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NEWSLETTER OF CARLETON COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION

LEARNING COMMON SENSE



above: Fr. Fernando Cardenal

by Sam Estes '08

During my off-campus program in Central America, my program group met with many different people, from organic coffee farmers and AIDS activists to US embassy officials and officers in the Guatemalan army. But the one speaker I will always remember is Fernando Cardenal. Fr. Cardenal is Jesuit priest who joined the Sandinista revolutionary movement in Nicaragua in the mid-1970s. After the Sandinista movement overthrew the dictator Somoza in 1979, Fr. Cardenal was named the regime's first minister of education and oversaw the Sandinistas' remarkable literacy campaign, which reduced illiteracy in Nicaragua from over 50% to around 12% in less than a year. He now works with an organization called Fe y Alegría (Faith and Happiness), which

provides education for street children and orphans in Nicaragua and other countries in Latin America. In his talk, however, he did not speak to us much about his time as a revolutionary or his work today, but told us of his encounters with poverty as a seminarian.

In the final six months of his formation before taking his final vows to become a Jesuit priest, Fernando lived with several priests and seminarians in a neighborhood in a very poor slum on the outskirts of Medellín, Colombia. It was the first time during Fernando's formation that he had lived outside a university setting. He told us heart-wrenching stories of the reality of poverty in this neighborhood. There was the family in which the children ate garbage because their parents could give them nothing else to eat; there was the

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Interview with:

PROF. RICHARD CROUTER

by Margaret Cremin '08

Richard Crouter, one of the department's emeritus professors, came out of his retirement to teach a New Testament course this term. I recently met with Professor Crouter to ask him some questions about what it is like to be back teaching in the religion department. Crouter's office is located in the chapel (he has been there since he retired three years ago); this is the same office in which he began his Carleton career in September 1967.

I asked how it feels to be back, and he said that he is having "great fun", and that it seems perfectly normal to be teaching the New Testament course. He taught the same course while still a full time faculty member. He says that he always feels "torn about whether to first teach the Gospels or the letters of Paul", but this term, he is teaching the Gospels first. Professor Crouter says that what excites him most about teaching the New Testament is

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IMPROVEMENTS ONLINE

Changes are on the horizon for the Religion Department's website. In the coming months, we plan to make much of the content currently distributed every term with NumeNews available online. This will allow us to elaborate with stories and pictures that cannot fit in print, and with your help, will facilitate a growing conversation among those of us working in Leighton, alums, and the wider Carleton community. As this process moves forward we welcome ideas and input for content you would find interesting, and we strongly encourage the participation of everyone involved with Carleton's Department of Religion. Please contact Jill Tollefson with ideas for features, story submissions, comments, or suggestions, and keep your eyes open for further updates. ■

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“the image of Jesus as a great storyteller.” He also loves to teach St. Paul, though he can be more difficult to teach because of “the bad press he’s received in modern culture. Whether it’s because Paul believes in divine judgment, or if it’s because of his perceived opinions on the status of women, it’s harder to get into Paul.”

Crouter received most of his training in early Christianity, which makes him a great professor for the New Testament class, but after beginning his teaching career, he became more interested in nineteenth-century German Protestant theologians. Most of Crouter’s academic work has dealt

with the writings of Friederich Schleiermacher (1786-1834); in 2005, he published a book on Schleiermacher, entitled *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism*. Crouter has also translated some of Schleiermacher’s works.

After this term, Crouter plans to work on a book on the 20th century theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, a project he began last summer. He is not sure where the book will go, but he is a big fan of Niebuhr’s, and says that he is a very important. Crouter says that his Niebuhr research “pulls him closer to today”, away from the nineteenth century. According to Crouter, there is a “bit of a Niebuhr revival going on

– he was a realist in terms of foreign policy – and his ideas “fly in the face of the Iraq War and the illusions regarding American adventurism in Iraq”. Niebuhr held “a Christian realist view of politics, and was a great believer in human sinfulness”; Crouter also says he is also great believer in human sinfulness, especially the “way our pride destroys moral vision.”

Crouter is happy to be “surrounded by nice colleagues.” He says, “the department is quite wonderful. It is more pluralistic, more interesting than ever. I hope and suspect this will continue.”

