

# BIBLE & RELIGION DEPARTMENT

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

## FALL 2011

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### **Greetings, Haverim!**

“How should one translate Job 42.6?,” Nancy Heisey asked me as we were preparing to do the “talk back” after the Theatre Department’s staging of J.B., Archibald MacLeish’s Pulitzer prize-winning retelling of Job. The question is important because what we make of the divine poetry out of the whirlwind in 38-41 depends to a great extent on what we think Job makes of it. But there seems to be no consensus. The NRSV reads: “Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” Gerald Janzen, in his wonderful commentary, renders it as “Therefore I recant and change my mind concerning dust and ashes.” Terrence Tilley, in *The Evils of Theodicy* lists eight different translations from various sources and claims that “The state of the text is such that any of the above are possible renderings.” In light of this diversity, it seems that translation isn’t necessarily driving interpretation. Interpretation often, and necessarily, drives translation. That is, what one makes of Job’s final remark may depend on what we make of the divine speech.



In casting the EMU production, director Alisha Huber made a remarkable decision which radically and appropriately affects this question of God’s speech. She cast an 11 year old girl, Augusta Nafziger, as the voice of God. Why? What hermeneutical work does it do to hear “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” not in the voice of James Earl Jones, but of a small girl?

I don’t know how others heard it, but for me it created the possibility of hearing God’s questions to Job differently. In the deep booming voice of the masculine Zeus-like god, verses like 40.10-14 (“Deck yourself with majesty and dignity....”) read like sarcasm. Job can’t do that anymore than he could lay the foundation of the earth. But in the voice of a child, it sounds like invitation. It helped me understand a suggestion of Janzen’s commentary—that the

questions in Job 38-41 should be read similarly to the way we read Psalm 8. Set against the backdrop of the grandeur of creation, humanity can only appear insignificant— “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” But the answer is not an affirmation of our insignificance. It is “Yet you have made them a little lower than the angels.” When it comes to the questions posed to Job in Job 38-41, we usually assume answers that make us insignificant. We assume that questions like “Have you commanded the morning?” “Have you entered the storehouses of snow?” are rhetorical. The answer is too obvious to state. Next to the power of God and the immensity of creation, we are hardly worth noticing. Therefore, our suffering, while personally overwhelming, really isn’t that bad once we put it in perspective. Job’s last line in 42.6 can seem to confirm this.

