

Weaver-Zercher, David. "A Modest (Though Not Particularly Humble) Claim for Scholarship in the Anabaptist Tradition." *Scholarship and Christian Faith*, edited by Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 103-118.

ESSAY THREE

A Modest (Though Not Particularly Humble) Claim for Scholarship in the Anabaptist Tradition

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This essay both exemplifies and explains the character of Anabaptist scholarship. Rather than focusing on worldview or theology as the key to unlock the distinctiveness of Anabaptist scholarship, David Weaver-Zercher focuses on narrative. Of special concern are the tensions that exist between narratives of American identity and the stories that define Anabaptist identity. Narratives of cultural identity often give rise to competing versions of the group's story. This is true even within the small world of North American Anabaptism. Nonetheless, two elements figure prominently in almost all Anabaptist visions of faith and scholarship: the importance of nonviolence and a commitment to serve the poor and oppressed both at home and around the world.

Shortly after the events of September 11, 2001, the humorist Dave Barry tried his hand at political commentary and U.S. history: "I'm not naive about my country," Barry wrote. "My country has at times been terribly wrong. But I know this about Americans: we don't set out to kill innocent people. We don't cheer when innocent people die."¹

Barry's comments, echoed by so many others in the aftermath of September 11, should compel us to ponder the state of American historical memory. Consider, for example, March 10, 1945, when the United States Army Air Corps dropped enough bombs on Tokyo to kill one hundred thousand Japanese in a single night, most of them

civilians living in working-class sections of the city. The next week *Time* magazine reported on what it breezily called the "Tokyo Bonfire," smugly telling its readers that "properly kindled, Japanese cities will burn like autumn leaves."² Five months later, the United States dropped atomic bombs on two other Japanese cities, first Hiroshima and then Nagasaki, incinerating thirty to forty times the number of people who died in the World Trade Center attacks—again, most of them civilians. One New York City daily ran a cartoon the day after the first bomb was dropped; the cartoon was totally blank except for two caustic words at the top: "So Sorry." Another newspaper's cartoon, captioned "Land of the Rising Sons," depicted bodies flying through the air over the Hiroshima landscape.³

Americans' poor historical memory is not because Americans are disinterested in war.⁴ But many Americans are not particularly interested in exploring the more troubling questions raised by America's warring. Rarely has this historical "disinterest" been more apparent than in the mid-1990s, when the National Air and Space Museum sought to mount a fiftieth-anniversary exhibit commemorating the *Enola Gay*, the plane that dropped the first atomic bomb in 1945.⁵ Earlier American exhibits commemorating the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been cautious, nondescript, and morally innocuous, but the proposed fiftieth-anniversary exhibit at the National Air and Space Museum, which included melted school lunch boxes and graphic photographs of Hiroshima's burn victims, was intended, at least in part, to focus viewers' attention on the bomb's ground-level effects.⁶ Such an exhibit would quite naturally raise questions about the decision to drop the bomb, including the most basic question: Was it justified?⁷ In other words, while the National Air and Space Museum exhibit was not intended to instruct viewers about the intricacies of just war theory, it was intended to raise some of the same questions that Christian just war theorists have often thought important, not the least of which pertain to the targeting of civilian populations.

The key word, of course, is "intended." The exhibit was intended to raise such issues, but it never actually did. Due to pressure from various interest groups, heightened by widespread media misinformation, the planned exhibit was eventually canceled, replaced with the plane's fuselage, which, like the fortieth-anniversary exhibit before it, was left largely to speak for itself. And given the historical narrative that's long been dominant in American life, the plane's fuselage, according to historian Marilyn Young, was probably read as follows: "There was a Good War: it ended when Good Men flew a Good Plane and dropped a New Bomb on Bad People. What these bombs did had nothing to do with Us, only with Them: their atrocities, their aggressive war, the horror [of] their resistance." Young continues: "To question this [narrative] is to bring the meaning of the bomb home to us, where it belongs."⁸ Or to put it a little differently, to seriously discuss this issue would force Americans to confront

the reality of Us—not Them—using weapons of mass destruction on civilian populations in order to achieve military aims.

For many Americans, confronting this reality and others like it is extremely difficult. Indeed, for some Americans, considering these ideas is tantamount to entering the land of heresy, a place where sacred beliefs are examined, challenged, and potentially abandoned. No doubt many Americans, including many American Christians, would object to my associating the word *sacred* with their patriotic proclivities and nationalistic loyalties. But as an Anabaptist Christian trained as a religious historian, I find it impossible to overlook the existence of formative, morally construed narratives out of which Americans (and others, for that matter) make sense of themselves, their communities, their nation, and their world. I would further contend that it is not inappropriate to describe these narratives as sacred—sacred in the sense that they orient people in their universe by constructing their identity, shaping their moral judgments, and fueling their actions.

