Innovation that Matters: Theological training and spiritual formation in a dynamic world

Matthew Hisrich, Director of Recruitment and Admissions

There is no doubt that religious life in the United States and the world is undergoing significant changes. The Association of Theological Schools, the body that oversees ESR's accreditation, reports that enrollment in graduate theological programs has been on a steady decline for years. Behind this decline in seminary enrollment are larger changes affecting the whole educational and religious landscape that challenge traditional institutions – be they churches, denominations, or seminaries. How is ESR responding to these challenges – and opportunities?

Before developing a response, it is vital to understand the nature of the change taking place. This is why ESR made it a priority to seek out feedback from young Friends across the wide spectrum of Quakerism about their concerns and interests related to spiritual formation and training. After a series of one-on-one interviews, phone conversations, and a broad survey, the conclusions we came to were surprising.

First, young adult friends crave mentorship and genuine leadership among Friends. They truly do want to know more about what it means to be Quaker, and they desire to be included in the future of Friends rather than relegated to token roles on committees. Second, they feel deeply the divisions and conflict affecting Friends – particularly over questions of Christology and sexuality – and they don’t feel as though they have been prepared to address them effectively in their communities or among their peers.

In some ways these concerns are unique to Friends. In other ways, though, they reflect concerns experienced by many – especially the young.

This is perhaps most evident in the research the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life released in their October 2012 study, “Nones on the Rise.” Forty-six million Americans answered “none” to religious affiliation question – one in five adults. This rises to one in three among the young. “Young people today are not only more religiously unaffiliated than their elders,” said Greg Smith of Pew to NPR Morning Edition, “they are also more religiously unaffiliated than previous generations of young people ever have been as far back as we can tell.”

Despite this lack of interest in religious affiliation, though,
there is still strong interest in spirituality. As sociologist, Rodney Stark, points out, there is a difference between being unaffiliated and being unreligious. Even among those that say they have no religion in the Baylor National Religion Survey, Stark reports that, “Most say they pray, and a third even report having had a religious experience.”

How a seminary such as ESR chooses to respond to these trends has significant implications for its future. “One way seminaries have responded to this statistical decline is by reducing the number of students they admit and shrinking class size,” says Wayne Meisel, Founding President of the Bonner Foundation and Director of Faith and Service at the C.F. Foundation in Atlanta. “This is a misguided response to a world growing in size, complexity, and opportunity.”

ESR would like to answer this call to respond to a world growing in size, complexity, and opportunity. This involves two key components:

**SERVICE** –

The importance of service is a clear area of emphasis among emerging religious leaders. ESR students have a long history of service in their communities both during their time here and as their ministries continue after graduation. There is a growing movement to foster intentionally a culture of service at the high school and undergraduate level that carries forth into voluntary service, graduate school, and beyond. ESR has been exploring how best to engage this movement through a variety of means. As Quaker Voluntary Service was forming, the school was able to play an important role in helping the organization find its footing. QVS director, Christina Repoley, recently came to ESR to present at our 2013 Leadership Conference. This fall ESR is joining a select group of other seminaries to discuss the development of a network of service-focused schools that include Community Engagement Fellows. Several of our students will be joining others from around the country at a seminary service conference in Princeton.

**INNOVATION** –

As part of the current strategic plan, ESR is committed to exploring expanded offerings, including dual degrees and certificates. The school is actively engaged with other institutions to move these efforts forward. This year has also seen two innovative firsts: ESR’s leadership in developing a virtual recruitment fair for seminaries and theological schools, and a gathering of college Quaker leaders from around the country.
Both present opportunities to reach out to new audiences – particularly younger audiences – and to build upon that foundation in the future. These activities are a continuation of the effort to meet the ESR students of tomorrow where they are and respond to them in ways that meet their interests and needs.

No one can predict the full impact of all of the changes underway affecting religious education. Nonetheless, it is possible to make informed decisions about what ways we can best adapt while staying true to who it is that we are as an institution.

As Carol Howard Merritt recently reflected in The Christian Century, “it sometimes feels like the whole of Christianity is being spooned out right now. It’s being emptied, and it will be your prophetic imagination, your dreams that will fill it back up. And in this moment, we can open ourselves up to what God would have us to be.”

