

ANABAPTIST-MENNONITE SCHOLARS NETWORK NEWSLETTER

www.AnabaptistScholars.net

Volume 11, Number 1
Spring 2008

Exploring the Intersections of Mission and Academy

By Ryan Schellenberg, editor

While preparing the most recent edition of the A-MSN newsletter, "Mennonite Scholars in Non-academic Careers," I contacted James Krabill to see if he would be willing to contribute. I knew that Krabill was working as an administrator for Mennonite Missions Network, and wondered what comments he would have on the relationship between his academic work and his current vocation—a vocation that I would have characterized as "non-academic." It was Krabill's reply to my request that became the impetus for the current newsletter's theme.

As Krabill reminded me, mission work and academic work have been so intertwined among Mennonites that it is hardly useful to speak of two distinct vocations—one scholarly and the other practical or "non-academic." Scholarship and mission work have often been two sides of the same coin, as is attested by the work of Krabill himself and by careers of many others: Neil Blough, Alan and Eleanor Kreider, Steve Dintaman, Linda Oyer, Dennis Byler, Mark Thiessen-Nation, Norman Kraus, John Driver, Joe Liechty, Delbert Erb, Wilbert Shenk—and of course the list could go on.

This same overlap of scholarship and mission work can be seen in Mennonite Brethren circles. J. B. Toews, who served as the president of each of my MB alma maters—Bethany Bible School (1932-38), MB Bible College (1945-48), and finally MB Biblical Seminary (1971-78)—was also the longtime general secretary of the MB Board of Missions and Services. Other key MB leaders whose careers encompassed both missions and higher education include Henry Krahn, Jacob A. Loewen, A. E. Janzen, and G. W. Peters. More recently, mission experience has informed the work of MB scholars like Robert Enns, Gordon Nikkel, Mark Baker, and Paul Hiebert.

Krabill's reminiscences (p. 3)—which he sent me, appropriately enough, from a cyber-cafe in India—highlight the ways in which cross-cultural experience

poses questions that academics otherwise seldom confront. Krabill advocates that Mennonite scholars take up a role that is both mission-informed and mission-oriented.

Wilbert Shenk, who literally "wrote the book" on the history of Mennonite missions, provides us with a unique lens into that history by describing how mission work and academic work have intersected in his own career (p. 5). Shenk's reflections describe a dual reality: yes, scholarship and mission work have united seamlessly in his own career and the careers of many of his colleagues; yet Shenk notes that the attitude of the academy still ranges "from ambivalence to hostility" towards missions and missiology.

We always appreciate getting feedback from our members. If you have questions or comments about the newsletter or the network, or suggestions for a future issue of the newsletter, please contact me at AnabaptistScholars@gmail.com.

Anabaptist-Mennonite Scholars Network

47 Queen's Park Crescent East
Toronto, ON M5S 2C3 Canada
t: 416-978-6078
f: 416-978-7821
e: AnabaptistScholars@gmail.com
w: www.AnabaptistScholars.net

Coordinator and Editor: Ryan Schellenberg

The Anabaptist-Mennonite Scholars Network is a project of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre, Conrad Grebel University College. The Institute of Mennonite Studies is a co-sponsor.

Research Notes

As an abbreviated synthesis of my doctoral research, I will be presenting a paper at the Canadian Society of Church History, 2008 Annual Meeting in Vancouver, BC on June 3, 2008.

<http://www.augustana.ab.ca/csch/meeting2.htm>.

The paper is entitled, "Balthasar Hubmaier and the Authority of the Church Fathers," and is intended to initiate discussion and serious investigation into the surprisingly neglected subject of Anabaptist access to and use of the writings of the Church Fathers and attitude towards their authority. My paper will deal exclusively with Hubmaier, but will avoid simple conclusions based solely on Hubmaier's references to and citations of the Fathers in his own writings (although this will of course be addressed as well). Instead, I will be presenting much on the conveyance of Greek patristic texts into Italy by Byzantine émigré scholars particularly during the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438-9 and upon the fall of Constantinople in 1453, their translation into Latin after 1470 by both Byzantine scholars and Italian humanists, and finally their reception in Germany. The paper will also address Hubmaier's possible exposure to texts such as Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*, Gratian's decretals, the *glossa ordinaria*, as well as other florilegia and editions, particularly those of Erasmus, all of which contain citations of the Fathers. Exploring the curriculum (*studia humanitatis*), teaching methods, and required textbooks to which Hubmaier may have been exposed, as well as the early library indices of the universities at Freiburg-im-Breisgau and Ingolstadt will hopefully also allow insight into Hubmaier's access and exposure to the writings and thought of the Church Fathers.

