OMNI NEWSLETTER #4 ON VIOLENCE USA, July 26, 2012. Compiled by Dick Bennett. BUILDING A CULTURE OF PEACE.
(#1 Feb. 25, 2008; #2 August 20, 2011; #3 April 8, 2012)
See OMNI Newsletters on International DAY to End Violence Against Women, part of OMNI’s National/International DAYS Project.

Here is the link to all OMNI newsletters:

http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/ Many of OMNI’s topical newsletters confront different kinds of violence: empire, militarism, torture, individual wars, bullying, death penalty, women, etc. See Index. Also see the newsletters on resistance: nonviolence, conflict resolution, diplomacy, etc.

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**Murder Victims’ Families for Reconciliation (MVFR)**
[Dick: I attended the showing of the documentary on MVFR at the Wiggins Methodist Church on 6th Street. The film, “Meeting with a Killer” by Lucky Duck Productions, traced the lives of the family of a murdered daughter/sister and of the murderer, and their eventual meetings and forgiveness by the mother and sister. The mother, Linda L. White, a remarkable person, brought the film and was present for questions. An engrossing experience.]

**For information, contact:**
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Washington, DC 20037

- Home
- About Us
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- Remembrance Project
- Resources
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**MVFR’s Mission**
Founded in 1976, Murder Victims’ Families for Reconciliation (MVFR) is a national organization of family members of victims of both homicide and executions who oppose the death penalty in all cases. MVFR includes people of many different perspectives. Because violent crime cuts across a broad spectrum of society, our members are geographically, racially and economically diverse.
Welcome!

We are happy you found us and hope you will sign up for our action alerts. We currently have high-level campaigns in Texas, North Carolina, and California; additionally we are actively working for abolition in all states that continue to execute.

Over the next year we expect to expand our presence in additional, targeted states by recruiting, training and mobilizing family members. MVFR will roll out more resources for our members, speak at more events and raise awareness through the media by telling our stories.

Announcement

MVFR is undergoing an exciting period of transition. Scott Bass began as interim executive director (media release) on November 1st following the resignation of Beth Wood. We thank Beth for her service on MVFR’s staff and we wish her well as she returns to another of her passions – teaching elementary school.

Scott takes the helm during this transition after two years as MVFR’s North Carolina Coordinator and many more years of working with victims’ family members and working with his home state’s campaign to end the death penalty.

MVFR’s commitment to its mission is firm. We will build on our existing strong foundation, will continue to nurture healthy relationships with our partners across the country and will steadfastly work to fulfill our mission.

SEPTEMBER 25 IS NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR MURDER VICTIMS.

http://peacefultomorrows.org/
The vision for September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows was born when a small group of family members of those killed on 9/11 became connected after reading each others’ pleas for nonviolent and reasoned responses to the terrorist attacks. Several of these individuals met one another when they participated in the “Walk for Healing and Peace” from Washington, D.C. to New York City in late 2001 organized by Kathy Kelly of Voices in the Wilderness (now Voices for Creative Nonviolence).

Peaceful Tomorrows Reflects on 10th Anniversary of Attacks
“The members of September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows are grateful for the expressions of remembrance and concern being offered on the 10th anniversary of the events which took the lives of our loved ones. On this day we ask those who feel compassion for our loss to expand their compassion to include others who continue to experience loss ten years later: innocent families in Afghanistan and Iraq experiencing the loss of their loved ones and displacement from their communities as the result of war and political strife; Muslim-Americans subjected to bias and violence at home; those denied the protections of our Constitution and law, whether in Guantanamo or in our own country; those suffering from job loss and economic
dislocation related to the cost of war and rising military budgets; and those who have seen their civil liberties and freedoms exchanged for the false promise of security.

The lesson of 9/11 is that we live in a connected world. We rise or fall together. As Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” On this 10th anniversary, let us honor those we lost by recognizing our kinship with people all over the world, and affirming the values and principles that will guarantee peaceful tomorrows for everyone.”

Defending Muslims and Immigrants

Members of Peaceful Tomorrows have shared their voices on issues affecting immigrants as a result of 9/11, rejecting Islamophobia as well as the stereotyping and scapegoating that sometimes accompanied otherwise positive and meaningful reform efforts. Most recently, members of Peaceful Tomorrows have expressed their support for the creation of an Islamic Cultural Center in Lower Manhattan, referred to as the “Ground Zero Mosque.” As a wave of Islamophobia swept the country in 2010, the cultural center became a national issue, making it clear that a larger public education campaign was needed. We forged new kinds of partnerships to bring to new audiences our message about the vital necessity for restoring the rule of law and defending civil liberties and religious freedoms. Protection of religious freedom and human rights strengthens our nation; denying Muslims their rights is un-American. Repressive policies that grow out of fear and hatred play into the hands of the terrorists.

