

Final Issue of Mennonot

Publisher's Note:

Here, at long last, is the final issue of Mennonot, Issue #13. This issue of Mennonot is very past due. As you read this issue, please bear in mind that most all of the writers penned their words over 2 years ago. The remarkable delay in publication was solely the result of the procrastinations and other events in the life of the publisher from Ohio.

Nonetheless, here it is. Enjoy.

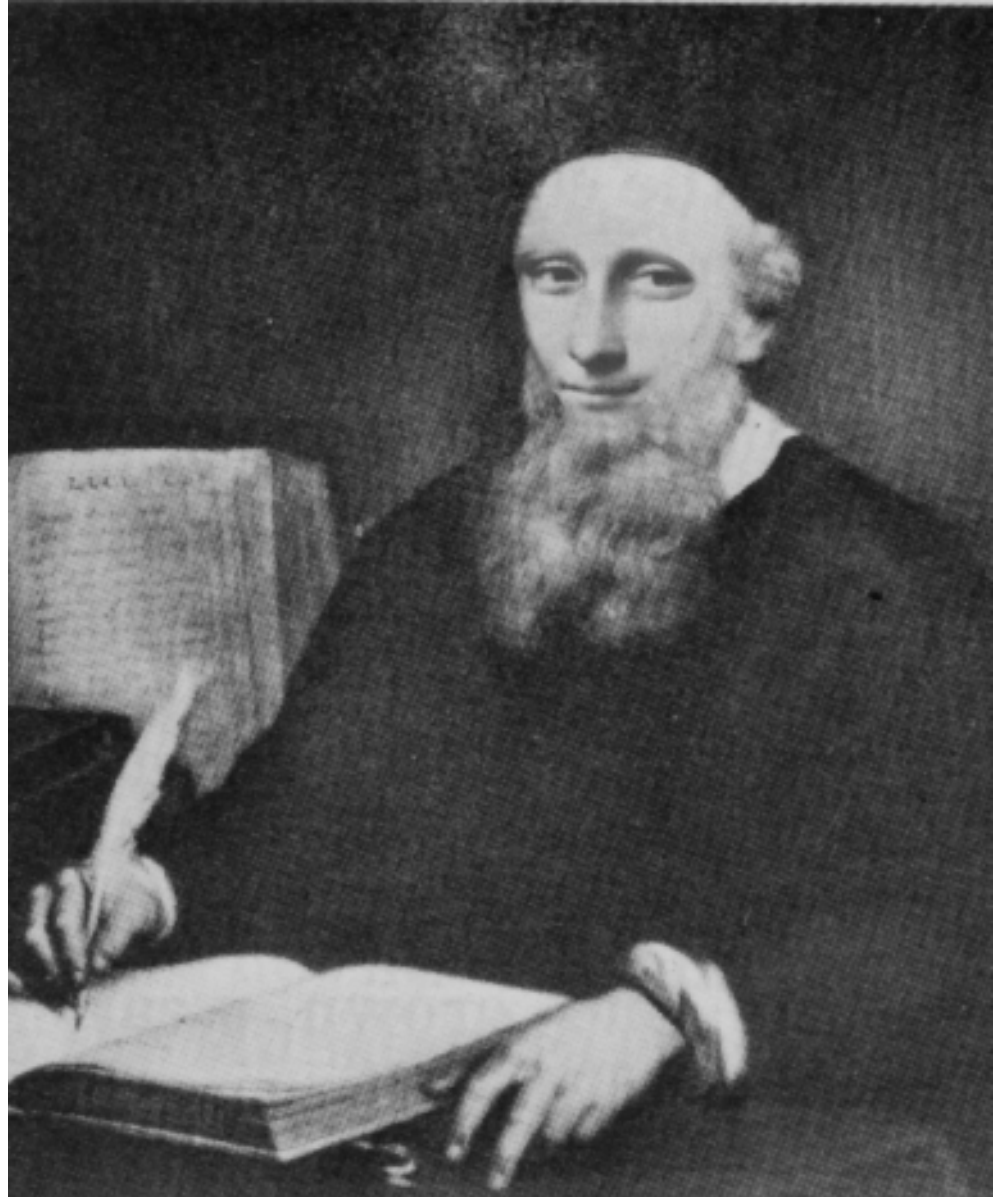
Steven L. Mullet
January 4, 2004

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M E N N O N O T

FOR
MENNOS
ON THE
MARGINS

No. 13 2003 A.D.



MENNO LISA: Our first cover and, eventually, our mascot.

What a long, strange trip it's been

By Sheri Hostetler

This is the last issue of *Mennonot*. Most of you probably assumed the old girl had died anyway, since you hadn't received an issue for so long. Consistency is one thing *Mennonot* has never been accused of, and since Emerson called consistency the "hobgoblin of little minds," we're sort of proud of that fact.

I have several reasons for packing it in.

By Steve Mullet

As I write this, the final issue of *Mennonot* has been on my desk awaiting final production for nearly two years. I'm typically not so drastic a procrastinator, and perhaps this lengthy delay is indicative of the need to bring *Mennonot* to a close. I have had the busiest and most intense agenda of my life over this past year. *Mennonot* was not a part of that agenda. I apologize for the delay.

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One is simply practical. Once I began working full-time jobs again, I discovered I had little time or energy left over for doing *Mennonot* — not that it takes a lot, but I am by nature a slothful person and would rather spend my after-work hours petting the cat and picking on my husband.

Of course, there are other reasons besides the practical. By way of explanation, I had thought I would title this farewell column “How My Mind Has Changed,” an idea nabbed from the *Christian Century*. They would ask a well-known theologian to write an article on how their mind had changed over the years, and I always found it fascinating to see how their thinking had evolved, metamorphosed, and sometimes reversed itself. (Consistency, it turned out, was not their strong point either, thank goodness.) But, in truth, my mind hasn’t changed all that much. Most of the opinions I have voiced in the pages of this rag are ones to which I still hold. It would be more apt to title this column “How My Heart Has Changed.”

A good deal of what lurked in my heart when I founded *Mennonot* was a sense of solidarity for those of us who considered ourselves Mennonite but didn’t see ourselves represented in mainstream publications or conversations. I founded *Mennonot* because I wanted there to be at least one forum within the Mennonite community where we could speak without censorship, where we could bring all those doubts and rants, identities and jokes that didn’t seem to fit or be tolerated anywhere else. This sense of solidarity has remained and, if anything, is stronger than it was seven years ago.

What also lurked in my heart was anger. I was angry at a community that purported to draw its ethics from the life of Jesus and then in his name maimed the spirits of people I cared deeply about (including myself). I was angry at a church dedicated to peace that was

capable of committing acts of emotional and psychic violence that struck far deeper than a fist to the face would have. Soon after founding *Mennonot*, I was at a restaurant in Oakland with my friend, Mark. I had just heard of yet another act of emotional violence committed for the sake of that favorite Mennonite idol, church purity. A Catholic acquaintance of his came over to our table, someone who was very active in the nuclear disarmament movement. (She had recently been arrested yet again for scaling the walls at a local nuclear weapons lab.) When my friend Mark introduced me as Mennonite, she nodded admirably, almost reverently in my direction, “Oh, a member of a historic peace church.” I snorted and said, “Yes, we’re very peaceful. We don’t kill others, just ourselves.”

We’re still killing each other, I think. What has changed is my anger is no longer there. I’m not sure what happened, but instead of being angry at “those people” who are doing bad things to people I love, I’ve found myself loving “those people.” (My favorite guru, Jesuit priest Tom Hand, says to love is to “discover oneness and to totally accept it.” It’s what I mean here.) I realize that, for the most part, “those people” are trying as hard as any of us to live a good, ethical life. They are trying to be true to a church and community they also value. I do not agree with their truth; my mind has not changed. But my heart has. I’m more willing now to listen to them, to hear what is being said beneath words that are sometimes hurtful, and to try to build a bridge between two shores that sometimes look awfully far apart.

In truth, that metaphor isn’t accurate. I don’t think a bridge needs to be built, because we’re not on opposite shores at all. We’re all in the same river. None of us have the safety of a shoreline. We’re each of us trying to stay

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■ READER'S WRITE

Memorable Mennos

On page 6 of the Summer 1999 *Mennonot*, you inquire about the possible Mennonite roots of Kim Basinger and Dyan Cannon. I don't know about Basinger, but Dyan Cannon definitely has such background. Born Samille Diane Friesen, her ancestors were part of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church in Russia. The details of the story are told by Delbert Plett in an article entitled "Dyan Friesen Cannon, a Bergthaler!" published in the June 1998 issue of *Preservings*, a publication of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society.