Because the existence of a sacred counternarrative is so prominent in the Anabaptist tradition, and because Anabaptist scholars are so often cognizant of the contrasts that exist between their particular narrative and other sacred narratives, it seems useful to launch my consideration of Anabaptist scholarship by limning the outlines of two sacred narratives: one largely “American” and one “Anabaptist.”⁹

Sacred Narratives, American and Anabaptist

In her oft-cited essay “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” the sociologist Ann Swidler proposes the image of culture as a “tool kit.”¹⁰ According to Swidler, every culture possesses a particular set of tools—symbols, stories, and rituals—that persons in that particular culture use to solve problems. Contrasting this understanding of culture to the idea of culture as values (a view of culture that perceives human action as entirely ends-oriented), Swidler contends that most people “do not, indeed cannot, build up a sequence of actions piece by piece, striving with each act to maximize a given outcome.” Rather, “they construct chains of actions beginning with at least some pre-fabricated links,” that is, the preexisting tools of their culture. Swidler is not simplistic in her cultural analysis, noting for example that all cultures possess diverse and sometimes conflicting symbols, rituals, and stories. But here is where her idea of culture as tool kit is most compelling. Humans are not “cultural dopes,” writes Swidler, but are rather “skilled users of culture,” selecting the cultural tools that help them construct their lines of action. In all of this Swidler does not dismiss the importance of values, though she does encourage her readers to be realistic about their causal significance. “We can . . . recognize the significance of values,” writes Swidler, “if we acknowledge that values do not

shape action by defining its ends, but rather fine-tune the regulation of action within established ways of life.”¹¹

Twenty-first-century Americans no doubt encounter an even more daunting array of symbols, rituals, and stories than existed in 1986, when Swidler’s essay was first published. But even as American culture has become increasingly diverse, it is nonetheless true—and especially so after September 11—that most Americans have somewhere in their cultural tool kits a narrative that places America at or near the center of God’s purposes.¹² Numerous scholars of American life have probed the power of this particular narrative—few as clearly and concisely as religious historian Catherine Albanese. In her book *America: Religions and Religion*, Albanese rehearses the details of this peculiarly American narrative, highlighting its familiar features: wise Founding Fathers, their passion for liberty, a heroic revolution, and so on.¹³ To underscore the sacred quality of this American narrative, Albanese details the Pledge of Allegiance, a ubiquitous ritual that instructs American children about a particular creed (telling them they inhabit “one nation, under God, indivisible,” that aims to provide “liberty and justice for all”) and reminds them of an uncomplicated ethical code (that, due to what America represents, they must show “allegiance” to). Although Albanese doesn’t actually make this point, the visceral power of these cultural tools can be seen in the way certain objects in America’s civil religious cultus have been awarded a sacramental quality, most notably the flag itself. Like the bread and the wine in the Roman Catholic mass, which according to Roman thought embodies the real presence of Jesus Christ, so too do red, white, and blue pieces of cloth assume sanctified status in America’s civil religion, so much so that some Americans have sought to pass laws against flag “desecration.” It’s little wonder, says Albanese, that some religious groups have considered the Pledge of Allegiance an act of idolatry.¹⁴

In addition to limning the contemporary outlines of America’s civil religion, Albanese traces how this religion developed over time, often borrowing from Christian sources. Albanese is an astute enough historian to know that the founders of the American republic were not the evangelical Christians that some people have made them out to be. Nonetheless, Albanese grants the seventeenth-century Puritans their due for influencing some of the outlines of America’s civil religion, most notably the sense of divine chosenness that Americans have often assumed for themselves and their nation. The “city on a hill” idea in John Winthrop’s *Arbella* sermon—that is, Winthrop’s notion that the Puritans were setting out to create a New World community that the rest of the world would view as uniquely connected to God—is deeply embedded in America’s civil religion. So even though most contemporary Americans couldn’t delineate many differences between a Puritan and an Amishman, many continue to interpret the events that occur on American soil (and September 11 is a good example here) as uniquely important in God’s millennial plans.¹⁵