Andrew P. Klager, PhD candidate, Ecclesiastical History
University of Glasgow
a.klager.1@research.gla.ac.uk

* * *

I am completing my dissertation in theology at the Toronto School of Theology, the title of which is "The Emerging Practice of Ecclesial Repentance and the Nature and Mission of the Church."

Recent decades have seen the emergence of "ecclesial repentance"—the practice of church/denominational bodies making official statements of repentance, apology, confession or requests for forgiveness for those things which were once official church policy or practice. Though denominations are moved to such acts

through recognition of their complicity in, for example, racism, they do not often consider what the very fact of repenting implies about the pilgrim nature and the reconciling mission of the church. This dissertation proposes that what the practice of ecclesial repentance shows about the church may be framed in terms of three doctrinal loci: the holiness of the church, the forgiveness of sins, and the communion of saints. Under each of these loci, I move from doctrine to practice in order to show how acts of ecclesial repentance reflect the Gospel; and I move from practice to doctrine to show that what is entailed by ecclesial repentance also reforms and challenges existing understandings of the nature and mission of the church. The contributions of the project are thus both methodological—understanding theology as "embodied doctrine," and practical—helping the church to think more concretely about its identity and the implications of its historical identity for its mission.

Jeremy M. Bergen
Toronto School of Theology
jeremy.bergen@utoronto.ca

* * *

I am on sabbatical at this time and am working on a number of research and writing projects:

1. "Peacemaking as a Spiritual Discipline": A paper written for use by first year students in a Spiritual Disciplines class that uses Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* as a text.
2. "An Alternative Spirituality for Men": A popular book that presents an alternative male spirituality to that which predominates in North America (e.g. Promise Keepers, Wild at Heart, Iron John, etc.).
3. "How Anabaptist Theology and the Emerging Church Address the Problem of Individualism and Consumerism in Believer's Churches": A paper for presentation at the Believer's Church Conference at CMU in Winnipeg in June.

Gareth Brandt
Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, BC
gareth.brandt@columbiabc.edu.net

Removing the (Western Academic) Plastic Bag . . . to Offer Bread

By James R. Krabill

In the summer of 1976, I was finishing up a rather conventional Mennonite academic training for ministry (Bethany Christian, Eastern Mennonite, Goshen College and AMBS) that I believed would serve me well in the new teaching assignment my wife, Jeanette, and I had accepted in Ivory Coast. We had one more stop before getting to West Africa—a period of French language study in Paris—and then, we'd be on our way.

Within months of our arrival in Paris, however, I began to realize that “French” was not simply a language. It was a “world”—a profoundly Catholic, but increasingly secular world; a world of minority-minded and threatened Protestants; and a world—despite my rather serious study patterns to date—of academic scholars, arguments, research methods, and a vast body of literature virtually unknown to me.

This came as a bit of a shock. For even in the disciplines where I had concentrated my studies, I found myself needing to start again. The sub-Saharan African course I had completed at Notre Dame University in Indiana had fo-

cused primarily on former British colonies (e.g., Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria). French scholars rarely referred to these at all in their hurry to analyze trends in post-colonial francophone nations (e.g., Senegal, Algeria and Ivory Coast). The African theologians and thinkers I had pored over so diligently (e.g., Mbiti, Idowu, Dickson, etc.) received no attention whatsoever in French African circles, where names like Sanon, Sastre and Penoukou were all the rage.

But the learning slope only steepened when we did finally arrive in Africa and encountered yet another “world”—the one we would call “home” for much of the next eighteen years.

Perhaps the best way to capture a bit of that reality is to recount four short stories, each of which occurred within the first year of our move to the village of Yocoboué, Ivory Coast, armed with our college and seminary textbooks and note files in late spring 1982:

STORY #1: On my third day as a Bible teacher in the village an elderly gentleman raised his hand and said, “Okay, I have a question for you. There is something I have never understood about the Lord’s Supper. Here we live daily with the reality of witches who exist only because they drink the blood and eat the flesh of other family members they wish to destroy. So now we say that Jesus is our best friend. Why is it, then, that we would want to harm or kill this good friend of ours by drinking his blood and eating his flesh?”