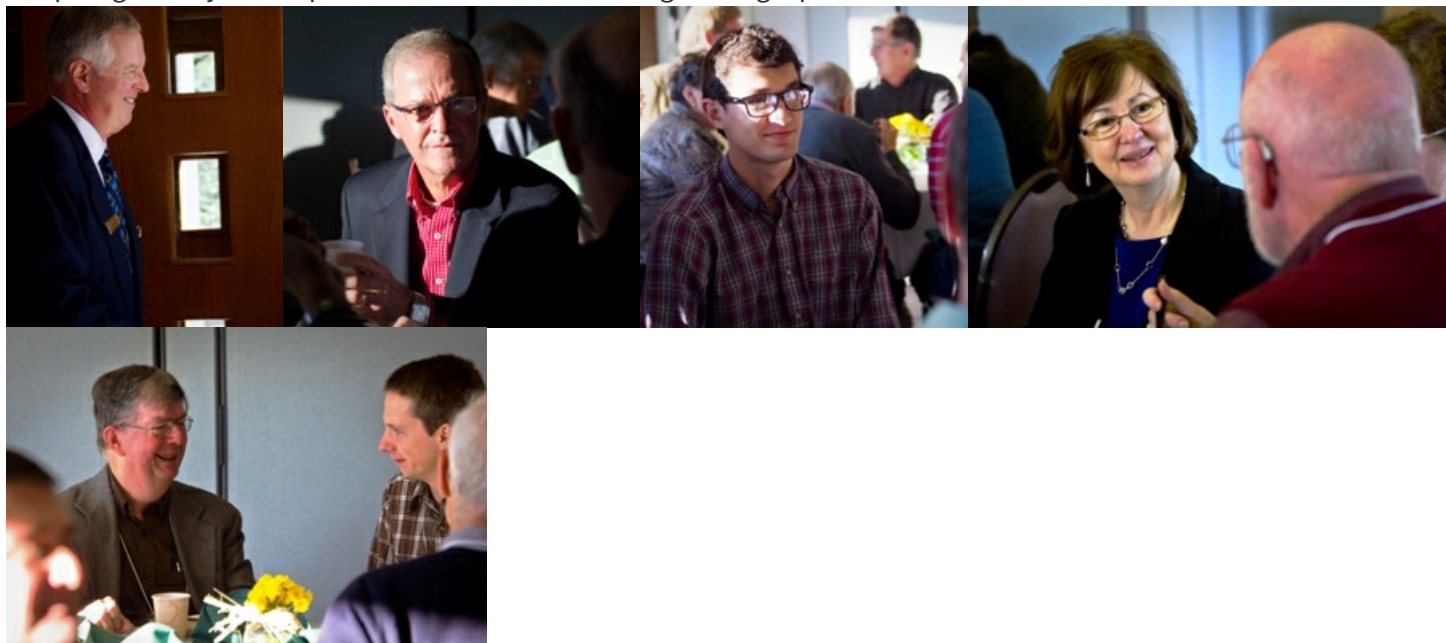
One of the liberties MacLeish takes with Job’s closing speech is that he has him repeat Job 40.10. As J.B. (played wonderfully by senior Joel Rittenhouse), staggers to his feet he says to himself, in a quizzical tone, “Deck yourself with majesty?” His quizzical tone is ours also. How does one do this? Especially one who has been brought as low as Job? Were all those questions meant not to impress Job with his smallness but to remind Job that he is made in the image of God? Are the ‘dust and ashes’ of Job’s last words, not the ashes of self-loathing, but the dust and ashes of Gen. 18.27—“Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.” Finally, can we now begin to better understand why for so many, from the Church fathers to Karl Barth, Job was considered a figure of Christ?

I don’t know the answers to all those questions. But I am grateful to teach at a university where such questions are not the sole domain of the Bible and Religion department but are powerfully raised across departments, not just in classrooms but on stage and not just for students but for the entire community.

~ Peter Dula, chair

## Haverim Breakfast

The annual homecoming Haverim Breakfast gathered dozens of alumni to hear President Loren Swartzendruber speak on the relationship between church and academy and opportunities facing EMU as we endeavor to remain unapologetically Anabaptist in the face of challenging demographic trends.



Images courtesy of Travis Duerksen.

## I Met God This Summer!

The [Ministry Inquiry Program](#) is an exciting opportunity of the Mennonite Church USA for college-age young adults to explore pastoral ministry. The program offers the opportunity to experience first hand what ministry is and to test one’s own gifts and sense of call. [Hear two current students share](#) experiences from their participation in the Ministry Inquiry Program last summer. . .Rebekah in Bolivia and Jamie in Philadelphia.

## Faculty in Action

**Peter Dula** attended the American Academy of Religion conference in San Francisco in November. While there he biked to the top of (and back down) Mount Tamalpais, the highest peak in the Marin Hills.

**Christian Early** is currently in the process of editing the keynotes from the “Attachment theory and Anabaptism” conference. They will be gathered into a book for which Annmarie, his wife and chair of the graduate Counseling Department at EMU, and he will write the introduction and the conclusion. It should be out this coming summer. He says, “The conference was a great hit and it is very exciting to be working on the book and to have it be available to those who could not come but who are interested in the integration between a psychological theory and Anabaptist theology.”



**Ted Grimsrud** delivered the annual Keeney Peace Lecture at Bluffton University on October 25. His title was A Theological Response to WWII. He also attended the American Academy of Religion conference in San Francisco in November.