The Puritans, of course, didn't invent the idea that God might choose a special people and a special land for a special mission. Rather, they tied their sense of themselves to a much older narrative in which God's people were oppressed by God's enemies, escaping that oppression only by making a long, difficult journey through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. Not surprisingly, some Puritan divines talked about the Native Americans in the same cadences as the Hebrew writers talked about the Canaanites, asserting that the heathens needed to be cleansed from the land across the Atlantic Ocean even as the Israelites cleansed the land across the Jordan River.¹⁶ Other Puritan leaders believed that evangelizing their "savage" neighbors was a more humane option than genocide or land dispossession, though even then their means of proselytizing were often less than compassionate. Those who challenged the Puritan party line on Native Americans were given two options: shut up or leave. Roger Williams chose the latter option, setting up camp in Rhode Island, where he became the first great spokesperson for American religious liberty.¹⁷ In sum, Williams decided that being a follower of Jesus Christ and participating in the Puritans' particular brand of Christ-transforming culture were incompatible.

Which brings us to the early Anabaptists, who some hundred years before Roger Williams was banished from Massachusetts Bay decided that if they really wanted to be faithful followers of Jesus, they couldn't be faithful followers of Ulrich Zwingli. Zwingli, the leading minister in Zurich, Switzerland, joined up with the nascent Protestant movement in 1522, just five years after Luther posted his theses on the doors of Wittenberg's cathedral. Concerning himself primarily with moral and ecclesiastical reform, Zwingli soon came to the conclusion that the mass as performed in Zurich's churches was improperly conducted; he also began to hint that infant baptism might be indefensible as well. But rather than vigorously pursue those reforms, Zwingli chose to heed the advice of the Zurich city council, which warned him that implementing such reforms might result in theological confusion at best, social upheaval at worst. In short, Zwingli chose a politically conservative approach, an approach that alienated some of his closest disciples. Following their consciences, these youthful radicals broke with Zwingli and, shortly thereafter, baptized one another, symbolizing with baptismal waters their decision to create a new community based on conscious, adult commitments to Jesus Christ.¹⁸

The decision of these youthful radicals to become rebaptizers earned them the label "Anabaptists." It also set them at odds with both state and religious authorities. The Anabaptists were deemed outlaws, tracked down, and ordered to recant. Some did, but many did not, resulting in the execution of several thousand of them—not at the hands of Muslims or Hindus but at the hands of their fellow Christians, Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed. Surprisingly, most of these Anabaptists decided that, to be faithful to Jesus, they could not strike back at their enemies. They were, as one early Anabaptist wrote, like

“sheep for the slaughter.”¹⁹ Thus the Anabaptist movement was born, somehow surviving until Menno Simons and other second-generation leaders came along to organize, renew, and strengthen the movement.²⁰

This particular narrative, which prioritizes Zurich, the first adult baptisms, vigorous persecution, and a nonviolent Christian response, provides an important tool in the cultural tool kit of most Anabaptists. Of course, the *real* story of Anabaptist origins is far more complicated and much less pristine than the one just told. One historian, for instance, has argued that the radicalism of the early Anabaptist leader Conrad Grebel was as much a rebellion against his father (who sat on the Zurich city council) as it was a result of following his Bible-formed conscience.²¹ Other Reformation historians have advanced what has come to be known as the polygenesis thesis of Anabaptist origins, noting that there were lots of rebaptizers milling around in the sixteenth century, many of them not pacifists—indeed, many of them rather boorish and unseemly.²² So again, the historical record is not as tidy as the story I just recounted. But for present purposes, the real historical record is not particularly important. What is important is the fact that most contemporary Anabaptists, including most Anabaptist scholars, embrace the simpler, more pristine narrative as their own. Or to translate this into Swidler’s language, this simpler narrative is a much more useful tool for solving the problems that Anabaptists have faced throughout their history and continue to face today.

This formative Anabaptist narrative has been sustained via stories, symbols, and rituals in North America’s Anabaptist communities. For instance, membership classes in Anabaptist churches are more likely to instruct new members on the outlines of this narrative than they are to do theologically oriented catechetical instruction. Copies of *Martyrs Mirror*, which provides specific accounts of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Anabaptist martyrdom, can be found in most Anabaptist church libraries and many church members’ homes. The woodcut iconography of Dirk Willems, which illustrates the willingness of an early Anabaptist to lay down his life for his enemy, has gained near iconic status in some Anabaptist quarters; it is, we might say, the Anabaptists’ answer to the Iwo Jima memorial in Washington, D.C.²³ And the newest Mennonite and Brethren hymnal, devoid of nationalistic anthems like “The Star-Spangled Banner” and “My Country ’Tis of Thee,” contains a thirty-page section of hymns under the heading “Suffering.”²⁴ Far from triumphalistic renderings of the Christian life, these hymns encourage the singing congregation with ideas such as this: “What though my joys and comforts die? The Lord my Savior liveth. What though the darkness gather round? Songs in the night he giveth.”²⁵

