

REMEMBERING FRANK REILLY (1938-2009)

Reflections by **Richard Crouter**, John M. and Elizabeth W. Musser Professor of Religious Studies, Emeritus

Former students and friends of the Religion Department will be saddened to learn of the death of Frank Reilly, who succumbed to ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) on October 17, 2009. Frank had served the department in Christian studies several times — always stimulating interest in courses in Catholicism, New Testament, Liberation Theology, and Lutheran-Catholic dialogue. He came for an initial teaching stint in 1985-87 and was called back during winter 2001-02 and again during 2003-04.



Deeply trained in the Catholic tradition at St Mary's Seminary, Frank did a master's degree on Karl Barth and a Ph.D. on the Swedish Lutheran theology of Gustaf Wingren at Catholic University. I wondered initially if he were a closet Protestant, though I knew it was not the case. The stories of his casual yet compelling teaching style are legendary. As one of his 1984 recommending letters stated: "Dr. Reilly's life speaks eloquently of the fact that there are still professors who have something to profess," while the same writer gave us assurance that students wouldn't be bored by this Irishman.

Many of you have perhaps not read Frank's scholarship. It was always present, often in his mind and in process of unfolding. Trained in scripture at St. Mary's Seminary under Raymond E. Brown, he began to be perplexed by scholarship on the virginal conception in the 1970s. His seminal paper on this topic appeared in *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* in 2005.

He had poured much of his career into this concern. In turn it represented pure Frank, who sought to awaken others to the

possibility that the life of Jesus of Nazareth began not virginally but in an act of illegitimacy if not outright violence. For me, Frank's paper is metaphor for his life: A way of seeing the world squarely in all its potential squalor, while recognizing the beauty of life that emerges from our common suffering. The open spirit of Vatican II is alive and well in the work, and in the legacy, of Frank Reilly.

Frank was a gentle person, full of passion, a gregarious soul who longed to swap stories with others. As I see it, Frank's scholarship was an extended conversation with others — that's why it took forever to get it all properly written out. His essay writing, as a shorter craft, was an extension of that same tendency.

I've lost count of the number of Opinion pieces he published in the *Star Tribune*, beginning in 1980. Often I knew something was bugging him, causing his writer's juices to flow. Sometimes I didn't, and was delighted to open the paper at 7 a.m. to discover a Reilly column. Typically his opinion pieces illustrate the contrarian streak of mind he brought to observations of the world around him. For him, the political was always personal.

He could as easily take up the pen to write about an archbishop caught driving under the influence as about the agonizing fate of American troops in Afghanistan and the prospect of a further buildup under President Obama, which he did in a piece published August 11, 2009.

As colleague and long-time friend I'm moved to reflect on an editorial that Frank wrote after surviving stage four Colon Cancer for five years. It appeared in March 2005 under the heading: "To live with the end of life in mind." In the piece Frank — as fearless as Socrates — probes the theme of "death as the end of life, and of everything that life has to offer." His essay does not retreat to the solace of the church's assurances regarding a hereafter. Yet, true contrarian that he is, Frank does not rest with his agnosticism about a world beyond. His final sentence states: "I believe one additional thing: that somehow it all has meaning." Somehow, even if we don't know exactly how, life has meaning.

When I told him a few months ago that a colleague was using that editorial in a course on ethics, Frank was quick to remind me that "the last sentence is the most important of the piece." I suspect I'm not alone in thinking that the examples of his courage and his conviction, his gentle spirit and fierce determination, attest eloquently to his belief that life does indeed have great meaning.

FIELD TRIP: RAGAMALA



In early October, students in Prof. Shana Sippy’s class, “Religions of South Asia,” attended the world premiere performance, “Dhvee (Duality) – Scenes from the Ramayana,” at the Walker Art Center’s McGuire Theater. Performed by the Ragamala dance troupe in conjunction with Cudamani, Dhvee incorporates Carnatic music and Bharatanatyam dance from South India with gamelan music and classical dance forms from Bali.

RETURNING PROFS: INTERVIEWS WITH NEWMAN & MCNALLY

Just last year, Professors Louis Newman and Michael McNally were on sabbatical leave. Now that they have returned, NumeNews is here to report on what they did.

Professor Newman spent his sabbatical working on a book project about the idea of repentance in Judaism. NumeNews sought out an interview to ask him how it went.

NumeNews: How was your sabbatical experience? Did your research work out as expected?

Newman: I had a wonderful sabbatical. I very much enjoyed having the sustained time to work on my research project, and I am pleased to report that I did succeed in finishing a draft of a book on repentance. In addition, I worked to put together the new course that I’m teaching this term, “The State of Judaism in the State of Israel,” and to plan the associated winter break off-campus trip to Israel (together with Stacy Beckwith). So, it was a very creative and productive time for me.