John Denver's grandmother was a Mennonite Brethren in Oklahoma. His real name was Henry John Deutschendorf. His father left the Mennonite church, but his grandmother remained a member all her life.

■ PLEASURE WITH PAIN FOR LEAVEN

Adieu, adieu to yieu and yieu and yieu

From the disenchanted perspective of the 21st century, the brief floruit of the 'zine *Mennonot* is frequently viewed as an aberration, an abomination, a mildly diseased symptom of the Mennonite world's fin de siècle decadence. By now we've all heard the story of the nascence of the concept "Mennonot" in the lurid imagination of Sheri Hostetler, exploding like a delirious toadstool in her fevered brain at a soiree in a neighborhood crack bar in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco.

"Mennonot"! Of course! Why didn't I think of that? For almost a year, the concept reverberated among the best minds of a generation of Menno outcasts in the big city and Holmes County, Ohio. The strangled cry

Ross L. Bender lives in West Philadelphia and hasn't moved for 15 years. The doctor thinks it might be catatonia.

But why stop with Cannon and Denver? An even better celebrity with Mennonite connections is Matt Groening of "Simpsons" fame. His grandparnets were members of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church in Kansas, and his grandftather, Abraham Groening, taught for many years at Tabor College.

Matt's parents are named Homer and Marge. Better yet, his mom's maiden name was "Wiggum" (just like Police Chief Wiggum). Matt's grandfather and Grandpa Simpson also share the same first name. This material comes from a Wiebe-Groening family history published several years ago in Kansas.

Just knowing that some of our own made it big helps us all feel a little less insecure and inadequate about ourselves, doesn't it?

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arose, "What is a Mennonot?" Valiant attempts were made to defy logic and provide a satisfactory definition. Interviews of "Mennonots" from flesh-piercing performance artists to wannabe poets at provincial Mennonite colleges were published, exemplifying the psychic qualities of that elusive quantity. Sometimes the magazine hit the bulls-eye, sometimes it went wide by a mile. Eventually the gnawing question arose, "Who really gives a shit?"

Recent studies have attributed the demise of *Mennonot* to faulty marketing technique. Certainly the initial campaign, in which every issue was mailed out with a 3.5" floppy disk containing the complete works of Menno Simons was a disaster; financially, it set the magazine back about three years, and merely puzzled, rather than stimulated, the subscriber base. The seemingly brilliant stratagem of placing coin-operated boxes on every intersection in Kidron, Ohio foundered when no one ever had exactly \$2.50 in coins to put in the slot to retrieve the publication, even had they had sufficient curiosity and the sense of adventure to purchase what looked vaguely like a homemade pornographic newspaper. The nefarious scheme to smuggle *Mennonot* out as an insert in *Festival Quarterly* collapsed just on the eve of the

HOW YOU KNOW YOU'VE HAD TOO MUCH OF THE 1990s, #1

You tried to enter your password on the microwave.

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A WELCOMING WEB SITE

A group of courageous people within the Mennonite church calling themselves "The Welcome Committee" has gone public with their support for gay and lesbian people. Check out their Web site at www.welcome-committee.org.

collapse of *Festival Quarterly*.

Eventually, as we have all come to acquiesce in the triumph of rampant world capitalism, a mist has lifted from our eyes and we recognize the truth of the dictum: "It's the economy, stupid." In baldest terms, there simply ain't enough Mennonots in this world to subsidize the production of a magazine just for them. Even had the number of subscriptions ever soared above the peak figure of 27 (#9, sometime in early 1998), there would not have been enough.

Because the plain fact is that, boys and girls, there ain't no Mennonots. The feverish drug-inspired concept that exploded in Sheri Hostetler's brain remains just that — a feverish drug-inspired concept. Because, to put it in the simplest terms, there are Mennonites and there are Mennonites, and then, there are people who are not Mennonites. There is not, except in your dreams, a fence-stragglng intergendered category of actual people who are both Mennonites and not Mennonites.

Science has demonstrated that the sense of Mennoniteness vanishes after only one generation away from the church. Ex-Mennonites in the big city often like to think they're Jews, participating in a tangible ethnicity even though they're completely secular. No such thing. And that's why there's no market for a publication aimed at vaguely sentimental ex-Mennonites. Because there is no market. No Mennonots.

As Amos Stoltzfus, the Amish Druid, used to say: "You're either on the buggy or off the buggy."

I'm sad to see *Mennonot* go. Of course, I got my copy free, by virtue of writing some nonsense for every issue. But if it had been a choice between spending my \$2.50 on *Mennonot* and a bottle of Thunderbird, there would have been no choice at all.

■BLAST FROM THE PAST

Top ten reasons for being glad you're a Mennonite

Editor's note: This top ten list ran in the first issue of Mennonot. Some of the humor refers to events current at the time, but for the most part, it's still funny. Of course, I'm biased. Jerome Baggett, my Catholic husband, wrote it.

10. Over 600 songs in the new Mennonite hymnal and not one of them is *Kum Ba Yah*.
9. The excitement is really building over the upcoming motion picture, starring Harrison Ford and Kelly McGinnis, about Mennonite ethnic diversity called *Whiteness*.
8. Church leaders plan to remain true to the traditional stance of military non-involvement by prophetically declaring all Mennonites to be gay or lesbian.
7. Who can dance to rap music anyway?
6. The fellowship at the annual Amish-Mennonite Oktoberfest is never strained by a nasty hangover.
5. Three words: three bean salad.
4. Completing one's education without ever experiencing sex ed taught by an 80-year-old nun claiming to be "married to Christ" greatly increases the possibility of having a healthy sex life.
3. Menno Simons could have kicked Luther's and Calvin's butts.
2. Church leaders took a dramatic step forward in the cause of women's rights by affirming that head coverings need not be worn during the swimsuit competition at the Miss America pageant.
1. Large gene pools are so darn impersonal.

Mennonot's Award for Most Ironic Convention Theme



Mennonite Convention Atlanta 2003

** Certain restrictions may apply. Void where prohibited by Membership Guidelines, conference shenanigans, or other such misguided human attempts to usurp God's role.*

■ FAREWELLS

Postcards from the end

When we realized we were calling it a day, Mennonot asked some of our regular contributors to write down their farewells and final thoughts for us. Mennonot was only as good as the writing we published, and the voices below were among the best. Thanks, Menno muses.

Sheri Hostetler

The articles that could have been...

Alas, the end of the *Mennonot*, the publication which gave me an excuse to keep a pen near at hand while I drank.

The saddest part of the demise of *Mennonot* is all the unwritten articles still roaming around in my head. Things like:

“*Confessions of Candi Harder: Mennonite Exotic Dancer.*” Her story begins at a Mennonite Convention workshop on liturgical movement and ends with her multimedia show “Stripping with the Saints.” While stories of the martyrs flash across the video screen, Candi, in various stages of attire, interprets their lives through dance. (Bet you didn’t know that before being burned at the stake our ancestors were spanked.)

“*More With Less: The Game Show.*” Each team of contestants is given a 12” piece of string, 3 empty used envelopes, half a boiled potato, a 25-pound bag of brown rice, a pencil, some tinfoil, a hymnal sampler and some organic honey. They must use all and only these ingredients and design a missionary sending service, an ethnic potluck, a youth fundraiser and three committee meetings all with gender, age and height balance.

“*Schism for the Hell of It.*” An in-depth look at what Anabaptists do best and an injunction to celebrate this heritage. This would also include the side-bar, “Integration is just another word for shut-the-hell-up.”

“*Elvis is an Amish Man.*” Unveils recently discovered documents and pictures that demonstrate that Elvis is alive and well as an Amish pretzel maker in Shipshewana. Evidence includes a Polaroid of a speeding pink buggy, a sudden run on sequins at Yoder’s

Department store, and an interview with a 14-year-old Middlebury girl who lives with Elvis but claims there is nothing going on.

And finally, 'Frieda,' the story of a Mennonite chef who swears off veal so that the people at 'More-With-Less' will not think she's callous and include her recipe for 'Double baked butter-nut squash.'"

