deliver us from personal responsibility. It is that personal responsibility to which we are called; we are challenged to become aware of the choices that have confronted us and will continue to do so. We are made aware of these challenges because of the way Hershberger has chosen to present them to us.

Hershberger's current style emphasizes the simplicity and directness of his Mennonite heritage while retaining the artist's sophisticated concern for materials and techniques as an integral part

of the total communication of an artwork.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In addition to working as a contract printer, Kevin Garber taught graduate and undergraduate courses for Washington University for eight years.

<sup>2</sup> Personal interview with Abner Hershberger, 26 October 1997.

<sup>3</sup> DeAgostino, Martin, "Close to Home," 21 May 1996, p. E1. "Roots: Painter Abner Hershberger Looks Back at His Beginnings," an exhibition review by Martin DeAgostino, *South Bend Tribune*, 9 October 1997, pp. D1 and D7, is another good source of information and insight.

<sup>4</sup> Personal interview with Abner Hershberger, 26 October 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Hershberger interview.

<sup>6</sup> Hershberger interview.

<sup>7</sup> Hershberger interview.

<sup>8</sup> Hershberger interview.

<sup>9</sup> Hershberger interview.

<sup>10</sup> DeAgostino, p. E6.

<sup>11</sup> Hershberger interview.



I was travelling an on-ramp to the Ohio Turnpike one weekend last May just as an old Carole King song came up on my tape deck. Orange cones flashed by, for the interstate highway needs a third lane to accommodate more and more traffic in our mobile society. Just at this moment, however, King voiced the unease of our hypermodern world: "So far away. Doesn't anybody stay in one place anymore?... I sure hope the road don't come to own me."

On this day, however, the road was taking me to an abbey of Benedictine monks, where I was to commit myself to a premodern road at least fifteen centuries long by becoming a Benedictine *oblate*. Oblates are people who are not monks but who dedicate themselves to the service of God and neighbor according to the Rule of St. Benedict, insofar as their state in life permits. Specific commitments include the practice of holy reading, praying the Psalms, and working in the world as unto God. Benedictines share with Mennonites the values of simplicity, hospitality, and peace.

I learned about all of this quickly enough once I discovered that it is possible for someone who is not Roman Catholic to become a Benedictine oblate. Knowing that there are good arguments for considering monasticism in general — and the Benedictine sensibilities of Michael Sattler in particular — to have supplied a formative influence on early Swiss Anabaptism,<sup>1</sup>

becoming an oblate had instantly seemed a concrete way to express a growing sense that somehow I am a "Catholic Mennonite."<sup>2</sup>

For monks, Benedict's rule requires a vow of stability — the uniquely Benedictine commitment to live in a particular monastic community for life. At first, this may hardly seem to apply amid other ways of life. Yet precisely because it contrasts so sharply with the fragility of most commitments in our hypermodern society, Benedictine stability may speak more directly to our age and churches than anything else in the Rule. Application must be by analogy. And one cannot understand the vow of stability apart from the Benedictines' two other vows — conversion of life and obedience, which in turn requires us to face questions of authority. Still, it is no use rediscovering any of our own church's roots, nor discerning innovative ways to be faithful to our church's calling, if we won't slow down, stay *longer* even if we can't stay *put* indefinitely, and take something *like* a vow of stability.

### Post- or Hyper-modern?

As one Mennonite leader remarked concerning the impact of constant mobility on our congregations: "It's getting so the Abrahamic thing to do is to stay put." Much of what is currently being called postmodernism seems to thrive on the problem of instability, not confront it. Yet a few

## The Vow of Stability: A Premodern Way through a Hypermodern World

G e r a l d W .

S c h l a b a c h

of the most incisive voices on the contemporary scene are calling us to decompress, slow down, stay in place, and commit ourselves to places for the long haul, precisely so that the planet can provide a human home *over* a long haul.