**Nancy Heisey**, who is also Academic Dean at EMU, preached at Zion Mennonite Church in Broadway on Dec. 4.

## Meet Carmen

**Carmen Schrock-Hurst** joined the faculty of the Bible & Religion Department in August of 2011 as Instructor of Spiritual Formation. She is also co-pastor at Immanuel Mennonite Church.



**Q:** Tell us about where you have lived and how often you have moved!

**A:** I was born in Buffalo NY and have lived in Scottsdale PA, Pittsburgh PA, Richmond, VA, Elkhart IN, Ocean City MD, San Francisco CA, Washington DC, Honduras (Tegucigalpa and Danli) and Manila Philippines. We have been in Harrisonburg for the last six years which is the longest we have been in any one place in our 27 years of marriage. I am very happy to stay put for a long while now.

**Q:** Is it true that you can beat your sons at Dominion?

**A:** I am proud to say that I have done so twice, but I won't say how many times we have played in order for me to pull off those two wins.

**Q:** Why do you drive the crazy red electric car that looks like a golf cart?

**A:** I wish I could say that my main motive was to fit in with the Bible departments' strong commitment to green transportation. We probably have the highest percentage of biking faculty and staff of any department on campus. But truthfully I drive the GEM car due to limitations on my eyesight from advanced glaucoma. I am able to fit a teen aged son, his backpack and cello, and my bookbag in the front, but not much more.

**Q:** What was your first published work?

**A:** My first published work was a short poem about tapioca pudding, which was printed in Story Friends when I was five. Of course having a father who was an editor at the Mennonite Publishing House might have made that possible.

## 2011 Justice Lectures Feature Prominent Pauline Scholar

What do you get when a world-renowned Methodist New Testament scholar who is a professor at a Roman Catholic seminary speaks on a Mennonite campus about the Apostle Paul?

Enlightenment? Inspiration? Indeed!

Michael Gorman, Professor of Sacred Scripture at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, Maryland, graced the EMU community on November 8 with two thought-provoking lectures. The two lectures, part of the Bible and Religion Department's annual Justice Lectures series, spoke directly to key elements of EMU's mission—nonviolence and justice.



In the first lecture, “[Paul, Apostle of Nonviolence](#)”, made the case for the centrality of active nonviolence in Paul's life and thought. Thus Gorman directly challenged the tendency for some Christians to pit Jesus vs. Paul—either in order to marginalize Jesus' message of peace or to marginalize Paul. Gorman's Paul is a faithful heir to Jesus' way of peacemaking and turning from violence.

The second lecture, “[Paul Apostle of Justification and Justice](#)”, also challenged common understandings of Paul's alleged lack of concern with social ethics. When our English translations tend to read “righteousness,” Gorman argued, “justice” is actually closer to Paul's intended meaning—as a call to social transformation shaped by the message of Jesus' way of the cross.

Linford Stutzman, Associate Professor of Culture and Mission in the Bible and Religion Department, and Reta Finger, Professor Emerita of New Testament at Messiah College, each provided a thoughtful response to one of the lectures. As would be expected, Gorman's powerful lectures and the perceptive responses elicited lively discussion.

## Upcoming Events of Interest

[School for Leadership Training](#) – January 16-18, 2012 at Eastern Mennonite Seminary. The plenary speaker is Walter Brueggemann and there will be 15 workshops covering a range of topics from living more with less and preaching on money to faith in work settings.

[Mennonite/s Writing Conference](#) – will both celebrate and examine this rapidly developing literature across borders on the North American continent and as it is developing world wide. [March 29-April 1, 2012](#). “If you love to read or write, whether you're Mennonite, MennoNot, or Menno-curious, this conference is for you,” said conference co-chair Kirsten Eve Beachy, assistant professor of Language and Literature at EMU.

## Alumni Update

What have you been doing since leaving EMU? We'd enjoy hearing from you! Use our [online form](#).