NN: Did your research lead you in any unexpected directions?



Newman: Very much so. The book evolved from my original conception of it into a less academic and more popular book. While it still explains various concepts of repentance and atonement within Judaism, its purpose is not to trace the historical development of ideas of repentance, but to offer a phenomenology of repentance. Readers will be invited to consider the meaning of repentance, both as traditional Jewish sources describe it and as it might be relevant to their own lives.

NN: What sort of impact do you expect your book to have? How has this experience been rewarding for you?

Newman: My hope is that people will find the book inspiring, as well as enlightening. The writing of the book enabled me to synthesize my own experiences of repenting when I felt I had harmed others with my scholarly study of the texts dealing with repentance in Judaism (with some passing attention to Christianity and Islam). In that sense, it was unlike any other writing project I have ever undertaken.

NN: While you were off-campus, what did you miss most about Carleton?

Newman: I missed the contact with students most of all. I enjoy working with students both in class and also getting to know them outside of class. So, I’m very glad to be back this year. I also missed my departmental colleagues, of course, though I did continue to have significant interactions with them through various ongoing departmental activities throughout the year.

NN: Can you offer any advice for panicky senior majors who are just starting their comps projects?

Newman: Plan ahead. Take lots of breaks. Seek lots of advice. Don’t let yourself get so absorbed in working on comps that you lose a sense of balance in your life. Be patient with yourself and with the process. Try to keep an eye on the big picture and not to drown in the details.



Professor Michael McNally spent his sabbatical exploring the complex intersections between the law, the conceptual and legal category of “religion” and Native American sacred places, practices and “objects” that are religious but not plainly so.

NumeNews asked Prof. McNally to speak about his sabbatical experience and he kindly provided the following case study:

A key example has been the case of the San Francisco Peaks in Arizona (pictured on page 3). A mountain massif centrally sacred to the Navajo, Hopi, and several other tribes, the Peaks also host a controversial ski area that wanted to extend its business viability in drought years by proposing to make snow with treated wastewater from the city of Flagstaff.

For the Navajo, this is troubling not simply because of the ritual insult involved, but because no matter how thorough the treatment process, water that had potentially come in contact with the dead from hospitals, funeral homes, and the like, would be sprayed on their mountain.

With the Hopi and four other tribes, the Navajo challenged on religious freedom grounds and despite a favorable three judge panel ruling in an appellate court, lost in a rehearing of the case by all nine judges of that appellate court. The tribes appealed in December, the Supreme Court considered in June, but did not grant an appeal.

Religionists might find this case interesting because the decision accepted the claims of sincere religious exercise by the tribes but ruled against them by asserting a supposedly meaningful distinction between religion, which can be protected, and spirituality, which is too diffuse and subjective to do so. They found that spraying wastewater as artificial snow on a sacred mountain did not “substantially burden” religious exercise, merely “diminished” “spiritual fulfillment”.

NN: So how do you think studying law has influenced or changed the way you think about the conceptual category of religion?

McNally: So in the San Francisco Peaks case, I came to realize how a general drift in the American population “I’m spiritual, not religious” can inform, in the law, a way of construing strongly religious claims as merely subjective.

NN: Did anything unexpected happen in your research?

McNally: I came to know the main lawyer for the Navajo in the case and called to his attention several lower court decisions about Navajo religion that could perhaps have helped bolster their case, but it was after the Supreme Court appeal briefs had already been filed.

NN: Have you produced any literature or planned new projects based on your sabbatical research?

McNally: I put the finishing touch on two books that came out this year, but related to this project, I wrote “Native American Religious Freedom Beyond the First Amendment” for *After Pluralism*, a collaborative book by law professors, sociologists,

and historians of religion and American public life. I also have submitted to law reviews a religious studies consideration of the discourse of spirituality in the San Francisco Peaks.

NN: While you were off-campus, what did you miss most about the department?

McNally: Water cooler conversations with the best colleagues and student assistants one could ask for.

VISITING ISLAMICIST INTERVIEWED: PROFESSOR ADIL OZDEMIR



This fall term, Professor Adil Ozdemir has kindly agreed to teach the survey course “Introduction to Islam”. He is a professor from the University of Saint Thomas where he is co-director of the Muslim Christian Dialogue Center. He specializes in Islamic studies, Arabic language, and interfaith dialogue. A native of Turkey, Prof.

Ozdemir speaks Turkish, Arabic and English fluently. Although his visit is brief, the NumeNews was fortunate enough to get an interview with this intriguing Islamicist.