In the Lounge:

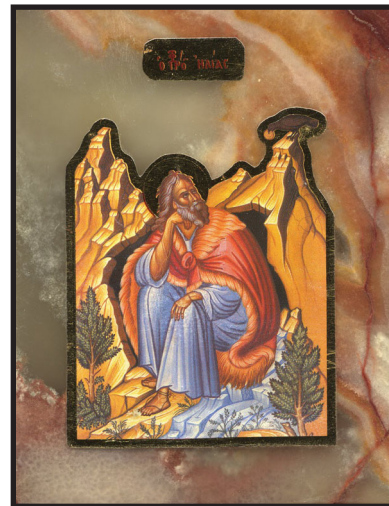
TRAVELS ON DISPLAY

by Emma Glidden-Lyon '08

With what seemed like most of the junior class gone fall term, the Religion department has seen an influx of experiences and insight with their return. Many of the returning students brought back mementos from abroad and some of these items are currently being featured in the department display case. While travelers visited such destinations as China, Mali and El Salvador, two majors visited Greece. Sophia Paraschos, '07 and Sari Cornfeld, '08 both studied the Orthodox tradition and brought back illustrations of the Greek religious life.

Sophia spent time studying the rituals and traditions practiced by the laity and brought back a *tama*; an Orthodox votive offering. Made of metal, *tamata* depict various body parts and, as Sophia notes, they are used by the pilgrim to “request specific healing for themselves or loved ones.” This tradition is a continuation of a much older practice common in the temples of ancient Greece.

Sari also returned with an item relating to Orthodox worship. Sari visited the Monastery of the Holy Cross and was given a gift of an icon made by the nuns. The icon depicts St. Elias the Prophet, more commonly referred to as Elijah in the Old Testament. The icon illustrates a command from God to Elias: “You shall drink of the stream, and I have commanded ravens to feed you there” (1 Kings 17:4). Sari notes that the nuns thought-



above left: Sari’s icon; right: Sophia’s tama.

fully selected an Old Testament prophet after learning of Sari’s Jewish faith. Icons are an integral part of Greek Orthodox practice and are a way to experience the miraculous nature of the saints depicted. Both of the pieces are beautiful in their form and symbolic meaning. The tama and the icon are modern traditions that have their roots in much older practices. Their modern relevance illustrates the importance of a continuous tradition that stretches back to the beginnings of Christianity, or in the case of the tama, to antiquity. This continuation and transformation of tradition represented in these objects is especially interesting from the point of view of scholars of religion. ■

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young woman who asked for Fernando's blessing before heading into the city to become a prostitute because there was no other way for her to make money for her family; there was another young woman who worked as a cook in the Jesuits' house who was contemplating suicide because she could not bear the thought that, if she had children, they would suffer through the same cruelties of poverty that she had experienced all her life.

One day, Fernando was given the opportunity to respond to this poverty. Within his Jesuit community, every person had different chores, and one of Fernando's chores was to buy bread for the community. The first time the community needed bread, Fernando was given some money and went out and purchased bread in the market. When he reentered the neighborhood, a child who saw that he had bread stopped Fernando and asked him if he could spare a little bit for her. Now, Fernando had a good

deal of bread, so he decided to break off a piece for this child. However, almost immediately, a second, and a third, and a fourth child came up to him to ask for bread. He decided to give some bread to each of these children as well. But because there were so many hungry children in the neighborhood, by the time each one of them had gotten a little bit of bread, there was none left for the Jesuits! When Fernando returned home without bread, the others in the community asked him what had happened. After explaining how he had given all the bread away, he said to them, "You might as well give someone else the chore of getting bread because as long as there are hungry children in the streets, I'm going to give the bread to them."

What was particularly memorable for me about Fernando's story was his nonchalance about the incident. He said he did what anyone would have done: give bread that the community did not need to those children did need it. In his

view, what he did was simply common sense. As a Jesuit priest in formation, the words of Jesus must have also been in his mind as he gave the children bread: "What father among you, if his son asked for a fish, would hand him a snake? Or if he asked for an egg, hand him a scorpion?" (Lk 11:11-13) What kind of priest, Fernando must have thought, if a child asked for bread, would pretend not to notice? However, what is commonsensical for Fernando is not for many people, including myself. How many of us, if we were in the same situation Fernando, would put our obligation to get bread for the community of well-fed men or our need to be seen as a responsible and trustworthy member within that community before the need for sustenance of a malnourished child standing right in front of us? Given the large and growing wealth disparities I witnessed in Central America – both within each country and in relation to those to the north – I think many of us could use a bit of Fernando's common sense. ■

In the Classroom:

PROF. NEWMAN CONFRONTS THE BOOK OF JOB

by Margaret Cremin '08

Professor Louis Newman is teaching a new course this term on the biblical book of Job, in which Job, though extremely faithful to

God, suffers at the hand of God for no apparent reason. It's a text that inspires the question "why do bad things happen to good people?" Professor Newman says, "The book of Job is very problematic in several ways. It is virtually heretical in its depiction of God; the end of the story, which softens this heresy, seems at odds with the rest of the book. At the end of the book, God's speech to Job doesn't seem to answer Job's questions, and even Job's response to God seems ambiguous. The book of Job contains lots of material to wrestle with."