Throughout his many essays, the farmer-poet-environmentalist Wendell

**“Much of what is currently being called postmodernism seems to thrive on the problem of instability, not confront it.”**

Berry has been arguing tenaciously that our very humanity may depend on local communities that sustain a relationship with the land. Berry laments that we have come to accept as a norm that our resources and our children will move away and never return home. Education systems prepare youth for an indeterminate career anywhere (and probably elsewhere) rather than to return home and be of use to a place and community. Berry recognizes that cycles of adolescent rebellion are necessary, but unless adolescents have viable economic opportunities for returning to their parents and meeting them as fellow sufferers and friends, whole generations become locked into the permanent adolescence of rebellion and mere critique, untethered by a corresponding responsibility for *reconstruction*.<sup>3</sup>

If Berry's plea for a return to rural community seems too much of a stretch, perhaps we can hear the arguments of city-dweller Scott Russell Sanders of Indiana

University. Sanders challenges those who urge us “to deal with difficulties by pulling up stakes and heading for new territory.” The national culture is wrong when it tells us that “the worst fate is to be trapped on a farm, in a village, in the sticks, in some dead-end job or unglamorous marriage or played-out game.” “People who root themselves in places are likelier to know and care for those places,” he insists, “than are people who root themselves in ideas.” In our hemisphere, people rooted in ideas rather than places have been the ones who have committed the worst abuses against land, forests, animals and human communities — and hardly without shedding their bigotry. Those who do not value their own places are unlikely to value others', he argues. For unless one is “placed,” one merely collects sensations as a sightseer, lacking the *local* knowledge that grounds and

**“In our hemisphere, people rooted in ideas rather than places have been the ones who have committed the worst abuses against land, forests, animals and human communities....”**

measures *global* knowledge. “Those who care about nothing beyond the confines of their parish are in truth parochial, and are at least mildly dangerous to their parish; on the other hand, those who have no parish, those who navigate ceaselessly among postal zones and area codes, those for whom the world is only a smear of highways and bank accounts and stores, are a

danger not just to their parish but to the planet.”<sup>4</sup>

### Stability in the Rule of St. Benedict<sup>5</sup>

One does not have to speculate about what St. Benedict would have thought of the hypermodern propensity to move on, try to reinvent ourselves, and keep trying to construct lifestyle enclaves to our liking — without sticking to any one project long enough to create authentic community. Following St. Benedict’s prologue, the first chapter in his rule proper describes four kinds of monks. The first two are cenobites or monks living in community (RB 1.1-2), and anchorites or hermits living alone (RB 1.3-5). Early in monastic history, new or prospective monks had simply sought out experienced ones to guide them, and attached themselves as apprentices to these spiritual masters they called father or

**“The obedience to authority that Benedict called for...is the obedience of an apprentice who has sought out someone who knows the life one longs to live better than one can know it oneself.”**

mother, abba or ama. Thus, solitary and communal monks both had a place; Benedict commended both.

The third and fourth categories of monks in his typology were another matter. “Sarabaites” (RB 1.6-9) were “the most detestable kind of monks” who thought they could form small communities of two or

three without the aid of either an experienced master or a rule to order their life over time. They were sheep trying to construct their own sheepfolds. Their law was their own fancy: “Anything they believe in and choose, they call holy; anything they dislike, they consider forbidden.” Yet a fourth kind of monk was even worse, the “gyrovagues” (RB 1.10-

**“The ‘master’ whom one must obey is not a ‘slavemaster’ but a ‘master craftsman’ or ‘teacher.’”**

11). These drifted all their lives from monastery to monastery. “Always on the move, they never settle down, and are slaves to their own wills and gross appetites.” We might say that the sarabaites were trying to form “intentional communities” on the strength of intention alone, without accepting the need for some structure based on time-tested experience to even out the peaks and troughs of whim, passion, and mere enthusiasm for the *idea* of community. If the gyrovagues were worse, it was precisely because they were even more hyper. Think monks on MTV!