NumeNews: You’re from Turkey, right? Where did you grow up?

Ozdemir: I was born in a small village known as Mizar. Mizar means a shrine, a place for visit, or graveyard. We have a mosque in the village estimated at over a thousand years old. The remnant of the mosque and the minaret are still there. I was born there, but I went to middle and secondary school in the city of Kazi Aytol or ‘Veteran City’. This was only three hours by bus to the city of Antioch, where the early Christians were. And then I moved to Izmir, the western part of Turkey near the Aegean where I studied as an undergraduate and graduate at Dokuz Eylul University.



NN: What did you study at University? How did you become a professor?

Ozdemir: I studied religious sciences, an Islamic discipline, even in middle school. And then at the university, I pursued the same theological studies. In such a discipline, I studied texts like the Qur'an, Hadith, and read in Islamic law. When I graduated in 1973, I went back to Mizar and served as an Imam, a leader in a mosque. Later, I joined the academic faculty at the Dokuz Eylul University in Izmir. As an academic of Islam, I study Arabic and rhetoric. My dissertation was on the "Impact of Qur'an on Arabic Rhetoric." I examined how the Qu'ran used rhetoric effectively as spoken performance.

NN: At the University of St. Thomas, you are the co-director of a Muslim Christian Dialogue Center (MCDC). How did you get into leading interfaith dialogue in the US?

Ozdemir: In 1980, I started interreligious Muslim-Christian dialogue. This was because I was learning English and in Izmir there were some Americans, missionaries, so I took advantage of this opportunity. I thought that discussing religion would be a good way for me to practice English.

But after English, it turned out to be genuine interfaith dialogue. And since that time, I have met many people coming from America, Europe and the West. I became a sort of 'interpreter of Islam' for my university. These American visitors were interested in Islam in general as well as some cultural things like how Turkey is and where it is going.

During these years I encountered so many questions. And I tried to develop my own understanding of Islam in response to these questions. This led me to rediscover my own faith. This was a conscious effort to understand Islam. It was not the sort of consciousness I had in a purely Islamic environment. I had to rediscover everything all over again. I had to start in the beginning with reading the Qur'an. I had to revisit everything with my own eyes, asking fundamental questions about God, life, action, belief and humanity.

After this encounter with the Americans, I had a scholarship to go to Harvard where I studied at the Center for the Study of

World Religions. I had a one-year experience in a multi-religious setting with scholars. My Harvard experience made me very critical and sharp. I began asking critical questions about my own faith.

And that criticism has shaken many of my colleagues back at my university in Izmir. So I was very controversial for a time. I was even seen as a threat. My questioning was creating problems and I thought that something was lacking there. I was isolating myself from my school, from my community. I became silent for a time and reflective.

And then I obtained another scholarship to come to the United States, to stand away and reflect a bit. And this time I came to visit about seven to eight seminaries with the United Church of Christ (UCC) and Disciples of Christ. I was given a scholarship to teach at the seminaries and talk with the clergy.

I begin to see something else in the seminaries. How do I reconcile intellect with faith, reason and faith? I think seminaries there were different than Harvard. Harvard was all about intellectual questioning and rigorous study. There was less faith and commitment to the community. I admired these UCC seminaries because they were somewhere in between. Simultaneously they managed a commitment to intellectual rigor and a commitment to their community.

Now I try to find ways to reach my people, to understand them and appreciate my community and tradition. In the United States, I continue to understand, to reformulate my faith in response to these experiences and my encounters with other faiths.

NN: What is your impression of Carleton?

Ozdemir: Carleton is a very welcoming, very engaging environment. My students ask so many tough questions. I feel challenged here. The class discussions are fantastic.

For more information, or to contribute to NumeNews, call or email Sandy Saari at (507) 222-4232, ssaari@carleton.edu.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES FALL 2009

- RELG 100: Faith, Hope and Love**
taught by Louis Newman
- RELG 110: Introduction to Religion**
taught by Lori Pearson
- RELG 122: Introduction to Islam**
taught by Adil Ozdemir
- RELG 150: Religions of South Asia**
taught by Shana Sippy
- RELG 152: Religions in Japanese Culture**
taught by Asuka Sango

- RELG 222: State of Judaism in Israel**
taught by Louis Newman
- RELG 225: Catholicism**
taught by Aimee Chor
- RELG 243: Native American Religious Freedom**
taught by Michael McNally
- RELG 255: Social Engagement in Asian Religions**
taught by Asuka Sango
- RELG 380: Radical Critiques of Christianity**
taught by Lori Pearson