



BIBLE & RELIGION DEPARTMENT

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

Winter 2002

Greetings, Haverim,

As a historian, I think often about heritage. It is fascinating to trace the connections between people and ideas from the past and the issues and questions that we struggle with as members of Christ's body in the twenty-first century world. I continue to meditate, for example, on the third-century Egyptian biblical scholar Origen, on his love for the Scripture, and on the ways he worked at taking it seriously. He essentially laid the groundwork for serious biblical textual work today, but he also believed all of Scripture was God speaking to us, and even God giving us the words needed for our own situations.

That brings me to another thing I think about often, as a member of the global church—the matter of call. Recently I had the opportunity to work with a group of African Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women theologians. I heard them speaking of their call to serve the church, of their struggles to receive the training they desire and to be taken seriously by church leaders. I listened as they spoke from the Bible, and was struck at how much like Origen they are in interpreting the Bible as speaking directly to them, even while the textual questions that fascinated him and me are not even on their radar screen.

The creative tension between heritage and call was laid out for us at this year's Haverim Homecoming breakfast, in the presentation between senior Culture, Religion and Mission student Matthew Krabill and his father James, senior executive for Global Ministries at Mennonite Mission Network. Describing the father's upbringing in a traditional Mennonite community and church in the United States, and the son's growth and development as the child of missionary parents in a village in Ivory Coast, Matthew and James helped us to see how our varied heritages can strengthen us for what God calls us to be—a people who live in this world but also as citizens of God's reign.

By the way, at the Haverim breakfast this homecoming, the "baton" (a South American rain stick) of leadership for the Haverim Steering Committee was passed from Michael King to Roger Steffy. We are deeply grateful for their leadership and for the support of all of you who are part of the Haverim network.

Nancy R. Heisey, Chair

FACULTY UPDATES

Ray Gingerich

Professor of Theology & Ethics

With a lighter teaching load (and a lower salary), I am able to turn more of my attention to writing. Projects that are currently receiving priority status include *Our Journeys with Scripture*, a book that Earl Zimmerman and I are co-writing and editing as a spin-off of a colloquy that we headed up last June in Laurelville. On that occasion twenty-three Mennonite pastors, academics and administrators got together for a weekend and shared their pilgrimages with the Bible. As part of an ongoing project to develop more materials in a *theology* (as opposed to only ethics) of *nonviolence*, I have submitted an article to *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (to be published next spring), on John Howard Yoder's theology, entitled "Was Yoder's God a Warrior?" A few of you may remember that Ted Grimsrud and I are also working on editing a set of papers from the Wink conference on "Confronting the Powers" held several years ago. Because we believe this expansion of Wink's thought will make a significant contribution to our understandings of the structures of violence, we hope the public, in due time, will have access to these materials.

Heidi Miller Yoder

Instructor in Worship & Spirituality

Although I have taught part-time in the Seminary and in a few classes in the Bible and Religion Department for the last several years, I feel as though I am a newcomer as I begin oversight of the Youth and Congregational Ministries major, attend faculty meetings and advise students. I feel welcomed in this new role. Colleagues provided welcome as I oriented to departmental meetings and asked questions about the advising process. Students provided welcome as I had opportunities to get to know them, listen to their aspirations and work out the details of practicum placements. You as Haverim provided welcome as you laid hands on each of us as faculty and offered prayer at the Haverim breakfast over alumni weekend. Thank you for not only empowering me, but also for empowering us as a department in such a powerful way.

I ask for your ongoing support and prayers as I continue my doctoral studies at The Catholic University of America in the area of Christian Spirituality and Liturgical Studies. I anticipate beginning my dissertation this summer. I have a tremendous amount of excitement as I enter into this next stage. On a more personal note, remember my husband Derek and our three-year-old son Brynn as they give me space in which to attend to my research.

I also ask for your support and your input as I facilitate in the process of revising and restructuring the Youth and Congregational Ministries major. If you wish to provide me with feedback or suggestions for the major, I would be delighted to receive that via email at yoderhm@emu.edu.