In the past, Professor Newman has taught a Hebrew Bible survey course, and a seminar on the book of Genesis. He wanted "to give students a chance to study another book in depth." In addition to reading the biblical text, students read "other renditions of Job – the story of the suffering person – both ancient and modern, as well as interpretations of the story, and interpretations of various passages within the story." The students seem to "really like the text and to enjoy discussing its meaning." ■

This year's **Forkosh Family Lecture** in Judaic Studies will be given by **Ian Lustick** on Monday, February 26, at 8pm in Great Hall. The topic of the lecture will be: "Are We Trapped in the War on Terror?" Lustick



above: Ian Lustick

will deliver a second lecture the following night, Tuesday February 27, at 8pm in Leighton 305 entitled: "Yerushalayim, al-Quds, Jerusalem: What's in a Name?" Ian Lustick currently teaches political science at the University of Pennsylvania. He has authored numerous books, such as *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and West Bank- Gaza; For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel; Arabs in the Jewish State: Israel's Control of a National Minority, and Trapped in the War on Terror?* He has received many awards and grants, and has served as consultant to the CIA, the US State Department, and the NSA. ■

In the Cities:

BODY WORLDS EXHIBIT SPARKS DEBATE

by Emma Glidden-Lyon '08

Any of the students from “Christian Approaches to Bioethics” would have immediately identified a small scene from the new Bond film. In a stroke of true brand placement genius, the exhibit “Body Worlds” is featured prominently in the action movie. Although the movie came out after the class was completed, the potential commercialism of Body Worlds, and its creator Gunther Von Hagens, was hotly debated in the classroom. While the literature that accompanied the Minneapolis Museum of Science exhibit touted the educational benefits, many of the students focused more on the voyeuristic tendencies of much of the audience.

For those who don't know, Body Worlds is a touring exhibit that consists of bodies, body parts and vein structures that have been preserved through plastination. The controversy surrounding the exhibit stems from two separate critiques. The first is centered on the legality and morality of how the bodies are obtained. The second debate is focused on whether or not the display and viewing of these bodies is ethical. Many of the critics' arguments, including those in the classroom, postulated that the exhibit was degrading to human dignity and therefore unethical. Even if the bodies were ethically obtained, the making of human corpses into art (in some cases Von



Back row (left to right): Schulyer Vogel, Divya Rao, KC Fujiwara, Sophia Paraschos, Yi An. Front row: Drew Weber, Peter Berry, Emma Glidden-Lyon, Will Huynh.

Hagen even signed the pieces) was unacceptable. This argument became even stronger when the class examined the various Christian traditions that view the human body as a part of God, or a sacrament. The role of dualism, whether or not the body and soul could be separated, also had implications for the class debate.

Each student had various reactions to the exhibit, but most were, unsurprisingly ambiguous in their final judgement. It would be hard to deny the beauty of

some of the exhibits, specifically the plastinated veins which formed lacy, delicate sculptures. However, the gawking invited of the audience and the freak show presentation of some of the corpses were troubling. In addition, the class agreed almost unanimously that the motives of the creator were less than ethical. In the end, it seemed that the Body Worlds Exhibit walked a delicate line between human curiosity and voyeurism, depersonalization. ■

WINTER '07 SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Prof. Anne Patrick

- Catholic Life and Thought
- Issues in the Study of Religion

Prof. Roger Jackson

- Senior Research Seminar

Prof. Richard Crouter

- Christian Origins

Prof. Michael McNally

- Religion and American Culture

Prof. Shazad Bashir

- Introduction to Religion
- Muhammad and the Qur'an

Prof. Louis Newman

- Job
- Contemporary Jewish Thought

Prof. Clarke Hudson

- Japanese Religion and Culture
- Religion and Sexuality

We invite both your comments and your news updates for future issues of NumeNews. Please contact Jill Tollefsen at (507)646-4232, jtollefs@carleton.edu