

# TMTc NEWSLETTER

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A publication of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre, an advanced degree (primarily doctoral level) research and teaching centre at the Toronto School of Theology.

## Life at the Centre

by A. James Reimer  
Acting Director

The first issue of the *TMTc Newsletter* appeared in September, 1993. In the editorial, "From the Director's Desk," yours truly made the observation that "With this first issue of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre . . . we introduce you to an exciting new venture in higher Mennonite theological education. During these times of fiscal restraint and denominational entrenchment, such a cooperative inter-Mennonite and inter-confessional initiative at a major North American federation of theological schools may seem surprising." During the seven years since that first issue of the *Newsletter* many changes have occurred in our society and at our Centre.

The most obvious changes have to do with administration of the Centre. While I was on sabbatical in 1994-95, Lydia Harder filled in as Acting Director. During that year I resigned my Directorship and Lydia became the Director, a position she has held with distinction, energy and creativity up to the

present. This year (after January, 2000) she is spending her sabbatical in Egypt with her husband Gary [see p.10], and now she also has resigned her Directorship of the Centre. During her leadership I have continued as Academic Advisor and will continue to do so into the foreseeable future. Lydia will continue in her role as teacher and advisor. Below, you will find my tribute to Lydia and her contribution to the work of the Centre [see p.5].

There is another change in administration. In 1993 Daryl Culp, from Listowel, Ontario, then a doctoral student at the Toronto School of Theology, was my Administrative Assistant and Assistant Editor of the *Newsletter*. In May, 1998, Daryl successfully defended his thesis on Gordon Kaufman and he is now teaching at the University of Lithuania. He has just recently won a distinguished Templeton award for developing and teaching a course on religion, science and technology. Now, seven years later, Jeremy Bergen, of Winnipeg, and recent graduate from Canadian Mennonite Bible College and the University of Winnipeg, is the Administrative Assistant to the

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### TMTc Newsletter

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Irma Fast Dueck,  
Miroslav Volf.  
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Centre. Bergen, who has experience with the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, and Christian Peacemaker Teams in Hebron, is a M.A. student at TST, and has done most of the work putting together this issue of the *Newsletter*. I express also my appreciation to Anita Tiessen, our secretary treasurer for her "yeoman's" job of keeping our finances organized, and to Phil Enns, doctoral student who has organized a number of student discussion forums.

One of the things that has not changed is that, despite the alleged economic boom that North America is experiencing, the Centre is still trying to figure out new ways of raising money to meet its very modest budget of roughly \$30,000, met through board membership fees (about one-third) and fundraising. This year we have had a number of very successful fundraising events, including one at the Waterloo North Mennonite Church in Waterloo and another at the St. Catharines Mennonite Church. The success of such events depends to a large extent on how many people come out (and how much money they give). We have managed to attract credible numbers, to both of the above events, to hear the Bluegrass Gospel group "Five on the Floor," of which yours truly is a member. You may be surprised at this strange juxtaposition of advanced theological studies and gospel music. "What does Barth have to do with Bill Monroe?" More than you think. I'm not going to use this space to engage in an apologetics for "Gospel." I have done so elsewhere (e.g., "Why a theologian sings the blues," *Christian Living* [September, 1999], 26-27). Let me just say, it has something to do with "grace." At the Waterloo event, CBC host Eric Friesen reflected on how he bridges the world of classical and gospel music [see p.7.]

The most significant development for Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre is its transition from an independent organization to one owned and administered by Conrad Grebel College (CGC). This means that the Centre will become part of the graduate programme of Conrad Grebel College. Until now TMTC was an independent entity with an independent bi-national board made up of a variety of church agencies and educational institu-

tions. Financial pressures and ambiguity about who actually owned and operated the Centre led the Board at its annual meeting in September (1999), and a subsequent teleconference, to ask CGC to assume responsibility. The College consented conditional upon reaching an agreement with the Toronto School of Theology to become an affiliate member of the TST federation of schools. This agreement is now in its final stages of negotiation. These significant changes will not affect the underlying goals, vision, and work of TMTC, and the present Board, with its bi-national membership, will continue as an "advisory" body.

The Centre has again this year been involved in numerous activities and events, from teaching, advising students, to sponsoring conferences and a lecture--a conference on the theological significance of suffering for Mennonites, a colloquium on worship, and a lecture by Yale theologian Miroslav Volf. I hope you enjoy getting a glimpse into these and other aspects of the Centre's life through reading this *Newsletter*.

**And please find it in your generous hearts to contribute financially to the ongoing work of the Centre. Thank you.** | TMTC |

## CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to the following Mennonite students:

### *Graduations*

- **Grace Brubacher, M.A., Regis.** Area: Ministry and Spirituality.
- **Andrew Brubacher-Kaethler, M.A., Emmanuel.** "Christology in African Independent Churches: Theological Reflections in Mennonite Missions Perspective"
- **Karl Koop, Ph.D. St. Michael's.** "Early Seventeenth Century Confessions of Faith: The Development of a Tradition"
- **Carol Penner, Ph.D. St. Michael's.** "Women Abuse: Mennonite Silences and Feminist Voices"

### *Thesis defended*

- **Eleanor Epp-Stobbe, Th.D., Emmanuel.** "Practising God's Hospitality: The Contribution of Letty M. Russell Toward An Understanding of the Mission of the Church"