Finally, may we all remember to "Pray for Peace and Act for Peace" amidst the strong possibility of the U.S. declaring war on Iraq. In a recent episode of *60 Minutes*, I was struck when a political analyst said that the proper time to "sell" going to war was in September, the same month that the car industry introduces their new line of automobiles for the coming year. As Christians, who model our lives around Christ, may we never "be sold" war, but rather, may we embody peace in our world, church, neighborhood, campus and home.

Christian Early

Assistant Professor, Philosophy & Theology

A semester has already seen its dawn and dusk, and a new semester is waiting beyond the horizon. This past

semester, I gave an informal lecture on the role of philosophy within the Bible and Religion department at EMU. In it, I argued that philosophy could help us in our human quest to know God and to be known by God—a quest that Anabaptists call "following in the way of Jesus of Nazareth."

The quest raises questions: how might Christians confirm or, if necessary, revise their convictions concerning God and God's relation to the world, to God's people, and to the peoples of the world such that those convictions can be shown to be true? To answer this question is to do philosophy in the service of faith; it is to deepen one's faith by seeking understanding.

This is the journey we invite Bible and Religion students to take. Theirs is, of course, a difficult road because submitting one's convictions for scrutiny and possible revision is never easy. Consider the difficulty that the disciples had with Jesus' refusal to conform to their expectations of the Messiah. I ask you to join with me in prayer for our students. One observation should make that request urgent: I possess nowhere near the competence in these matters that Jesus did.

It is, however, a great source of comfort to know that they and I are not alone in this quest. I met many of you at the Haverim breakfast, and I look forward to meeting many more at breakfasts still to come. Your presence and support provides a place of rest when questions become too big for a single disciple to hold. In that place of rest in the storm, something important happens: God becomes wonderful as we sit with the frustration that even now Jesus refuses to conform to our domesticating expectations. As disciples all, we will never cease to ask ourselves the question What child is this?

FUND FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Dan Umbel

Bible Studies/Philosophy & Theology major

In summer 2002 I had the privilege of attending a conference entitled, "The Pastoral Imagination," held on the beautiful campus of St. John's University in Collegeville, MN, under the auspices of the Fund for Theological Education. During this conference I had the rare opportunity to interact with peers who too feel called to some form of ministry in the church body - peers who represented the whole gamut of Christian theological traditions.

The primary focus of the Fund for Theological Education is supporting those persons who feel called to ministry - especially those who are younger (undergraduate or just entering seminary). The FTE provides some financial support, but the primary benefit I received while attending the conference, was simply the unabashedly positive affirmation I received for desiring to be a minister. This affirmation is probably the single most important element in the necessity of the FTE.

The Fund for Theological Education is doing a work that from my perspective is critically lacking in today's church. Most church denominations are having enormous problems filling pulpits with qualified ministers - especially in rural pastorates. This problem cuts across all denominational boundaries, from United Church of Christ to the American Baptists. The FTE has taken upon itself to actually encourage young people to take seriously their inklings - however small and ambiguous these inner nudgings may be - to claim the ministry as one's life calling.

As the Apostle Paul says, "And how can they preach unless they are sent?" The FTE is trying to function as an organization that can encourage young people to attend to "callings" to ministry, and thereby perform that very necessary sending function. In this respect the FTE is filling in an enormous gap in the very structure of the church - an organization whose soul purpose is to encourage potential church leaders. In an age where more and more younger persons are being drawn away from rather than toward the ministry, the church does need an organization that attempts to counteract this very powerful social propensity.

ALUMNI UPDATE

Megan Rutt, 2002 graduate

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One month in Germany...
September 18, 2002

One month ago I was sitting between my parents in the check-in area of Washington-Dulles Airport wondering if I would really be able to manage living on my own in Germany. Today I sit here in front of my computer in the Christliche Dienste office barely believing that it's only been one month since I came. The daily routines have become familiar and the faces

have become friends. And though I still have so much to learn in the way of expectations, culture and particularly language, it somehow feels within reach.