Benedict’s reasons for insisting on stability may pertain more to us than we like to recognize. In his book *After Virtue*, philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre baited his readers famously by suggesting that we await “another — doubtless very different — St. Benedict.”<sup>6</sup> According to MacIntyre, “the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers, they have already been governing us for quite some time” — polling,

managing, manipulating, and creating our consumer preferences through corporate and governmental bureaucracies alike. Meanwhile, theorists of modern democracy fail to account for the moral life as anything more than subjective choice. For MacIntyre, our hope then is in new and localized forms of community life, constituting traditions of virtue wherein apprenticeship not autonomy shapes the moral life.

MacIntyre is right. Television preachers afflict conservative Christians, and theological fads afflict liberal ones; in other words, itinerant "gyrovague" Christianity cycles all around us, without the discipline of sustained community life. Further, the "voluntary community" for which Anabaptists once died has largely degenerated into the marketing of churches and "church shopping" among all sectors within all traditions.<sup>7</sup> Even if these groups have far more than the two or three members that Benedict imagined, they are still "sarabaite" in their desire for community *only* on their own terms. All this occurs in a larger socioeconomic context where most days are far too like the sixth century insofar as marauding bands of advertisers, poll-takers, and other well-groomed MacIntyrian "barbarians" comprise a danger to Christian faithfulness that is far more subtle than either the Roman Empire or the modern nation-state.

In this light we may begin to approach from afar the famous opening paragraph of Benedict's prologue, which first strikes modern ears as irretrievably authoritarian.

Listen carefully, my son, to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from a father who loves you; welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice. The labor of obedience will bring you back to him [Christ] from whom you had drifted through the sloth of disobedience. This message of mine is for you, then, if you are ready to give up your own will, once and for all, and armed with the strong and noble weapons of obedience do battle for the true King, Christ the Lord. (RB Prol. 1-3).

Benedict's stated intent was to "establish a school for the Lord's service" (RB Prol. 45), or a "workshop" in which to learn to exercise the "tools of the spiritual craft" (RB 4.75-78) that were needed for Christian perfecting. The obedience to authority that Benedict called for both requires and creates stability, but is not *coerced* obedience. It is the obedience of an apprentice who has sought out someone who knows the life one longs to live better than one can know it oneself, at least without a master who has advanced in the craft of living this life and is in position to thwart one's favorite illusions. This is exactly what one has asked for by approaching an abbot-father (or abbess-mother) in the first place, and the opening paragraph of Benedict's prologue is simply a reminder. The abbot is one's superior, but the term is a play on words, for the one with authority is first of all to be one who is "better" or more advanced in the communal search for God to which

one has committed oneself. The “master” whom one must obey is not a “slavemaster” but a “master craftsman” or “teacher.” No human system precludes every possibility of abuse, but the community that elects an abbot as its leader for life should be seeking someone who is already well-schooled in the virtues that *all* are seeking (RB 64.2-3).

Benedict countered at least some of the potential for abuse in the abbot system. Above all, he warned the abbot and would-be abbot that they do *not* have absolute power in the community. The abbot is himself subject to the rule (RB 3.10-11; 64.20). A truly thriving monastery will in turn be full of people whose consciences are being formed by the rule and daily meditation on Scripture; such people will know that their abbot dare not guide or command them in ways that violate Scripture, rule *or* conscience (RB 2.4-5). Further, Benedict warned the abbot or abbess repeatedly that they would be examined on judgment day about those entrusted to them (RB 2.7, 11-15, 30, 39; 3.11; 64.7, 20; 65.22).