Rule of Law

September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows Rule of Law campaign mobilizes and amplifies the voices of 9/11 family members who support closing the prison at Guantanamo Bay, restoring the rule of law, and ending indefinite detention and other violations of human rights that have become an enduring legacy of the U.S. "War on Terror." Our goal for this initiative has been to strengthen the reasonable voices of 9/11 family members who support the rule of law in all aspects of dealing with the perpetrators and accused perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks. This includes the decision to conduct federal versus military trials, to close Guantanamo, to end indefinite detention, to end the military commissions, and related issues.

9/11 Stories: Our Voices, Our Choices

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♦ Humility, Compassion and Wisdom on September 11
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With Us Forever
9/11 anniversary brings local residents sadness, and continued resolve to make the world better September 08, 2011| By Cindy Cantrell, Globe Correspondent Read the full story here: http://articles.boston.com/2011-09-08/news/30131100_1_steel-beam-ground-zero-world-trade-center Loretta Filipov... Read more »
♦ NY Stories: An Oral Historian Takes on 9/11
♦ Press Summary, 10th Anniversary
♦ YNN-TV: Families and Friends of Murder Victims Remember Their Loved Ones
September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows has announced two winners in its “Say Your Peace” video contest. Mary and Katie Ginther, 11 year-old twin sisters from Sammamish, Washington, were winners in the youth category for their video, “Say Our Peace with Brownies.” Sarah Fuhro of Natick, Massachusetts, the mother of a soldier sent to Iraq and Afghanistan, was the winner in the adult category for her video, “Who May Vote for War?” Two cash prizes of $1,000 were awarded for each of the videos, which can be viewed here:

Say Our Peace with Brownies:  Who May Vote for War?

September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows’ “Say Your Peace” video contest grew out of a desire to hear how individual Americans think our nation can promote alternatives to war and to offer support to others seeking non-violent responses to all forms of conflict, hate and terrorism. We believe strongly in the rule of law, and are committed to calling attention to threats to civil liberties, human rights, and other freedoms in the U.S. as a consequence of 9/11 and its resulting wars. We seek to promote U.S. foreign policy that places a priority on internationally-recognized principles of human rights, democracy and self-rule. The “Say Your Peace” video contest is part of Peaceful Tomorrows’ 9/11 Voices for Restoring Rule of Law campaign, funded through a grant from the Open Society Institute.

GUN VIOLENCE

Cole reports: "The international comparisons show conclusively that fewer gun owners per capita produce not only fewer murders by firearm, but fewer murders per capita overall."

Murders by firearms in Britain are 30 times fewer per capita than in the US. (photo: file)

58 Murders a Year by Firearms in Britain, 8,775 in US

By Juan Cole, Informed Comment  RSN, 22 July 12
Number of Murders, United States, 2010: 12,996
Number of Murders by Firearms, US, 2010: 8,775

Number of Murders, Britain, 2011*: 638
(Since Britain’s population is 1/5 that of US, this is equivalent to 3,095 US murders)

Number of Murders by firearms, Britain, 2011*: 58
(equivalent to 290 US murders)

Number of Murders by crossbow in Britain, 2011*: 2
(equivalent to 10 US murders).

For more on murder by firearms in Britain, see the BBC.

The international comparisons show conclusively that fewer gun owners per capita produce not only fewer murders by firearm, but fewer murders per capita overall. In the case of Britain, firearms murders are 30 times fewer than in the US per capita.

Do hunters really need semi-automatic AR-15 assault weapons? Is that how they roll in deer season? The US public doesn’t think so.

- **British crime statistics are September to September**

Bill Moyers, The NRA’s Dark Gun Culture
Moyers & Company, RSN, July 21, 2012
Moyers writes: "The gunman in Colorado waited only for his opportunity. So there you have it – the arsenal of democracy has been transformed into the arsenal of death. And the NRA? The NRA is the enabler of death – paranoid, delusional and as venomous as a scorpion."
READ MORE  http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/416-gun-control-/12541-focus-the-nras-dark-gun-culture

Obama Joins Romney in Gun-Control Silence After Shootings
McCormick reports: "President Barack Obama and Republican challenger Mitt Romney have spoken little about gun control in their campaigns for the White House and showed no sign of shifting course ..."
Mayors Against Illegal Guns <info@mayorsagainstillegalguns.org>

More than 48,000 Americans will be murdered with guns during the next president’s term. How can President Obama and Governor Romney face that fact without a plan?

After the Aurora mass shooting, both candidates made moving statements that echoed the sympathy we’re all feeling. But words of condolence aren't enough. It's way past time for action.

Join Mayors Against Illegal Guns in telling the presidential candidates that right now, what we need is not a moment of silence, but a moment of courage.

Tell President Obama and Governor Romney: We Demand A Plan to End Gun Violence in America.

Columbine, Virginia Tech, Tucson and now Aurora. The list of mass shootings keeps growing. And gun violence continues to take a constant, devastating toll with 34 Americans murdered with guns every day.

It’s time for all of us to join with the survivors and families from Arizona who have issued a powerful call for concrete action from the men who are asking to lead our country. They know that sympathy without solutions isn’t enough.

The deadly toll of gun violence mounts higher every day. And what have we heard from our political leaders when it comes to common-sense reforms that even NRA members support? Dead silence.

We can’t let people continue to get gunned down every day without a plan of action. It's time to ask the candidates for president: If not now, when?

Americans have a right to live without fear of gun violence, and we have the right to hear specific, concrete plans from those who seek to be our leaders.

Demand that President Obama and Governor Romney present a detailed plan to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people:

http://www.DemandAPlan.org
Thank you,
Mark Glaze
Director, Mayors Against Illegal Guns

P.S. - A group of Tucson survivors and family members ran a full-page ad in this morning’s USA Today demanding a plan from President Obama and Governor Romney. Read their personal call for leadership on gun violence and join them today.

REFLECTION: Levine, Gabel, Lerner

Mark Levine, Rabbi Lerner, American Mass Murder: a Toxic Cultural Brew
Tikkun info@spiritualprogressives.org via uark.edu
2:13 PM (24 minutes ago) to jbennet
[Editor’s Note: Contributing Editor Mark Levine correctly highlights the shallowness of American media in understanding the recurrence of mass murder in our society. Levine, who helped organize our 1996 conference on the politics of meaning in Washington, DC. and has subsequently written about the Middle East, helps draw attention to how deeply violence permeates our society. What Peter Gabel and I would add to his analysis is the ways that people in a society based on individualism, selfishness and materialism are constantly in pain that results from the isolation and lack of mutual recognition and human connection that is an essential feature of capitalist societies (for a deeper analysis of this, please read Peter Gabel’s book The Bank Teller and Other Essays on the Politics of Meaning or my book The Left Hand of God: Taking Back our Country from the Religious Right). By obscuring these underlying issues, the corporate media gives a free pass to both sides in this debate to focus solely on guns and unattainable gun control (important as gun control really is) and diverts attention from its own role in helping create a society in which violence seems like such an easy and accessible path in responding to the spiritual violence built into the daily realities of life under global capitalism. -Rabbi Michael Lerner RabbiLerner.tikkun@gmail ]

“American Mass Murder: A Toxic Cultural Brew” By Mark Levine One of the recurring questions in Michael Moore’s 2002 documentary Bowling for Columbine is why Canada, America's "friendly" neighbor to the north, has among the highest rates and ease of gun ownership in the world, yet has much lower rates of gun violence than the United States. Moore travels to several major southern Canadian
cities asking random citizens and local law enforcement officials their opinions. His conclusion, and one of the most powerful arguments of the movie, is that it's not the mere existence of guns, but the socio-economic, cultural and political context in which guns exist, that are primary determinants of the levels and kinds of gun violence in a society. According to Moore's interviewees, Americans are both pumped full of fear by their political elites and media, and too quick to assume that violence is the appropriate response to a dispute. "They're afraid more easily," one person explained. "They don't stop and think," said another, assessing Americans' supposed proclivity to shoot first and ask questions later. Such views might help explain the shooting of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman and other more spontaneous acts of gun violence. But James Eagan Holmes, the alleged Aurora killer, apparently spent months methodically planning his crime. He didn't just "snap" and go on a killing spree in response to a perceived threat or insult. What's more, there seems to have been no political, ideological or economic motive behind his actions. He is not a member of an oppressed group seeking revenge against the dominant society; nor is he some 1970s-style bourgeois radical (or the fin-de-siecle al-Qa'eda equivalent) acting in perceived solidarity with the oppressed masses. However terrorised were his victims, the shooting is not an act of political terrorism. Whatever psychological diagnosis ultimately gets pinned to him, Holmes and the act that will forever define him—as he hoped it would—were the products of a peculiarly American set of cultural experiences, values and motivation, which hold the key to understanding how and the United States seems to produce such a disproportionate number of people who engage in acts of seemingly senseless mass murder. Locating the Violence Americans are certainly no more prone to extreme violence than other cultures. In Syria today the leadership and tens of thousands of government soldiers have little compunction about kill many times the number of people Holmes killed every day merely to retain their political and economic power. The same can be said of most dictators, and many of the violent movements who oppose them. War, civil conflict, and the violence routinely deployed by those in power to remain so have produced unspeakable brutality in the last half century, from Latin America across the global south to Southeast Asia. The four years of World War II produced three times the number killed in all the violent conflicts since. As a recent collection of family photos of SS guards, “Laughing at Auschwitz,” documents, people engaged in the most unspeakable horrors can lead seemingly “normal” lives, celebrating Christmas with family, drinking with friends and co-workers at the world's most infamous charnel house as if it was an automobile plant (http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/laughing-at-auschwitz-leisure-photos-of-camp-guards-shock-germans-a-507175.html). The point being, the human proclivity towards unfathomable cruelty and violence knows no racial, national, religious or historical boundaries. But
most of the violence described above was motivated by some sort of comprehensible political, ideological or economic motivation and thus “rational,” even if we might oppose the reasons used to justify it. One of the paradoxes of the modern world is precisely that we try to carve out boundaries between legitimate or at least politically and morally comprehensible—and more to the point, sanctioned or at least excusable—violence from violence that is “totally beyond the pale of any acceptable human conduct,” as one of the most famous lines from Apocalypse Now puts it. Cinematic anti-heroes like Apocalypse Now's Colonel Kurtz, or The Joker from Christopher Nolan's Batman (as whom James Holmes allegedly dressed during his rampage) are powerful precisely because they call into question the supposed boundary between legitimate, comprehensible and even sanctioned violence that is understood as necessary to achieving and maintaining social and political order, and nihilistic, “irrational” violence that threatens it. We judge them insane and terminate them with “extreme prejudice” not because their violence is so qualitatively different from that sanctioned by the state, but rather because it is so uncomfortably close. Is there any wonder that many post-9/11 mass murderers, including Holmes, dressed in military style clothing, as if they’re acting out a first-person shooter game in real life. How sane is it to create a culture that is so caught up in war that a staggering 7 percent of GDP, $1 trillion, is spent on it even as tens of thousands of people—that's several thousands times the number Holmes killed—die each year from lack of affordable health care and the country's infrastructure rots? And where the structural violence of an economic system based on rank greed and amorality is fully supported by at least half the population? It's not surprising that people who suffer from some form of mental illness or psycho-social disorders resort to military-style violence when they finally break from whatever bonds still connect them to society. It's literally programmed into our cultural DNA, today more than ever before. In fact, it's surprising that