Even without these riveting bits, *Mennonot* was a pretty entertaining piece of work. Thank you, Sheri and Steve, for all the work. Thanks for printing things when you really should have known better. Thanks for making Mennonites seem like an occasionally not boring group of people. And thanks for knowing when to hold ‘em and when to fold ‘em.

Kevin Driedger

You say goodbye and I say hello

Congratulations to *Mennonot* on concluding a successful publishing venture. As editor of *Rhubarb*, another independent publication for “Mennonites on the margins,” I know how much work, love and commitment is involved in making a magazine. Thanks and loads of appreciation to Sheri and Steve and all the contributors and guest editors for having done so much so well.

A special thanks for the opportunity to guest edit a Canadian issue. It was this opportunity and the enjoyment I got out of doing it that encouraged me to begin a cross-border, two-countries, one-publication, arts magazine devoted to work of writers and artists of Mennonite heritage, descent or interest.

I always looked forward to reading *Mennonot*. I was especially engaged by its tone, a “lightness of being” that made it a joy to read. The ability to inject humor and make a joyful noise can not be underestimated. I especially appreciate this right now that I’m editing an edition of *Rhubarb* with humor as its theme. Some days I think I would have been better off calling it “the importance of being earnest.” I think many serious ideas can be best communicated with a lightness of touch that *Mennonot* was usually able to carry off, overcoming the ethnic weaknesses of earnestness. I am certain I will not be the only one to miss *Mennonot*, and I join in with other readers and contributors who wish happy

EXPRESSIONS FOR HIGH STRESS DAYS, #1

I’m not tense, just terribly, terribly alert.

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2003 A.D.

SUBMIT TO SIMPLICITY

“Alternatives for Simple Living” is looking for humorous, serious, religious and secular quotations and graphic illustrations about voluntary simplicity, sustainability, social justice and related topics. The aforementioned will be published, via paper and CD-ROM, sometime in 2001. To learn more about submitting something or simply about the cool resources “Alternatives” makes available, check out their Web site at www.SimpleLiving.org.

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MENNONOT

trails for Sheri and Steve.

At the same time I'm not going to miss the opportunity to put in a plug for *Rhubarb*, which continues to publish, if somewhat erratically, the best literary and visual work of Mennonites, near-Mennonites, declined Mennonites and Mennonite wannabe's.

We accept work not related to each issue's theme for visual arts, fiction and poetry contributions. I would especially encourage U.S. contributors to send in their work. I would also like to make contact with more visual artists from the States. We still have a lot of good visual art to choose from north of the border, but I have not got the network yet to ensure any knowledge of the U.S. Mennonite visual arts community. Any leads would be appreciated. (For more information on *Rhubarb*, see sidebar below.)

Victor Jerrett Ens

Leaving home

Editor's Note: The following is an email correspondence between Scott Holland and myself, which started out being about the last issue of Mennonot and quickly segued into a discourse on the Anabaptist spiritual imagination that offers several salient salvos for Mennonot readers to savor.

Mennonot was an important voice and it will indeed be missed. But to everything there is a season and a time for every purpose...

You know, something interesting to explore in the final *Mennonot* might be why so many Menno poets & writers & intellectuals can claim the Anabaptist-Menno heritage as their cultural home of origin but no longer

their spiritual home. Several who remain interested in Menno history & culture can no longer worship in Menno-Anabaptist churches. Even my first Menno editor, Walter Klaassen, now attends an Anglican church. It could be that this is because the root metaphors & founding narratives of Anabaptism (and not simply conservative local churches influenced by fundamentalism) cannot be translated into an authentic modern/postmodern spirituality. I really wonder. You know, during my troubles with the Mennonites, I often quoted the words of my 103-year-old grandmother, Leitchman Holland: "Because Brethren & Mennonites don't believe in war, we must nevertheless find some way to shed blood in church." It took me some years to "get it." I think she was right. The tradition, in its repression of both sex and aggression, constructs a morally punishing, even terrorizing, system. A transference. On the rare occasions when the community gathers for Communion, it is not about Eucharist, Thanksgiving and Celebration – it is about discipline, correction and criticism, about who is worthy to come to the table and who is unworthy: GOD = ETHICS is Menno math. Even in more progressive congregations, the root metaphor continues to inhibit anything close to celebration. This is perhaps why many Anabaptist artists & intellectuals are leaving Anabaptism as a possible spiritual home. Well, enough of this! - Scott

I was fascinated by your idea of exploring why so many Menno poets and writers and intellectuals claim the Menno heritage as their cultural home of origin but not their spiritual

**There's still an independent publication for
"Mennos on the margins" out there...**

Rhubarb

published by the Mennonite Literary Society

For further information, check it out on the web at:

www.mennolit.com

Contributions are encouraged, back issues are available, and a four-issue subscription can be had for \$20 US by mailing to:

Rhubarb, 200 Lenore Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 2C5

home. I think your ideas get very close to something I told Steve the other night. I'm on staff at a Methodist church in Helena, and the Methodists have felt like home to me because they combine the best of what I love about Mennonites – social conscience, walking the talk, etc. – but, unlike many Mennonites, they're happy! They actually believe in grace, and they love to celebrate. Since I am really only familiar with the Methodist church I work at, I don't know if some of this is peculiar to St. Paul's or is more a part of the Methodist denominational "charism." - Sheri

You know, I have recently been giving some thought to the differences between Anabaptist-Mennonite Communion and Methodist or Episcopal Eucharist. In our tradition, the Lord's table has been a heavy symbol of discipline, correction and criticism – and of course exclusion and even punishment of the nonconforming individual. The Communion is not really a Eucharist, a Thanksgiving, at least in the tradition. However, in Eucharistic traditions, there is "confession," but it is "we confess," and the WE can embrace rather than exclude the individual. After confession, the accent in word and ritual is one of grace, thanksgiving and celebration. When the root metaphors, rituals and narratives of a religious traditions center on discipline rather than confession/grace/thanksgiving/celebration, it is hard to be happy even around the tavern table! No? - Scott

I think your riff on the Anabaptist Lord's Supper vs. Methodist/Episcopal Eucharist is fascinating. Yes, perhaps there's something askew with the central metaphor. And how does one go about changing central metaphors? I've been trying to excavate the wild, passionate side of my Anabaptist roots – because I know it's there. That kind of Radical Reformation had to be fueled by passion. I think a poem I wrote about a year ago captures this excavation. I was haunted by an Anabaptist woman martyr, and this is what she said...

The Woman with the Screw in Her Mouth Speaks

When people are starving, they go inside. This is the only way to survive. Conserve. Save. Go to the quiet place in yourself

and wait for the day food come. Wait without hoping, for hope takes energy and you have very little to spare.

We went inside, too, but we wrapped our silence around a kernel of fear. This fear fed us, and for this we were grateful. It made us shrewd and cautious, not dim-witted like those who starve, nor desperate. For us were the orderly rows of corn, the tight cluster of farm buildings. Our barns were clean and painted white, bright white. No one, no one, was going to find a blemish, an opening, a crooked row, a reason. For the most part, outsiders would not see us, and when they did, they would see only perfection.

And now what has happened to you? Some of the ancestors are not pleased. They fear for you; some fear for themselves. They would tell you not to be messy and bold. Don't take us down with you, they say. But listen to me. We oldest ones remember: The dying was worth it. Every pain. We were chosen to bring something new into the world. They had to keep us from singing. They had to keep us from singing.
- Sheri

You and I have both, I think, tired to recover the wild and passionate side of our Anabaptist roots. Yet even progressive contemporary Anabaptists have not always been sympathetic. Even Arnold Snyder has been rather critical of this tendency in my work because, "as an historian," he finds this effort "unsystematic and not reflective of the normative course of our history." Well of course! It is not normative or systematic — it is transgression, excess and gift! Not all of our sisters had their tongues screwed, at least not literally, but this metaphorical memory can help us all resist too much normativity and too many systems. - Scott

Aw, shucks

I have always admired your courage and optimism in taking on the *Mennonot* project, Sheri. It amazed me that you could deal with the issues you did and somehow refrain from cynicism. I always figured it had to do with living on the sunny West Coast, but more likely it was related to a vision fueled by God's grace and a certain kind of stamina that I've

MENNONITE FUSION FOODS

■ Mesquite-grilled mahi-mahi accompanied by buttered lima beans

■ Pork and sauerkraut with tofu in a plum-orange sauce

From "Jackie Lapp's Fusion Haus Menu" in the January 2000 issue of Central Pennsylvania magazine. Thanks to Cathleen Hockman for bringing this to our attention.

