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Book Review of At Peace and Unafraid: Public Order, Security, and the Wisdom of the Cross

Ron Mock

George Fox University, rmock@georgefox.edu

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The Quaker road is not for those who would sit quietly on their benches. On some days it means we hold up mirrors that reflect truths about ourselves that are difficult to accept. On others, it means we struggle with the complexities of layered issues and the added burden—and gift—of discernment. On still others, particularly when we're bearing witness in Jerusalem or Baghdad or Darfur, it means that we can be called upon to make what has been viewed as the ultimate sacrifice.

This month our reviewers are drawn from the ranks of those who do a lot of the heavy lifting for us. Few of them say what we want to hear. Ron Mock tells us that our fuzzy pacifism no longer works. Marty Grundy reminds us that the Religious Society of Friends is, simply by definition of the word "religious," an organization of those who believe in God. J. Brent Bill lets us know whose side God is on. Lloyd Lee Wilson helps us weigh the strengths of a meeting. Elizabeth Boardman explains why we can't keep revving our fax machines and wait for the next election to get rid of George W. Bush. Susan Jeffers cautions us about throwing the Biblical baby out with the bathwater. Cynthia Jones urges us to re-examine the power of a Spirit-led process. Max L. Carter finds wisdom in the everyday. And, when spiritual questions are raised, Kirsten Backstrom wonders if we should be seeking definite answers. "When dealing with the meaning of our lives and deaths," she writes, "many of the best 'answers' involve an openness to the questioning process itself, a willingness to experience the limits of what we can know, [and] a sense of awe at the mystery beyond our certainties."

I am humbled by the wisdom of these Friends. They do not all offer a comfortable view of the world, but they speak to my condition.

I am grateful for their service.

—Ellen Michaud, book review editor

At Peace and Unafraid: Public Order, Security, and the Wisdom of the Cross

Edited by Duane K. Friesen and Gerald Schlabach. Herald Press, 2005. 456 pages. \$19.99/softcover.

Modern life is ratcheting up the pressure on Christian pacifists. The global spread of democracy and terrorism has left us no place to hide.

Pacifism evaporated from official Christian doctrine as a result of the dilemma we can imagine Roman emperor Constantine faced when he converted—how to love his enemies (and thus, obviously, not kill them) and his neighbors (whose safety was his responsibility).

Theologians developed "just war" doc-

trines in response to Constantine's dilemma, relegating pacifism to the margins in Christian life. Quakers' attempt in colonial Pennsylvania to revive pacifism as a foundation for public order petered out during the American Revolution.

Since Constantine, Christian pacifism has hidden behind one of two skirts. Pacifists flourish among separatist groups who avoid participation in politics and government, leaving to unbelievers the dirty work of fighting crime, suppressing terrorism, and defending the nation. Others, including many Quakers, join in governing but permit their pacifism to go a little fuzzy when it comes to the coercive aspects of police work or international collective security (e.g., United Nations peacekeeping missions).

But neither separatism nor fuzzy pacifism works anymore. Democracy gives everyone a voice in government, so not participating is just shirking. And global terrorism means we no longer have the luxury of irresponsibility. We are all on the front lines, so we desperately need clearer insights all the way to the bottom of Constantine's dilemma, and practical means of putting those insights into effect.

The Mennonites take this task seriously, now that their separatist walls have tumbled. They experiment with active, effective nonviolence, including Christian Peacemaker Teams. And they are building the leading network of serious Christian peace scholarship, with their flagship at Eastern Mennonite University. After 9/11, they brought their practitioners and scholars together to push the boundaries of our understanding about peaceable public order. We can see how far they have gotten in *At Peace and Unafraid: Public Order, Security, and the Wisdom of the Cross*.

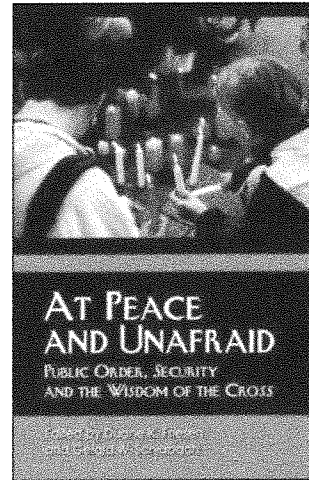
Edited by Duane K. Friesen and Gerald Schlabach, *At Peace and Unafraid* presents 21 essays on a wide range of topics connected to Constantine's dilemma. The result is neither systematic nor comprehensive, but it is a rich stew of theology and practice. Among the practitioners' contributions, six stand out:

Alfred Neufeld's reflections on Paraguay, where Mennonites find themselves entering prominent governmental positions as democracy takes root there.