STORY #2: To introduce the life and ministry of Jesus, I adopted the practice of orally reading through one of the gospels with my students. I remember the day we got to Luke 22, where Jesus sent out a delegation to prepare for the Passover with these words, “As you go into the city, a man carrying a jar of water . . .”—at which point the students broke into uncontrollable, leg-slapping laughter. This continued unabated until I finally asked, “So . . . what’s so funny about that?” “Carrying water?” they looked at me incredulously. “That’s *women’s* work! There must have been only *one* guy in the whole town who’d be doing that. Jesus sure was pretty clever, wasn’t he!”

STORY #3: The elderly head preacher, N’Gueusan Benoit, who first invited us to Yocoboué, had been preaching already for almost three decades when we arrived in the early 1980s. Amazingly, Benoit had no formal schooling and could understand but a very small percentage of the 19th century archaic French-language Bible (the *Louis Segond* version) that he carried with him each week into the pulpit. Wycliffe Bible translators had just arrived in the village at about the same time we did

Membership dues

1 year: \$25 US / \$25 Cdn
3 years: \$65 US / \$65 Cdn

Dues for graduate students have been waived thanks to a grant from the Faculty Calling Project of the Mennonite Education Agency.

Make cheques payable: “Conrad Grebel University College” and send to the address on page 2.

Members outside Canada and the U.S. may pay via Visa or Mastercard. Contact the editor for details.

Steering committee

Trevor Bechtel, Bluffton University, Bluffton, OH

Peter C. Blum, Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, MI

Randolph Haluza-DeLay, The King’s University College, Edmonton, AB

Chris K. Huebner, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, MB

Myron A. Penner, Trinity Western University, Langley, BC

Valerie Rempel, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, CA

Mary Schertz, Institute of Mennonite Studies, Elkhart, IN

and had done little more than establish the alphabet in the local Dida language. So *Louis Segond* was unfortunately all that Benoit had. How, then, did this preacher manage to prepare sermons all those many years and carry out his ministry of counseling the flock? At the beginning of each week, Benoit would call into his courtyard a young elementary school lad, hand him his Bible, and tell him to pick a passage. Then Benoit would say, “Now, read it to me.” The young lad, himself with only a few years of French-language instruction, would do his best to bumble through. “Now, tell me what it means.” At this point, the young boy would attempt to take what he understood of the text, and translate it into the Dida language—the medium Benoit would be using on Sunday morning to transmit God’s word to the faithful. This was, as I said, in 1982. Twenty-six years later, in 2008, Benoit is *still* the head preacher in Yocoboué and is still preaching as he has now for over half a century.

STORY #4: The church we attended in Yocoboué composed all of its own music. It literally sang *nothing* imported from the outside. Most of the hymns, particularly the earliest ones dating back to the first decades of the 20th century, were composed by women and transmitted orally over the years from one generation to the next. The church possessed no written hymnbook; everything was stored away in the heads and hearts of the faithful and brought forth when needed during one of the seven weekly worship services. On our first Easter Sunday in the village, an elderly woman stood up during the service and began to sing. Music in this church is done antiphonally, with “the leader” lining the song as the congregation repeats what they hear in echo-style response. Most songs during worship are 3-5 minutes in length. But this one went on for 10, 15 ... 20 minutes before the woman finally finished and sat down. My curiosity got the best of me and I asked at the end of the service, “So ... what was *that* all about?” “Oh, that was the story of Christ’s last week on earth, beginning with the Triumphal Entry and moving through the Last Supper, death, resurrection, and on into the Thomas story where Jesus says, ‘Blessed are those who never see yet believe.’ The song ends by asking the congregation, ‘You are among those who have never seen. Do you *believe*?’” I was eventually able to transcribe the full text of this song—along with over 500 other hymns composed by this village congregation. The “Easter Song,” Christ’s passion set to music, turned out to be the longest one of all, a full 108 lines of text.