it doesn't happen more often. Certainly the methodical murder of so many people seems insane to “normal” people, exponentially more so to the victims. But how different do the members of an Afghan wedding party whose loved ones have just been blown to smitherines by a US drone feel? How about the parents of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children who died during the sanctions regime? Can they make any more sense of that than we can of this? Are Americans as a society ultimately that much more sane than James Holmes? How many innocent civilians die each year in its name? And not just in foreign conflict. Two days after Holmes' massacre 14 people, most probably “illegal” migrant laborers from Mexico and other Central American countries, where killed when the pick-up truck into which they were crowded careened off a road and crashed into a tree (http://www.latimes.com/news/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-texas-crash-13-dead-20120723,0,2632784.story). Can a country that so depends on cheap foreign labor yet criminalizes and dehumanizes them, spends billions of dollars to build walls to (sort of) keep them out, and
forces them to risk—and so often, lose—their lives merely to get to their jobs be considered sane or even morally competent? If you look at rates of obesity, prescription addictions, or the willingness to continue with policies that manifestly harm the majority of people supporting them, is the country not committing a collective crime against itself and the world around it? Thriving on Chaos Or do people like Holmes serve as a wake-up call to the society-wide psychological disturbance of the equilibrium between empathy and uncheked individualism and selfishness, the two contradictory impulses which have, depending on their balance, produced and destroyed countless civilizations before ours? Indeed, the American success story has depended more than most on a strategy of creative destruction, of encouraging the kind of reckless risk-taking and disregard for consequences that are at the heart of entrepreneurial capitalism. America's history as a settler colonial enterprise turned global empire, whose expansion and development depended on the murder and dispossession of millions of native people and the enslavement of even more Africans, has made it one of the greatest examples of the benefits and consequences of the impulse to creative destruction. When it has been tempered by a concern for the common good, it enabled an unprecedented level of prosperity across society; when it is bereft of any concern for society at large, it produces precisely the predicament in which the US presently finds itself. “Thriving on Chaos” is how business management guru Tom Peters described this strategy twenty-five years ago, as neoliberalism was being cemented as the official political and economic ideology of the United States. Those who care to look can easily see the consequences of such chaos on workers, communities, and ecologies around the world. But for those who, like Holmes—or his fictional doppleganger The Joker—can't turn chaos into “legitimate” profit or power, it can easily become its own end—the creativity becomes a means towards destruction, rather than the other way around. And here is where we can return to Moore's primary point in Bowling for Columbine: The reason gun violence is so much higher in the US compared with its northern neighbor is precisely because Canadians are still willing to take care of their own, to provide adequate health care and other social services for the poor and working classes, to make the fuller dignity of people's life of equal value to the pursuit of profit by the few. Ironically, Moore's argument is not that different than that of the gun lobby, which argues that issues like poverty, alcohol and drug abuse and endemic violence in the inner city are responsible for the epidemic of gun violence, not the mere availability of guns (http://www.americanfirearms.org/statistics.php#15). If society “tackles these issues... you'll solve, to a large degree, the problems of violence in society. But they go ignored.” Of course, as far as we know James Holmes was not the product of the inner city, or of an abusive, disfunctional or even criminal environment. He's just a person who traveled the terrible path from slightly strange to insane, and because he lived in a culture where guns are readily...
available and gratuitous and amoral violence suffuses and is even celebrated across the culture, his insanity and complete disregard for others was expressed through mass violence. In so doing, he offered Americans a glimpse of the darkets recesses of the cultural and economic logic of their society. Guns might kill people, and getting rid of them would certainly reduce the death toll. But as long as Americans suffuse their culture with violence at almost every level, there is no chance for meaningful gun reform, and young men like James Eagan Holmes will continue to turn their private mental illness into an occasion for cinematic murder and mayhem. Mark LeVine is Professor of history at UC Irvine, Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University, a Contributing Editor at Tikkun Magazine, and author of numerous books, including the just published Struggle and Survival in Palestine/Israel, co-edited with Gershon Shafir (UC Press). If you like this kind of analysis, help us continue by subscribing to Tikkun magazine www.tikkun.org and/or by joining The Network of Spiritual Progressives at www.spiritualprogressives.org. Please read our ESRA—the Environmentl and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and our Global Marshall Plan at www.spiritualprogressives.org and please share this entire message with your friends.