These are only a few of the ways that Anabaptists sustain a historical narrative that orients them in the world. Of course, it’s important also to recognize that Anabaptists have traditionally linked the details of this sixteenth-century narrative to a much older narrative in which a lamb was led to slaughter after

offending both religious and political authorities. This earlier narrative, expressed most poignantly in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, features a radical who was encouraged by the authorities to renounce his calling and, when threatened with death, chose not to respond with the sword. For twenty-first-century Anabaptists, these two narratives are not coincidentally connected. Rather, the sixteenth-century story represents a mimetic response to the first-century story, and both narratives offer tools for twenty-first-century Anabaptists, including Anabaptist scholars, to shape their worlds and their work.

An Anabaptist “Perspective” on the World?

Recent discussions of Christian scholarship have awarded the notion of “perspectivalism” a prominent role. This notion, fueled by growing racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in the academy in the 1960s and 1970s, asserts that a person’s research is shaped, sometimes radically, by the perspective the person assumes or the social location she occupies.²⁶ Largely superceding the notion of “objectivity” (at least in the academy), perspectivalism has been warmly and widely embraced by Christian scholars, many of whom see it as a convenient opening to advance “a Christian perspective” on various issues. George Marsden, for example, affirms the notion of perspectivalism in his book *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, noting that “[k]eeping within our intellectual horizons a being who is great enough to create us and the universe . . . ought to change our perspectives on quite a number of things.”²⁷ More central to his book’s thesis, Marsden contends there is no compelling reason to silence religious perspectives in the secular academy. Since religious perspectives are as relevant to exploring the world as nonreligious perspectives (Marsden points to Marxism here as a case in point), religiously committed perspectives should not be ruled out of bounds, so long as those who hold them are willing “to support the rules necessary for constructive exchange of ideas in a pluralistic setting.”²⁸

While it is difficult to deny the reality of perspectivalism, many arguments about doing scholarship “from a Christian perspective” are fraught with problems, often because they claim too much. All too often these arguments neglect the fact that Christianity possesses many disparate theological traditions. Indeed, in their attempts to make a case for Christian scholarship to nonbelieving audiences, some scholars have operated from the naive (or perhaps disingenuous) assumption that Christianity is a monolithic entity, or at least a settled theological conversation. More than being naive, however, this assumption runs the danger of compromising the usefulness of talking about Christian scholarship by reducing Christianity’s theological reality to a few abstract, common-denominator beliefs shared by all Christians. More helpful, and ul-

timately more fruitful, is the nuanced recognition that all Christians participate in particular Christian traditions that, while sharing some things in common with other Christian traditions, nonetheless possess unique emphases and concerns.²⁹

Here, then, we arrive at the importance of scholarship in the Anabaptist tradition. More than most North American Christians, Christians in the Anabaptist tradition have long recognized that some of their understandings of the Christian faith clash with those held by other North American Christians. Indeed, Anabaptist theologians, church historians, and church leaders have devoted an extraordinary amount of energy seeking to differentiate Anabaptism and its theology from that of other Christian traditions. One influential book, published in the early 1970s, contended that the early Anabaptist movement was “neither Catholic nor Protestant,” a distinction the author deemed applicable to twentieth-century Anabaptists as well.³⁰ Other writers have cast Anabaptist/Mennonite distinctiveness in a different light, for example, as neither “liberal” nor “evangelical.”³¹ To be sure, many Anabaptist church members would not be able to articulate the details of their theological distinctiveness, and some have been easily attracted to more predominant (and less particular) theological expressions.³² Still, the peace tradition that continues to thrive in most Anabaptist churches serves to remind even the least articulate Anabaptist church members that Anabaptists are, in certain respects, different from most North American Christians.