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2003 A.D.

DEFINITIONS, #1

Diagnostic:
Someone who
doesn't know
whether there are
two gods.



MENNONOT

been unable to muster in recent years. You are a hero, Sheri! Really. You gave us a name, *Mennonot*, and you insisted that institutions grow to include us. (“We here, we’re queer, get used to it!”) Part of me wants to say that the Mennonite institutions never deserved your best efforts and attention, but that would be awfully bitter; and I do know that there are wonderful folks who subscribe to those institutions, so I guess that’s what keeps the likes of us still working and a little hopeful. Which brings to mind the words of Allen Ginsberg, “America, I’m putting my queer shoulder to the wheel.”

Julia Kasdorf

Humor = Humility

I have a history with *Mennonot* that goes back way before it was a twinkle in the eyes of the editors (at least I think that’s right; they’re twinkley people and it’s hard to keep all the twinkles straight, sometimes). I nearly roomed with Sheri twice when we were students at Bluffton (it was one of those star-crossed things, plans kept falling through) and had my first out-of-country experience with Steve Mullet when we went to Colombia in 1982.

A few years ago, when Sheri approached me and told me that she and Steve were thinking of putting out a “dissident *Festival Quarterly*,” I thought it sounded interesting. When I saw how funny the first issue turned out to be, I celebrated. As a long-time subscriber to *The Door*, which bills itself as “the World’s Pretty Much Only Religious Satire Magazine,” I have learned to value the role of humor in church life, even when it annoys me (i.e., when people poke fun at my own sacred cows, Bessie and Clover.) At its peak, *Mennonot* was much funnier than many issues of *The Door*, and more importantly, it printed my stuff (and tolerated my promiscuous parentheses.)

As I mourn *Mennonot*’s passing, I hope that another venue arises some day to take its place, because I believe that humor is closely related to that very Mennonite striving for humility. People with senses of humor are attuned to the foibles and failings of themselves and others. They know that no human being has all the right answers. They see that absolutism is an ugly outgrowth of

human pride and ego. They understand how people with power over others can use doctrine as a weapon to maintain control.

As I’ve spent time with Haitians, Palestinians and First Nations people over the last few years, I have been struck by how the people who fight oppression most actively often have keen senses of humor. Perhaps they develop it as a defense against those who treat them with contempt, or perhaps they just see the obvious: People who loudly proclaim their right to dominate others are simply ridiculous. C.S. Lewis once said the devil can’t stand to be laughed at, and I think that holds true for most oppressors. Egotism and power-hunger may be seem like invincible forces, but a good joke gives people the ability to see right through the shield they create to the puny little guy pulling levers behind the curtain.

Humor cuts through the crap of a thousand Empires — and that quality connects intimately with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, who subverted the Roman Empire and religious establishment of his day by rising from the dead.

Kathleen Kern

Living the questions

I’m sad to see that *Mennonot* will cease publication. I recall that when I first heard about or saw *Mennonot* I was elated to know that you were doing what you were doing. With the inevitable changes in Mennonite life in the U.S. and with the concomitant pressures on our beliefs, we need a place where these situations and the attendant questions can be freely and openly addressed. I hope someone will take up the magazine and continue it. If I weren’t so old, I’d take it on and publish it. But I just turned three score and ten, and you know what the Bible says about that.

The Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship is an interesting group because of its members. I have made the joke that to be a member of the Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship you must have at least a master’s degree. That’s not true, of course, but the fellowship is made up of mostly “professional” people: teachers, university instructors and administrators, doctors, lawyers, ministers, sculptors, musicians, writers. In short, these Mennonites ain’t farmers no more, even though many of the members came from rural areas. Most all of the members are college graduates.

We see that change in Mennonite demographics in the Mennonite Arts Weekend that has been celebrated in Cincinnati biennially since 1992. This year the Arts Weekend occurred on February 4-6 and featured the composer J. Harold Moyer as honored artist. For this year's Arts Weekend, the Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship commissioned a sculpture by Esther Augsburg. The theme of the Arts Weekend was "The Healing Arts: Peaceful Mind and Body."

I cannot recapitulate more completely here what the Arts Weekend means. What I can say is that the work of the Mennonite artists was first-rate. I don't say that because it is work by Mennonites. You know how cynical I can be. Certainly I don't like shoddy art of any kind. But the Mennonite artists who displayed their works, whether music or sculpture or whatever, are truly "artists." No one need make excuses for the quality of the work. Esther Augsburg and Harold Moyer are the real stuff. The quality of the work would stand up in any context. It was enough to make an old farm boy proud of his heritage, except that pride is not allowed.

Just think of it, Sheri. It was all done to worship God. Somehow or other it made it all seem worthwhile when you realize that the talents of the artists were exercised as an act of praise. And that the quality of the work reflects the spiritual commitments of the artists. It was as if the artists said we will not offer sloppy work as praise to God. You give of your best or you don't give at all. It was as if it were blasphemous to offer to God shoddy work.

That, of course, brings up the whole question of the function of art in the Mennonite Church. The most beautiful interior of a Mennonite Church that I know is the interior of the Alexanderwohl Church at Goessel, Kansas. The interior is absolutely bare. Maybe "stark" is the word. On the other hand, I saw a Crucifix by Paul Friesen. It was made of wood and was just three empty crosses. It was in the Hesston United Methodist Church in Hesston, Kansas, but Paul Friesen has done some for Mennonite churches also. The Friesen "Crucifix" struck me as one of the most compassionate and most beautiful of all statements about the Passion. We need *Mennonot*, or something like it, to discuss the implications of art in our churches.

I believe that you are the questions you ask yourself. Who am I? What am I? What is in your mind? What is thought? What is consciousness? The obvious questions are the most important ones and the most difficult. How can you know who you are if you don't ask? Only you can look into your own heart. The "examined life" and egotism are not the same thing. And we must always be examining our lives, our thought, our beliefs. Asking questions is never wrong; not asking questions is something like sin. When you stop asking questions about belief, for instance, you get orthodoxy, and when you get orthodoxy your church is dead. Mennonites are constantly arguing about their beliefs. Good. They should. It means their religion is still alive.

Because of the way I think and because of what I think is important, I think the spiritual life of Jesus of Nazareth was just as important as his public life. Jesus asked the right questions, and he got the right answers. That's why he could be called "the son of God." Had the world listened to his message, we would have the kingdom of God here on earth. Right now.

On the other hand, I argued humorously, I hope, in my essay "Can a Mennonite Be An Atheist?" that humanism and humanistic thought reinforce and sustain Mennonite belief. Not only that. Right thinking can lead to the same beliefs that come from revelation. In short, there are different ways of coming to virtue. One of those ways begins in the Bible. One of those ways begins in thought, in study, in learning, in sympathy. In Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, the narrator says that the fruit of consciousness is inertia. That's not true for the true scholar. The fruit of consciousness for the scholar is commitment to help others. For him the fruit of consciousness is charity.

It doesn't take much thought and you don't have to be a genius to see that helping the spiritually and economically impoverished is helping everyone, including yourself. Inequalities and persecutions come back on all of us and make our world unlivable. We may shield ourselves from, say, poverty, and hide ourselves from, say, oppression, but they will inevitably come back upon us and afflict us as well. "Enlightened self-interest," a concept no longer around much, tells us to end evil

HOW YOU KNOW IF YOU'VE HAD TOO MUCH OF THE 1990s, #2

You have a list of 15 phone numbers to reach your family of three.

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SEEN ON A CHURCH SIGN

“How Will You
Spend Eternity –
Smoking or Non-
Smoking?”

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on this earth. We don't need the Bible to tell us to do good. We should at least see that doing good to anyone is doing good to ourselves. The duty to help others comes as much from study and understanding as it does from Biblical injunction. Come to think of it, maybe one could be an atheist and still be a Mennonite.

I do not mean to belittle in any way the role of religion and religious beliefs in our lives. I mean only to say that virtue is not dependent on belief. Virtue can come because it is necessary for life on this good earth. You don't have to be a believer in order to agree with the teachings of Jesus. He taught us salvation because this world cannot exist without forgiveness, charity, helping the suffering, the ending of violence.