## Current students

*Students who affiliate with TMTC*

**Jeremy Bergen, M.A., Theology.**

**Yousef Daneshvar, Ph.D., Philosophy of Religion.**

**Phil Enns, Ph.D., Philosophical Theology (Philosophy of Language; Continental Philosophy).**

**Brian Enns, M.A., Centre for the Study of Religion, U of T.**

**Mohammed Farimani, Ph.D., Philosophy of Religion.**

**Irma Fast Dueck, Th.D., Worship and Ethics.**

**Susan Kennel Harrison, Th.D., New Testament.**

**Tim Reimer, Ph.D., Old Testament.**

**Sarah Smith, Th.D., Homiletics (Listener-response theory).**

**Joel Schmidt, M.T.S., Conrad Grebel College.**

**Geoff Wichert, Ph.D., History (19<sup>th</sup> Century France), U of T.**

## Consultation on Worship

by Irma Fast Dueck  
Th.D. student, TST

Last October about 30 Mennonite scholars, pastors and practitioners gathered at the Toronto School of Theology to examine Mennonite worship theology. The event was sponsored by TMTC and supported through representation by various levels of both conferences (GC and MC). An awareness of the need for a consultation grew out of various informal conversations among those teaching worship courses in Mennonite colleges and seminaries and among pastors looking for some kind of theological framework by which to guide and reflect upon current worship practices.

While the general purpose of the consultation was to examine Mennonite worship theology, how to access this task was not easy. The organizing committee decided on including two approaches to examining our liturgical theology: first, through the presentation of theological papers on particular aspects of Mennonite worship, and secondly, through an examination of the operative theology at work in our worship practices.

John Rempel began the consultation with a paper entitled "Sacraments: The Inner Grounding of Worship." Rempel appealed for a fuller understanding of the sacraments as the heart of worship. "Sacramental actions," Rempel argued, "are the grounding for worship in all its manifestations because they actualize in the most simple and basic way the intersection between grace and faith." The battles of the Reformation, Rempel claimed, prevented the early Anabaptists from working through the inherent relationship between ecclesiology and sacraments. In his paper, Rempel proceeded to "think through" this connection between ecclesiology and the sacraments, suggesting that an Anabaptist theology of church, its worship and mission are profoundly grounded in the doctrine of incarnation.

Irma Fast Dueck in her paper, "Gottesdienst: Worship and Service in



left to right: Ron Guengerich, Eleanor Snyder, Marlene Kropf

the Mennonite Church," focused more specifically on the relationship of worship and discipleship within Mennonite worship theology. Mennonites have long considered worship and work to be one, insisting that worship encompass all of life and not be restricted to the practice of particular rituals or sacraments. Unfortunately, Mennonites have been susceptible to a liturgical imbalance in their worship practices and rituals, overemphasizing ethics and discipleship sometimes at the expense of the worship of God. The strong emphasis on service and the prominent place of discipleship ethics in Mennonite Christology and ecclesiology and the limited critical reflection on Mennonite worship theology reflects a potentially one-sided emphasis on human action not tempered with the action of God. Dueck argued that a more performative understanding of worship, expressed particularly through the ordering of worship allows Mennonites to bring together worship and work in a healthier balance.

Marlene Kropf and Ken Nafziger presented the findings of a three year project which examined the role of singing in the Mennonite tradition. The project involved interviews with approximately a hundred people between the ages of eight and eighty, who were asked about the function of singing in Mennonite worship. Kropf drew sev-

eral conclusions on the basis of the project. In singing, Kropf argued, our vision of God is formed and we encounter a revelation of the word of God. Furthermore, Kropf argued that singing helps in forming us into Christian community: "we discover ourselves bound in love to one another." Finally, through singing our life is formed as people of the spirit in the world. Kropf claimed, "we are transformed as we find comfort, healing and new life which empower us to love and service Christ in the world." The strong significance of singing in worship for Mennonites confirmed for Nafziger that great care is needed for what is sung (including the images and metaphors that are given people to sing) in worship. Care must be given to the craft of music in worship including care to include "another's" song. Times of singing in worship must be cared for in pastoral ways.

Theological reflection on the operative theology currently at work in Mennonite worship practices was done through the use of video case studies. Rebecca Slough, Gary Harder and Rod Stafford each presented video clips of three different Mennonite congregations at worship. These case studies also included some reflection by the worship planners of the particular services on questions around the core values expressed by the service and the Mennonite self-understanding at work in the particu-

lar service. Following these case studies, consultation participants were involved in further reflection on the issues/perplexities involved in Mennonite worship practices as well as further identifying the root values which needed to be expressed by Mennonite worship.

The case studies and papers revealed various issues with regards to Mennonite worship practices. Numerous tensions were identified such as tensions between an emphasis on a transcendent God and a personal God in worship, between prescriptive and free worship, between the personal and communal, between competence in worship and the participation of lay people. Issues were raised around the integrity of the language of worship, particularly around the "language" of other traditions incorporated into Mennonite worship and the struggle for Mennonites to find a worship language which is their own yet allows for the wide diversity which currently characterizes the Mennonite Church.

Is it possible to identify the root values of Mennonite worship despite the diversity in practices? The three persons of the Trinity were frequently appealed to as providing the theological



Rebecca Slough presents a clip of a congregation at worship.

framework for thinking about Mennonite worship. Worship is a holy encounter with a gracious, imminent and yet transcendent God. In worship we practice the presence of God. Worship takes places in the midst of the people of God, within a community where Christ is incarnated in each other. In worship we are transformed and empowered by the Holy Spirit for mission and to live

faithfully in our world. "Letter" and "Spirit" are brought together in worship, where scripture is read and interpreted by community and which informs who we are and what we do. In worship the God of Christ is present through the power of the Holy Spirit. Holiness, community, scripture, mission. These words need to be embodied within a Mennonite theology of worship. | TMTC |

## TMTC Courses

Three courses are planned for the 2000-2001 school year.

**Anabaptist Spirituality** (Sept.-Dec., Mondays 11:00am-1:00pm) Taught by Dr. C. Arnold Snyder. This course will consist of description and analysis of Anabaptist spirituality in the context of the spiritual currents of early, medieval and late medieval Christian spiritual traditions. (History dept., cross-listed to Pastoral dept.)