One cannot have repeated encounters like those described here and remain unaffected. Within weeks of my arrival in Yocoboué I knew that I would need to “revisit” the Scriptures and many of my theological and methodologi-

cal presuppositions. I knew that I would need to begin once again in The Beginning of the biblical narrative and work my way through to The End, asking this time, “What would it mean to be reading this age-old text through *African* eyes? What would I see that I have, up until now, totally overlooked? What questions would I bring to the text? What answers would I be looking for? What similarities and parallels would I find between biblical thought and culture and my own? And where would I feel the most challenged and disconnected?”

Professor B. Makhathini of the University of Swaziland proposes a fascinating image to describe what has been for me a life-transforming journey. In his view, many Western Christians have taken the Bread of Life (the Christian faith) they received over the centuries and put it in a plastic bag (their own customs). When some of them arrived as missionaries in Africa, they fed people the bag along with the bread. “Now, the plastic bag is making us sick!” says Makhathini. “The plastic is theirs. We know that God planned for us to receive the bread just as he planned for them to receive it. We can remove the plastic, and enjoy the bread” (quoted in Bruce Britain, *We Don’t Want Your White Religion* [Manzini, Swaziland, 1984], 26).

I was asked in this writing assignment to describe how living in different cultural contexts has changed my life and thinking. Ultimately, however, this is not about *me* alone, but about *us together* in the Body of Christ. Do we realize as members of the global faith family that in today’s world the “average” Christian—and the average Mennonite, for that matter—looks a lot more like Preacher Benoit and the village woman singing her faith on Easter Sunday than they do like anyone reading the Anabaptist-Mennonite Scholars Network newsletter? Does that matter in any way? Should it?

I’m surprising myself by ending this reflection on a passionate, rather “preachy” note. But I picked up some of that along the way in Africa as well and the very fact that I feel the need to apologize for it is, of course, part of our problem. All of us, both individually and corporately as the church, have limited days in our lives and resources at our disposal. I am of the firm conviction that one of the greatest challenges we face as a global faith family is finding creative and as yet uncharted ways to build the global Body of Christ ... together. Members of the A-MSN represent an intellectual powerhouse that could and hopefully will participate in that most important endeavor.

James R. Krabill is senior executive for global ministries at Mennonite Mission Network.
jamesk@mennonitemission.net

Mennonite Missions and the Academy

By Wilbert R. Shenk

Upon graduating from Goshen College in 1955, Mennonite Central Committee appointed me to Indonesia where I served four years. My assignment was to work with Gereja Injili Tanah Jawa and Greja Kristen Muria in Central Java. The GITJ was the fruit of the work of the Dutch Mennonite Mission Society that started in 1851. I arrived six years after the Dutch Government had ceded sovereignty to the Indonesian nationalists. Nation building was the order of the day. It was also a period of instability. In late 1957 war erupted between the “outer” islands and Java. By mid-1958 an uneasy calm was restored.

Following study at the University of Oregon, I joined the MCC staff at Akron, PA in 1963 as assistant director of overseas services, with responsibility for MCC programs in Asia, the Middle East and Europe. On June 1, 1965 I began working with Mennonite Board of Missions, Elkhart, IN, initially as assistant director for overseas missions, and then from 1967 to 1990 as director. In addition to carrying overall responsibility for MBM’s overseas ministries, I was directly involved in program administration in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe while an associate administered programs in Latin America and supervised financial matters for the division. After 1983 we added more regional directors.

The 1950s and 1960s were a period of soul-searching in Mainline Protestant mission circles. The “closing of China” in 1949 was widely interpreted as proof positive of the failure of the modern mission enterprise. The process of de-colonization spearheaded by Indonesia and India brought tensions between missions and churches to the surface in one country after another. An outpouring of articles and books addressed the meaning of these developments. Books like James A. Scherer’s *Missionary, Go Home* (1964) were cited as obituaries of Christian missions. One of the reasons I was attracted to MBM was my respect for J. D. Graber. As a mission leader, Graber stayed abreast of debates and developments in the field of mission studies and interpreted these changes in terms that a lay audience could understand. John Howard Yoder had joined the MBM staff in 1958 and was continually interacting with Graber and others about theological/missiological issues that missionaries were encountering in various parts of the world.