Benedict also required certain procedures that favored intra-community accountability. In guiding the lives of the monks, an abbot’s directions were not to come with legalistic one-size-fits-all rigidity; rather he was to adapt them to each monk (RB 2.23-29; 27; 37; 64.7-19). This required two-way communication. Benedict also made provision for monks to object to commands that seemed impossibly burdensome to them (RB 68). On major community matters, the abbot was not to make a final decision

before taking counsel from the entire community (RB 3). “The reason why we have said all should be called for counsel is that the Lord often reveals what is better to the younger” (RB 3:3). Benedict also insisted that the abbot host visiting monks and receive their “reasonable criticisms or observations” — for “it is possible that the Lord guided [them] to the monastery for this very purpose” (RB 61.4).

In any case, Benedictines read their rule within their community, as their community’s text. They do not treat it as a historical artifact, but neither do they read it like fundamentalists. What most commends the model of stability in the text — together with its pattern of authority, obedience, and measured openings for loyal dissent — is precisely that it has engendered a tradition in which flexibility, adaptation, critique, and

**“What most commends the model of stability in the text...is precisely that it has engendered a tradition in which flexibility, adaptation, critique, and reform are possible within the nurture of deep continuities.”**

reform are possible within the nurture of deep continuities.

But the point is not really to create the *perfect* monastery. The Cistercian contemplative Thomas Merton once commented on the significance of the Benedictine vow of stability by stressing the very *realism* of Saint Benedict. Benedict, he observed, “introduced this vow

into his Rule precisely because he knew that the limitations of the monk, and the limitations of the community he lived in, formed a part of God's plan for the sanctification both of individuals and of communities." In making this vow, "the monk renounces the vain hope of wandering off to find a 'perfect monastery.'" That requires deep faith, and a recognition that finally, "it does not much matter where we are or whom we live with, provided we can devote ourselves to prayer, enjoy a certain amount of silence, poverty, and solitude, work with our hands, read and study the things of God, and above all love one another as Christ has loved us."<sup>4</sup>

### Reply to Objections

In their struggle against oppression, patriarchy, and abusive authority, some may imagine and promote radically egalitarian forms of community along liberationist, feminist, or supposedly Anabaptist lines, and assume that a premodern patriarch such as Benedict can offer little counsel. Yet *any* true and sustainable community will need the virtues of mutual patience and mutual submission that the vow of stability requires and engenders.

The most obvious objection to any attempt to retrieve Benedictine stability for other communities is that the vow of stability comes linked so closely with that other vow of obedience to hierarchical authority, that we had better steer clear. Compared to his sources, Benedict actually spoke quite sparingly of the abbot as a father exhorting a son, and when he did so

he followed Hebrew wisdom literature more than the hierarchical Roman legal code. But above all, he retained language that made the abbot a "master" because monastic life was unimaginable without the structure of apprenticeship.

Not all authority is authoritarian anyway, much less tyrannical. If we

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study premodern traditional cultures carefully and respectfully we begin to notice that modern democracy does not have a monopoly on accountability. Christian polities should strive toward the accountability of all, but in fact, modern democratic processes do rather poorly at holding their *electorates* accountable. When democratic processes allow dysfunctional churches to run out one pastor after another, we have only exchanged one abuse of authority for another. And where congregational participation is a matter of consumeristic taste, we gain the accountability of the marketplace but undermine growth in disciplined Christian virtue. Patterns of accountability in premodern communities at least deserve a second look.

We should develop a critical distance from the paradoxically authoritarian hold that modern *anti-*

authoritarianism has upon us. Before we pass over the wisdom of a vow of obedience, we might ask ourselves: Do we really want to excise altogether the apprenticing shape of Christian life and community? Let us call our spiritual leaders “teachers” or “mentors” if that is more palatable than “masters.” Let us spread them throughout Christian communities that are discerning God’s will collectively. But let us remind *ourselves* that all learning in the Christian life involves *unlearning* — that putting on Christ by growing more fully into our baptism involves a putting off of old habits and illusions that die hard.