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Life and Thought** (Sept.-Dec., Tuesdays 11:00am-1:00pm) Taught by Dr. A. James Reimer. Theological writings of Bonhoeffer in the context of his life: studies, teaching, World Council of Churches, Confessing Church, resistance to Hitler. (History dept., cross-listed to Theology dept.)

**Bible as Authoritative** (Jan.-April, Thursdays 9:00-11:00am) Taught by Dr. Lydia Harder. This course will explore the notion of biblical authority within the context of a variety of communities of interpretation. Attention to the challenges of Radical Reformation, feminist and liberation theologies. (Theology dept., cross-listed to Bible dept.)

*These courses are taught at the advanced degree level (M.A. or Ph.D.) as well as the basic degree level (M. Div.) If you are interested in taking a course for credit or audit, contact Jeremy Bergen at the TMTC office, 416-978-6078, [tmtc@chass.utoronto.ca](mailto:tmtc@chass.utoronto.ca)*

## Tribute to Lydia Harder

*The following was a tribute given by A. James Reimer at a special farewell for Lydia on January 8, 2000 at Danforth Mennonite Church, Toronto, on the eve of her sabbatical departure for Egypt together with her husband Gary. It was also an occasion to celebrate her contribution to the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre as its Director since 1995.*

I want to express my appreciation to Lydia for her contribution to the vision and work of Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre. I've known Lydia since my College days in Winnipeg in the early 1960s. I don't remember many details about Lydia from those days, but I do recall that she was one of those Neufeld kids from Ontario, that "liberal" province, and that her father was a well-known minister there. I knew her brothers Vic and Hugo better, because I sang with both of them in male quartets. Our paths really did not pass again until about 12 years ago, when she came to study here at the Toronto School of Theology, with her husband Gary, who became pastor of Toronto United Mennonite Church, succeeding Darrell Fast. I could go on and on about Lydia's significant work for TMTC, but I'm going to restrict my comments to just a few observations about Lydia's academic and theological contributions to the Centre and the Mennonite Church in general. I will take the risk of situating Lydia theologically.

Lydia received a degree in theology from Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg, in 1964; her M.Th. from Newman College (Alberta) in 1984; her B.A. in the German Department from Goshen College in 1969; and her Th.D. from Emmanuel College in 1993. She achieved all of this while raising a family together with her husband, teaching part-time, writing and publishing scholarly and popular articles, and having numerous church responsibilities: she was board member of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, a member of the preaching team at Toronto United Mennonite Church, on the editorial council of the Believers Church Bible Commentary Series, sat on the steering committee of a North American Wide conference on

women doing theology. She began publishing scholarly articles during her years as a graduate student, and continues to be productive: she has to her name one book, numerous chapters in books and articles in refereed journals.

In most of her scholarly work Lydia has been concerned with giving women a voice in theological thinking and she has done this successfully and in quite a distinctive way. Unlike Mary Daly, Lydia has not left the church but has been passionately committed to the transformation and opening up of the church to all voices. I think Lydia's most significant contribution to Christian feminism in general, and Mennonite feminism in particular, is her strong belief that the Bible as interpreted by a believing community continues to be God's Word to us. The believing community, is for her, a hermeneutical community in which all believers, including both male and female, have equal access to God's Word; but this Word nevertheless is not our Word but is addressed to us in a way that is not at our critical disposal. Here she remains

faithful to the historic Mennonite view of the Bible in a way that I think distinguishes Lydia, at least to some degree, from Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's "hermeneutics of suspicion." The Church also continues to be at the centre of Lydia's theology, in a way reminiscent, I believe, of Rosemary Ruether, with some differences—I think Ruether is more ready to draw on non-biblical and non-Christian sources than is Lydia.

Lydia is really a Mennonite/Christian feminist theologian in the best sense of the word—taking both the Bible and the Church—as authoritative, and adding to this the centrality of Women's experience. This combined emphasis (Bible, Church as community, and women's experience) is reflected in her work at the Centre: in the type of courses she has taught, in the way she has tried to create community amongst students and scholars in Toronto and throughout North America, and in the way she has tried to anchor advanced theological studies in congregational life. All of us appreciate greatly what you (Lydia) stand for and what you have contributed to the Centre.

TMTC

## Volf speaks on 'The Spirit and the Church'

by Jeremy Bergen  
M.A. student, TST

On March 16, 2000, around 80 people gathered to hear a TMTC-sponsored lecture by Yale theologian Miroslav Volf. Volf, who is from the former Yugoslavia (Croatia), is the author of *Exclusion and Embrace; After Our Likeness: the church as the image of the Trinity; Work in the Spirit* and dozens of articles. In his introduction of Volf, Jim Reimer noted that Volf's attention to issues of reconciliation and ecclesiology has made him a theologian of particular interest to Mennonites.

Volf began by observing that while there is a close link in the Christian creedal tradition between the Holy Spirit and the church, the nature of this relationship has received little atten-

tion. Often, the church has been related to Christ (such as Christ as head, church as body), with the Spirit's role being secondary and related to invigorating the christologically-defined nature and mission of the church.

However, as Christ not only gives the Spirit, but Jesus was also shaped by it himself, it will be important to understand the relationships between Christ and Spirit, Christ and church, and Spirit and Church. The lecture proceeded to explore the implications of the proposal that "the church is the continuation of Christ's anointing by the Spirit."

