

FALL
2008

BIBLE & RELIGION DEPARTMENT

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

Did you know . . .

- **Ted Grimsrud** presented at conferences in August (Messiah College), September (San Francisco Theological Seminary) and November (American Academy of Religion) and had a book published: *Reasoning Together: A Conversation on Homosexuality* (with Mark Thiessen Nation). Herald Press, 2008.
- **Nancy Heisey** travelled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in a reconciliation ceremony of the Mennonite Church in the Congo in November.
- **Heidi Miller Yoder** has been working on her dissertation this semester.
- Check out the Fall/Winter 2008 *Crossroads* cover photograph of '02 Bible & Religion graduate **Christopher Friesen!**

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Greetings, Haverim,

Recently I graded the paper of a student in my New Testament survey course, Following Jesus Christ. This student had worked with the passage in Mark's gospel where Jesus commands love of God and love of neighbor as the fulfillment of the law (12:28-34). The student described his struggles with loving God, and said that he had not learned anything about that love, either in his home United Church of Christ congregation, which is very socially active, or at here at EMU. He hears all the time about love of neighbor, he declared, but not about love for God.

As part of my response, I took advantage of the fact that the last class of the semester covered the three letters of John. It's a good place to end the semester, I always think. The pounding home of the concepts is relentless, and students find the love-hate, good-evil, light-darkness, life-death themes easy to spot. One theme that students usually do not find is that of "walking." In these letters, we notice, with more careful searching, "walking" is the way we exist in the midst of these great theological tensions: we "walk in the light" (1 John 1:6), walk "as (Jesus) walked" (2:6), walk "according to God's commandments" (2

John 6), and walk "in the truth" (3 John 3).

Furthermore, the Johannines are unmistakably clear: love in God's way is one undivided whole. "Those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen" (1 John 4:20-21). Drawing from a series of African posters to teach the Bible by Sudanese artist Samuel Bullen Ajak Alier, we turn to the painting for the "catholic" letters. It portrays a young woman feeding a dying man. The title reads "God is love," followed by the caption: "Love knows no fear. A husband dying of AIDS is fed by his young wife with her bare hands. She is not afraid of touching him and caring for him."

So, I wonder after class, has any of this conversation reached my student? But I also wonder whether he has put his finger on a tender spot in my identity and that of many of us from Mennonite heritage. For, as a colleague from time to time points out, "born and bred" Mennonites lack a robust enough language to talk about God. As a historian, I ponder what about our past might make that the case. Is there something about a past of flight from persecution, about becoming "the quiet in the land"?

Is there a more recent conflictual experience, from the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, or even the contemporary "worship wars," that shapes our language? What seems more likely in my case is the daily diet of news about the chaos and brokenness of our world, coming my way via sisters and brothers in other places, or through Internet, radio, or newspaper reports. How do we speak of God in the face of untold suffering as it is going on all around us? Is the cup of cold water all we can speak?

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams pushes us to speak of God in just such a world, a world where we recognize that we are not "in control." I recognize the challenge of articulating love for God in the midst of the "daily struggle to renew and mature a response (to our world) in every corner of our lives. . . . The only freedom that finally matters is the capacity to say 'yes' to God's great 'yes' to us in Christ, and that no powers of darkness and chaos and evil can rob us of that without our consent."

I'm going to e-mail my student and see if he has time to come in for a chat before finals are over.

Blessings, Nancy Heisey

Understanding Conflict

by Christian E. Early, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Theology