At the same time, signs of the shifting landscape were clear. A new generation of missions was being established in the aftermath of World War Two, often appealing to the challenge not to repeat the mistakes that classical missions were charged with making. Developments in linguistics and missionary anthropology offered new

tools for understanding culture. Donald McGavran’s critique of classical mission strategy was a breath of fresh air. Finally, by the mid-1960s missiology arrived in North America. Up to this time, only Roman Catholics and European Protestants used the term. In the Anglo-American world, mission studies had been essentially history of missions. From 1955 to 1970 Mainline Protestants seminaries closed their schools of missions and disbanded most chairs in mission studies. Following the Second Vatican Council, U.S. Roman Catholic seminaries also went through down-sizing and restructuring of their programs, including mission training. But in the 1960s American evangelicals embraced missiology as a field of study and began establishing schools of world mission that would attract hundreds of students over the next three decades.

It was my good fortune to work with an agency that encouraged its staff to reflect on their work in various ways. A policy provided opportunity for study leaves. We benefited greatly from the fact that a number of missionaries did doctoral studies that grew out of their field experience or were geared to fundamental questions that needed to be addressed. They brought the fruit of their scholarship to bear on the way our program was conducted. Some colleagues made important contributions through their writings *in situ* (e.g., John Driver, Dennis Byler and Norman Kraus). They wrote in response to questions put to them by local leaders.

In 1972 I participated in development of a proposal to organize an American Society of Missiology. The formal launch of the ASM took place the following June in St. Louis, Missouri. The ASM broke rank with previous mission studies professional societies by inviting missionaries, mission administrators, and scholars of the Christian missionary movement into membership. Some members of the almost-defunct Association of Professors of Missions, motivated by academic elitism that would admit to the guild only full professors at long-established academic institutions, opposed the upstart ASM on the grounds that it represented a lowering of academic standards, but ASM soon gained wide support—founding a journal and sponsoring the ASM/Orbis monograph series. The ASM devised procedures that guaranteed representation from Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestants, and Independent Protestants on all boards and committees. I served as secretary-treasurer of the ASM (1979–88) and as president (1994–95).

On the Mennonite front we launched a small publication called *Mission Focus* in September 1972. The inaugural issue consisted of one article by Howard H.

Charles, "The Gospel and Mission Strategy." I commissioned most of the articles that appeared during the first 15 years and deliberately solicited material from missionaries, academics, and administrators. A primary purpose of *Mission Focus* has been to promote missiological reflection on mission practice in the light of Anabaptist-Mennonite theology.

In 1973 I was granted a study leave. Having met Andrew F. Walls through missionary colleagues in Nigeria in 1965, he invited me to come to the University of Aberdeen. This seemed to be an ideal setup because of Walls' familiarity with MBM work in West Africa and evident common interests. Shortly after arriving in Aberdeen in August 1973, Walls suggested to me that I ought to do research on the foremost Anglican mission leader of the nineteenth century, Henry Venn—"an administrator studying an administrator," as Walls put it. Given the scope of such a study, the best solution was to turn the project into a doctoral program. Venn, an evangelical Anglican, was an extraordinary leader: an outstanding administrator, unusual in his insight and foresight, and a stalwart opponent of the slave trade. He was an unflinching sponsor of Africans, providing scholarships for advanced study, getting British entrepreneurs to undertake development projects in West Africa, and championing African leadership in the church. Venn was a fascinating example of a mission leader who combined action and reflection effectively.

MBM sent its first missionaries to Western Europe in 1950. This landed us in a new kind of missionary situation: the post-Christendom West. David A. Shank, John Howard Yoder and others had wrestled with this new challenge over the years. In 1981 I had an exchange of correspondence with W. A. Visser t'Hooft—based on two articles he had written addressing "neo-pagan Europe" as an evangelistic challenge. Visser t'Hooft asserted, "this is the main issue to which evangelists and missiologists should turn." In 1983 Lesslie Newbigin wrote a book on the topic that sparked wide interest. Finally, I was finding interlocutors from the mainline churches willing to talk about this concern.

In 1988 I concluded that after a long tenure at MBM I should complete my service by 1990. As the transition unfolded, I was invited to join the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary faculty starting in 1990. Meanwhile, I had received an invitation from the British Council of Churches to participate in their Gospel and Our Culture Programme (GOCP) scheduled to run until July 1992. It was negotiated that I would spend the first half of the academic years 1990, 1991, and 1992 in Birmingham, U.K. and the rest of the year teaching at AMBS. GOCP asked that I give special attention to the need for a new kind of training of people to engage in evangelization of

post-Christendom people. In 1992 the Pew Charitable Trusts provided a grant that supported a project that ran seven years, A Missiology of Western Culture. This project brought together scholars from North America and Europe concerned to address this challenge. In spite of the inertia of the traditional churches, I found many concerned individuals eager to come together to reflect and work for renewal.

After several years of informal conversation, a group of us in North America organized the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) in 1989, as a counterpart to the British GOCP. We recognized that the methodology used by the British was not suitable to North America and devised a different approach. GOCN has made a significant contribution, especially through conferences and publications.

In 1994 Fuller Seminary's School of World Mission (now the School of Intercultural Studies) invited me to join their faculty and in 1995 we moved to Pasadena where I taught for the next decade. One of the attractions to Fuller was the school's eagerness for me to develop a concentration "Mission to Contemporary Culture." Approximately half of the doctoral students I have mentored since 1995 have done their research in this area.

From the beginning of my involvement in the Christian mission, I have been convinced that one must hold together action and reflection. The Christian mission is not simply sanctified activism. Neither can we be content with intellectual abstraction that does not touch living reality. Rather we need a process where action leads to reflection, followed by new engagement. There can be nothing mechanical about Christian witness. The missionary colleagues I most respected have modeled this kind of commitment.

But I have lived with a second reality over the years. Modern theology has little interest in the Christian mission. Schleiermacher thought it important to include missionary work in his *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology* in 1810, influenced in part by the fact he had family ties to Moravian missions and respected their witness. But Schleiermacher the systematic theologian put "missions" at the end of the Practical Work section. The positioning was telling. A century later nothing had changed. The academy's attitude ranged from ambivalence to hostility toward mission and mission studies. The idea that mission is integral to the very existence of the church—not merely one of many functions—still does not register with many scholars. To be sure, a solid body of literature has developed over the past fifty years that challenges this conventional understanding but the traditional formulation dominates at both the professional and lay levels.

In retrospect, I would say that my transition to academic work after my years in Indonesia and twenty-seven years of program administration went smoothly. At Fuller Seminary our students came from more than sixty nations and some 100 denominations. I did not have to surrender my long-term international engagement when I went to the academy. Furthermore, my students have kept the agenda focused on present global reality.

Theologically and missiologically, I continued to work with much of the same agenda that had occupied me during my years with mission and service agencies. Several themes illustrate this point:

1) In the 1960s and 1970s I became increasingly concerned about theology of mission and was convinced that Anabaptist/Mennonites were short-changing themselves by failing to draw directly on their theological inheritance as they engaged in mission. At the center of this legacy stands *the gospel of peace and reconciliation*. Mennonites have been more comfortable with this theological imperative as a political program than as an evangelistic mandate. But we met this concrete challenge in many places over the years: the Nigeria/Biafra war, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the friction between African-Initiated

Churches and mainline denominations, the National Security State ideology that dominated Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, to name a few.

2) The daunting challenge of evangelizing Post-Christendom peoples, a task still only grudgingly acknowledged.

3) In light of the momentous shift in the center of gravity for the Christian movement from the north to the south since 1980, we must reconceptualize how we interpret the history of the Christian world movement. The long-standing Western-centric interpretive grid simply must be replaced.

This new situation has important implications for the future of the Christian mission. These themes, and many more, form the new agenda for both academics concerned with the Christian movement and for those who are working on the many frontiers.

Wilbert R. Shenk is Senior Professor of Mission History and Contemporary Culture at Fuller Graduate School of Intercultural Studies, Pasadena, California.
wshenk@fuller.edu

Call for Papers

"Anabaptist Convictions After Marpeck" June 26–28, 2009, Bluffton University

Proposals are invited for papers that address the emergence and development of Anabaptist convictions in light of the work and life of Pilgram Marpeck and of the Marpeck circle. This interdisciplinary conference seeks to strengthen the development of contemporary Anabaptist convictions through a careful analysis of the emergence of historical Anabaptist convictions—especially those found in the Marpeck circle. The planning committee welcomes proposals from the standpoint of any academic discipline and solicits both presentations that are primarily descriptive as well as those that make prescriptive claims.