For that, we need guides with enough authority and integrity to confront us with lessons we so fear to learn, that we may not learn them at *all* unless we obey *before* we fully understand or desire. No such guides are themselves free from sin and the need for accountability; furthermore, true authority bears no rightful power without the integrity that earns our trust. But unless we grant the probability that some members of

**“We should develop a critical distance from the paradoxically authoritarian hold that modern *anti*-authoritarianism has upon us.”**

the community know and embody the Christian life in fuller and more trustworthy ways than others, then there is hardly any point in speaking of Christian growth at all.

In any case, here is the rub: Christian communities that structure their life together in ways that are more egalitarian than the Benedictine polity *ostensibly* is, are going to need

more protracted processes of participatory discernment as they seek to discern God’s will for them collectively. And for *that* they are going to require *more* not *less* of a vow of stability! Consensus takes

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long to reach. Good intentions and the initial romance of community life wane. Patience frays and righteous conviction turns to anger. The elusive option of starting over with a group of one’s like-minded is never absent from any non-Catholic church, is far too accessible in all Anabaptist ones, and is especially tempting in the modern milieu where voluntarism is nothing we need to die for anymore. So a figurative vow of stability is actually going to be much *harder* to make stick than stability in the technical Benedictine sense — yet all the more crucial!

So in the end, my reply to objections is simply this: *Write to me when you get halfway to your utopia, and tell me whether you do not need some vow of stability more than ever, to see you through.*

## **A Not-So-Innovative Conclusion**

One lesson of premodern ways is that we might not need to say as

many new things as we think. One reality of our hypermodern world, however, is that we might need to hear old lessons through voices that are new and a bit exotic for us. Either way, the lesson is that what we need may not be a new theory or -ism at all, but the virtue of patience, and the practice of hunkering down to stay together through the long haul, as we listen to God's voice.

The Psalm that most often begins the daily cycle of prayer in Benedictine monasteries is Psalm 95: "Come, let us sing to the Lord and shout with joy to the Rock who saves us." The Lord our God, it proclaims,

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is "the great king over all the gods," and bears in hand earth, mountains, seas, and dry land. Come, it urges, let us bow down, for we belong to this very God as the people of God's pasture, the flock that God leads. And then suddenly, the Psalm issues a warning: "Today, listen to the voice of the Lord: Do not grow hard-hearted, as your forebears did in the wilderness.... Forty years I endured that generation. I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray and they do not know my ways.' So I swore in my anger, 'They shall not enter into my rest.'" And there the

Psalm abruptly ends.

The stability of the Benedictine way does not claim to be a stability written into the fabric of the universe. But for the enabling grace of God it is a humanly made vow. But it renews itself each day — by listening. And it listens — from the living assumption that something is there beyond us, and beyond our every ability to construct reality, to which we must listen. Thus it finds its stability not in the unreliable hardness of our own hearts, but in the socially-embodied conviction that God has a will to voice and a hand to lead. God is the stable rock, the rock who saves. In the stability of God and God's purposes, in fact, lies our deepest freedom. Hardness and unrelenting burden (as the Psalmist warns and the Benedictines repeat) lie not in God but in hearts that go some other way. In praying and seeking to live out the stability of God our saving rock, the Benedictines thus proclaim a freedom that the hypermodern world can barely know, a freedom *not* to change everything always, a freedom even to sustain premodern ways, a freedom to conserve, a freedom to obey, a freedom to stay.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Arnold Snyder, "The Monastic Origins of Swiss Anabaptist Sectarianism," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 67, no. 1 (1983): 5-26; *The Life and Thought of Michael Sattler* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1984); "Michael Sattler, Benedictine: Dennis Martin's Objections Reconsidered," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 61, no. 3 (July 1987): 262-79; Dennis D. Martin, "Monks, Mendicants, and Anabaptists: Michael Sattler and the Benedictines Reconsidered," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 60, no. 2 (April 1986): 139-64; "Catholic Spirituality and Anabaptist and Mennonite Discipleship," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 62, no. 1 (January 1988): 5-25. Also see Eoin De Bhaldraithe, "Michael Sattler, Benedictine and Anabaptist," *Downside Review*, April 1987, 111-31.