Judith Gardiner's description of her involvement in politics as a member of a local borough council in London, England.

Paulus Widjaja's account of challenges in peacemaking among Christians and Moslems in Indonesia.

Alain Epp Weaver's too-brief study of non-



violence in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Alix Lozano's report on Mennonite peacemaking in Colombia, highlighting how a "weak church" sustains a wide variety of projects that have distinct practical effects.

Jeff Gingerich's reflections on his efforts to transform a culture of violence among New Orleans' police by training them in peacemaking.

Schlabach follows Gingerich with a proposal to replace current police and

military with "just policing, and just just policing." Schlabach envisions a world in which community-based law enforcement, with an emphasis on restorative justice and proactive social ministry to communities on the margins, would reduce the number of marginalized people willing to operate outside the law. Schlabach believes something similar is also possible at the international level, so the traditional military mindset of "just war" national defense could give way to an international version of domestic "just policing." Schlabach's vision is not entirely convincing yet, but the way to speed its evolution into something workable is to put him into dialog with people doing the work on the streets, as the Mennonites have done here.

Elsewhere, Lisa Schirch and J. Daryl Byler describe ten "Effective and Faithful Security Strategies." Several are promising, especially providing universal training in peacebuilding, including civilian-based defense. Others are more problematic, such as shifting our approach to terrorism from a warfare model to a law enforcement approach—which leads us directly back into Constantine's dilemma.

The meatiest visionary piece is Friesen's. Friesen steps into a pothole, repeating tired shibboleths of those who assume peacemaking is a leftist project: America is the Beast from the Book of Revelations, "one of the greatest threats to human life and dignity" in history; and globalization, and by extension the market, are its handmaidens. This regrettable diversion obscures the strengths in Friesen's message, and reinforces the ghettoization of peacemaking among those to the left of Howard Dean.

But the heart of Friesen's argument deserves our full attention. Security is central to Biblical shalom, where "everyone will sit under their own vine and fig tree, and no one will make them afraid." (Micah 4:4) We need to replace our culture's faith in violence with recognition that true security embraces an

"ethic of risk," in which no one country or group is in a position to dominate others. There is much more in this essay, leading to another impressive list of practical strategies for transforming security policy. But, again, it is partly based on a law enforcement approach to terrorism.

So Constantine's dilemma persists. We have not found our way through this tangle between our commitments to love our enemies and our neighbors. *At Peace and Unafraid* does some important clearing of the brush, and points in promising directions. But it leaves us standing on the threshold of a breakthrough. The authors give us many tools, but we still don't know which, if any, will clear the path.

—Ron Mock

Ron Mock, a member of Newberg Friends Church in Oregon, teaches political science and peace studies at George Fox University. He was a member of the International Quaker Working Party on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, which published its report as *When the Rain Returns: Toward Justice and Reconciliation in Israel and Palestine*. He is also the author of *Loving Without Giving In: Christian Responses to Terrorism and Tyranny*, which recommends a law enforcement approach to terrorism.

Godless for God's Sake: Nontheism in Contemporary Quakerism, by 27 Quaker nontheists

Edited by David Boulton. *Dales Historical Monographs*, 2006. 146 pages.
\$18.50/softcover.

This series of essays purports to prove that there are significantly large numbers of people who identify as Quakers who do not believe in any supernatural deity. They hope that the response of the Religious Society of Friends will range from openly welcoming such interesting diversity to dropping its unnecessary attachment to the superstitious, outmoded concept of "God."

As evidenced by their more nuanced self-definitions, 19 of the 27 contributors to this book would not be happy with the label "nontheist" applied in the book's title. But the title sets the editor's tone. It is taken from Meister Eckhart: "Man's last and highest parting occurs when, for God's sake, he takes leave of God"; and editor David Boulton cites a modern interpreter, Raymond Bernard Blakney, to suggest that Eckhart was keen to distinguish between what we might wish to be true and what we find to be true experimentally. What Eckhart demands is equivalent to what pure

science demands of the laboratory investigator. He means to say that the price of truth is self-denial in things spiritual, as well as in things material and intellectual.