Suitable topics include, but are not limited to:

- the social and historical background of Marpeck and his circle
- the religious and political exigencies addressed by the texts of the Marpeck circle
- the theological and historical relationships between Marpeckites and other Anabaptist figures and groups
- the contemporary discovery and appropriation of Marpeck
- the illumination of historical and contemporary Anabaptist theological developments and controversies by the convictions of the Marpeck circle
- comparisons of Marpeckite convictions with those of other historical and contemporary Anabaptist circles

The conference will be held at Bluffton University, where a student center named after Pilgram Marpeck highlights the continuing visual and material impact of a once obscure sixteenth-century radical reformer. The conference is sponsored by Anabaptist-Mennonite Scholars Network (A-MSN), the Anabaptist Sociology and Anthropology Association (ASAA), and the Institute of Mennonite Studies (IMS). The conference planning committee includes the following members: Trevor Bechtel (A-MSN); Gerald Mast (ASAA); John Rempel (IMS, AMBS); John D. Roth (MHS). Paper proposals should be sent to John D. Roth or Trevor Bechtel. Mail proposals to Box 141, Bluffton University, 1 University Drive, Bluffton, OH 45817; or email to johndr@goshen.edu or bechtelt@bluffton.edu.

Conferences

The Anabaptist Colloquium April 25-26, 2008, Elkhart, IN

The Anabaptist Colloquium—an annual forum for presenting scholarship-in-progress on a broad spectrum of topics in Anabaptist-Mennonite history—will convene on April 25-26, 2008 on the campus of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. For further information, contact John D. Roth (574-535-7433; johndr@goshen.edu).

16th Believers Church Conference: "Congregationalism, Denominationalism, and the Body of Christ," June 11-14, 2008, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, MB (sponsored by CMU's Institute for Theology and the Church)

Beginning with the biblical image of the church as "the body of Christ," the conference will focus on ecclesiology and understandings of Christian community in the Believers Church tradition, especially in light of the challenges and opportunities afforded by the contemporary postmodern context. Keynote speakers include Reginald Bibby, Fernando Enns, and Jonathan Wilson. For a detailed description, updated program, list of papers, and downloadable registration form, see the CMU website at www.cmu.ca.

Mennonite Graduate Student Conference: "The Church" August 7-9, 2008, Harrisonburg, VA. Sponsored by the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre

Present graduate students (and those recently finished) are invited to come hear and critically interact with fellow Mennonite graduate students from across North America on the theme "the church." Papers will be presented from a variety of disciplines. This meeting is concurrent with the Mennonite Faculty Conference as well as a gathering of the Marpek Deans. Thus there will be formal and informal chances to "hobnob" with the people who may want to hire you. Generous travel subsidies, thanks to the Mennonite Education Agency's "Fund for Peoplehood," will be provided. Watch the *Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre* website for registration and other details: grebel.uwaterloo.ca/tmtc/

Book Notes

Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*. Brill, 2007.

Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin, eds. *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*. Eerdmans, 2007.

Roberta King, Jean Kidula, **James R. Krabill** and Thomas Oduro, eds., *Music in the Life of the African Church*. Baylor University Press, 2008.

Alain Epp Weaver, *States of Exile: Visions of Diaspora, Witness, and Return*. Polyglossia: Radical Reformation Theologies 3. Herald, 2008.

Alain Epp Weaver and Gerald Mast, eds., *The Work of Jesus Christ in Anabaptist Perspective: Essays in Honor of J. Denny Weaver*. Cascadia, 2008.

Diane Zimmerman Umble and **David Weaver-Zercher**, eds., *The Amish and the Media*. Young Center Books in Anabaptist and Pietist Studies. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

Transitions

Brice Balmer is now working as secretary for Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) after 23 years as House of Friendship chaplaincy director. His new role involves advocating for the Ontario poverty reduction strategy and establishing and encouraging interfaith social justice groups across Ontario.

Jeremy Bergen has been appointed Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Theology at Conrad Grebel University College, effective fall 2008.

Research Notes

I am currently on sabbatical from EMS co-teaching a course on the history of religions in Indonesia since 1945 here at ICRS in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. ICRS (Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies) is in a Ph.D. program in interreligious studies jointly sponsored by Duta Wacana Christian University, Gajah Mada State University and Sunan Kalijaga Islamic State University.