But before I say too much here, I should be careful to avoid the same mistake that others have made in talking about “Christian scholarship,” namely, the mistake of assuming there is a monolithic “Anabaptist perspective” that all Anabaptists assume. One needn’t spend very much time around Goshen, Indiana, or Lancaster, Pennsylvania, to realize that, just as there are many Christian perspectives, so too are there many Anabaptist perspectives. For instance, the world’s most famous Anabaptists—Lancaster County’s Old Order Amish—have a perspective on education that essentially forbids the sort of “higher education” advocated in this book. Not only would the kind of scholarship detailed here be of relatively little interest to most Amish people but also many of them would find the suggestion that one’s faith might be sharpened by “worldly learning” a dubious idea indeed, perhaps sprouted by the devil himself! But other Anabaptists, who teach at places like Goshen, Bluffton, Penn State, and Harvard, would find the same idea commonsensical, perhaps even spiritually invigorating.

Rather than claiming an Anabaptist *perspective* (or, worse yet, invoking *worldview* language), it makes more sense to speak of the distinctive cultural tools that Anabaptist scholars bring to their work. These scholars cannot and should not be reduced to “Anabaptists,” as if being an Anabaptist defined their entire being. For in addition to being Anabaptists, these scholars are Canadians, Americans, Africans, and Asians; they are Mennonites, Brethren, Baptists,

and Anglicans; they are Dutch-Russian Mennonites, Swiss-German Mennonites, ex-Amish Mennonites, Latino Mennonites, and African-American Mennonites; and, of course, they are men and they are women. Like all Christians, then, Anabaptist scholars occupy a host of social locations and carry an array of tools in their cultural tool kits. Still, Anabaptists share an overlapping array of narratives, rituals, and symbols that allow them to fashion their own form of Christian scholarship. And it should therefore not be surprising that the scholarship produced by Anabaptists has exhibited distinctive hues and trumpeted particular themes.

Anabaptist Scholars at Work: A Few Examples

Since I began this chapter by focusing on readings of American history, I'll continue in that vein, citing an example of historical scholarship presently being done in the Anabaptist tradition. In their recent book *The Missing Peace: The Search for Nonviolent Alternatives in United States History*, James Juhnke and Carol Hunter offer alternate interpretations of various events in U.S. history, highlighting the possibilities of nonviolence to challenge what they call more traditional, violence-sanctioning interpretations. According to the authors, their nonviolent interpretive bias, which is rooted in their peace-church commitments, stands in sharp contrast to the prominent bias of "redemptive violence" that informs much historical writing about the United States, particularly writing at the popular level.³³ For example, when Juhnke and Hunter look at the American Revolution, they argue that, in addition to having been unnecessary for Americans to gain greater measures of self-determination, the war was not at all "revolutionary" in that it did not bring freedom to the people who needed it most, the African-American slaves.³⁴ In other words, the war was not the redeeming event that so many Americans imagine it to be, a recognition that, while not unique to Anabaptist scholars, is nonetheless an Anabaptist perspective that finds itself at odds with other prominent interpretations embraced by many American Christians. Indeed, in an insightful essay in *Fides et Historia*, William Vance Trollinger reminds us that Juhnke and Hunter's historical interpretations are likely to find the coolest welcome in conservative Christian schools that, for various reasons, are deeply committed to the idea of redemptive American violence.³⁵

In my own interactions with American college students, I too have found the myth of redemptive violence deeply embedded—so deeply embedded that it is hard for students to recognize it. One of the films I often show when we discuss the civil rights movement is *Mississippi Burning*. This movie, which dramatizes the FBI's investigation into the murders of three civil rights workers during Mississippi's Freedom Summer campaign, focuses on the work of two FBI agents, both of them white. The racial lines in the film are clearly

drawn—and are clearly drawn incorrectly. As the film's African-American characters cower in the background, their white, FBI agent rescuers bravely investigate the murders and, after torturing a white supremacist or two, solve the murder case. The film is a gripping one, and my students seem to enjoy it. But when I ask them afterward what was wrong with the picture it presented (even after we have studied the events of Freedom Summer), they usually do not know. The fact is, the film gets a lot of things wrong. For one, J. Edgar Hoover's FBI was hardly a friend of the civil rights movement. Second, African Americans in the South, while sometimes intimidated into inaction, did not by and large cower in their houses waiting for their white Northern friends to liberate them. But in addition to being a profoundly racist film, *Mississippi Burning* presents a historically indefensible story about the role of violence in the civil rights struggle. Throughout the film, the brutality of white supremacists is countered not by the suffering of nonviolent African Americans but by the "righteous" brutality of the FBI agents, who ride into Mississippi like two gun-slinging sheriffs. In other words, the courageous, largely nonviolent witness of Southern blacks—which I would argue is the real story from Freedom Summer—is itself slaughtered by a filmmaker who embraces and perpetuates the historiographical myth of redemptive violence.