How did the historical Jesus see himself in relation to the Spirit and the community? The earthly Jesus did not intend to found a church, yet proclaiming the reign of God involved the gathering of a people. The Twelve, for example, were gathered around a Spirit-mandated centre

(Jesus) and sent out for the Spirit-authorized ministry of healing, exorcism, proclamation. The particular way in which Jesus gathered is significant for the emergence of the church. These particularities are shaped by the *Spirit's* presence in the encounters that Jesus had with others. These encounters, characterized by freedom and the unconditional outreach of God, were concretized in forgiveness offered to sinners, fellowship that welcomed the outcast, and care for the physically needy.

Thinking the church as continuation of Christ's anointing by the Spirit suggests an identity between church and Christ: they share the same goal (reign of God) and means (the Spirit). There is also non-identity. Christ's being fully coincides with his mission: *to be* Jesus Christ is what he is to do. On the other hand, the church's being diverges from what it is supposed to proclaim and enact because it is full of people prone to deny Christ. The Spirit functions to mediate this identity (church intimately united with Christ) and non-identity (church falls short and is thus over against Christ).

In the interest of time, Volf summarized three elements of the *nature* of the church so conceived: gathering in diversity, gifted for ministry, and united in love. But moving to a discussion of the *mission* of the church is not a departure from its identity if the church is conceived in the image of the Trinity. The church signals the coming reign of the triune God by sampling (in an inadequate way) the way in which the triune God, in God's very being, is redemptively engaged with the fallen world.

First, the mission of the church includes the *rebirth of persons* through the love and grace which is poured out from the Holy Spirit on those who are weak, sinners, and enemies. Sin is named, but God's offer of embrace holds even the in face of the most heinous sin.

Secondly, life in the church is to be

modeled on God's self-giving. This self-giving, seen in the cross, is the reconciliation of human beings with God. Yet, reconciliation *among people*, the church's social mission, is intrinsic to reconciliation with God.

Finally, the church as the continuation of Christ's anointing by the Spirit highlights the way in which the Spirit empowered Jesus to minister and *care for bodies*. The work of the Spirit is not limited to the church "gathered" (gifting members, uniting



them, etc.), but extends to the church "scattered" in the world which cannot ignore social and ecological issues. Remembering that its mission is not its own but always Christ's mission, the church must have the courage to be "misfitted" to the surrounding culture as it offers the alternative vision in which the reign of God is brought to bear on all aspects of life.

The three respondents took quite different approaches to their task. Irma Fast Dueck, professor of practical theology at CMBC and Th.D. student at TST, reflected on the connection between the church and the Spirit for Mennonites. Historically, the Anabaptists understood that at baptism, the Spirit takes control of the adult believer, freeing a person for a life of discipleship. Furthermore, the Spirit is known through the gathered community of faith, expressing itself through the consensus of the community.

But there are problems with a view of the Spirit solely contained and defined by the church. The emphasis on the corporate over the individual tends to ignore difference and variety, sometimes resulting in exclusion, silencing, and oppression. Volf's distinction between the *individual*, autonomous believer and the *person*, born of the Spirit, forgiven, and transformed, is helpful, according to Dueck. A theology of church and Spirit in which church members are *persons* affirms the God-given dignity and personal spiritual transformation in each while maintaining an emphasis on the community.

Clark Pinnock reflected on the way in which Volf's lecture challenged the church to experience God through the Holy Spirit. Pinnock, professor at McMaster University Divinity School, noted that the first act of the risen Christ was to pour out his Spirit, not to structure a church. Christians must see the Spirit at work outside the church.

David Demson, professor of theology at Emmanuel College (TST), focused primarily on the concept of "equality," which Volf proposed as the nature of the relationship among Persons of the Trinity, and among the church. Jesus rejected hierarchy, according to Demson, but neither did he endorse equality. Regarding the Trinity, it is certainly true that each Person is wholly divine, yet "equality" will confuse us because the Father commands and the Son obeys, a dynamic which is never reversed. Commandment and obedience in this case is not about domineering power and submission, but rather the proper form of love between Father and Son in which each relates to the other with humble self-giving. On earth, the motivation to act in love ought not be some inherent human equality, but rather to confirm among humanity the forms of love which are already true among the Trinity. | TMTC |

*Miroslav Volf's lecture and responses will appear in a forthcoming issue of the Conrad Grebel Review.*

## Between Gospel and the Classics: Bridging Musical Worlds

*The following are excerpts from a speech given by CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) music host Eric Friesen at a TMTC fund-raising event at Waterloo North Mennonite Church on November 28, 1999. Friesen, a native of Altona, Manitoba, and a member of Conrad Grebel College Board, hosts three classical music programs for CBC Radio 2: "In Performance," "Onstage at Glenn Gould Studio," and "Great Pianists of the Twentieth Century." Friesen's speech was given in the context of a performance of Bluegrass Gospel music by a group known as "Five on the Floor." Members of the group are Bob Janzen (lawyer), Ron Harder (social worker), Lyle Friesen (ecologist), Henry Schmidt (Senior Citizens Homes consultant), and A. James Reimer (theologian). The talk in its entirety appears in The Conrad Grebel Review (Winter, 2000): 80-84*

Classical music has been my life. The music from my father's record collection is my earliest aural experience. Schubert songs, Bach cantatas, Beethoven sonatas. I have always loved classical music, from those days before I could speak even to now, working with classical music every day at the CBC. I love it and will always love it. It's an inexhaustible richness of music that feeds my soul every day.

But it isn't the only form of music out there, and it isn't the only kind of music I was drawn to as a kid or even now. Every one of us 'crosses over' in some way from the territory of our major musical interest to others. Sometimes we do it enthusiastically and openly. Sometimes we do it furtively, apologetically, slightly embarrassed that we might be caught listening to country music, rock-and-roll, jazz, or even. . . gospel music.