Some people now believe that morality is a product of evolution. Suppose that Jesus of Nazareth is the inevitable product of evolution. Suppose that evolution is inherently moral and that it leads inevitably to us recognizing what is necessary for our salvation. Isn't that some kick in the butt for the Creationists?

Recently I was given the task of editing the sayings of Abraham Nofziger. He was a Mennonite recluse, and when he died he left a large number of sayings that he had written over his lifetime. His sister-in-law Agnes Stolfuss, née Pannebecker, found the sayings and a request from Abraham Nofziger that I edit and publish the sayings. The first selection of those sayings is now ready for publication. Most of the sayings are insightful, wonderful and clever.

There is, however, one of his sayings that I can't publish, and I will never publish it. The saying is: “Consecrate your life to God, or kiss your ass good-by.” Only in *Mennonot* could such a saying be published. With *Mennonot* no longer in existence no one will ever hear that wonderful insight from a Mennonite seer.

Because of what we Mennonites have become and because of the kind of world we live in, we must learn to live in ambivalence. We must live in a world of doubt because religion without doubt is fantasy. We must be professionals of all kinds and yet retain our Mennonite heritage. We must maintain a spiritual life, no matter what kind of work we do. That means asking all kinds of questions and

debating them. That's why *Mennonot* was, at least, a good beginning in the process of seeing what we are and what we can and maybe will become. The debate must be open and serious. *Mennonot* provided us, for a time, a place where we could address the questions.

Dallas Wiebe

A parallel universe

The other night I dreamed I was sitting at my office computer, where I put out twice-monthly news packets for the General Conference Mennonite Church, and that the only thing I could find in my “News” folder was the following:

Newhart, Mo. (ARFCT) — Leaders of North America's newest Christian denomination, called Anabaptist Renewed Fellowship Church of the Transformation, marked their official founding day by also establishing a town here in the rolling hills of central Missouri.

A group of 70 gathered for a foot-washing and flag-raising ceremony at the site in rural Phelps County, near the town of Devils Elbow. The event concluded with the traditional Mennonite potluck.

“We've long said that our headquarters should be located somewhere between Newton [Kan.] and Elkhart [Ind.], the centers for the now defunct denominations, the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church,” said ARFCT spokesperson Madison Schrag-Romero. “Since no one was willing to move to St. Louis, Kansas City, Fargo [N.D.], or Paducah [Ky.], we realized our only alternative was to develop a completely new town.”

Newhart is the perfect name, said Schrag-Romero, since it is not only a combination of the names of the historic centers for the two former denominations, but also the namesake of “Bob Newhart, an American icon whose self-deprecating manner, strong work ethic and plain looks could qualify him as an honorary Anabaptist.”

Schrag-Romero would neither confirm nor deny rumors that the 144 acres of land being staked out as the town site for Newhart had been given by an Amish farmer from upstate New York.

When questioned about the number of Mennonites in Pennsylvania and Virginia,

whose geographical placement seems to belie Missouri as a “central location” for a church headquarters, Schrag-Romero pointed out that the eastern Mennonites are on the verge of forming a separate denomination, tentatively called Anabaptists Concerned for Truth, Uniformity and Purity (ACTUP).

Head architect for the Newhart project, Pat Friesen Fast, said plans for the town include a school for grades K-12; housing for denominational headquarters staff in gated communities to be named for historic Mennonite villages in Russia; Kidron View Green, a senior living and holistic health facility; Swartz-Kauff Memorial Medical Center; and all essential services, in addition to the denominational center itself.

Bike and walking trails will connect the town in a grid meant to resemble quilt patterns when seen from the air, said the architect.

Friesen Fast said that several donors have already pledged funds in excess of \$7 million to begin construction, but was unable to say how many churches the town would contain, or how they would be financed.

“All churches will conform to ARFCT guidelines for membership, fellowship and community life,” noted Marty Martens, executive staff person, but declined to elaborate.

“The reason we as Mennonite leaders initiated merger that became integration that became transformation was because we knew if we only worked hard enough, we could achieve the one true and pure church,” said Lynn Lehman, a pastor from Middle Menno Creek, Ohio. “Here in Newhart, we are realizing the Anabaptist ideal of church and community in perfect harmony — like an excellent four-part rendition of ‘Praise God from Whom’ or a well-made lentil-sausage casserole.

“It’s vision become reality.”

Mennonot, this is where we are headed without you. Who will scatter the road apples along the straight and narrow when you are gone? Who will keep those of us who know we are actually the true heirs of Menno gathered into what suffices for us as community, once you are no more? Who will save that poor unsuspecting town of Devils Elbow (I did not make that name up) from succumbing to quilt pattern grids in the name of Mennonite denominational transformation,

missional identity, preliminary program proposals, the Anabaptist vision and perfect shoofly, when *Mennonot* no longer exists?

Well, I see two possible sources of hope. One is that the above “news release” appeared only in a dream! It has no date! It has no by-line! If I ignore it, maybe it will go away!

Second is that just because there is no *Mennonot* the magazine does not mean there will be no Mennonots. I have noticed that we always manage to find each other on the back rows at delegate sessions or mission consultations. We have scattered all over the world as missionaries and MCCers, yet eventually we find ourselves sitting down in each other’s kitchens over drinks (tea, of course) and Hershey’s Kisses.

Wherever two or three marginal Mennos are gathered in the presence of caffeine, *Mennonot* is there in the midst of them. Thank you, editor and editrix of the eponymous publication, for giving it all such superb form over these last few years. We all pray for a second coming.

Melanie Zuercher
writing from a wide spot in the road in
central Kansas

Top Ten Mennonite Microbrews

As several of we the faithful here in Austin, Texas, were at a pub listening to one of our own perform a wonderful acoustic set, we were struck with the idea that it was high time we urban/suburban Mennos mix our mostly German heritage with our new urban lifestyles, jump on the bandwagon and start a microbrewery. Here at the top 10 brews we’d introduce at our grand opening celebration:

10. Amish High Life
9. Brüderweiser
8. Turkey Red
7. MGC (the integration libation)
6. Shoofly Stout
5. Yodermeister
4. Special Edition Relief-Sale Ale
3. Zwie Bock
2. Martyr’s Best Tongue-Screw Brew
1. Menno Lite (Tastes Great, Less Killing)

Mark Metzler Sawin
Austin, Texas

VICTOR’S NEW BOOK OF POEMS

Victor Jerett Enns, publisher of the Menno literary magazine *Rhubarb* and contributor to *Mennonot*, has published a new chapbook, *A Poem of Pears*. The chapbook is available for \$7 (Canadian) and can be purchased by contacting Victor Publishing, 200 Lenore Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 2C5 or victor@mb.sympatico.ca.

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■ POETRY

The Relief Sale

It was a two hour drive
in a different state
the first time without parents
or a youth group.

Linda wanted to see
straw hats and overalls
listen to jokes in Pennsylvania Dutch.

We'd patched our favorite jeans
with flannel hearts
and french braided our hair.

Five of us in an orange Scout
yelling quilt names
pretending we'd each buy a pie
and eat them altogether Sunday.

We knew how to replace shingles,
fix lawn mowers, change tires.
We baked lentils,
sunned tea in the backyard,
played pool and drank Coke
Saturday nights at Abe's,
sumertimes we roasted chilies,
canned and froze till midnight
listening to the Cowboy Junkies
dreaming about Mennonite boys with rhythm.

We were loud and beautiful
braless lifting our tie-dyed T-shirts
to flash men with beards
in Semis, Sedans, Chevys
like handing out blessings.

Two awkward boys lip-synching to Meatloaf
followed us twenty miles.

First thing we bought was carrots,
crunching them as we wandered through the quilts.
Janet went looking for strawberry-rhubarb pies.
Brenda bought five quarts of apple butter
remembering her home church
the men starting it at night
the women stirring it thick all day over a fire,
in black pots big enough to bathe in.
All afternoon we listened to the auctioneer
drank cider and ate sausage and kraut sandwiches,

and wondered if our hands would ever be thick
and wrinkled, sitting behind a table
of homemade soup, wooden bowls
and rag-weaved blankets,
ready with a thousand stories to choose from
to enthrall anyone.

Cheryl Denise grew up in Elmira, Ontario. She and her husband, Mike Miller, are part of Shepherd's Field Community in Philippi, West Virginia. She works as a nurse and enjoys raising sheep and writing.

Hemispheres

If your right brain causes you to sin,
lobotomize.
Seat your men & boys on the left side of the sanctuary,
women on the right with their daughters
and suckling baby boys.

The congregation shall raise its voice
harmoniously
but in parallel lines

which, according to custom, never cross.

Your father lifts his ax
to chop you from your mother, severs the cord
like lightning
strikes the telephone wire.

There are reasons why
you can't remember being born
apart from the physical trauma
of exodus
from mother's womb, through her widening channel,
into life.
In this promised land,
there are things you would still miss:
uterine rays emitting guileless warmth, a fist-like circle
closed around your nakedness, her garden of
coalescent cells, ripe curves
and the closeness of her breathy voice, contracting
with instruction.

Limp hemispheres
dangle from your center
like rope sausage –
the diversity of rib, tongue, buttocks
all blended into one
unchanging meat.

Are you not hungry?

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Will you not eat?

Speak the language you never learned
to swallow. It's bitter fruit
that's fallen from your mother's
Epicurean tree
but you have tasted so much sweetness that your stomach,
teeth, breath and lips
are sour.

Won't you come back to the girding of the womb?
Stay the cherubim & seraphim who stand between
your right & left, your north & south,
your east & west –
the dragons you've hired as hit men
to harm you in your sin.

Won't you shed those garments of fig?

Listen to the wordless touch
of embryonic fluid, the rustle of the wind,
God walking through the garden.

You've toiled many years away, harvested the notion
that every leaf must one day detach
and fall.

Have you not heard of evergreens?
They stand tall, leaves intact, speak one language
every season, year after year.

Jessica Smucker is from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. She attended Goshen College and now lives in western Illinois. Her self-published book of poetry, How the Light Gets In, is available for \$7 from her at 1030 Derry Lane, #22, Macomb, IL 61455.

■ **CYBERSATIRE**
Email is for lovers
(or for hamballs)

From: Earnest Smoker
<Smoker@dialogue.edu>
To: Joe A. Bauman <Joeab@dialogue.edu>

Steven P. Miller is a 1999 graduate of Goshen College and a native of Stuarts Draft, Virginia, although both of his parents are Lancasterites. Steven will be with the Pittsburgh Urban Leadership Service Experience (PULSE) program through August. His email is stevenpml@hotmail.com.

Subject: InteGRITy
Date: January 14, 2000

Webster's defines slander as "a false and defamatory oral statement about a person." Thankfully, my humility reflex will not allow me to label your surreptitious response to my earnest, if sacrificial, editorial in such a perfunctory manner. To do so would hinder the cause of the Fourth Estate, not to mention that of Campus Crusade for Community 2000. You think I jest? Not so. As editor of the sesquicentennial Doctrine, I am certainly aware that we — as members of a small Mennohood tucked away in a prairie town known more for a college football wunderkind than for extreme moral license — sometimes get a little giddy about guarding our image. Rest assured,

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pater. I'm still attracted to women, I still think Jesus is just all right, and even yesterday I fondly recalled REL 101: The Bible and Post-Traumatic Sunday School Syndrome, a favorite frosh class of mine.

When I suggested, in my editorial of a mere 700 words, that the church reconsider its position on hamballs, I was not consciously attacking your Lancaster County heritage. Hey, man, I'm one of you's, sheltered and dutchified for 21 years on Lot 27 of the old Delp homestead. You say "Blue Ball!" I say "Weaverland!" In offering, then, to discuss the matter of breaded swine with any willing Lancasterite over a "mug of golden, hops-happy home brew," I never intended to insult either you or your alcoholic great-grandfather. Don't we all have one of those?

Please, in future weeks, take your problems with my probing pen to the grand central server of your consternation — that is, to me. With two installments of my hamballs triptych remaining, I'm bound to rattle a few more toupees. So I apologize in advance. The behind-the-casserole slander won't work, you should know, as I will merely surf my way to fuck-the-administration heaven.

Instead, let us dwell upon our commonalities. Mennoniteness and the manure-scented fields near Lititz flow in my blood, same as yours. We may register on opposite ends of the anality scale, but our shared heritage will pull us through yet. Let loving decency rule the setting sun. I'll tilt my Pabst mug, and you'll sip your mid-afternoon Turkey Hill Ice Tea. They both taste good. Truly, Earnest Smoker.

From: Joe A. Bauman
<Joeab@dialogue.edu>
To: Earnest Smoker
<Smoker@dialogue.edu>
Subject: Re: InteGRITy
Date: January 17, 2000

Thankfully, I didn't discover your email until I returned from the "Christian Fathers, Express Yourselves!" conference held last weekend at Camp Shalomkoinoniawald. I attended with my Married Men's small group. The drums and spirit paint were a bit much, but I grew nevertheless. I have since decided that, like the apostle Paul, I express myself best through concise and forward lists. Directness can be good sometimes. That's what

Peter the Rock teaches us.

TEN THINGS I HATE ABOUT YOUR EMAIL (NOT TO MENTION YOUR EDITORIAL)

10) Your general sassy tone bothers me. You could have been more eloquent — and forthright. I'll say it again, sarcasm is a form of hiding. Yesterday I told my wife the Frosted Mini Wheats were all. I meant what I said.

9) Also, your continued flippancy toward Lancaster County annoys me. There's a lot more to Lititz than its occasional stench. Why not mention soft pretzels or the new Bomberger's store?

8) You use Menno as shorthand for Mennonite. This disturbs me. Would you rather me call you Earn or Smo?

7) Your image of "surfing . . . to heaven" juggles contexts in an irresponsible manner. Surfing is not associated with passage to the afterlife. Golden chariots or wooden rafts, maybe, but not wet suits.

6) I find your use of profanity to be sexist. No feminist I know, such as my wife, would accept the use of this crass and aggressive language.

5) Again, why castigate hamballs? The Church needs time on this issue.

4) What does anality mean? The word comes up red in my spell-check.

3) You liken Turkey Hill Ice Tea to cheap domestic beer.

2) It's hard to grasp what you're getting at with your pronouncement about loving decency and the setting sun. Are you alluding to a Simpsons episode? Do I represent Reverend Lovejoy to you?

1) I'm not sure what you want, Earnest. Perhaps you should consult the dictionary about integrity in addition to slander.

Normally I'm more reserved about these matters, but you really got me going, and I think this kind of list is something John the Baptist might have written. Your words are like four-part disharmony sometimes. I wish you could hear yourself. Listen. Email me back if you want to continue talking. Sincerely, Joseph A. Bauman.

EXPRESSIONS FOR HIGH STRESS DAYS, #2

How do I set a laser printer to stun?

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2003 A.D.

UPCOMING ESSAYS

A book of essays by Mennonite poet Julia Kasdorf, *The Body and the Book: Writing from a Mennonite Life*, should be published by Johns Hopkins Press by the time you read this. Look for it!

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continued from page 2

a float when the rapids come, and we're enjoying the cool water and the warm sun when the river is still. We are all in this river, and that applies not just to Mennonites, but to all of us half-baked, brokenhearted humans bobbing along in this life.

This change of heart was crystallized for me when I visited my parents in Ohio four years ago. I went to the church I grew up in, and the minister there – a man about my age – gave a sermon on idols. He named many things as idols that I would also name as such, militarism and consumerism among them. And then he talked about the idol of homosexuality. He said people who believed homosexuality was okay were like Jezebel worshipping a false god, or something to that effect. I called the pastor up the next day to see if we could talk about his sermon. My parents were afraid. They thought I was going to get in the face of this guy and give him a good dose of Mennonot what-for. What I really wanted to say – and did – was, “Look. You

■ SERMON

Thinking outside the lines

This sermon was originally preached at Danville Congregational Church, on Feb. 8, 1998. The text for the day was Romans 12:1-8. I was a ministerial intern at that church, and on that particular day my Mennonite congregation from San Francisco was joining the Congregationalists in worship for a sort of “meet the Mennonites” day.

Sheri Hostetler

I'm going to let all of you non-Mennonites out there in on a secret – although it may also be a secret for some of the Mennonites here, or at least a reminder of something they forgot: Mennonites are irritating people. Yes, irritating. Now, this certainly belies anything you might know about Mennonites. Most people, when they think about Mennonites – which is probably never – think about Amish, whom they know to be vaguely connected to Mennonites. And when you think of Amish, you think of anything other than irritating

and I are two people on two sides of an issue that has divided this church. Can we both give up the name-calling and both believe that we are trying to live out the Gospel as best as we can?” I wanted him to see the face of Jezebel, and I wanted to see the face of someone I might have lashed out against or dismissed a few years back. And that's what we did. No minds were changed, but maybe a heart, or two, was.

Even that change of heart, however, is not the real reason I'm no longer doing *Mennonot*. *Mennonot* could have existed, and did exist to some extent, beyond the polarities of “us vs. them” or “margin and center.” Instead, I'm engaging the same concerns and issues *Mennonot* addressed through another forum, as pastor of First Mennonite Church of San Francisco, where I began in November of 2000. Who would have thunk it, huh? The editrix of *Mennonot* now a Mennonite pastor? As I said, consistency is something of which I have never been accused.

Thank you, gentle readers. And Godspeed as the river carries you.

people. You think of quiet people who work hard and keep tidy farms. You think of people living in harmony with the land in a state of pastoral bliss. You think of people with ruddy cheeks who should be in ads for milk. Those people who do know something of Mennonites often know only that they are really nice people who you'd want for neighbors because they'd keep their yards mowed and would bring you a casserole when you're sick. I'm sorry to disappoint you. Instead of being one of the last heralds of wholesomeness in our society, I want you to know that these Mennonites are indeed irritating.

At least, that's what Martin Luther thought. Luther, the great Protestant Reformer, could not stand these people. He referred to them as *Schwärmer*, a German word meaning a beatnik kind of enthusiast, a person driven by impulses and emotions rather than common sense – like Luther was one to talk. Another famous Protestant Reformer of the time described the ancestors of today's Mennonites as people with bees in their bonnets. Irritating people, like a swarm of bees stuck under your hat.

Why were these people so irritating? Most

of us are familiar with the basic facts about the Reformation, a 16th century movement in Europe to reform the church.¹ The Catholic Church, which was the only game in town up until that point, was definitely at a low ebb. All through the Middle Ages, the voices of councils, clergy and lay people had been crying for an end to the corruption and worldliness of the body of Christ. Everyone seemed to agree on one point: the church needed to its original purity. Somehow, the church needed to return to the virtue it had once possessed back in New Testament times. Into this scene steps Martin Luther and the other Protestant reformers.

Let's cut to Zurich, Switzerland. It's about 1525, and there's a man there named Ulrich Zwingli, a Roman Catholic priest. Independent of Martin Luther, he was coming to very similar conclusions. Like Luther, he believed that one should look to Scripture and to the simplicity of the New Testament church for a guide as to how the church should look. His beliefs led him to resign his post as priest of the local parish church; instantly upon doing so he was re-appointed as a minister at the same church by Zurich's local governing body, the equivalent of a town council. Now this was a revolutionary move, because it said, in effect: "We're not going to kowtow to the hierarchy in Rome. We, the city council, can call our own minister." Pretty radical. What this meant, however, was that the while the minister of the Gospel, namely Zwingli, was no longer under the authority of the Roman hierarchy, he was still under the control of the local city council — that is, the state. It'd be like the town council of Danville taking it upon itself to appoint the minister of this church.

Tensions quickly developed when Zwingli and his band of reformers wanted to push reform further than the city council wanted to go. The reformers decided that, instead of having a traditional Roman Catholic Eucharist, they wanted to have a simple communion service, which they believed to be more Scriptural. They had to bring this before the Council for approval. And the Council said "no." The Council didn't say no because they thought it was theologically unsound idea but because they were afraid the other cities in Switzerland, which were still Roman Catholic, might not look favorably upon the Coun-

cil for allowing such a sacrilege to occur. And they didn't want to take the economic hit if these cities refused to trade with Zurich. Zwingli, the fiery Protestant Reformer, more or less caved to the Council's wishes. But some of his friends, who came to be called the Radical Reformers, asked why. "Who says we have to be bound of the authority of the state in religious matters? Aren't we bound only to the authority of our own conscience, and to authority of the Scriptures — to the truth that sets us free?"

In our present day, that does not sound radical. For these Radical Reformers were the first to uphold a truth which, on the North American continent, we hold to be self-evident: the separation of church and state — which meant that the church should not be supported by the state, neither by tithes or taxes or the use of the sword, and that, therefore, the state shouldn't have a say in how the church does church. But in 1525 in Zurich, these ideas were by no means self-evident. They were seen instead as a huge affront to the authority of the state.

For a few months, these Radical Reformers were tolerated. But they finally stepped over the line when they decided that not only should infants not be baptized — because they believed that becoming a Christian was a decision one had to make as an adult — but that even those people who had been baptized as children needed to be rebaptized. Opponents started calling them Anabaptists, which means literally rebaptizers. The state eventually invoked a 3rd century law that decreed the death penalty for anyone who practiced rebaptism. The irritating Anabaptists were hunted down and killed in almost every country in which they sprang up.

From this irritating group of Anabaptists has sprung an amazingly diverse group of people. It's a group that includes everyone from the Old Order Amish of the area in which I grew up to people such as myself. There's a wonderful photo in a little book about Mennonites and Amish.² You can't see it, but it shows two women at a Mennonite church conference. On the left, is an Amish woman in a dark, plain dress that goes down almost to her ankles. Her graying hair is bound up in a bun, on top of which is a traditional head covering. To her right is a young woman wearing a short dress with long, lanky, tanned legs, long

HOW YOU KNOW YOU'VE HAD TOO MUCH OF THE 1990's, #3

You now think of three espressos as "getting wasted."

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2003 A.D.

DEFINITIONS, #2

Puritanism: The haunting fear that someone, somewhere may be happy.

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hair, a bare head and a cigarette poised elegantly in her slender fingers.

The one thing uniting these disparate groups – the one thing I would dare say that those two women have in common — is their attachment to a verse from Romans that we read today: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” Mennonites and Amish alike share this distinctive belief in something called “nonconformity,” a belief that Christians are somehow different from the world – or, to put it another way, that Christians think outside the lines. For the Amish, this nonconformity calls for distinctive dress and modes of transportation. For Hutterites, another Anabaptist group, it means that they don’t believe in private property; rather all property is held in common by the community. Or, if you are a thoroughly modern Mennonite who wears short dresses, nonconformity might mean living fully in the world, looking for the most part like everyone else, but attempting to live by a different set of values, ones based on Gospel ethics.

For centuries, that different set of values for Mennonites has included something called non-violence or non-resistance, the way of forgiving love and peace. The print you see on the cover of your bulletin shows Dirk Willems, a Dutch Anabaptist, being chased by a sheriff, who was trying to capture him for being a “subversive” Anabaptist. While in pursuit, the sheriff fell into the ice. Willems remembered the teaching of Jesus “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,” turned back and helped the sheriff to safety — whereupon he was promptly arrested and later burned at the stake.

In the present day, examples of “nonconformity,” of thinking outside the lines, are not so dramatic. And yet there are many ways that this belief is embodied in very ordinary ways, and I’d like to briefly mention three ways that modern-day Mennonites try to think outside the lines, ways that I think are pertinent for anyone living in the Bay Area in the late 20th century:

1) *Thinking outside the lines of a consumer culture.* Mennonite ethicist John Howard Yoder has said that Mammon is the only divinity identified in the Gospels by name as being a power which makes people its slaves.³ And so, for centuries, the heirs to Anabaptism have tried to live simply. “Living more with less” is not

only a sort of slogan among Mennonites, but actually the name of a book that describes countless ways to live more simply – to recycle, renew, or, more often, just do without. I know a 22-year-old woman who just graduated from a Mennonite college. During her last semester there, she and several other classmates decided to do a “living more with less” experiment and choose only five outfits out of their wardrobe to wear the entire semester. Her finding? “It was liberating,” she said. And then there’s the modern-day Anabaptist Ron Sider, author of the book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*⁴, who proposes something called a “graduated tithe.” He says that Christians should figure out how much they need to live on for a year, a figure that should permit reasonable comfort but few luxuries. They should then tithe 10% of this basic amount. For every additional increment earned over that basic amount, he suggests tithing 5% more, until – depending on how much you make – you may be tithing well over one-third of your income. Now there’s an irritating Mennonite.

