



---

# BIBLE & RELIGION DEPARTMENT

---

*The Newsletter of the Bible & Religion Department at Eastern Mennonite University*

## Fall 2001

### Greetings, Haverim,

Fall semester 2001 in the Bible and Religion Department has been marked and shaped, as has life for all Americans, by the terrorist attacks against New York and Washington D.C. and the ensuing American-led war in Afghanistan. It has seemed almost impossible to carry on with "business as usual," although the demands of class preparation and grading, and committee work, have abated little after the first few days of shock passed by. All of us are praying and seeking for ways to show by words and actions that our commitment to Christ's way of peace is more than skin deep. This search has been affected by responses of others in the Harrisonburg community who have described pacifists as "parasites."

One of our early responses as a department to the terrorist attacks was to submit a letter to the Weather Vane and to the Harrisonburg daily newspaper. (The text of that letter is included in the newsletter on page 3.) In another community involvement, Kathleen Temple learned from an EMU alumna teaching in a local high school about conflict that had erupted there between Arab and other students. Through Kathleen's efforts, school administrative leaders learned about Calvin Shenk's experience in the Middle East, and he was invited to make a presentation on Islam to school officials.

Ted Grimsrud wrote an "op-ed" piece for the Weather Vane reflecting on his father's experience as an American veteran of World War II, and his own conversion to pacifism. Later serving on a panel at the university-wide teach-in focusing on the draft, Ted surveyed the history of Christian struggles with the question of participation in war and violence. James Rhodes reports that student conversation about peace questions has taken on new urgency, as he shares his outline of traditional Christian "detours around agape."

I had the opportunity to participate in a tiny way in the "blanket blitz" initiated by a group of EMU students, which in one-week's time managed to piece, knot, and bind 73 comforters for inclusion in Mennonite Central Committee's shipment to Afghan refugees. The project moved me to dig out a high school graduation present from my parents, a Singer sewing machine. Later, I sat in the University Commons holding my infant granddaughter while my daughter joined students and community members around one of the quilt frames set up during the blitz.

Reflecting on some of my understandings from my days with MCC about the deep problems with events such as the blanket drive, I recalled my concern at that time that such symbolic gestures don't seem to do enough to tackle the root causes of the problems they seek to address. In the same way, it might be charged, teaching about the history of nonviolence, or pushing students to consider new approaches to biblical texts on peace is doing little to stop the war or prevent the starvation of millions of Afghans still trapped inside the borders of that devastated country. My hope in November 2001 is that we make room for all things that build the habits of peace, whether personally, as a faculty, or within the church. By disciplines of prayer and fasting, by sharing our stories and those the ancestors of our faith heritage, by doing concrete, local acts of mercy and justice, or by contributing to the broader efforts of others in our faith community, I believe, we nurture such habits and keep them alive for the next generation. My prayer is that all of us may deepen and broaden those habits so that we will be ready for the next, perhaps harder tasks of peacemaking, to which God may call us in the weeks and months ahead.

**Nancy R. Heisey**  
**Chair, Bible & Religion Department**

---

### **TERRORISM: A POST-MIDDLE EAST PERSPECTIVE ON SEPTEMBER 11** **Linford Stutzman**

To paraphrase a cliché, terrorism is hell. For those of us who have experienced neither terrorism nor hell personally, both are incomprehensible and the horrible reality of the cliché is lost. From a distance, it is possible, even easy, to wax philosophical, theological, political, self-righteous, and to relativize, excuse, or trivialize, both hell and terrorism.

Terrorism is hell.

The victims of terrorism do not have the luxury of distance. They experience, or have experienced hell.

Because the hell of terrorism is deliberately conceived, created, and carried out by people against other people, often unsuspecting and innocent, evil has a human

face, shown incessantly on television sets around the world. Terrorism has a name, repeated endlessly. Evil is embodied, burned in effigy, bombed, hunted, hated. On both sides of the conflict involving terrorism, the enemy is named "terrorist."

It is easy to take sides when terrorism occurs. What I and the group of EMU students last Spring discovered in the Middle East were people, victims of terrorism on both sides, who have learned to recognize the futile evil of terrorism through experience of it. What amazed us were the many people whose lives are shaped by suffering and insecurity, but who, in spite of this, are committed to both reconciliation and justice for the good of everyone.

Father Elias Chacour, the Palestinian Christian who wrote *Blood Brothers*, told the EMU student group last April, "It is easy to take sides in the Middle East. We do not need people coming here and taking sides. What we need are people around the world who are friends of both sides, and on the side of justice." We met wonderful people on both sides of the Middle East conflict who became our friends.

But can we be friends of terrorists? For many of the Palestinian people we lived with in Beit Sahour in the West Bank, and for many of the Israeli people we lived with on Kibbutz Afikim in the Galilee, terrorists are everyone's enemy, whether they are Palestinian terrorists killing Israeli civilians or Israeli terrorists killing Palestinian civilians.