My earliest hearing of gospel music was on the main street of my home town, Altona, Manitoba, on a summer Saturday night. As the sun was setting and the dust

rising from all the young lovers cruising main street in their sleek Desotos and Chevy Impalas, a gospel quartet from the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church would set up in a strategic location directly across from the Rhineland Hotel and its infamous beer parlour. And with the Pool grain elevator and the railroad station as backdrop, the gospel quartet, with an ancient sound system mounted on the roof of an old Chevy pickup, would sing their witness to the drinkers and the lovers of a prairie summer's night. I would sit on the steps of Friesen's Stationary Store, right next to the hotel, and listen, strangely attracted to this music that was so reviled at home and in the better homes of Altona Mennonites.

\* \* \* \* \*

In September 1999 I hosted a concert at Glenn Gould studio in Toronto with cellist Yo-Yo Mas. He played a Bach Unaccompanied Cello Suite, and then one of the most difficult pieces in the cello repertoire, the solo sonata by Zoltan Kodaly. It is almost unplayable, fiendishly difficult, a piece Yo-Yo Ma has taken up only the past few years. At the end of the concert, for an encore he play a solo cello version of the *Appalachian Waltz*, a tune written by the fiddle play Mark O'Connor—a slow, haunting tune from the Appalachian gospel tradition that Yo-Yo has come to love. He has made a video and a CD with O'Connor and the great Nashville bass player, Edgar Meyer; all of it music from this same tradition. Of course, when Yo-Yo Mas plays the *Appalachian Waltz*, he plays it like Jascha Heifetz plays a Gershwin standard. Yo-Yo is a classical player, but he takes this music as seriously as Bach, Beethoven, or a new piece written for him by some smart New York composer.

I'll end with a personal experience. A couple of months ago, I was walking in the Don Valley near my home in Toronto, feeling particularly low, blue. . . no, I was depressed and feeling kind of hopeless. In the midst of this walk a long-forgotten tune came into my head, and I started humming it. And then the words started coming back to me from this old gospel hymn that I know I first heard on the main street of Altona. I started singing to myself, tentatively at first, and then with real conviction and healing.

Somewhere beyond the blue.  
The angels beckon me  
From heaven's open door,  
And I can't feel at home  
in the world anymore.

Oh Lord you know  
I have no friend like you.  
If heaven's not my home  
then Lord, what will I do?  
The angels beckon me  
From Heaven's open door.  
And I can't feel at home  
in this world anymore.

So there I was, feeling really down, and what came to me was not the slow movement of Sibelius's *Violin Concerto*, Liszt's *Last Songs*, but this simple gospel hymn from childhood. And as I walked along, I felt a sensation move up my arms and through my head, like a physical shivering, as my body reacted to this huge rush of spiritual feelings. I may have a great deal of difficulty with the theology of that hymn, but one thing I know for sure. I didn't feel at home in this world right at that moment, and this music spoke to me with a connection as direct, as visceral, as a lover's touch in the heat of passion.

I suspect that most people who say they hate gospel music are afraid of it. They say it is inferior music, they sneer at its sentimentality, its simplistic theological views. But poke at this sophisticated snideness and you will find simple fear. Fear of gospel music's intimacy, fear of its directness, and most often, fear of the connection gospel music makes between our minds and our bodies, between our heart and our body. We cannot listen to this music without feeling our toes begin to tap, our fingers and arms and legs to move, our heads to nod. This music releases often long suppressed feelings we have. It speaks directly to our hearts.

The best music feeds both our intellect and our emotions. Classical music when it errs, most often errs in concentrating on the head and not the heart. (And it becomes a refuge for the feeling-impaired.) Gospel music, it could be argued, does the opposite, focussing on the experience at the expense of the intellect. (And becoming a refuge for sentimentality.) I find the balance in embracing both and making them part of my one world. I need them both, I love them both, gospel and classical are indivisible in my daily life. | TMTC |



Eric Friesen

This world is not my home  
I'm just a-passing through.  
My treasures are laid up

# Living with a history of suffering

Consultation addresses the repercussions of the Soviet Mennonite experience

by Jeremy Bergen

What does the Mennonite experience of suffering in the Soviet Union under Stalin and through World War II mean for our faith, theology and mission today? This was the issue that the participants of a consultation hosted by TMTC wrestled with on November 12-13, 1999. About 70 people attended the public session on the 12<sup>th</sup>, and 25 participated in presentations and discussions the following day. Participants at this event generally identified two sets of agendas. There was a personal agenda because they, their family members, or others in their congregations had experienced the terror. An intellectual and professional agenda focused questions of theology, history, pastoral care and the mission of the church.

The planners, including Werner Fast, Arnold Neufeldt-Fast, Krista Taves, and Lydia Harder, intentionally involved historians, theologians, pastors, psychologists, church musicians and interested lay people. Presentations, storytelling, discussion, and singing gave shape to the event. "Our theology and our experience must inform each other because what we have experienced shapes our understand-

ing of God," said Harder.

Waldemar Janzen, professor at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, began the keynote address on that theme, as someone who has lived through the Soviet experience. Conscious of the importance such a narrative has for shaping identity, the Soviet story must be seen in light of the shape of the Biblical story. In the Biblical story, suffering is not denied, but God's initiatives remain the focus. The function of remembering these stories is to awaken hope. If the story of Mennonite suffering can be set in the context of movement toward a God-set goal, we could be set free to find positive meaning in it, said Janzen.

The tendency for people in the depths of suffering, such as the Mennonites in the era of Soviet terror, is to see their situation as eternal. Stoic or fatalistic submission to the "grip of the futureless present" seems the only response, although faith and hope in a God who leads toward the Kingdom can break this grip. However, this hope is often collective hope—hope that the

*people of God* would continue even as individuals died in suffering.

Mennonites of that time drew selectively from biblical perspectives on suffering. For example, few Mennonites interpreted their suffering as judgment from God calling for individual or corporate repentance. Nor did Mennonites draw significantly on the suffering of Job, nor a perspective in which a faithful remnant suffers in light a future apocalypse.