To be sure, challenging the well-worn myth of redemptive violence is not the exclusive domain of Anabaptist scholars (i.e., it doesn't take an Anabaptist to recognize these sorts of shortcomings in *Mississippi Burning*).³⁶ Still, broad-ranging historical works like Juhnke and Hunter's, which self-consciously wield the tool of nonviolence, are precious few in the academy-at-large, in part because of a longstanding Anabaptist reticence to participate in discussions deemed relevant by the larger academic community. Indeed, only recently have significant numbers of Anabaptist scholars begun to set their scholarly sights higher than their own confessional (and typically ethnic) communities. These communities, some of which have been places of considerable intellectual ferment over the past fifty years, have nonetheless been relatively insular, and the conversations generated therein correspondingly parochial.³⁷ But this, I would argue, is undergoing a significant transformation. At the risk of claiming too much for the present generation of Anabaptist scholars, these current scholars have increasingly recognized that their work can contribute something of value not only to their fellow Anabaptists but to the disciplines generally and thereby the larger world.³⁸

The growing public-mindedness of Anabaptist scholars is evident at many turns, perhaps most impressively in the realm of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Eastern Mennonite University, nestled in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, boasts a well-regarded graduate program in conflict transformation, attracting students from many regions of the world. The credibility of this program is rooted, at least in part, in the ongoing contributions its faculty members are making to real-world conflict transformation. Victim-Offender

Reconciliation Programs (VORP) and related initiatives, which seek to move the justice system beyond “retributive justice” to “restorative justice,” have been key concerns, particularly in the work of the VORP pioneer Howard Zehr.³⁹ Other faculty members have worked internationally, addressing large-scale, deeply rooted conflicts between tribal groups, religious parties, and nation-states. The most renowned individual in this regard is John Paul Lederach, who has worked (among other places) in Northern Ireland, Central America, and Central Africa. Reflecting the practical, ethical concerns that have long characterized the Anabaptist tradition, Lederach, who also holds an appointment at Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, is perhaps best known for being a skilled practitioner. But he is also a scholar, reflecting carefully on his craft and contributing frequently to a growing body of literature in the area of peacebuilding.⁴⁰

While scholarly endeavors in the area of peacemaking and conflict transformation reveal the most obvious connections to Anabaptist history and theology, other Anabaptist scholars have wielded other Anabaptist cultural tools. Prioritizing the Anabaptist emphasis on community building and face-to-face relationships, Mennonite economist James Harder argues for an Anabaptist approach to economics that limits “the way in which the market economy is allowed to operate” in order to “preserve space for strong and vibrant local economies that foster a sense of community cooperation.” Turning his focus toward caring for the most vulnerable members of American society, Harder contends that America’s economists, rather than focusing primarily on economic growth, should devote more of their energy to rethinking policies “that allow the wealthiest 1 percent of households in the United States to control 57 percent of all wealth while leaving 44 million Americans with no health insurance.”⁴¹ To be sure, Harder’s concern for the poor and oppressed cannot be reduced to his Anabaptist commitments or cultural heritage. In an autobiographical piece describing his scholarly motivations and objectives, Harder recounts his experience of teaching economics in an economically deprived Kenyan province—an experience that, from all indications, affected his thinking as much as the economics courses he took as an undergraduate at a Mennonite-affiliated college.⁴² Still, it is arguable that Anabaptist scholarship and, more generally, Anabaptist-related education have demonstrated a keen interest in recognizing, evaluating, and addressing the needs of the world’s most vulnerable people, an interest rooted in and sustained by a historical narrative in which Anabaptists are themselves suffering and vulnerable.⁴³

Some observers might find it ironic (and perhaps even hypocritical) that wealthy, well-fed, securely employed Anabaptist scholars would claim to identify with the world’s marginalized people. Given that most North American Anabaptists are relatively wealthy, and given that the most recent persecution recounted in *Martyrs Mirror* occurred over three hundred years ago, isn’t it a little much to claim solidarity with people who suffer today?⁴⁴ Similarly, doesn’t

the Anabaptist emphasis on nonviolence ring hollow in a social context in which Anabaptists are well protected politically, economically, and physically? Such questions, while difficult to address, are certainly not out of bounds. North American Anabaptists, who sometimes overestimate the depth of their own ethical rigor and moral compassion, need humbly to admit that their ability to identify with suffering people, let alone embrace suffering itself, is very limited indeed. At the same time, it is difficult to disparage any cultural tool that compels scholars to tend to the needs of the world's vulnerable people or helps them critique the cultural myths that sanctify American violence, wealth, and power. As long as Anabaptists keep telling their peculiar stories and reenacting their community rituals, those sorts of cultural tools should never be in short supply.