I am also one of six presenters for a conference on April 2 sponsored by Duta Wacana Christian University and focused on Philip Jenkins' book *The Next Christendom* in which Jenkins predicts that there will be wars between Muslims and Christians in Asia and Africa within fifty years. The task of the four Christian (Catholic, Protestant and Anabaptist) and two Muslim presenters is to evaluate Jenkins' thesis, data, and argumentation in light of the significant strength of moderate Muslims and Christians in Indonesia. A further issue to be addressed is what Christianity will be like in Indonesia in 50 years.

I am also working with the Sunan Kalijaga Islamic University president and a professor of dakwah (Islamic mission) to plan conversations between Christian missiologists and other Christian theologians with Muslim professors of dakwah and other Muslim theologians. The goal of these conversations is for Muslims to help Christians to understand what Muslims teach and practice in the area of faith sharing and leading people to Islamic faith and for Christians to converse with Muslims to help them to know what Muslim teach and practice in the area of faith sharing and leading people to faith in Christ. Our assumption is that this is one of the most crucial areas of conversation between representatives of the two greatest missionary religions.

Lawrence Yoder
Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, VA
yoderlm@emu.edu

* * *

In February 2008 I delivered the Elmer A. Martens Festschrift manuscript to its publisher, Jim Eisenbraun. The anticipated release date is November 2008. The volume celebrates the contribution to OT theology by Prof. Elmer A. Martens, president and OT professor emeritus at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, California. It includes three essays written by Elmer himself, as well as fifteen others written by his former students, his colleagues, his friends, and even one of his professors! The essays are clustered around three topics—making Chris-

tian use of the OT (Paul R. House, Marlene Enns, Douglas Carew, Franklyn L. Jost, Rolf P. Knierim), aligning God's people with God's call for justice (Ben C. Ollenburger, Waldemar Janzen, Pierre Gilbert, Alfred Neufeld, John E. Toews), and addressing the issue of land in the life of God's people (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Timothy J. Geddert, Theodore Hiebert, Daniel I. Block, Gordon H. Matties)—each of which signals a particular interest of Elmer's.

Jon Isaak
Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, CA
jisaak@mbseminary.edu

* * *

I recently completed writing, *Preaching the Gospel of Mark: Proclaiming the Power of God* (forthcoming fall 2008, Westminster John Knox Press).

This commentary on the Gospel of Mark is part of a series intended for teachers, preachers, and pastors who are interested in engaging Scripture in their work and ministry. In addition to exegetical comments, I offer homiletical insights and suggestions related to each passage. According to Mark, Jesus Christ invades this world with the good news of God's gracious, just, and loving reign so that the power of God is on the loose among us as never before. From the dynamic opening chapter to the controversial closing chapter, Mark will not let us sit at ease as the Gospel urges our way to the cross - and beyond. While writing this commentary, I was part of a group Bible study whose members provided encouragement and insight along the way. Their comments are quoted at various points in the manuscript, also.

Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm
Bethany Theological Seminary (Church of the Brethren),
Richmond, IN
wilheda@bethanyseminary.edu

Book Series

The Young Center at Elizabethtown College solicits proposals for its series Young Center Books in Anabaptist and Pietist Studies published by the Johns Hopkins University Press. The series seeks to:

- Stimulate and encourage original/creative scholarship in A&P studies.
- Solicit manuscripts which advance original scholarship in A&P studies as well as those that synthesize key findings in A&P scholarship.
- Acquire manuscripts of national scope and significance, with occasional regional studies in regions with large A&P populations.
- Publish historical and contemporary studies of A&P topics and/or communities.
- Give primary attention to North American studies with occasional European historical projects.
- Identify high quality scholarly manuscripts that are accessible to general readers, including ones with crossover potential as trade books and supplemental texts for academic courses.
- Provide interpretive scholarship in A&P topics for general readers.
- Provide an avenue of publication for scholars in A&P studies.

See <http://www.ETOWN.EDU/YoungCenter.aspx>.

For more information, or to submit a proposal, contact the series editors:

Donald B. Kraybill (kraybilld@etown.edu), distinguished professor at Elizabethtown College and senior fellow in the Young Center, for proposals on Anabaptist topics.

David B. Eller (ellerdb@etown.edu), director of the Young Center and professor of history and religion at Elizabethtown College, for proposals on Pietist topics.