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**The Bank Teller: Peter Gabel**

**Books, Books Defying Categories**

*The Bank Teller* explores the desire within each of us to overcome our isolation and to see and be seen by the other in a relation of authentic connectedness. (Available on many sites, below.) Insisting that this desire for “mutual recognition” is the very foundation of our social being and is as fundamental in the spiritual realm as the need for food and shelter is in the material realm, Peter Gabel shows how the fear of humiliation blocks our capacity to become fully present to each other and leads us to collectively reproduce an alienated and artificial society that isolates us from one another and from the capacity to fully experience the natural world. In a series of strikingly original essays, Gabel shows how “the opening up of desire” requires a fundamental challenge to our existing social institutions and a new political strategy that invents new forms of work, friendship, and community.

See the **Publisher’s Weekly** review on Amazon’s webpage. **And others:**
“In this insightful and provocative essay collection, Peter Gabel—lawyer, psychoanalytic theorist, associate editor of Tikkun magazine, and philosopher extraordinaire—examines the psychic and spiritual losses that attend our new-age reduction of ethics to cost-benefit analysis. Compassionate, polemical and witty, The Bank Teller reveals the limits of a world in which human regard is measured only by the commercial value of one’s approval ratings.” -Patricia Williams, columnist for The Nation and author of The Alchemy of Race and Rights

“In evocative, accessible, and often beautiful language, he describes how we could address our longing for connection and recognition, and thereby break through the rituals of denial that keep us apart.” -Gary Peller, professor of law, Georgetown University

“I chose Peter Gabel’s The Bank Teller as an undergraduate religion text for its radical clarity in exposing American cultural forces of alienation that deny our common human desire for genuine connectedness and community. Gabel’s “politics of meaning” is built upon Buber’s I-Thou and seeks the healing inherent in Buber’s ideal. Gabel’s essays focus on images of pseudocommunity and its legitimating myths and false moral visions. As they read, students realize the powerfully destructive nature of deceptive acculturation processes leading people to accept poor substitutes for community, and concealing personal isolation, longing, and pain, even within churches. Gabel’s emphasis on healing rather than societal norms of escape and denial is as refreshing as it challenging, especially for intense group discussion.” -Craig Bowman, professor, Rochester College and

**The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country from the Religious Right**
$24.95…now $17.47…30% discount until October 15, 2006

Reviewed by Patricia Farris, Senior Minister of First United Methodist Church, Santa Monica, California

The title of Rabbi Lerner’s book may cause some of you to go right out and buy it and others of you to run the other way. Skip over the title and read the book anyway. For anyone concerned about the state of the soul of the people of God in our country at this time, as well as faith questions about social and public policy (that is, anyone preaching, planning worship and teaching), it’s worth a read. Rabbi Michael Lerner has a PhD in Philosophy from the University of California, Berkeley and in Clinical Psychology from the Wright Institute. He is currently rabbi of the Beyt Tikkun synagogue and editor of Tikkun magazine. His long experience in psychotherapy, social psychology and social movements, combine with his faith perspective to provide what may be the book’s most helpful section. Along with other colleagues and students, Lerner has spent most of the past thirty years interviewing middle-income people in the United States, Canada, England and Israel. From this research, in the first section of the book entitled “America’s Spiritual Crisis,” Lerner offers insights into the spiritual hunger and yearning of that group of people as well as a critique of the social and political structures that contribute to their anxiety, their sense of isolation and fear, and the tremendous stress of living in a highly competitive and pressured society.

“It is the search for meaning in a despiritualized world that leads many people to right-wing religious
communities because these groups seem to be in touch with the sacred dimension of life.” It is Lerner’s contention that many people have affiliated with the Religious Right not out of any support of their political or social agenda, but because the Left has abdicated any acknowledgement or support for what Clifford Gertz named “the politics of meaning.” Of course people want a ‘purpose-driven life’ (small case), Lerner observes. They want a higher meaning for their lives and values for their children. And, in his view, if the only place they can find support for that hunger is on the Right, that’s where they will turn.

The second half of the book is entitled “The Spiritual Agenda for American Politics: A New Bottom Line.” The book is obviously a challenge to America’s progressives to “get their spiritual house in order” and to frame their agenda in ways that address issues of meaning and values. He provides an historical analysis as well as a prescription of policy positions. While finding points of agreement and disagreement, readers will be challenged by his assertions and his political claims, as he addresses the range of domestic and foreign policy-- the environment, families, health care, sexuality, non-violence and so forth.

Readers in the church of various political persuasions would be well-served to consider his metaphor of the two different hands of God and of the need for a balanced outreach of both. In Lerner’s image, the right hand of God is the strong hand that reaches out in power to liberate God’s people, free them from slavery and give them a home in the Promised Land. But once they are settled and grow to become the dominant group in power, it is the more gentle left-hand of God that reaches out through the prophets to bring compassion and justice to those who are most vulnerable among them--the widows, the orphans, the outcast, the aliens and the poor.

In spite of the book’s unfortunate title, there is plenty of material here to forge common ground and focus on God’s people and their spiritual and material needs. For example, Lerner’s reflections on what this country can learn from the Katrina disaster makes important reading for all of our congregations who have sent work teams and financial support to the region. What might we make of the fact that team after team reports hearing that the church is the only presence working to rebuild the Gulf? What can we all—of whatever political bent—make of Lerner’s insistence that our national response must have three foci: the permanent elimination of poverty, policies to sustain the environment and the retooling of the infrastructure of all our cities? A vital conversation across the church at this critical time based on our own experience and Lerner’s contentions could well prove to be transformative for our fractured denomination as well as for our witness in the world.

For all Methodists, respectful of differences of opinion and for whom there is no holiness but social holiness, Rabbi Lerner’s provocative book provides plenty of material for reflection, dialogue, and action.