NOTES

1. Dave Barry, "The Power of Goodness Will Prevail," reprinted in *Newsday*, September 17, 2001. Barry's column and the subsequent references to the Tokyo bombing are cited in Perry Bush, "The Lessons of History," *Mennonite*, October 23, 2001, 6.

2. "Firebirds' Flight," *Time*, March 19, 1945, 32.

3. Cartoons cited in Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 13. My point here is not to argue precise parallels between the events of September 2001 and those of March and August 1945; it is to suggest that the historical memory of many Americans is conveniently selective, allowing them to construct a moral universe in which the other is easily demonized and we are easily let off the hook.

4. I was reminded of this recently when I visited a large chain bookstore near my home. Near the store's front entrance sat a table stacked shoulder-high with books, with a sign boasting "U.S. History." Perusing the table, I soon discovered that the only sort of history occupying this table was *military* history, most of it related to the Civil War and World War II.

5. I've placed the word *disinterest* in quotation marks, since *disinterest* suggests passive noninterest. There was nothing passive about the approach of those who sought to reconfigure and/or cancel the Enola Gay exhibit. Their response to the exhibit was not so much *disinterest* as an aggressive attempt to quash a morally sensitive mode of historical inquiry.

6. For example, a fortieth-anniversary exhibit, displayed in 1985 at the National Museum of American History, limited itself to displaying replicas of the bombs' casings, along with plaques that, according to historian Marilyn Young, allowed the casings to "speak for themselves." Marilyn B. Young, "Dangerous History: Vietnam and the 'Good War,'" in *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*, edited by Edward T. Linenthal and Thomas Engelhardt (New York: Holt, 1996), 205.

7. One need not be a pacifist to ponder such questions and come to the conclusion that it was not justified. In his classic *Just and Unjust Wars*, Michael Walzer con-

cluded that America's use of the atomic bomb could not be justified according to standard just war criteria. See Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 264-68.

8. Young, "Dangerous History," 208-209.

9. The idea that a particular narrative is central to Anabaptist identity is hardly novel. See, for example, Richard T. Hughes, *How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 82-84. Hughes calls Mennonites/Anabaptists a "story-formed community" and argues that this story compels Anabaptist scholars to honor particular commitments.

10. Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986), 273-86.

11. Swidler, "Culture in Action," 276, 277, 282.

12. How else can we explain the surge in interest in apocalyptic literature following the events of September 11? See Nancy Gibbs, "Apocalypse Now," *Time*, July 1, 2002, 40-48.

13. Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth, 1999), 438-45.

14. Albanese, *America: Religion and Religions*, 432-33.

15. Albanese, *America: Religion and Religions*, 435.

16. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 75; Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 80-85.

17. Roger Williams's most thorough indictment of Puritan policies toward Native Americans was his treatise *Christenings Make Not Christians*. For a summary of Williams's ideas and influence, see Edwin S. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991).

18. For a more detailed summary of these events, see J. Denny Weaver, *Becoming Anabaptist: The Origin and Significance of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1987), 25-51.

19. In a letter to Thomas Müntzer in 1524, Michael Sattler wrote: "The gospel and its adherents are not to be protected by the sword, nor are they thus to protect themselves. . . . True Christian believers are sheep among wolves, sheep for the slaughter." See *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, edited by George Huntston Williams (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), 80.

20. John D. Roth, "The Mennonites' Dirty Little Secret," *Christianity Today*, October 7, 1996, 44-48.

21. Peter Iver Kaufman, "Social History, Psychohistory, and the Prehistory of Swiss Anabaptism," *Journal of Religion* 68 (1988), 527-44.

22. See James M. Stayer, Werner O. Packull, and Klaus Deppermann, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49 (1975), 83-121.

23. The woodcut image of Dirk Willems can be found in Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*, 5th ed. (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1949), 741.

24. *Hymnal: A Worship Book* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1992).