2) *Thinking outside the lines of an individualistic culture.* All religious systems have a continuum in which there’s individual, self-identity on one hand and collective identity on the other. In our day, we’ve swung quite heavily to one end of that balance, to a virtual worship of the autonomy of the individual, so that, at its most extreme, we are no longer a member of a beloved community but an individual consumer of religious products. You aren’t getting what you need from the church? Leave. When things get tough, go shopping for another faith community. Anabaptists are a reminder of the other side of this balance. They remind us that the community has a claim on us as individuals. They remind us that we are not only accountable to our own self-fulfillment, but to the common good.

About two years ago, First Mennonite Church of San Francisco did a most radical thing, I thought. During an Education Hour on simple living, we started talking about how much was too much, and we got very specific. Like: How much is too much to spend on a car? On a dinner out? On a house? Now, we weren’t by any means coming to group consensus – say, \$20 for a meal – and asking people to stick to that. But by even asking those questions, we were assuming that how we spent our money was not just a matter of individual choice, that

the faith community had some right to have input into that most “private”—at least in our culture — of activities.

3) *Thinking outside the lines of a status-oriented culture.* Traditional Mennonite belief has said that success is defined not by the level of our status, but by the level of our service to others. My college roommate told me that she was recently reading through the alumni notes of the Mennonite college we attended and was struck by how many people were teachers or social workers. If they did go into business, she said, it was often as administrators of nursing homes or hospitals. This is not to malign people who work at money-grubbing corporations — many Mennonites work as such places — only to say that we need to be wary of how our culture defines success and whether we are subtly buying into it. Is it really true, in the words of that horrible bumper sticker, that “He who dies with the most toys wins?” Do we really find our fulfillment as human beings by climbing the corporate ladder?

Earlier in the Romans passage read today, we heard that beautiful metaphor for the church as a body with many parts. It’s also a beautiful analogy for the wider Christian Communion — for each denomination, each religious movement within it has some distinctive gift to offer to the whole. I think the peculiar gift that Men-

nonites have to offer is a sometimes irritating reminder that, as Christians, we are all called to be nonconformists. We are all called to be in tension with the mainstream; and we are all to be ever vigilant that we are not accommodating to the “world” too much.

Earlier, I had told you this “secret”: that all these nice, friendly-looking Mennonites are actually irritating people. But the real secret is, everyone in this church is. Anyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus is irritating. Someone with bees in their bonnets. Someone who thinks outside the lines and who has found, in that vast space, the freedom of the Gospel, the truth that sets us free. Amen.

¹ Much of this history is drawn from *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, Cornelius J. Dyck, editor. (Herald Press: Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 1967).

² *20 Most Asked Questions about Amish and Mennonites*, Merle & Phyllis Good. (Good Books: Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1979).

³ Quoted from his essay “The Anabaptist Shape of Liberation” in *Why I Am A Mennonite: Essays on Mennonite Identity*, Harry Loewen, editor. (Herald Press: Kitchner, Ontario, 1988).

⁴ *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study*, Ronald J. Sider. (Paulist Press: New York, 1978).

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The end of *Mennonot* rings bitter-sweet for me. Truly, I have only been along for the ride. To the degree that this publication successfully accomplished what it set out to do (and I believe it succeeded to a significant degree), the credit must mainly go to Sheri. With the rest of our readers, I tip my hat to her in gratitude for the creation of a light-hearted and open-minded journalistic oasis in the midst of what oft-times feels like a desert in the rest of Menno-Land.

As *Mennonot*’s circulation person, I can take this opportunity to provide some of the trivial data that I am sure everyone is dying to know. The life-span of *Mennonot* spanned a decade, beginning in the fall of 1993. At its peak, *Mennonot*’s paid circulation swelled to 322 copies, with issue 7. The lowest circulation is this final issue, at 176 copies. Of course, we will never know the typical per-issue readership of *Mennonot*, though we have always suspected that in the hands of frugal Mennos, even Mennos

once removed, each copy got passed around rather promiscuously.

I have appreciated *Mennonot* the most for its humor, which has had a substantial satirical zing to it at times, and I poured most of my own personal energies for this ‘zine into the agenda of funniness. I’ve enjoyed producing the cover graphics along with a number of other comical pieces, some more successful than others. If I could prescribe one thing for the Mennonite church, it would be a mega-dose of humor and much more willingness to celebrate life. My God, we remain an overly sober and somber bunch.

Sheri’s farewell article has prompted me to reflect some on how I have changed over the course of *Mennonot*’s 10-year legacy. To be sure, I have mellowed some, but my frustrations with the Mennonite church still run deep. At the grassroots level, we have been largely coopted by American civil religion and fundamentalist

HOW YOU KNOW YOU’VE HAD TOO MUCH OF THE 1990’s, #4

You check the ingredients on a can of chicken soup to see if it contains echinacea.

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2003 A.D.

evangelicalism. We sport a self-centered and spiritualized theology that is obsessed with individual piety, purity and holiness for the sake of getting to heaven. We care less and less about peace, let alone justice, and we never have truly given a rat's patooty about ecological issues. We are much more politically active than our reluctant past generations, but our support and votes are thrown overwhelmingly to political parties who give tax-cuts to the wealthy, slash programs for the poor, continue to rape the ecosystem and desire to expand greatly the military-industrial complex. I speak here of Mennonites in the USA, giving some reprieve to our Canadian and certainly to our non-North-American partners.

When viewed against the backdrop of Anabaptist, Sermon-on-the-Mount ideals, this reality makes little sense. But from a sociological perspective, it all adds up. Living luxuriously off of an unsustainable economy while suckling at the breast of North American materialism, consumerism and militarism, we have little sense of the negative effects of our profound cultural transformation over the past century. We are a very affluent bunch of people, and we consume with the best of them. We've got a lot of stuff, we would like to have more stuff, and by God, we would like the stuff that we have to be well protected from taxes and terrorists. Anabaptist theology does not mix well with our social reality, and thus we are led to embrace more palatable alternatives.

To be sure, we do have some congregations here and there, mostly in urban areas, that do not fit this pattern, that are in tune with the needs of society's outcasts and have more progressive theological and social agendas. These congregations are the poster children of the denomination, of course, held up by leadership as shining examples of our church's commitment to diversity and justice. But the vast majority of the rest of the church is nowhere close to being on the same page.

O, and let us not forget that in the midst of all of this apostasy, we are told that the greatest threat to our church's spiritual integrity is the acceptance by some of same-gender couples who make life-long covenants of love and faithfulness. If it weren't so sickening, the ridiculousness of the

situation would make for some incredible humor.

For those who would say that I am painting with too broad a brush here, I can only say: you need to step outside your circle and into the Menno mainstream. There is an enormous theological rift between Mennonite leadership/academia and the majority of Mennonites in the pews, and I believe that Mennonite leadership either underestimates or frankly does not know how to respond to the fact that the Mennonite grassroots has been largely co-opted by evangelical fundamentalism. And, quite honestly, they are reticent to bite the hand that feeds them. From where I sit, this situation is not getting any better. Institutional media spin assuring that "we're going to be OK" notwithstanding, things are in fact worsening, and I predict further fallout and church splits in our denomination's near future as a result. It pains me to say it, but Anabaptism in North America may be destined to wither and die in its current manifestations.

There is a bright side. If *Mennonot* has taught me anything, it is that "church" is not confined to that which is defined by the human structures of denominations and what-not. Church happens wherever the scandalous compassion and inclusive grace of God's in-breaking Spirit are at work tearing down walls and countering the forces of fear, injustice, exclusion and hate. God's work knows no boundaries, and is certainly not dependent on Mennonite faithfulness. So if *Mennonot's* tagline "for Mennos on the Margins" defined margins in relation to the real work of the church, then we were wrong. *Mennonot* was not a publication for those on the church's margins – on the contrary, *Mennonot* gave voice and inspiration to people who are deeply and passionately involved in God's work.

But there I go ranting again, being earnestly Mennonite and probably taking it all too seriously. *Mennonot* was fun, and I feel privileged to have played a small part. May *Mennonot's* spirit live on in the life of the church, urging us to talk openly and light-heartedly with one another, to throw more parties, and always to err on the side of delivering more jokes than sermons.

Mennonot

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