Suffering was most often tied to that of Jesus Christ. "Taking up Christ's cross" meant suffering as a direct result of obedience to God. Furthermore, for many there was an assurance that Christ could empathize with their suffering and was present during the darkest hours. The perspective of Romans 8:18, in which suffering was a form of training or test of one faithfulness, was also present.

Janzen highlighted a number of questions to shape further conversation: What is to be remembered and what ought to be forgotten? In what forms ought we preserve the story? Who are the "saints," whose experiences might be retold, not to glorify suffering, but to focus on Christian virtues and fruits of the Spirit? Can we pass on this history to our children without unduly burdening them? Can it help us relate to and help others suffering today?

Werner Fast shared the moving story of his father being taken away at night during the Stalinist purges, as so many men were. Years later, wounds were reopened when he and his mother in Canada learned that her husband had remarried in the Soviet Union. Fast shared about a trip he took there decades later to visit his father, and the total forgiveness and reconciliation they shared. Ann Konrad read translations of several letters written in the Soviet Union between 1930-32 which showed ways in which suffering people responded to the challenge of evil.

Walter Sawatsky, in the first major paper of the second day, asked how we should understand martyrs, those who died for the faith, during this period. Some stories inspire and teach. Others do not fit into the martyr formula. We wonder how to tell the stories of those tar-



left to right: Barry Smith, Waldemar Janzen, Henry Petkau, Helmut Harder



## Proceedings from the consultation on theology of suffering

The forthcoming issue of the *Conrad Grebel Review* will publish a number of the papers presented. Contact: [cgreview@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:cgreview@uwaterloo.ca) or (519) 885-0220 ext. 242.

TMTC has produced a 7-page summary of the papers and discussion. If you would like a copy by email attachment (preferred method) or hard copy, contact the TMTC office.

geted for economic reasons, or who felt they compromised the faith, or who accused other Mennonites. He asked if we are too possessive of our own martyrs. Would we be willing to "share" our martyrs with other Christian traditions, and adopt theirs?

Henry Petkau presented a paper drawing from the recollections of three Mennonite ministers during the Stalinist era, one of whom did not survive his arrest. From their writings, it is clear that suffering was interpreted both as the mark of faithful disciple and an opportunity for purification. The conviction that the experience of suffering was within God's power enabled these particular leaders to stand firm in their faith.

Arnold Neufeldt-Fast presented the third major paper of the day, suggesting that Mennonite theology has yet to address convincingly those cases when God did not deliver from tragedy and suffering. Such a theology must closely identify God with the interruptive event of the cross of Christ, in which God steps into human misery in order to embrace us. An account of truth as an event which interrupts the everyday suggests that worship will be central in this theology.

Several panelists presented shorter papers or reflections. Kathy Lawrence, approaching trauma as a psychologist,

suggested that many who experience "insidious trauma," have their basic beliefs challenged or shattered. When faith tells people to just "forgive and forget," it hinders dealing from this trauma. Some factors, such as the Protestant work ethic, may have helped lessen the trauma after they came to Canada as refugees.

Marlene Epp observed the intersections of gender and immigration in the experience of Mennonite women who came to Canada from the Soviet Union as refugees after World War II. Many experienced the trauma of loss in forms such as lack of confirmation of death, ambiguity in marital status, the idealization of absent men, and the prioritizing of the memory of "martyrs" over "survivors." Some experienced judgment by church leaders who believed that these women had compromised their faith. Karl Koop reflected on the ways in which the *Aussiedler* (those who migrated from the USSR to Germany in the 1980s) coped with suffering.

Jonathan Dueck, drawing on a Russian-Mennonite choral journal of the early 1900s, observed how many choir participants were able to rejoice in spiritual goods, even as material goods were scarce. Congregational singing today may bridge the gap of time and space, and offer a means for our participation in the story of hope in the midst of suffering. Jacques Kornberg, a

Jewish scholar at the University of Toronto, reflected briefly on efforts to memorialize Jews who died in the holocaust as *human beings*, not as numbers or emaciated bodies.

During the day's discussion, Gail Kunkel asked about a God who weeps. "Does our theology of suffering depend on resignation? How does our theology handle the fact that death at least ended the suffering for many?" People in our churches continue to suffer from racism and family violence, and our experience and theology must be brought to bear on these realities, said Carol Penner. Len Friesen warned that one danger is that Mennonites tend to idealize their experiences. Mennonites may have found safety and prosperity in Canada, but should not therefore be uncritical of the capitalist system.

An issue for further conversation is how the story of the Soviet experience is heard by those in our churches who are not of Russian-Mennonite descent. How do we avoid reinforcing cultural particularities while seriously reflecting on that experience and incorporating those reflections into faith and life? How might these experiences serve as bridges between Mennonites in North America and those in countries such as Congo, Indonesia, or Colombia? The tone of the conference: personal, reflective, disciplined, within a theological framework, may point a good way forward. | TMTC |



Lydia Neufeld Harder (left) and Marlene Epp

## LETTER FROM LYDIA HARDER

(*excerpts*)  
Cairo, Egypt  
February 11, 2000

Today we got up early because our son Kendall had left us some CDs and his little CD player-- just over night. So we are listening to some fine Mozart. Otherwise we have no TV, radio, cassette player or telephone and we can really say we have been experiencing some much needed silence here in this city of noise! We live in a one bedroom flat on the 6th floor of an apartment block built by the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Cairo very recently for its students and faculty members. It has new furniture and is certainly very adequate for us. We are in a part of Cairo where there are few foreigners. When we walk down the street we get many "hellos" or "welcome to my country" or "what's your name?" shouted by the school children or even young men. That must be the only vocabulary they learn in their English classes, which reminds me of the very few Arabic words we know. We can finally read the numbers so that we take the right buses...

