

BIBLE & RELIGION DEPARTMENT

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

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In this issue...

- [Greetings](#)
- [Students in Action](#)
- [Ministry Inquiry Program](#)
- [Faculty Comings & Goings](#)
- [Tribute to Calvin Shenk](#)
- [Alumni Updates](#)
- [A Special Gift](#)
- [A Different Kind of Birth](#)
- [Haverim Breakfast 2015](#)
- [Rewards and Risks](#)
- [Thanks to Haverim](#)
- [Subscribe](#)

Greetings, Haverim!

It has been a discouraging few months for those of us concerned to cultivate generous and vulnerable relationships with Islam. Donald Trump called for “a complete and total shutdown” of entry to the US by Muslims. The same week, Jerry Falwell Jr., President of Liberty University, told an audience of students, “I’ve always thought that if more good people had concealed-carry permits, then we could end those Muslims before they walked in.” A week later a [Wheaton College professor](#) wore a hijab while giving a devotional and quoted Pope Francis to say that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. She was put on leave for the Spring semester and told she could only return to teach in the Fall if she gave up her tenure. And in neighboring Augusta county, [public schools were shut down](#) on the last day before Christmas break because of threats in response to a World History assignment that had students attempt to copy Arabic calligraphy of the shahada (the Muslim confession of faith).



Amid reading the news reports of these events, I got an email from Nathan Hershberger (2012), now serving, along with his wife, Kaitlin Heatwole (2011), with MCC in Iraq. He was urging me to read an [article](#) by Navid Kermani, a German-Iranian writer who had just won the Peace Prize of the German Publisher’s Association. He begins with the story of Father Jacques Mourad, a Syrian Catholic priest. Here is part of the opening:

I first met Father Jacques in the autumn of 2012, when I was travelling through an already war-torn Syria to report on the events there. He was responsible for the Catholic parish of Qaryatain and also belonged to the community of Mar Musa, which was founded in the early 1980s in a derelict early Christian monastery. It is a special, probably a unique Christian community, for it is devoted to the encounter with Islam and love for Muslims. While conscientiously following the commandments and rituals of their own Catholic church, the nuns and monks engage equally earnestly with Islam and take part in Muslim traditions, including the observance of Ramadan. It sounds mad, even ludicrous: Christians who, as they themselves put it, have fallen in love with Islam. And yet this Christian-Muslim love was a reality in Syria only recently, and still is in the hearts of many Syrians. With the work of their hands, the kindness of their hearts and the prayers of their souls, the nuns and monks of Mar Musa created a place that seemed to me a utopia, a place which – although they did not ignore the divisions of the present – anticipated nothing less than an eschatological reconciliation, took for granted that reconciliation will come. A seventh-century stone monastery, amid the overpowering solitude of the Syrian desert mountains, which was visited by Christians from all over the world, but where day after day still greater numbers of Arab Muslims – dozens, even hundreds – knocked at the door to meet their Christian brethren, to talk, to sing and to keep silence with them, and also to pray according to their own Islamic ritual in a corner of the church that was kept free of images.

Though it might seem so to Americans, especially this month, this is not entirely unprecedented. Ten years ago, when I was in the position Nathan and Kaitlin now share, I spent a weekend with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Mosul at an MCC-supported shelter they ran for battered women. I vividly remember attending chapel with them and seeing the Muslim residents assemble with the sisters at prayer times. They prayed according to their own distinctive practice, but with no trace of hesitation about doing so in a Catholic chapel, alongside devout Catholic nuns. William Dalrymple, in his extraordinary book, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey Among the Christians of the Middle East*, reports observing similar things. He argues that the Muslim practice of prostration in prayer was borrowed from the early Christians, so much so that in some churches, even now, “the only thing to distinguish the worship from that which might have taken place in a mosque was that the worshippers crossed and recrossed themselves as they performed their prostrations.”

But until reading this I had never thought of it as eschatological. I had thought of such instances as exemplary moments of receptive generosity. I had thought of them as evidence of just how close Christianity and Islam can be under certain historical, social and political conditions. But eschatological? Here in the EMU Bible and Religion department, we regularly teach that one essential insight of Anabaptist history and theology is that eschatology is indispensable to Christian ethics. To pray “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” is an eschatological prayer and one that enjoins the church to embody not what is “realistically” possible now but what is promised then. The church is the community that has received a vision of humanity’s final destiny in the life of Jesus, a vision of peace among the nations and even between the wolf and the lamb. Communities of radical discipleship stretching throughout church history—from the first centuries through the contemporary movement known as New Monasticism—have described themselves in precisely the way Kerwani describes Mar Musa —“anticipat[ing] nothing less than an eschatological reconciliation.” Kerwani’s innovation is to insist that the kind of engagement with Islam expressed by the monks and nuns of Mar Musa is equally eschatological.