If terrorists on both sides are the enemy of all of us, we must love both.

We must condemn, resist and seek to prevent terrorism no matter how "just" the cause. We must condemn, resist and seek to prevent revenge no matter how much we, or anyone in the world may suffer from terrorism.

People of faith the Middle East, from biblical times until the present, from Jesus to Elias Chacour and countless others who have lived and continue to live amidst conflict, terrorism, and oppression, speak God's truth to us about terrorism in America and Afghanistan today. Love your enemies. Seek justice. Overcome evil with good.

---

## MY JOURNEY TOWARD UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

Calvin E. Shenk

It was predicted that with the demise of communism, Islam would be the next enemy of the West. Since September 11 it appears that this prediction is becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. I recoil at this prospect.

For the last forty years I've had contact with Muslims in Africa and the Middle East. I've listened to Muslim lecturers, I've been treated by a Muslim doctor, I've taught Muslims, I've interacted with Muslim employees and participated in inter-faith dialogue with Jews, Christians and Muslims. I've listened to the Muslim call to prayer at intervals from 4:00 am. until nightfall. Each year I take students to visit the mosque in Washington DC.

Islam invaded our consciousness in a very shocking and negative manner on September 11. In the popular mind Islam is equated with violence and terror. The worst possible interpretations are given to  Jihad  and Islamic fundamentalism. Many people are not aware that according to Islam there are two kinds of  Jihad  – the  greater Jihad  is to struggle with oneself and the  lesser Jihad  is to avenge wrongs done to Islam. Sometimes this takes the form of "holy war" or just war." Similarly Islamic fundamentalism is of two kinds – to  recover  Islamic values, or to  avenge  wrongs done to Islam by non-Muslims, even violently if necessary. September 11 confirms that one interpretation of  Jihad  and one interpretation of fundamentalism is violent, even terroristic, and this interpretation dominates our consciousness.

I've seen the result of Muslim violence in Jerusalem. On a Sunday morning in March 1996 a Muslim suicide bomber blew up an Israeli bus, killing 19 people. I went to the site after church to empathize with those who remembered the dead by lighting candles and praying. I prayed for peace. It was the third bombing within a week, killing a total of 50 people. Sadly, suicide bombing in Israel has resumed in the last year.

I'm deeply troubled when Islam (which means peace –  salaam ) supports violence and terror. But I am comforted and reassured by those Muslims who contend that "evil in the name of Allah blasphemes Allah." In Jerusalem a Muslim cleric, criticizing suicide bombers, said, "This disgusts me. It is against Islam. It is forbidden to commit suicide in Islam. Suicide is not martyrdom." Most Muslims are appalled by terrorism. Some accuse terrorists of "hijacking" Islam. The American Muslim Council contends that "There is not cause that justifies this type of immoral inhuman act that has affected so many innocent lives."

I'm glad I have not been blamed for all the things the United States has done to Arab Muslims. I refuse to blame all Arab Muslims for the events of September 11. I thank God that positive experiences with Muslims keep me from hating Muslims. My experience with Islam will not let me stereotype or scapegoat all Muslims. I want to model and promote kindness, respect, justice and peace toward Muslims.

---

## FACULTY UPDATE Earl Zimmerman

I have been busy with various writing projects including a chapter in a book on the contributions of Christian mission and service agencies to civil society. I keep working on my dissertation centered around the peace hermeneutic of John Howard Yoder. I have almost completed the first chapter which I will present at the Believers Church conference at the University of Notre Dame in March. As always, I'm busy with my teaching at EMU and my pastoral responsibilities at Shalom Mennonite Congregation. Oh yes, lest I forget, it has

been a great summer and for fishing on various streams and lakes here in the Shenandoah Valley.

---

## **BIBLE & RELIGION DEPARTMENT OPEN LETTER**

As we reflect on the recent horrific evil of the terrorist attacks we feel profound grief for the many lives that were lost and we lament the ongoing suffering and trauma that countless persons experience. We believe that feelings of outrage are legitimate human responses to the violent attacks. We ask ourselves how we as American citizens, committed to the way of Jesus, who taught us to love not only our neighbors but also our enemies, may respond.

We agree fully that US leaders must take appropriate action. Such action by our leaders calls for courage and sacrifice both at home and abroad. We pray that our leaders will concentrate their efforts on changing the global climate that nourishes terrorism, and we urge them to act in the following ways:

- to support the Palestinian appeal for international observers in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Palestinians have long pled for the presence of witnesses.

- to lift the embargo and stop bombing Iraq. The ongoing embargo and frequent bombing throughout the past decade feed Arabic people's rage against us.