We have been to many different churches and experienced many different kinds of worship. One of the most interesting was the Pope's Bible Study where the Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda answered

questions that people hand in on slips of paper at the beginning of the meeting, as well as presents a Bible study on a particular passage. There were probably over 4,000 people at the cathedral, waiting for this discussion. The questions ranged from "Shall I quit school, because I really don't know why I'm here?" (It is better to keep studying and disciplining oneself) to "Can I burn incense at home?" (no, that is only for public worship) or "Can I not sleep in the same bed with the woman I am engaged to, as long as we do not 'do' anything?" (You are naive if you think you can resist temptation!) The people seem to love the Pope and there is such a mixture of informality (with quite a bit of humour) and formality that we found quite refreshing. We were ushered right to the front and received headsets so that we could understand everything. . .

We have also gone to a number of "Evangelical" churches, or what we would call the Protestant churches. We will be attending St. Andrew's which is an English speaking Lutheran sponsored church. Kendall conducts the choir there and has already recruited Gary. I teach at the seminary on Monday and Tuesday in the newly established M.A. program which has two students. These students are both intelligent young men who graduated from the B.Th. program. That is the largest program and is taught in Arabic, though all students must learn

some English. Most of the teachers are part-time so we have not gotten to know many, except the ones who come from USA. My fellow teacher in the MA program is a NT scholar, Stephen Davis, a Yale grad. We have had some stimulating discussions. The students are good in the oral, but weaker in the written work. They have a fairly good background, though there has been more focus on memorizing content than critical thinking. But I guess that will be the challenge for me! I am enjoying the teaching very much.

We have taken one trip outside of the city, on the very first weekend. We accompanied one of the English classes (taught by one of the other MCC people) on their field trip to the Sinai. That was quite an experience. We went by bus, getting to St. Catherine's Monastery 12 hours before we planned to climb the mountain. I'm not sure why this was planned that way, except that they had planned to tour the monastery which happened to be closed to the public that day. So we spent the time in this little village in a coffee shop waiting for 2 am when we could start climbing in order to be able to greet the sun when it rose. The coffee shop was without heat so we kept warm by huddling in blankets, and wearing every thing possible, drinking tea and eating the lunches we had brought. We visited, played various games and cards and got to know this group of orthodox university age students. For them it was a religious pilgrimage. Most had never been this far (a five hour bus ride!)

We finally warmed up when we began climbing. It was full moon and the path could be clearly seen, very beautiful. There were other tourists including Japanese, American etc. The last part was quite a challenge for me as it was all steps and rather steep. However, when we got to the top it was blowing wind and about -10C. We were so cold!! We tried to stay out of the wind in a hut where they sold blankets and some tea. The sun was beautiful when it arose, but it's hard to appreciate it when you are so cold. The way down was rather treacherous, as the stone steps were very icy. I did enjoy this trip, including getting to see some of the desert, the Suez canal tunnel through which we drove, the Red Sea etc. However, when we finally arrived home that evening after 36 hours without sleeping, I decided that I only needed to climb this mountain once!

Greetings to everyone there. | TMTC |

## Anabaptist-Mennonite Scholars Network

*This is network managed by the TMTC of over 300 individuals who have identified themselves as "Anabaptist-Scholars Network." The activities of the Network include:*

- Semi-annual newsletter intended to facilitate informal discussion among scholars and communicate relevant information. In the most recent issue (May 2000), four scholars reflect on the questions What is your definition of 'Anabaptist-Mennonite'? Do you work self-consciously as an Anabaptist-Mennonite scholar?
- Maintaining a database of scholars, education, occupation, areas of research, publications, research methods, etc. To join the Network, please fill out a data form, and send along with membership fees (\$25 Cdn, \$20 US, \$10 student). The form is available from the TMTC website or the TMTC office.
- Co-sponsorship of the Mennonite Scholars and Friends forum at the 2000 AAR/SBL meetings in Nashville. This year, the forum is hosted by Eastern Mennonite University on the theme of 'Is God Nonviolent?'

## Iranian Muslim students studying theology in Toronto

by Carol Penner

*The following articles were written by TST graduate Carol Penner (Ph.D., 1999) as news releases for MCC. TMTC has been very involved with this particular exchange. Lydia Harder was instrumental in making sure that academic and other arrangements were in place. Susan Kennel Harrison, TST student, has served as coordinator of the Hosting Committee.*

Yousef Daneshvar and Mohammed Farimani bring a different perspective to their doctoral studies at the Toronto School of Theology. They are Islamic students from Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute in Qom, Iran, who are participating in an exchange program sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Together with their wives and children, they moved to Canada in 1998 and 1999. Going to classes, talking with other students and visiting with Mennonites, Daneshvar and Farimani have been learning about Christianity, as well as teaching others about Islam.

"This exchange has given me an opportunity to have very exciting work," explained Daneshvar. He outlined why he decided to come on the exchange: "At first what was important to me was to have some academic studies at a Western university--to know more about the West and Christianity. But as time passed and

we got more involved in the exchange another goal became more important to me--having a dialogue, an active dialogue with Christians."

"This is a good program for me," Farimani added. "For a person who has studied Islamic studies it's important to have knowledge of Christianity and Western culture in the world we are living with now....We can become familiar both with Western culture and Western perspectives about Islam."

MCC began this exchange program with the Qom institute in 1998. It is part of MCC's desire to consciously increase its understanding of Muslim people and countries. Islamic culture is often viewed with suspicion by North Americans, typified by the way Western media often portrays Muslims as terrorists. Some Islamic leaders see the secular and materialistic West as "the enemy." The exchange program is one way of trying to build bridges of understanding and reconciliation between Christians and Muslims.