<sup>2</sup> Like many people in recent years I first learned about Benedictine oblates from Kathleen Norris's best-selling book, *The Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1987), but all I needed to decide to explore this option was the raw fact that non-Roman Catholics could become oblates, which appears in her first paragraph.

<sup>3</sup> Wendell Berry, "The Work of Local Culture," in *What Are People For?* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 153-69. For a discussion of "fidelity" that parallels somewhat the practice of "stability," see Wendell Berry, "The Body and the Earth," in *The Unsettling of*

*America: Culture and Agriculture* (New York: Avon, 1977), 120-23.

<sup>4</sup> Scott Russell Sanders, "Settling Down," in *Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 102, 106, 114.

<sup>5</sup> All quotations from the rule (abbreviated as RB) are taken from Saint Benedict, *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in English*, edited by Timothy Fry, O.S.B. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1982). I am also consulting Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996) (abbreviated as BR).

<sup>6</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2d ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 263. For a short monograph that applies MacIntyre's thought to the challenge of Christian mission in modern culture, and frames its proposals as "a new monasticism," see Jonathan R. Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre's After Virtue*, Christian Mission and Modern Culture (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Stanley Hauerwas, in *Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 26, 73.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953), 9-10.

## Book Reviews

C. Arnold Snyder and Linda A. Huebert Hecht, eds., *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers*. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996. Pp. 405. ISBN 0-88920-277-X

In *Profiles of Anabaptist Women* Snyder and Hecht choreographed the scholarship of nineteen authors into a well organized and highly readable volume. The impressive list of assembled authors reads like a Who's Who in Anabaptist women's history. The book also represents some of the most important and enjoyable aspects of scholarly work: intense collaboration, the use of social history methodologies, and a great topic.

To all those interested in Anabaptist history and especially to those who teach Anabaptist history, whether in the college and high school setting or in local churches and Sunday Schools, Snyder and Hecht's volume should be helpful in at least two major areas. First, the collective authors' social history methodologies have resulted in a story in which the little people of the movement take center stage. Second, the richly detailed text focuses on the lives of ordinary Anabaptist women and therefore makes a major contribution to the task of recovering Anabaptist women's history.

The authors' "bottom up" or social history approach, to borrow a phrase from Elise Boulding, should substantially change how we teach Anabaptist history. The Anabaptist movement was not borne on the backs of a few male leaders. We should no longer teach our young that it was primarily great men who

inspired, led, and died for their faith, thus preserving and renewing the movement. Rather, the Anabaptism presented in this volume builds on the polygenesis theory, as revealed in the structure of the book in which women's experiences are divided into three main sections: Swiss Anabaptist Women, South German/Austrian Anabaptist Women, and North German/Dutch Anabaptist Women. (Students new to Anabaptist history will benefit from the summaries presented at the beginning of each section). Yes, Anabaptism had many origins. In an historian's terminology, there were many causes and many effects. These causes and effects were due in no small way to the vast numbers of little people who also inspired, led, and died for their faith. For example, in 1528 Augsburg the court records show 23 active ministers. A rethinking of how we teach Anabaptist history, therefore, is required.

*Profiles of Anabaptist Women* should finally put to rest the myth that sources are not available for the historical study of Anabaptist women. Court records, locally published pamphlets and books, and other printed material from the time including hymns, poems, letters, sermons, archival materials, and even an opera (which was written in commemoration of Divara of Haarlem, later of Münster), were gleaned to provide information on these women's lives. Most impressive are the biographies of women which were based on court records. Although, as the authors observe, appearing in court was not a welcome or fortuitous event, the resulting records provide a rich

source of information about the common women—what today we might call the rank and file members—of the Anabaptist movement.