Let me give you a brief tour of my life here. I'm living in Bammental, a small town about a 15 minute train ride from Heidelberg. There is a Mennonite church in town with between 25 and 40 attenders. This is where I have been going, and even got to play guitar one Sunday for worship.

I live in the Hausgemeinschaft, an intentional community of 5 families and two volunteers. Each family has their own apartment, but lunch is eaten together as a community. I have yet to experience cooking on my own for the whole group - a little intimidating. Anywhere from 8-15 people eat lunch together. In my apartment are the two of us volunteers (Dave Stutzman and I) and a Paraguayan couple who just had a baby two weeks ago. Because Dave is in the Middle East for 6 weeks, I have the chance to find my own way around with language and all the intricacies that go along with Hausgemeinschaft.

Every weekday I bike to work, about a 5 minute ride. Most of my responsibilities involve basic office duties - copying, printing documents, responding to inquiries, getting mail, sending packages, filing and of course answering the telephone. My biggest challenge at the moment is with the language. I have had some very interesting phone interactions with people. Usually I can grasp the basic gist of what people are calling about and quickly connect them to one of my coworkers, either Debbie or Barbara, my boss. There are certain phrases that I learned very quickly out of necessity, 'I don't know, let me connect you with a coworker.' 'How do you spell that?' 'Can you repeat that, slowly?' The most annoying thing is when I try to communicate and the person asks, 'You are American, nu? Shall I say it in English?'

Christliche Dienste as an organization is responsible for around 90 volunteers, mostly Germans who are in service around the globe. Some of my favorite work so far has been in the interactions with the volunteers themselves. Reading their reports and hearing their stories helps me feel like my work here really is making a difference. And this is important as my work is not always terribly exciting.

Highlights in my time here have largely been with interactions with various people. Every Thursday night a group of about half a dozen girls from the church get together in a sort of small group setting - sharing, praying together, sometimes having a time of worship. I've really enjoyed these evenings, particularly since

most of the girls are around my age. Sunday evenings the adults of the Hausgemeinshaft get together for the same sort of thing. This has been a good way for me to get to know them and keep up to date on what is happening in people's lives.

Two Sundays ago I was told that church would not take place in the normal building across the street from where I live, but rather it would be held about 10 km away on one of the members' farm. We were going to bike there! It was one of the coolest things! About 20 of us rode our bikes to the farm. After the service there was a potluck and a chance to socialize and play a little volleyball (When trying to speak English, Germans almost always mix up the 'w' and the 'v' sound. They play wolleyball and go on wacations to small willages).

Last Sunday was a get together for all the Mennonite churches in the regional conference. It was a bit overwhelming for me with so many new people. In addition, during the program I had to introduce myself... in German... in front of all those people! A bit of an adventure, but not one that I need to repeat anytime soon.

I am amazed, however, in how encouraging and supportive of me people are here. Germans are notorious for being somewhat closed and coming across as cold, particularly towards new people. I knew this coming in and assumed that it would take awhile before people were willing to open up

and include me. But in the Hausgemeinshaft, the church and at the office, the people around me have taken a lot of initiative in including me, encouraging me, and affirming my efforts, particularly with the language.

Since part of my job is dealing with the mail, one of the people I interact with most is the older lady at the post office. I see her almost everyday, sometimes more than once, and she always welcomes me with a smile and sends me on my way with a 'Danke schön, wiedersehen!' I've tried to be intentional about joining in when invited to do something and using German, even broken German, rather than reverting to English. Sometimes it is frustrating, but when I start to feel overwhelmed by language and responsibilities here I have to step back for a second and remind myself I have two years here, I don't have to learn everything in the first month.

Being away from family and friends for me always means at least some difficult times. But overall I have been so blessed in my time so far here in Germany. I love getting emails and mail from family and friends back in the states, hearing tidbits of info about what everyone is up to. Please keep me informed about what is going on in your life and I'll try to do the same.

Blessings to you all,
Megan



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