25. From Robert Lowry's 1869 hymn "My Life Flows On."

26. For a consideration of perspectivalism in the discipline of history, see Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
27. George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.
28. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, 45.
29. Clearly George Marsden is not so naive as to think that Christianity is monolithic. Nevertheless, in the course of his *Outrageous Idea* argument, he tends to emphasize the commonalities of Christians, underscoring such beliefs as God as creator and the sinfulness of human beings. But as the historian William Vance Trollinger noted in an address before the Conference on Faith and History, such common-denominator beliefs are so abstract that it is difficult to know how they would "mark out a particular sort of historical interpretation," that is, "it is not clear . . . how they will result in a definably Christian interpretation of history." "Faith, History, and the Conference on Faith and History," *Fides et Historia* 23 (2001), 7.
30. Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Waterloo, Ontario: Conrad Press, 1973).
31. See Paul M. Lederach, *A Third Way: Conversations about Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1980), and *Evangelicalism and Anabaptism*, edited by C. Norman Kraus (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1979). For more recent (and popular) considerations of these issues, see Thomas Finger, "The Place to Begin Mennonite Theology," *Gospel Herald*, July 30, 1996, 1-3; and J. Nelson Kraybill, "Is Our Future Evangelical?" *Mennonite*, March 5, 2002, 14-16.
32. See J. Denny Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical: Mennonite and Amish Atonement Theology in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1997).
33. James C. Juhnke and Carol M. Hunter, *The Missing Peace: The Search for Non-violent Alternatives in United States History* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 2001), especially 9-14.
34. Juhnke and Hunter, *The Missing Peace*, 35-51.
35. Trollinger, "Faith, History, and the Conference on Faith and History," 8.
36. Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1990).
37. After Anabaptists had lived in sectarian and antiintellectual isolation for much of their history, some Anabaptists embraced higher education with vigor during the twentieth century, but primarily as a way to shape their own particular culture. When they did engage the larger culture, they mostly did so with the idea that the best way to be "salt and light" was by empowering people in and through small, scattered communities around the world. There's much to be said for this mode of cultural transformation, but whether we frame it positively or negatively, the fact is the vast majority of Anabaptist educator-scholars did little to engage non-Anabaptist minds through much of the twentieth century. See Keith Graber Miller, "Transformative Education," in *Teaching to Transform: Perspectives on Mennonite Higher Education*, edited by Keith Graber Miller (Goshen, Ind.: Pinchpenny Press, 2000), 2-3.
38. The record, of course, is uneven. In the realm of theological ethics, Anabaptists (most prominently, John Howard Yoder) have engaged in larger disciplinary conversations for decades. On the other hand, many Anabaptist historians continue to

focus most of their scholarly energies on tracing the histories of Amish, Mennonite, and Brethren groups. In that sense, Juhnke and Hunter's *Missing Peace* is a welcome exception.

39. Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1990).

40. Lederach's books include: *A Handbook of International Peacebuilding: Into the Eye of the Storm*, with Janice Moomaw Jenner (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002); *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding*, coedited with Cynthia Sampson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1998); and *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

41. James M. Harder, "The 'Anabaptist School' of Economics," in *Minding the Church: Scholarship in the Anabaptist Tradition*, edited by David Weaver-Zercher (Telford, Pa.: Pandora Press U.S., 2002), 137.

42. Harder, "The 'Anabaptist School' of Economics," 127-28.

43. See Miller, "Transformative Education," 7-9. From a curricular standpoint, Goshen College's Study-Service Term (SST) program represents most clearly the Anabaptist concern for the world's most vulnerable people. More than simply an "international" learning experience, Goshen's SST program requires students to spend a trimester in a developing nation, where they learn from and, in small ways, serve their hosts.

44. I should note that some Anabaptist/Mennonite communities have suffered terribly in more recent times, for example, Ukrainian Mennonites during and after the Russian Revolution. For one scholar's reflections on the significance of that, see Alvin C. Dueck, "Anabaptism and Psychology: From Above and Below," in Weaver-Zercher, *Minding the Church*, 114-16.

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RHONDA HUSTEDT JACOBSEN

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

2004

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Oxford New York
Auckland Bangkok Buenos Aires Cape Town Chennai
Dar es Salaam Delhi Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi Kolkata
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai Nairobi
São Paulo Shanghai Taipei Tokyo Toronto

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198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016
www.oup.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Scholarship and Christian faith: enlarging the conversation /
Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-19-517038-5

1. Church and college. 2. Learning and scholarship—Religious
aspects—Christianity. 3. Education (Christian theology) I. Jacobsen,
Douglas G. (Douglas Gordon), 1951– II. Jacobsen, Rhonda Hustedt.

LC383 .S33 2004

378'.071—dc21 2003008369

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper