Book Review Essays

Richard A. Stevick
*Messiah College, rstevick@messiah.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://mosaic.messiah.edu/psych_ed](https://mosaic.messiah.edu/psych_ed)

Part of the [Applied Ethics Commons](https://mosaic.messiah.edu/psych_ed), [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](https://mosaic.messiah.edu/psych_ed), and the [History of Christianity Commons](https://mosaic.messiah.edu/psych_ed)

Permanent URL: [https://mosaic.messiah.edu/psych_ed/28](https://mosaic.messiah.edu/psych_ed/28)

**Recommended Citation**

Sharpening Intellect | Deepening Christian Faith | Inspiring Action

Messiah College is a Christian college of the liberal and applied arts and sciences. Our mission is to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society.

www.Messiah.edu
God will guide your footsteps...
Brethren in Christ History and Life

Published by the Brethren in Christ Historical Society. Membership and subscription: one year, $10; contributing members, $25; supporting members, $50; patron members, $100; lifetime members, a minimum one-time contribution of $1,000. Single issues of the journal, $5.00. Address articles and communications to E. Morris Sider, Editor, Brethren in Christ History and Life, P. O. Box 310, Grantham, PA 17027 (telephone 717-766-7767 or 717-697-2634; e-mail: msider@messiah.edu). Membership fees should be sent to Brethren in Christ Historical Society, P.O. Box 310, Grantham, PA 17027 or to P.O. Box A, Grantham, PA 17027. Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in Historical Abstracts and America: History and Life. They are also indexed in Christian Periodical Index and in Religion Index One: Periodicals, Index to Book Reviews in Religion, ATLA Religion Database, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Walker Dr., 16th Floor, Chicago, IL 60606. E-mail: atla@atla.com, www:http://www.atla.com/.

BRETHREN IN CHRIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PRESIDENT: Emerson Lesher
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Glen Pierce
EDITOR: E. Morris Sider
MEDIA REVIEW EDITOR: Edie Asbury
CANADIAN REPRESENTATIVE: Leonard J. Chester

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Emerson Lesher, President
Mechanicsburg, PA
S. Lane Hostetter, Vice President
Mechanicsburg, PA
Nevin Engle, Secretary-Treasurer
Grantham, PA
Myron Dietz
York, PA
Doneen Dourte
Manheim, PA
Kimberly Forry
Manheim, PA
Clyde Martin
Akron, PA
E. Morris Sider
Grantham, PA
Stephen Scott
Columbia, PA
Dorothy Jean Sollenberger
Greencastle, PA

EDITORIAL BOARD

Terms Expire 2008
Thelma Book, Upland, CA
Phyllis Carlson, Overland Park, KS
James Hain, Roanoke, VA
Wilmer Heisey, Harrisonburg, VA
Connie Harper, Downville, ONT
Jennie Rensberry, Prince Albert, SK
Alan G. Claassen Thrush, Managua, Nicaragua

Terms Expire 2009
Kenneth Abell, Morrison, IL
Pauline Hogan, St. Catharines, ONT
Daniel Lenehan, Colorado Springs, CO
Beth Mark, Mechanicsburg, PA
Charles Jones, Oklahoma City, OK

Terms Expire 2010
Miriam Brechbill, Chambersburg, PA
David Byer, Rochester, MN
Donald Clucas, Upland, CA
Lester Fretz, Port Colborne, ONT
Ethan Levengood, Elizabethtown, PA

Printed by Evangel Press
CONTENTS

Volume XXXI Number 3 December 2008

From the Editor ...................................................... 395

The Autobiography of Frey Sinankupa Chizongo ........... 397
Mweetwa
Frey Sinankupa Chizongo Mweetwa

Stability and Service Through Decades of Change: The . . . 426
Life of Menno O. Brubaker
Samuel M. Brubaker

Church Membership Profile 2007: The Canadian .......... 481
Conference of the Brethren in Christ
Ronald Burwell

The Graphic Art of Greg Cunningham ....................... 495
Greg Cunningham

PAPERS FROM THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF
BRETHREN IN CHRIST HISTORY AND LIFE

Celebrating Thirty Years of Brethren in Christ ......... 507
History and Life
Luke L. Keefer

Some Observations on the Development and Value . . . 527
of Brethren in Christ History and Life
Harvey R. Sider

Inside, Outside, Upside-down: Reflections on Form . . 530
and Function in Brethren in Christ History and Life
Doneen Dourte

Observations on Brethren in Christ History and Life .. 534
Stephen Scott

Media Review

Finding Hope in Recovery: Families Living with .......... 537
Addiction, reviewed by Roger C. Sider

Book Review Essays

John L. Ruth, Forgiveness: A Legacy of the Amish ........ 540
School; Donald Kraybill, Steven Nolt, and David
Weaver-Zercher, Amish Grace; Harvey Yoder, The
Happening: Nickle Mines Tragedy, reviewed by
Richard A. Stevick

- continued -

Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, reviewed by Richard Hughes and Merle Brubaker

**Book Reviews**

Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity*, . . . 565 reviewed by Howard A. Snyder

Richard T. Hughes, *Myths America Lives By*, . . . . . . . . . 570 reviewed by John R. Yeatts

A. E. Weaver and Gerald J. Mast, *The Work of Jesus Christ in Anabaptist Perspective*, reviewed by Marlin Jeschke

James O. Lehman and Steven M. Nolt, *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War*, reviewed by Jonathan R. Stayer

**Addresses of Authors** . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 582
When the story broke on October 2, 2006, that ten Amish school girls had been shot at an Amish one-room school, the event created a news vacuum into which hundreds of reporters, journalists, and television crews poured. The vortex was Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, an out-of-the-way crossroads in Lancaster County. Amish leaders, aided by local officials and state police, moved in to protect the privacy of the shocked and numbed parents, extended families, and members of the local community from the persistent inquirers.

Nevertheless, Nickel Mines became the epicenter of world-wide attention, for the curious, the compassionate, and those seeking a sensational story. The most insistent knocked on doors, stopped passersby, and sought to ferret out news on

* Richard A. Stevick is Professor Emeritus of Psychology, Messiah College, and author of the recently published book entitled Growing Up Amish: The Teenage Years.
the condition of the victims, the grief of families, and the reactions of the local community. Even after the funerals of the five murdered girls and after the razing of the Nichol Mines school, media and free-lance writers relentlessly sought any scrap of information they could glean. With few exceptions, the Amish community staunchly resisted these attempts, pleading for privacy and peace.

However, the story that emerged was not primarily about the perpetrator, event, and victims, but about an almost immediate forgiveness that the girls' parents and the Amish community expressed for the shooter. As Amish authority, Donald Kraybill, stated, "Their forgiveness quickly became the story that trumped everything else."

Some people expressed doubt that any person or group, so deeply wronged, could offer any kind of genuine forgiveness so quickly and with such apparent ease. Were these pronouncements simply a conventional or perfunctory response offered to an expectant public? Others did not question the sincerity of the public pronouncements but wondered if the proffered forgiveness reflected little more than simple-mindedness or naiveté on the part of these plain people. On web sites some wondered if this so-called forgiveness reflected a personal or cultural defect that minimized horrific happenings and losses. Interest in the aftermath of Nickel Mines remained high.

By this time, a number of Amish leaders realized that interest and questions were not going to fade away. Consequently, witnesses began recounting events and answering questions for a handful of men who, over time, had earned the respect and trust of the Amish. As a result, three books based on the Nickel Mines tragedy appeared before the first anniversary of the shooting. Two of them centered on the forgiveness theme, and the third focused on the struggles that a fictional survivor and her family and community faced in finding peace and forgiveness. None of the three pandered to readers seeking an explicit or lurid account of the execution of five Amish school children or the wounding of five more. Indeed, although each book touched upon the horrific event
that one Amishman described as “our own 9/11,” the authors quickly moved beyond the bloodshed to how the Amish survivors and community responded to the tragedy. In the process, all three have provided an accurate description of Amish beliefs, spiritual foundations, and practices. It is to these books we now turn.

The first to appear was Forgiveness: A Legacy of the West Nickel Mines Amish, by John Ruth, Mennonite author, scholar, film maker, and churchman. Ruth had already earned the respect and friendship of hundreds of Amish in Lancaster County and elsewhere with his perceptive observations and sensitive portrayals of Amish and Hutterite life. In the aftermath of the tragedy, Ruth's was a trusted voice to tell the story and to contextualize why forgiveness naturally emerged from both the Amish world view and from the habits of the Amish heart, to use sociologist Robert Bellah's term.

Ruth's book is short (only 150 pages with few endnotes), and he describes it as a meditation. Early on, he recounts the anger and rage of the killer, Charles Roberts, and the subsequent shock and grief of the survivors, including that of Roberts' wife. Her shock was compounded by her view of her husband as “loving, supportive, and thoughtful,” and “an exceptional father.” Ruth explores the hatred that the shooter directed at God for allowing their first-born daughter to die nine years earlier and the “unimaginable emptiness” that followed. He then captures the pain and chaos that ensues following the wounding, deaths, and suicide of Roberts.

However, forgiveness is the central focus of Ruth's meditation. He reviews the Scriptures upon which the Amish draw to form their forgiveness: the Sermon on the Mount, especially the Lord's prayer that calls for God to forgive us as we forgive our offenders, and Matthew 18 in which the forgiveness of a servant who had accumulated an impossible debt was revoked when he refused to forgive a fellow servant who owed him a pittance. Among other passages, these were the two they cited most to explain why and how they could seemingly forgive so easily and quickly. “We have no choice but to forgive,” many declared.
Ruth also shows how the Amish draw upon the words and experiences captured in the German hymns and in the stories from their Anabaptist heritage. For example, he translates for his readers several persecution hymns directly from the *Ausbund*, their venerable song book. These words of the sixteenth-century martyrs exhort forgiveness and love in the face of suffering and death. Finally, he explores the forgiving acts of the early Anabaptists recounted in *Martyrs' Mirror*, a bloody history of their forefathers and mothers that graces bookshelves in most Amish homes. Ruth explains that all of these contribute to a milieu in which forgiveness is the default reaction that moves beyond anger and rage. He describes forgiveness as the costly expression and outcome of *Gelassenheit*, the state of giving oneself up to Christ and to the body of believers.

The author's narrative skill emerges in his choice of a collage of stories and ruminations on forgiveness to end his book. He cites incidents and admonitions ranging from Native American forgiveness to stories from Alaska and Africa. He explores the forgiveness theme in a sermon from the Hutterites, a separatist Anabaptist group that also seeks to be plain followers of Christ. Unexpectedly, he also gleans thoughts on forgiveness from a devout Muslim.

Among Ruth's many insights, the one I found most helpful concerned Amish humility in the face of adversity. Ruth allows that the Amish, unlike many of their more evangelical counterparts, react with far less anger towards God when this tragedy occurs because they do not feel entitled to special treatment that exempts them from the vicissitudes of life. Rather, they accept what comes with resignation and trust in God's providence. "They expect nothing less than mystery, and thus do not need explanation or advice from books . . . to get their bearing" (p. 38).

The second book dealing with Amish forgiveness, *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcends Tragedy*, was written by Donald Kraybill, Stephen Nolt, and David Weaver-Zercher. All three are professors who have devoted years to studying Amish life and culture. Their book is extensive, nearly as long
as the other two combined. Even though it is the most comprehensive and nuanced, interested readers will find the content to be accessible and important. I could have easily focused all of my review to cover this book alone.

*Amish Grace* consists of thirteen chapters, an appendix, extensive endnotes, and an index. In Part One, the authors offer a profile of the Nickel Mines Amish prior to October 2. From there, they describe the shooting, its aftermath, the surprise of unexpected forgiveness, and the world-wide reactions to this gracious act. The four chapters of Part Two examine the habit, roots, spirituality, and practice of forgiveness. The final four chapters of Part Three delve into some of the complexities and implications of forgiveness in light of Nickel Mines. Each section and chapter is done with the care and accuracy that one would expect from these three scholars. In the process, they provide a rich foundation for anyone seeking to understand the Anabaptist beliefs and practices that undergird Amish life and forgiveness.

Among the many strengths of this work is the authors' recognition of the complexities involved in forgiveness transactions. For example, among other things, they carefully define their terms, such as forgiveness, collectivism, decisional versus emotional forgiveness, and the difference between forgiveness and pardon. They grapple with the questions that many had when they heard of the Amish forgiveness: was it too quick, superficial, unthinking, and simple-minded? Has the Amish culture damped down the anger response to an unhealthy degree? Also, how, if at all, is Amish forgiveness different from mainstream Christian forgiveness, or non-Christian forgiveness, for that matter? And what, if anything, can we learn about forgiveness from the Amish?

Along with John Ruth, they tackle the contentious issue of shunning wayward members and how such an action can be regarded as forgiving. (Both books admirably succeed in presenting the issue from the Amish perspective and in citing the scriptural passages used to support such a practice.) The authors do not hesitate to show the humanity of the Amish
who, like all of us, sometimes succeed and sometimes fail to forgive. For example, what if Charles Roberts had not died and survivors, friends, and families had to re-open wounds by testifying in court? One Amishman admitted that it is sometimes easier to forgive a troubled outsider, such as Roberts, than a perennially troublesome member of one's church or family. Such honesty.

I found the last chapter, “Amish Grace and the Rest of Us,” to be especially helpful—“well worth the price of the book,” as we say. The authors caution us that we cannot willy-nilly appropriate Amish behavior from their collectivist culture to our more secularized institutions and practices. As Two Kingdom adherents who believe that the state is God-ordained to punish evil-doers, the Amish do not expect the state department or the military to respond as Christian believers are instructed. As we have seen, the Amish way—certainly Jesus' forgiving and sacrificial way—does not come easily to anybody. The good news, of course, is that despite the corrosive effects of a toxic culture, the Amish offer an example and hope that forgiveness is possible.

As an alternative to the impossible ideal of forgiving and forgetting, the authors urge an alternative way, to forgive and remember. They write as follows:

“When we remember we take the broken pieces of our lives—lives that have been dismembered by tragedy and injustice—and re-member them into something whole. Forgetting an atrocious offense, personally or corporately, may not be possible, but all of us can and do make decisions about how we remember what we cannot forget.

“For the Amish, gracious remembering involves habits nurtured by memories of Jesus forgiving his tormentors while hanging on a cross and of Dirk Willems returning to pull his enemy out of the icy water. When thirteen-year-old Marian said “Shoot me first” in the schoolhouse, and when adults in her community walked over to the killer's family with words of grace a few hours after his death, they were acting on those habits. And just as surely, their actions at Nickel Mines will be recounted around Amish dinner tables for generations to
come, creating and renewing memories about the power of faith to respond in the face of injustice—even violence—with grace” (pp. 182-183).

A final observation about *Amish Grace*: Many books written by committee, as it were, suffer from unevenness in style and even contradictory content, especially one written with such time constraints. Not so this one. Of the three, this garnered dozens of favorable reviews, many praising its clarity of purpose and consistency of style. In its dozens of reviews in Amazon.com, the only criticism of substance was that the book could have been edited down to avoid some repetition. But even then, the reviewers gave it high marks.

The third book, *The Happening*, written by Harvey Yoder, is the least known among mainstream readers, both Christian and non-Christian. The author has published a dozen books sponsored by Christian Aid Ministries (CAM), a plain version of Mennonite Central Committee. CAM’s mission is to respond to world-wide disasters and to share the gospel along with the relief supplies and efforts. *The Happening* differs from the other two in that forgiveness is not the central focus. Rather, it is a fictionalized account of a fourteen-year-old school girl, Rebecca, who attends the Nickel Mines school. She survives a gunshot wound in the attack, but her younger sister dies in the shooting. The protagonist is a composite character based on the shared experiences of other survivors of the attack. In the Prologue, Yoder explains that he deliberately created this fictionalized character to avoid focusing undue attention on an actual individual and, in deference to the Amish, not dwell on the mayhem in the schoolhouse.

From the opening pages, the author demonstrates an unusually fine understanding of Amish life with its cadences, daily rituals and routines, and simple family joys. Also, the reader’s knowledge of what lies ahead for the children and families on that bucolic but fateful fall morning increases the poignancy and tranquility of her family's last hours together before "The Happening.” That day, we, as it were, follow the children to school and experience with the other morning visitors a well-organized class taught by a young but
A competent Amish teacher. Their calm is shattered when a laconic neighbor backs his pickup to the front door and lugs in his arsenal of violence and death to prepare his attack on the innocents.

Although Yoder waited six months before interviewing witnesses, they agree that he captures the mayhem, pain, and confusion in the aftermath of the tragedy. He also succeeds in describing the continuing effects of the killings on the survivors and their families and in portraying their struggles to make sense of this unprovoked attack. With spare but precise prose, Yoder helps readers reject the notion that the Amish possess a personal stoicism or naiveté that enables them to offer a simple-minded forgiveness.

Yoder also succeeds in helping us understand the humanness of those most closely involved. Rebecca and her family experience what professional care-givers term post-traumatic stress with its subsequent components of nightmares, fear, grief, distrust, temptations to bitterness, spiritual doubts, need for professional care, and ultimately the strength of a grounded faith to help bring about healing through cycles of doubt and despair. Yoder obviously understands their mood swings and anguish by entering into the experience of those he interviewed.

I responded positively to each of the three books I reviewed. All have provided an excellent context for Amish society, without which the typical reader would likely be handicapped in understanding how and why forgiveness was offered so quickly and freely. Amish Grace is the most comprehensive in its handling of forgiveness and most nuanced in its portrayal of Amish life. However, I might have wished in the end for an even stronger admonition to fight against the elements of mainstream culture that destroy us by harboring resentments and hatred and glorifying revenge. Certainly Christians should not be destined to play out the deleterious effects of our toxic culture. And all readers can seek to minimize the influence of Rambo and Indiana Jones and make Dirk Willems' rescue on the ice and Marian's words, "Shoot me first," cherished and central stories in our lives.
John Ruth's shorter work succeeds in providing a clear understanding of both the Amish and the centrality of forgiveness in their Christian faith and practice. An Amish friend who read both books declared, "Amish Grace is for outsiders like you. Forgiveness is written for people like us," a perspective likely influenced by Ruth's translation and use of the German hymn lyrics. Ruth is also known among the Amish as a consummate (my word, not theirs) storyteller, an attribute that the Amish admire.

The Happening is an incarnational narrative rather than a theological, philosophical, or analytical study. Yoder, who grew up in an Amish family, was well-qualified to fill this important task. I was more than once moved to tears as I experienced the event and its turbulent wake through the power of Yoder's description.

In their own way, all three books helped me to understand why forgiveness is so central in Amish belief and practice. They regard it as central in Jesus' teaching. Despite their failings and lapses, which they freely acknowledge, the Amish take Jesus' teaching on forgiveness literally and with great seriousness.

My moment of insight came from realizing that my own forgiveness struggles usually stem from an unwillingness to give up my "right" to not forgive when I have been slighted or injured. From my self-centered perspective, justice is not served by my forgiving the unworthy perpetrator who is "obviously in the wrong." But the Amish seem content to let God take care of justice and retribution, and the "giving myself up" of the Amish sounds like Jesus' incarnated way and example.

Finally, I am thrilled by the wide readership that these books, individually and collectively, are experiencing. Though the Amish characteristically have chosen not to write about Nickel Mines and forgiveness for the outside world, these authors have helped to explain and expand their witness of Christian forgiveness. The writers' words and the Amish example will undoubtedly be a means of grace to readers, Christian and non-Christian alike, who seek alternatives to
retribution and violence. At the least, all readers will be exposed to the tenants of radical Anabaptist Christianity. One would even hope that this witness may lead to the Christ who is at the center of the Amish response. In fact, if words are important, the name that the Amish chose for their new school combines hope with forgiveness. It is New Hope Amish School.


Reviewed by A. Graybill Brubaker*

In the very helpful autobiography with which Glenn Schwartz begins his book, I found a story whose beginning very closely parallels my own. We were both brought up in a conservative congregation and were verbally called to mission service. On our first deployment, both of us boarded a freighter in New York City and set sail for Africa. From that very point, our paths diverged sharply. While Glenn experienced an eighteen-day sea sickness, I spent a wonderful twenty-one days reflecting on my past experiences and

*A. Graybill Brubaker has served the Brethren in Christ Church as pastor, missionary to Africa, and missions administrator. He recently completed his seventh teaching assignment at Evangelical Bible College in Malawi. His book, The History of Christianity in Africa is in its second edition.

Glenn Schwartz is Executive Director of World Missions Associates. He served the Brethren in Christ Church in Zambia and Zimbabwe in the 1960s, and as an administrator in the School of World Missions at Fuller Theological Seminary in the 1970s.

Kenneth O. Hoke, owner and operator of KOH Consulting, has served with Brethren in Christ World Missions (including as Regional Administrator for South Asia), and with Gospel Tide Broadcasting Association.