We believe that these initiatives help position ESR at the forefront in both responding to, and getting out in front of, the changes facing seminary education and religious faith in the twenty-first century. I hope you will join us in the adventure!

Matthew Hisrich

CHANGING

Who I Am

Tim Seid, Associate Dean & Assistant Professor
of New Testament Studies

One of the things I can count on in my life is change. Over the years the circumstances of my life have changed, and I have changed too. Most of those changes I consider to be improvements. As much as it is up to me, I have worked at learning new things and at being open to having my mind changed. That change has come gradually and I’m not always comfortable with it.

It was during high school that I began to be interested in reading and studying about the Bible. My father, who was a pastor of a fundamentalist church in Michigan, would often have to chase me out of his study so he could work. I still have some of the books I swiped from his library. I felt the call to become a pastor. After graduating from a Bible institute in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I attended an evangelical Christian college. I intended to finish there, go on to their seminary, and then spend the rest of my life exegeting the Scriptures (in their original languages) and preaching expository sermons. I was committed to a rigorous study of the Scripture in the way I was taught by the evangelical scholars with whom I studied and whose books I read. The problem I began to face was that my interpretive conclusions didn’t always match the theology and practice of conservative and orthodox Christianity. The more my mind changed on central issues, the less welcome I felt within evangelical circles.

Over the years the issues arose and fell like dominoes. When I read the Hebrew of Genesis in college, I didn’t discover there a scientific basis for Creationism like I had been taught from the pulpit and lectern. An entirely different world was opened to me as I became aware of a beautiful, ancient and literary narrative explaining how the world came to be and why things are the way they are for this ancient group of people. But to reject Creationism felt like I was rejecting Christianity, rejecting Jesus, rejecting my father. The transition wasn’t easy, and it didn’t get any easier.

Learning about the textual tradition of the Bible and the development of the canon of Scripture affected my understanding of revelation and inspiration. Learning about cultural differences made me realize that many of the sins preached about in revival services were not part of the biblical tradition but values

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and customs perpetuated from Victorian and Puritan ideals. The Bible didn’t seem to me to contain insights into the future demise of the world, but these texts had been written in a prophetic and apocalyptic literary style. I can remember talking with my father, who is an expert in Bible prophecy and Dispensationalist timelines, about apocalyptic literature and how I could no longer think that the book of Revelation contained a record of John’s actual experience of traveling to heaven – unless we accept that a bunch of other people did too, who also wrote about going on heavenly journeys with angelic escorts and witnessing bizarre images and the panorama of human history.

Most recently, I’ve reached the (tentative) conclusion that our theory of an oral transmission of the words and deeds of Jesus from his lifetime and used as a source for gospel writers has some real problems. An important historical source for this period is the Apostle Paul, who shows very little evidence of such a tradition. If it existed, I can’t believe Paul wouldn’t have known about it; if he knew about it, I can’t believe he wouldn’t have written about it. And why wouldn’t he, for example, if Paul had this knowledge of the early origins of Christian practice, have picked up on the most basic of concepts such as referring to a follower of Jesus as a disciple: he never does it. Therefore, for me earliest Christianity is to be found in the communities to whom Paul wrote. The gospels are later compositions describing Jesus in the literary tradition of the wandering, wonder-working, wise man.

One of the greatest challenges for me has been changing my way of thinking about the Bible and theology but still having socially conservative views. That has been a greater challenge, but it has happened.

If evangelicals and conservatives don’t like how I’ve turned out, just remember your scholars taught me how to study the Bible and I learned the methods well. I tried over the years to be at home in your churches, and I didn’t feel welcomed. I have followed the truth as I have found it and have attempted to be intellectually honest with myself and others. Don’t get me wrong. I still love the type of Christianity in which I was raised – I love a good expository sermon; the hymns of the church make my heart soar; contemplating God’s love in Jesus can choke me up and bring tears to my eyes. I still believe in such things as resurrection, the divinity of Jesus, and the Bible as a foundational text. But I find much of popular American Christianity to be artificial, simplistic, and self-serving.

During my recent sabbatical I began thinking about how I would describe a type of Christianity based in my interpretation of early Christian origins. I created a web site called Soul Share (soulshare.org) and hope to develop it more and to finish writing a book I started during my sabbatical. The central idea based on the context of Paul in a Hellenistic philosophical tradition within Judaism, is the progress we can make in mental and moral development within a community of friendship toward the goal of a divine sort of life, a human flourishing life of fullness and well-being.