This past summer, I had the privilege to give a paper at the Understanding Conflict conference in Århus, Denmark. The title of the paper was “Anabaptist Ecclesiology, Radical Democracy, and Philosophy of Religion: Elements of a New Conversation,” and in it I argued that Radical Reform voices and Radical Democracy voices could both learn from each other, and that that learning could helpfully be applied to issues of religious diversity with the aim of reducing conflict. It was wonderful for me to be back in Denmark in a professional capacity, but the real treat was the opportunity

to meet and to hear what others are doing in the areas of conflict understanding and transformation. Douglas Fry, author of *Beyond War: the Human Potential for Peace*, gave a witty presentation on what sorts of strategies we might employ to evade the fact that peaceful societies do exist. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, author of *A Human Being Died that Night: A South-African Story of Forgiveness*, delivered a moving first-hand account of a painful act of violence followed by a miraculous but also very human reconciliation. Amina Wadud, author of *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women’s Reform in Is-*

lam, offered a feminist reading of the Qur’an emphasizing the idea of Tawhid, the promotion of oneness under God. In interacting with many activists, scholars, and students from around the world, it became clear to me that Anabaptists are not alone in searching for peace and also that there is a space for our voice to contribute to a growing conversation about peace and overcoming conflict. As advent is approaching, we make ourselves ready to receive Jesus of Nazareth, the Prince of Peace who is the Son of God.

Announcing 2007-2008 Recipients...

Haverim Scholarships —

Nick Meyer—2008 Congregational & Youth Ministry graduate, currently working for EMU’s Physical Plant

Heather Myers — 2008 Congregational & Youth Ministry graduate.

Haverim Writing Awards —

1st Place — John Tyson , 2009 Biblical Studies major, “A Lamb in the Lion’s Den: Theopolitical Pacifism and Atonement Theology.” John spent the summer working for Franconia Mennonite Conference relating to urban congregations.

2nd Place — Nicholas Stoddard, Dec 2007 Biblical Studies graduate, “God, Creation, and Humans.” Nicholas is working for Crossroads Counseling Services, which provides intensive in-home care to youth.

3rd Place — Laura Cattell, 2009 JPCS major, “A Biblical Narrative Perspective on Environmental Theology.”

Laura has been active in EMU’s recycling and composting efforts.



(Fletcher Continued from Page 4)

About two months before school ended, I got my acceptance letter to EMS. I must admit that I felt a tinge of excitement and perhaps it was a sign from God that I was going in the right direction. It is now October, and I somehow got roped into going fulltime. I feel like God has opened many doors for me, and has shown me that I am in the right place. I am enjoying my classes at EMS and I feel like this is where God is calling me to be at this point. I don’t know what God wants me to do in the long run, but I feel that God will let me know eventually.

I would generally think that surprises happen most strikingly to ‘planners’ – you know, those people who have every step of their lives planned out 3 steps before they take them (like a good chess player). Now that’s some fertile ground in which surprise can happen – that’s what I like to say! I don’t consider myself a planner when it comes to the direction of my life. I prefer to ‘keep my options open’ as my wife’s grandfather likes to say, leave plenty of room for the Holy Spirit to nudge, push, pull, and generally make an appearance. So while each new step is an adventure waiting to be discovered, surprise wouldn’t generally be a word I would use to describe the unfolding of events...until recently.

Following graduation from EMU in 2001 I moved to Kansas to answer (continue testing??) a call to ministry – congregational youth ministry in Hillsboro, working with two churches that had a shared youth program. For six years First Mennonite and Trinity Mennonite churches (Western District Conference) nurtured me, allowing me to experiment

(sometimes failing) while encouraging me to use the gifts God had given me. What a gift *they* have been to *me*! Last summer I ended my service with them and moved to Hesston where Julie (Stoltzfus) had been living so that I could be a ‘normal’ person for the first year of our marriage. We planned to remain in Kansas for that year, but no longer than that. After that foundational first year we were open to just about everything – no geographic region was out of question (except Kansas – we had both lived there long enough). So in the midst of not planning, God surprised us when I was invited to consider a call to ministry right here in Hesston, KS, at Hesston College as campus pastor.

Now I find myself nearing the end of my first semester. I’d like to say that with a semester under my belt, I’ve got it all figured out and I know exactly what I’m doing, which is exactly what I’m supposed to be doing. In reality, I don’t fully have a handle on either. However, I do have the privilege of working in a highly supportive Student Life environment. Furthermore, the previous campus

pastor Kevin Wilder is on campus as part of the faculty and he is readily available to answer questions as I need while ‘staying out of the way’ when I don’t need his input. Both have been huge blessings to me.