One is naturally led to ask about the contribution of Anabaptist women and why such a volume is necessary. How do these women's experiences add to or inform the Anabaptist story? Clearly, women were fundamental players in the early movement. Women did many of the things that men did: they testified, they held meetings in their home, they prayed and taught, and they exhorted those who were undergoing persecution to stand fast. Some experiences, however, were different such as enduring pregnancy and child birth in jail or exile. Women's history has often turned accepted interpretations of history upside down, but one will not find that here. Instead, by adding women's experience to our knowledge we gain texture and nuance, especially about the secretive aspects of the early church.

Anabaptism became, as is well known, an underground movement. Mennonites are taught about how their spiritual (and biological) ancestors conducted religious gatherings in secret and were often forced to flee. But what do we know about how such a movement spread? Did the movement grow because of the efforts of itinerant leaders who zealously preached and baptized everywhere they went or were there other actors in this drama?

The authors are careful to relate how communication in early sixteenth century Europe was primarily of a verbal and not a

written nature, something that our twentieth century minds might tend to overlook. People relied on word of mouth for news and information. Women's networks, which were based on kinship ties, occupations or guilds, and common tasks such as weaving and sewing were instrumental to the fledgling movement. Women organized and disguised prayer groups, Bible readings, and spiritual lessons as sewing and weaving bees. Women communicated the location and times of these secret meetings through a complex set of kinship and what we would today refer to as professional networks.

Conversions to Anabaptism often occurred among women of the same occupation and class, although there were exceptions such as noblewoman Helena von Freyberg and the aristocratic von Pappenheim women Magdalena, Walpurga, and Sophia. Women could spread the word of baptisms and prayer groups during guild meetings, or they could talk to one another in the markets and grocery stores. The authors speculate that because women's activities were more invisible than those of men it may have been easier for women to move around the city buying household goods and spreading the word as they went. In many cases the underground nature of the young Anabaptist movement was suited to the private lives of women.

Another new finding is the importance of hostessing which included alms giving. Leaders of whom even the most casual student of Anabaptism knows—for example, Hans Hut, Menno Simons, and Hans

Denck—all needed to stay somewhere. They needed to be housed. They needed to eat. Most important, someone had to provide a place for the flock to congregate. These hostessing functions were critical to the new movement. Again, a look at the court records reveals that, in an attempt to halt Anabaptism's spread, city and town officials decreed it illegal to host aliens and imposed branding on both cheeks and permanent exile as the punishment. The traditional role of keeper of the home placed women like Susanna Doucher and Scolastica Stiepau, who hosted preachers and fed impoverished Anabaptist exiles, in positions of the utmost importance.

Collective biography is a useful aid in interpreting women's historical experiences. Through these profiles we learn much about how women contributed to the movement. However, there is so much detailed information in the book that it leaves the door open for further distillation. After a close reading, comparative questions arise. How and why did women experience Anabaptism differently in the three geographical regions, or from city to city? There is some explanation present and Snyder and Hecht have pointed the way for further research in this area. *Profiles of Anabaptist Women* has made an impressive start in reclaiming Anabaptist women's history. Let us hope that future scholars embark on adventures that are just as ambitious.

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Dave Peters, *Surviving Church Conflict*. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1997. Pp. 160. (\$10.99 — paperback) ISBN 0-8361-9051-3

This is an easily read, short book (160 pages) related to an increasingly vital subject, that of dealing with conflict in the church. The author suggests he has been personally acquainted with church conflict in his own pastoral ministry so is speaking from personal experience as well as from a theoretical point of view. He uses a variety of other life situations to illustrate his points throughout the book.

The book is divided into four sections or chapters, 1) Restoration of the Church in Crisis, 2) Resolving Conflict from a Biblical Perspective, 3) Peacemaking and War Against the Church, and 4) When Peace is Not Sought by Others.

The first chapter focuses on three suggested "parameters of conflict," i.e. grace, worship, and peacemaking. Here he suggests God's grace is always at work in spite of conflict. Worship in any congregation should be at the heart of the church's activity, and the member's response to grace and worship should lead to peacemaking.