Father Jacques was kidnapped by ISIS on May 21, 2015. On May 22 his church was filled with Muslims who came to pray for him. In October many of those same Muslims contrived to help him escape from his cell. But 200 Christians of Father Jacques’s village remain hostages. Kerwani closes, “And so I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, to pray for Jacques Mourad, pray for Paolo Dall’Oglio [an Italian Jesuit, also kidnapped], pray for the Christians of Qaryatain, pray or wish for the liberation of all hostages and the freedom of Syria and Iraq. I invite you to stand up so that we can answer the snuff videos of the terrorists with a picture of our brotherhood.” Eschatology aside, Kerwani has invited us to pray—that is, worship—with the Muslims and Christians of Qaryatain as a sign of brother and sisterhood. I hope many of us take up his invitation.

– Peter Dula, chair

Students in Action

Two of our student majors are members of Emulate, a new vocal ensemble. **Perry Blosser** (2018, Biblical Studies, bottom row 3rd from right) and **Nathanael Ressler** (2015, Congregational and Youth Ministry, top row 2nd from right) are part of this group that performs on and off campus.



Ministry Inquiry Program (MIP)

Summer of 2014 offered a wide variety of ministry placements which enabled our students to test their gifts and their interest in ministry. MIP continues to be a strong program that matches students and churches in a way that is beneficial to both. EMU is pleased to continue to be able to be a part of this program.

Rachel Schrock combined her MIP service with First Mennonite of Iowa City, IA and Crooked Creek Christian Camp. **Daniel Barnhart** was placed with his home congregation, Mount Olive Brethren Church in McGaheysville, VA. **Jeremiah Knott** worked with both Faith Alive and Bethel Church of Christ in Elkton, VA. **Wesley Wilder** served with Journey Mennonite Church in Hutchinson, KS.

Check out our [MIP webpage](#) for student reflections on their experiences and for links to their chapel presentations. We are recruiting now for MIP students for this summer. Let Carmen know if you are aware of a current student who you believe would benefit from the MIP experience.

Faculty Comings & Goings

Peter Dula, **Ted Grimsrud**, **Nancy Heisey** and **Andrea Saner** attended the Society of Biblical Literature/American Academy of Religion annual meeting in Atlanta, Nov. 21-24. **Andrea** presented on “Trinitarian Judgments in/and the Book of Exodus.”

Christian Early was in Zürich, Switzerland for a conference on pacifism November 13-14. He gave a paper with the title “To Empire or Not to Empire: Theological Possibilities for Pacifism.”

Nancy Heisey and her sister, M.J. Heisey, co-authored *Relief Work as Pilgrimage: “Mademoiselle Miss Elsie” in Southern France, 1945-1948*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015

Andrea Saner preached at Community Mennonite Church on Nov. 29.

Tribute to Calvin Shank

I looked up to Calvin long before we became colleagues in the Bible and religion department. During my years at MCC I heard him challenging mission leaders to think carefully and deeply through questions related to Christian witness in diverse religious contexts. He was one of very few who carefully read through my dissertation and gave me a written response. And, as long as he was able, even after he retired, he always greeted me warmly in the Ethiopian way. He was a mentor, a brother, a friend.

... Nancy Heisey, Professor of Biblical Studies and Church History

I am grateful for the privilege of having been able to be Calvin Shank's colleague for about a decade in EMU's Bible and Religion department. I have good memories of many serious



conversations, especially about the Middle East and Jewish/Christian relationships. Calvin's commitment to the gospel of peace was, among many other ways, borne out in the evolution of his understanding of that very complicated center of conflict at the intersection of the three Abrahamic faiths. I also have good memories of Calvin's terrific sense of humor. He continually, with a twinkle in his eye, teased me by calling me a "Swede" when he knew I am Norwegian. Once I asked him how he got to be so funny. He said he had no sense of humor at all until he met and married Marie. That was only one of many ways she impacted his life for the good. I miss him greatly.

... Ted Grimsrud, Professor of Theology and Peace Studies

See Ted's [blog](#), his [website](#) and his [EMU personnel page](#).

Alumni Updates

Grace Schrock-Hurst Prasetyo (2010, Culture, Religion and Ministry), husband Yugo and big brother Jeremiah welcomed Simeon Luke Prasetyo to their family. Born Friday, 11 December 2015 at 4.3 kilos (9lbs 7oz) and 55 cms (21.7inches). Grace says "We are all healthy and happy and adjusting to life as a family of four...." Carmen Schrock-Hurst, instructor in spiritual formation and ministry, is the proud Oma (grandmother).



Matthew Tschetter (1992, Youth Ministry) is the new Donor Relations Associate for Ohio. Matt has a long history and strong commitment to MCC, most recently serving as Connecting Peoples Coordinator for Nicaragua and Costa Rica. He served on the MCC Great Lakes board from 2003 to 2012, and on the national board from 2008 to 2012. Matt has undergraduate degrees in youth ministry and organizational leadership; an MA in Peace Studies from AMBS; and is completing an MS in Community and International Development from Andrews University. He is a good story-teller and relates well to people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. He is married to Violeta Castro Lopez.

Tim (2012, Biblical Studies) and Katie **Heishman** will be the next program directors at Camp Brethren Woods, starting in March.

What have you been doing since leaving EMU? We'd enjoy hearing from you!

A Special Gift

Emily Hodges Nyce (2014, Religious & Intercultural Studies) graciously donated a beautiful hand-painted picture to the department. It now hangs on our wall in Roselawn...be sure to view it when you visit us. Thank you Emily!



A Different Kind of Birth Announcement

This isn't the kind of "miracle" that Sarah and Abraham experienced, but bringing into the world a new book, when one is advanced in age, also has its miracle quality. For those of us who read a lot and write a little, the process may be interesting, but the end product is much more inviting. In spite of what the Preacher said, I believe, in our world at this time, "we can be thankful for the making of many books."

As a twin myself, not the carbon-copy kind, I am pleased that this is a triple-format "child" (hard, soft, electronic). Therefore, as a reader or writer or both, I invite you to take a look at my second child by opening this website: <http://www.friesenpress.com/bookstore/title/11973400025156239>. Also available on Amazon.com under MY LOYALIST ORIGINS

Whatever your decision, to adopt or to foster, I thank you for being a part of this "birth day" celebration. With faith hope and love,
[Herb Swartz](#), B&R faculty emeritus

Haverim Breakfast 2015



Four students and sixty plus alums and Haverim members gathered on Oct. 10 to reminisce and hear Andrea Saner, assistant professor of Old Testament and Hebrew language, teaching in the seminary and Bible & religion department at EMU speak. Andrea and her husband, Eric, came to Harrisonburg from northeast England where she completed her PhD in Old Testament at

Durham University. She shared some thoughts on “Seeing God.”



Risks and Rewards in Ministering

Emmanuel Hagai (2008, Biblical Studies) writes...

Tanzania is a peaceful country known for her culture of peace for years. Both Christians and Muslims lived together peacefully. The community shared joys and sadness of every occasion undistinguishable of Christians and Muslims. But nowadays, the acts of violence are evidenced by acid being poured on ministers, burning of churches, and killing of ministers just to mention a few.

I am a lead Pastor to Temeke Mennonite congregation whereby more than 95% of the surrounding community are Muslims. The risks of leading a church in the midst of slum Muslims community are massive because the work demands significant investment before any lasting results are visible. It is a long term commitment, and there are always varying degrees of failure and painful moments. I have received two threatening letters from the radical Muslims, but I walk by faith, realizing that these are just difficulties which must be endured for the sake of Christ.

In Tanzania people with albinism are misunderstood, disadvantaged, and even attacked and killed. Their body parts are sold to witchdoctors for use in charms and magical potions believed to bring wealth and good luck. To the right, Pastor Hagai is praying and encouraging a Muslim Albino, Nasra, who had a baby. He is providing psychological support to seven Albinos.



Notably, there is also reward when serving the Lord. As Jesus says, “...My Father will honor the one who serves me” (John 12:26c). I am joyful to be honored by God, and this is the greatest reward. My prayer is that the message of God’s Word will bring peace and understanding between Christians and Muslims. The Bible is true when it says that, “all things work together for good... according to His purpose.” My message is that God has a purpose to honor every life and that each life is important to Him!

My goal is to foster the dialogue between Christians and Muslims. We must respect each other and we must recognize each other’s good work on the path to righteousness. I long to see hundreds and thousands of people are becoming followers of Jesus Christ. I believe the Holy Spirit will turn risks to a rewarding better future.

Pastor Hagai (Knees in front) distributing water filters to the Muslims community to build friendship while solving the basic community problem. The community suffers from waterborne diseases.



Thanks to Haverim

Thanks to Haverim for again underwriting the cost of providing a small stipend for three local pastors who each

met weekly with a group of six students from the spiritual formation class. Student evaluations from the class consistently rate the small groups as high points of their learning experience.

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