Former MCC workers Roy and Marlene Hange participated in the Iranian side of the exchange, studying for 10 months in Qom, before the illness of their child required their return to North America. MCC is actively seeking other students to take their place. Ed Martin, Central and Southern Asia program director, has traveled to Qom a number of times to forge relation-

ships. Dr. Haghani and Dr. Legenhause of the Qom Institute have also visited the United States.

Participation at the Toronto School of Theology has exposed Farimani and Daneshvar to people from a wide range of Christian denominations. The students acknowledged that they had held some stereotypes about the West when



Yousef Daneshvar came to Canada. In some ways these stereotypes were confirmed, particularly in terms of the openness regarding sexuality and relationships between men and women.

However, Daneshvar also noted, "My relationship with other students has helped me to distinguish between the West as secular culture and Christianity as a religion that seeks to preserve piety and morality." One important relationship is with Susan Kennel Harrison, who has served as a local coordinator for the two students and their families. Both

Farimani and Daneshvar have been careful to shield their children from negative influences in North American culture. However, Daneshvar has been surprised to see Christians doing the same thing, "Sometimes I have found Susan being as strict as me about her children watching TV!"

Harrison helped with the logistics of getting the two families settled in apartments in Toronto. Daneshvar's wife, Masoumeh, has been taking English classes, and has been able to connect with Iranians in the student housing apartments where they live. Their son, Mojtava, 14, and daughter, Maryam, 11, both attend public school. Their children have worked



Jim Reimer (left) and Mohammed Farimani talk during a graduate student gathering.

## Presence of Muslims forces Christian students to explain their faith more clearly

by Carol Penner

Yousef Daneshvar and Mohammed Farimani are no strangers to theological study, having each spent more than 10 years studying religion in Iran. They both took courses using English texts by Christian theologians. While somewhat familiar with the written English language, each of them needed several months of language training in Toronto before they were ready to begin studying at Toronto School of Theology (TST).

Farimani noted the cultural differences between theological education in Qom and Toronto: "In Iran when the professor arrives, students stand. We don't call the professors by their first name, and we don't eat or drink in class." A bigger difference is that in Qom after each class it is customary that two or three students gather to discuss what the teacher has taught. Daneshvar noted that there is discussion in his TST classes, but then everyone goes their own way. He misses the chance for small group discussion: "I am not accustomed to reading alone and thinking alone. I feel I need to find someone to study with!"

Both Daneshvar and Farimani commented on the friendliness of the students and professors. They particularly appreciate their faculty advisor. "Professor

George Schnier is such a knowledgeable man who understands what we need here," observed Farimani. "It is exceptional to find such a professor. At the first meeting, he said 'We want to learn from Iranian students, what is their method of studying, how can we learn from them?' He is very humble to have that attitude. Knowledgeable and humble."

Professor Schnier was enthusiastic about the exchange program. "No class goes by without their presence being a gift to the Christian students," he said. "If nothing else, we must explain ourselves and our beliefs clearly and carefully, often speaking about things we very much take for granted. Invariably when the Muslim students ask questions they cast an illuminating light upon the discussion."

Daneshvar expressed his surprise at the lack of knowledge about Islam that he has encountered, "Both profs and students do not have a basic understanding of Islam, compared to the knowledge students and professors in Iran would have about Christianity. I have to explain that Shi'ite is an Islamic denomination; people who I am studying with here wouldn't even know that basic fact!"

"Christians are more interested in Hinduism and Buddhism," Farimani noted. In a world religions course that he is tak-

ing, he was the only person to choose an Islamic topic for a research essay. This surprised him, since Islam and Christianity have commonalities. As Daneshvar explained, Muslims believe that "The same God that sent Jesus sent Mohammed."

Farimani was enthusiastic about the value of Muslims and Christians studying together. He has been surprised by conversations with Christians, "One thing that was unexpected was that people got upset when we called Jesus a prophet!" He explained that in Islam to call a person a prophet means that you hold them in extremely high regard. Christians refer to Jesus as the Son of God to distinguish him from the other prophets in the Bible.

Both Daneshvar and Farimani have several years of study left in Toronto, with many more opportunities to continue dialogue. "Muslims and Christians have to understand each other," Daneshvar stated, "and remove misunderstandings caused by bad experiences they've had with each other. This is difficult if not impossible without active cooperation between Christians and Muslims." ; TMTC ;

...continued from p. 11

successfully to adapt to the English language, "My daughter sounds like a native English speaker--she speaks without an accent!"

Farimani's wife, Atieh, studies English at home. The people in their apartment building have not been friendly, but she has made connections with Mennonites and with people at the mosque where they go to worship. They have a son Morteza who is 3-years-old.

Harrison has helped make connections with Mennonite congregations in the area. "We've gone to four different Mennonite churches — and had good discussions," Farimani noted, "and we would like to

visit more!" Daneshvar and Farimani have also attended an inter-varsity graduate student fellowship, as well as monthly gatherings of Mennonite graduate students.

The exchange program has resulted in many fruitful inter-religious discussions. Being faithful Muslims, Daneshvar and Farimani are clear on how Islam differs from Christianity. Farimani explained that the Koran rejects the concept of the incarnation and the trinity as corruptions of Jesus' original teaching. At the same time, "Jesus is greatly respected in Islam, he is one of the five greatest prophets along with Abraham, Noah, Moses and

Mohammed." Farimani went on to suggest some commonalities that he has noticed between Islam and Mennonites: "The Mennonite tradition has a high value on charity and a simple lifestyle. These are two things that are strongly recommended in Islam."

Prior to this exchange, neither Daneshvar or Farimani had heard the word Mennonite. Now they are forging friendships with people from another culture and religion. ; TMTC ;