In the second chapter, the focus makes the case for resolving conflict based on biblical truths and allowing the Holy Spirit to lead to spiritual brokenness and holiness. The point here is that being led by the Holy Spirit results in being attuned to God's will which eliminates the tendency toward selfishness and conflict.

The third chapter deals with two levels of conflict. One relates to

disagreements between Christian believers while the second relates to conflict faced by Christians who are persecuted by others for their faith. Here he suggests the battle is always between the servants of God and evil forces impinging on people's lives and, ultimately, God always wins these battles.

Chapter four confronts the reality that not all conflicts will get resolved. Again the suggestion is that becoming "weak vessels" before God is a key to letting his Holy Spirit guide the outcome of conflict, regardless of what that is, recognizing that not everyone will seek peaceful resolution to conflict.

The book is helpful in recognizing the sense of despair that pastors can and do feel when not able to resolve conflict in spite of their best efforts. This is particularly difficult when the conflict contributes to parishioners splitting the church or leaving the congregation. He notes there is an all too frequent assumption that changing pastors will solve basic conflicts in the congregation. Frequently, the dynamics are far more profound. Concern is appropriately expressed as to how to help pastors avoid a pervasive sense of failure when their efforts are unsuccessful.

The author examines in some detail many and various church conflicts as recorded in the New Testament. Frequent references are made to the Apostle Paul and his approach and words about dealing with various church situations at that time. The implication is that understanding conflict in the New Testament church will be applicable

to managing conflict in the modern church.

The book tends to focus on how church members should be relating to each other and to pastors to avoid conflict. There is a lament the church is in bad shape due mainly to church members and/or denominations not following the true way. This emphasis on how church members *should* behave is perhaps the strength of the book, i.e. admonishing members in concepts of spiritual vitality or the prevention of conflicts that historically have destroyed and divided churches as much as any other human organization.

Aside from identifying the sinful nature of men and women, including the "shoulds and oughts," there is not much help in understanding the dynamics of conflict that occurs because we are human beings whether or not we hold to a religious doctrine. Also there is not much help for those who may be looking for significant practical strategies for dealing with full blown church conflicts in the here and now. Rather, the author makes the case for letting God's grace work at resolving conflict. This is facilitated by helping each member and particularly those seen as conflict managers to be "broken" before God, recognizing their own need for forgiveness and redemption.

An added theme is the use of church discipline to bring change in individuals who do not respond to efforts at conflict resolution. He suggests that a sometimes necessary way of dealing with congregational conflict is to expel those who do not have the preferred theological view.

This approach to conflict resolution puts the emphasis on expecting all parties to adhere to "truth" rather than mediating conflicting differences.

The author approaches this entire subject from a primarily conservative theological perspective rather than from the body of knowledge related to mediation or conflict management. He notes that having a "methodology" for conflict resolution is precisely the wrong solution because it gets in the way of relying on prayer and the Holy Spirit. For those with this particular theological perspective, this book will meet their expectations. For those with a different orientation or theology, this book will seem limited.

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# Mennonite Life

*An Illustrated Quarterly Devoted to Mennonite History and Culture*

ISSN 0025-9365

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## Mennonite Life

*is a self-supporting, non-profit publication, and appears each March, June, September, and December.*

## Subscription rates:

*1 year - \$20.00; 2 years - \$30.00. Foreign: 1 year - \$25.00; 2 years - \$35.00.*

*Single copies: 1990-present \$4.50, pre-1990 \$3.00.*

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*Periodical postage paid at North Newton, Kansas 67117. Please send change of address to Mennonite Life, Bethel College, 300 East 27th Street, North Newton, KS 67117-0531.*

## Abstracted and indexed

*in Religion Index One: Periodicals, Historical Abstracts, America: History and Life, and Christian Periodical Index.*

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