- to withdraw US troops from Saudi Arabia, which is considered holy by many faithful Muslims.

- to support international courts that investigate and try war criminals regardless of their national origin. We can no longer afford to set ourselves above global courts of justice.

Now and always we should attend carefully to the safety and welfare of all people who live among us, whatever their religion, class, race, or national origin.

As a nation, "to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8) is our first and best defense against terrorism.

Faculty of the Bible & Religion Department

Ray Gingerich, Ted Grimsrud, Nancy Heisey, James Rhodes, Calvin Shenk, Linford Stutzman, Kathleen Temple, Earl Zimmerman

---

## **STUDENT REFLECTIONS**

Melinda Steffy and Megan Rutt, Bible & Religion majors, were awarded undergraduate fellowships to attend the

Fund for Theological Education conference at Vanderbilt University in June 2001.

### **Melinda Steffy**

During a small group discussion, Emily, a Unitarian Universalist who was skeptical about God and frustrated with Christianity, was reflecting on her experience at the conference thus far. In tears, she shared how this was the first time she had ever felt part of a Christian community and the acceptance and love she felt overwhelmed her. She thought she was willing to believe in God again.

This conference was the annual Summer Conference on Excellence in Ministry, sponsored by the Fund for Theological Education (FTE). More than 100 undergraduate and graduate students, all awarded scholarships for their interests in pursuing ministry, gathered with professors and pastors for this four-day event. People came from all over the country, representing a spectrum of Christian faith traditions. We attended workshops, listened to prominent theologians, shared in ecumenical worship services, participated in small groups, and discussed many current issues in Christianity.

While I learned a lot from these activities and enjoyed the whole conference, the welcoming and loving atmosphere impressed me most. The openness and humility of the diverse people who freely shared their beliefs while listening to and learning from others amazed me. I left carrying pieces of many people's stories, knowing that they also carry part of mine, and feeling like part of an incredible Christian community.

### **Megan Rutt**

When I applied for a fellowship with the Fund for Theological Education, the real motivator for applying was the scholarship provided. However, I found out that another major component of the fellowship is the weekend conference held during the summer.

In some ways, the conference was actually a deterrent to ministry for me. Here I was with 70 other undergraduate students, most of whom seemed positive about their call to ministry. Seminary was their understood objective after undergraduate work. I was quite intimidated. However, the conference provided opportunity for mentor-type discussion between students and both church leaders and scholars. This was particularly meaningful for me.

One of the most influential moments during the weekend was during a discussion I had with a professor from Yale. He spoke with me about how he incorporated into academics his perspective as both an Anabaptist and as an African American. Having this discussion allowed me to see the humanness of all the big-name people in this setting as well as making further study and work in ministry less overwhelming.

In addition, the keynote speaker of the weekend was Walter Brueggemann. My only previous exposure to Brueggemann had been through assigned readings in Ted Grimsrud's classes. Quite frankly Brueggemann's writings had

not impressed me all that much. But hearing him in person not only gave me a much more positive experience with Brueggeman, but helped me see ministry in a different light. He spoke with an awareness of the world and reality, but also with a desire to remain faithful. Through his speaking and my own processing with other students during the weekend I was impressed to remain both faithful to God and remain true in my own life. I found myself encouraged to live in the tension of faithfulness and genuineness, whether in academics, ministry or some other capacity in the world.

---

## GRADUATE UPDATE

**Marc Schoenhardt** – After graduating in December 2000 with a degree in Congregational & Youth Ministries, Marc attended Methodist Theological School in Ohio for a semester, pursuing a Masters in Christian Education degree. At this time those plans are on hold. He then returned to Harrisonburg to the Otterbein United Methodist Church in August 2001. As of September 1 he became the full-time Director of Youth and College Ministries and is the



*Bible & Religion Department*  
*Harrisonburg, VA 22802-2462*

contemporary worship leader there. In December he and his wife are anticipating the arrival of their second child.

---

## HOMECOMING HAVERIM MEETING

On October 13, about eighty Haverim members and interested guests gathered in Martin Chapel for a presentation by Calvin Shenk, Professor of Religion. In lieu of our traditional breakfast, Haverim members had earlier been invited to join other Homecomers at a continental breakfast in the University Commons. Drawing on his many experiences while living in Israel and Ethiopia, Calvin spoke on the topic, "Social Context and Theology: a personal pilgrimage." He illustrated how these contexts have shaped both the theology of those he encounters and his own theology. A time for questions followed, during which some attendees who also have lived in the Middle East added insights. Members of the Haverim steering committee then introduced the faculty of the Bible and Religion Department, and committee member Roger Steffy led in a prayer of blessing for the faculty.

|   |
|---|
| Non-Profit Org.<br>U.S. Postage<br>PAID<br>Harrisonburg,<br>VA<br>Permit No. 20 |
|---|