While there have been challenges with this steep learning curve, there have also been rewards. One of my passions is running and I have had a wonderful experience leading a running club on campus in light of there not being cross country or track/field varsity sports. Recently I was surprised again as ten students completed their first half marathon after a semester of training. (As the running club began I had hoped for two or three!)

I continue to ask myself the question ‘what does it mean to minister as vocation?’ Now I add to that ‘what does it mean to minister in a well-supported college environment?’ I don’t have final answers for these questions, but I do have the experience of asking similar questions in the past, relying on a big God who has remained faithful.

Haverim Breakfast

About 70 people, Bible and Religion alumni, friends, and current students, gathered for the Haverim breakfast at Homecoming on Saturday, October 11, 2008. Our speaker this year was Donald Kraybill, distinguished professor of sociology at Elizabethtown (PA) College, and a 1967 Bible and sociology graduate of EMU.

Haverim profited from Professor Kraybill’s presence at EMU to receive the Alumnus of the Year award to invite him for our breakfast presentation. Among his many writings are *The Riddle of Amish Culture*, and *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, which in its 25th-anniversary edition continues to be required reading in Bible and religion courses. The particular focus of Kraybill’s presentation at the Haverim Breakfast, however, was the theme of forgiveness, growing out of his involvement with the Amish community affected by the Nickel Mines shootings of October 2006. Kraybill co-authored the book *Amish Grace*, together with Steven Nolt and David Weaver-Zercher. This book describes the forgiving response of that community to the family of the man who carried out the shootings.

In his presentation, Kraybill emphasized the lifelong preparation for forgiveness among the Amish that allowed them to respond so quickly and surely to the shooting crisis. A question and answer period followed, during which Kraybill agreed that in many other situations of serious wrong, finding the appropriate way and time to forgive are extremely complicated.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Reflections by Melissa Fletcher, 2008 graduate — Biblical Studies

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I have found in the last few years or so that God calls people in different ways. It takes some people years and years to discover their calling, but for some of us it comes quite early. I was a senior in high school preparing to graduate so I could go to college and be a psychology major when I received my call. I remember sitting in church one Sunday and thinking that being a pastor could not really be that hard. I knew it would mean several years of seminary after college, but I didn't put a huge amount of thought into it. This is how God called me.

I have the type of personality where if I see someone doing something I feel like there is a way for me to do it too. I try everything several times before coming to a conclusion on whether or not I am able to do whatever skill or action I see done. So, I felt like God challenged me and I felt

I was up for the challenge. I must admit that I actually did not know what this would completely involve, and I did not know too much about the Bible; I had only a faint idea.

Upon my first year at Eastern Mennonite University I came to know what I was getting into. I did have one main goal: to pass all of my classes and get to seminary. My hope was to one day be a hospital chaplain. One of my first Bible and Religion classes was Missiology, and I felt like I was going to fail from the first day. Most of the people in the class seemed to know about missions in other countries, or were third-culture children, but I, not having any background in this, did not have a clue. I actually failed my first exam in the class and I was ready to quit when my mother told me to give it another try. I did pass the class and I found that this was one of the classes that really challenged me to stick with

the bigger challenge that God presented to me a year before.

Fast-forwarding to my senior year at EMU, I decided that I wanted to go on to Eastern Mennonite Seminary. The hope I had of becoming a hospital chaplain soon began to disappear. Most of my friends were looking for jobs in their fields of study, and I was worrying how I was going to afford seminary. I started to feel like I actually wasted my time at EMU, and maybe that God really didn't call me to be some sort of pastor. I knew I loved what I studied, but I felt like there was no guarantee that I would find a job after I went through years and years of studying. I decided that I would just apply to see if I would get in, and go part time if I did. If God really wanted me to get a higher education in seminary, then I would know by dipping my feet in the water.