To think this means that the methods of science should be applied to God is a misinterpretation. Eckhart, and the Rhineland mystics in general, were engaged in the *via negativa*. They knew that God, transcendent and imminent, was too great, too mysterious to capture in human words and concepts. Eckhart was warning against making idols of our perceptions of the nature of God. He was not saying the best thing is to discard God, but rather to lay aside our fondest ideas, definitions, and expectations about God, to step into the void and in the unknowing find the Presence. Stir into this misunderstanding of Eckhart the misuse of science-as-Truth when investigating spirituality, and there is a heady stew that makes logical sense only if you accept without question its basic assumptions.

So perhaps the most useful review of a book that wants to change the fundamental basis and understanding of the Religious Society of Friends is to examine the assumptions underlying the book and compare them with Friends' faith. They are vastly different.

First, let's look at Friends' tradition, that more than any other, rests for its knowledge and ongoing guidance on faith/trust in the experiential availability of the Living God, within a Biblical framework of interpretation. The message of early Friends was not the cliché "that of God in everyone"—a quotation often torn out of context. Their message was more accurately stated as "Christ is come to teach his people himself." It was realized eschatology; it experienced "the power of the Lord is over all" and "the Lord did gather us up as in a net." Individual Friends for generations experienced the pain and glory of taking up the Cross daily, of submission, surrender: "not my will but thine be done." They lived into the experience of knowing Jesus, who said "you are my friends if you follow my commands." It was the experience of the inward availability of Christ, enhanced and felt in community, that drew Friends together. The hallmarks of the group became its structures of worship in expectant waiting, church governance based on corporate discernment, and the expectation that the outward life of every Friend would witness to what the group had learned from Christ about living daily as if in God's kingdom.

Several assumptions underlie the book, all of which presuppose that theism is a fallacy. First is the assumption that only that which can be apprehended through the senses or deduced with logic and reason is real. But different phenomena have separate ways of perceiving and "knowing" them. To subject

everything to scientism begs the question of whether there are realities knowable in other ways. Second is the assumption that only what is inside one's own head or experience is real. Allowing that solipsism is correct closes the discussion before it begins. Third, they assume that only that which can be comprehended by human intellect is real, and that the best value humans can imagine is the ultimate measure of truth. This dismisses by fiat the early Quaker understanding of ultimate Truth.

Many contributors claim "experience" as the major tenet of Quakerism and offer it as proof that there is no God. George Fox's statement, "this I knew experimentally" does not make experiment an indispensable factor of Quakerism; it is the means to the end. The end Fox proclaimed was "there is one even Christ Jesus that can speak to thy condition." It is curious and sad that when contributors have had a "unitive" or mystical experience, apparently they have chosen to explain it away as something caused by nature, or a welling up of the collective unconscious. "God" for them is a figment of human imagination, and a sorry one at that, causing most of the evil they recount throughout history. Repeatedly they insist that experience is their only measure of truth. But they have deliberately chosen to emasculate their own experience and to misinterpret that of others. The experience of the Presence of God is real. Once you have tasted it, you know it. It cannot be measured by science, but that does not make it unreal.

Does this book prove the difficult negative that God does not exist? No. Does it prove that the contributors' varying interpretations of nontheistic humanism belong in the Religious Society of Friends? No. Ignorance of, or misuse or misappropriation of language, image, and metaphor does not change the reality of the matrix within which these symbols are embedded, and toward which they point. It is peculiar that a group of nontheist individuals should insist on grafting their theology onto another (Quaker) tradition.

None of these writers speak of inner struggles, of transformation, or even of joy. Sin, and therefore forgiveness and grace, are banished. They are defiantly or wistfully lonely but proud that they are superior to those of us deluded by superstition and the "lies" perpetrated by religion.

Ironically, they consider themselves religious. Several of them deconstruct the word's etymology to prove religion has nothing to do with a supernatural omnipotent deity. Even the *Oxford English Dictionary* dismisses this intellectual game based on "its supposed etymological meaning." Religion is an institutionalization of what binds us together with God. Over and over the contributors offer their stories as seekers making the conscious