My way of thinking has changed over the years and in dramatic ways recently. Along with it I have changed my body as well, having lost over 185 lbs. since my bariatric surgery in January 2012. In one way I am half the man I used to be, but in another way I am more fully human than I have ever been.

SoulShare.org is designed for people who are interested in how to live a Christian life based on the philosophical principles in the letters of Paul of Tarsus and to make use of current internet technologies for building community.
Memorial to Bill Ratliff

Stephen Angell, Geraldine Leatherock Professor of Quaker Studies

We were saddened to hear of the death of Bill Ratliff, former professor of pastoral care and counseling at ESR, on September 16, 2013, at the age of 74. In 1985, Bill came to ESR as the seminary’s first full-time professor of pastoral care and counseling, with specific training in that field. Over the next eighteen years, until his retirement in 2003, he made many contributions. One area that was especially close to Bill’s heart was cross-cultural ministry. He was resident scholar in 1991 at the Pacific Theological College in the Fiji Islands, and helped to arrange a student exchange between that college and ESR. In 1995 and 1996, some PTC students studied at ESR, and some ESR students at PTC.

He was a thoughtful, popular, and innovative professor, designing courses such as Emergency Pastoral Care and Creative Use of Anger in Ministry. Picking up on an idea of ESR student, Jesse Paledofsky, Bill was instrumental in organizing the Quakers in Pastoral Care and Counseling. One outgrowth of his work was a volume which Bill edited: Out of the Silence: Quaker Perspectives on Pastoral Care and Counseling (Pendle Hill Publications, 2001). There Bill wrote, “The mystery of God’s healing work is profound” (xv), and his deep listening, gentle, wise counsel, and groundedness in Quaker spirituality signified to his colleagues and students that such mysteries and profundities were not to be feared but welcomed, as he welcomed them in a spirit of quiet joy, humor, curiosity, and wonder. Bill also recalled Meister Eckhart’s statement, “If the only prayer you say in your entire life is ‘Thank you,’ it is enough” (73).

Thank you, God, for the witness of Bill Ratliff amongst us. Bill will be greatly missed.

Teaching & Learning
Pastoral Care at ESR

by Bill Ratliff, former Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling
from ESR Reports, Fall 2001

To provide pastoral care requires passion — a passion to be with God and a passion to be with people in ways that are caring and healing. A lot more is involved, but passion is the beginning point.

Teaching pastoral care at the beginning is easy because the subject connects. We have cared for others and have received caring at a variety of points in our lives. The water muddies as we begin to look at what effective pastoral care involves. By looking at ourselves we begin to see that caregivers need such attributes as a grounding in God’s Spirit; flexibility; courage; sustained, active listening; and ongoing self-care. Intellectual tools and content are also required. For example, knowing the history of pastoral care in the life of the faith community through the ages informs us of the long and rich tradition in which we stand and can inspire and even empower. Reading current literature in the field broadens and deepens our perspective. In this way we learn to take into account issues of age, gender, race, power differentials, culture, spiritual development, and what issues are being dealt with at that point. Complexity stares us in the face, and we wonder who is gifted for such relationships? Certainly not us!

The Good News is that we can learn, if we have the underlying passion mentioned at first. And we find out that we are not required to fix people — that is left to God. Our task is to be with people and use all our skills and intuitive gifts. The outcome lies in God’s hands. The deep belief that there is that of God in every person, as George Fox maintained, gets tested, then hopefully embodied in our relationships.

In order to be with people, we have also to learn to be with ourselves. Self-knowledge is required, so that we have some awareness of how our passion for caring meets our own needs. Caring for others always meets our own need, in some way, or we would not be involved. Once we become aware, then we can try to meet the other person’s need rather than strictly our own. Awareness of the range of our feelings, and some comfort with those feelings, helps us sit with another person who may be exploring the depths of their pain or rage.

Learning to live with our own helplessness is also necessary. Especially in times of terminal illness and grief, there is little concrete we can do. In our need to do something, we can say things that sound inane or easy and can shut down the other person. We may tell ourselves we are trying to “cheer up” the other person, when we really do this because we are

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Jay Marshall attended the FWCC Section of Americas Annual Meeting in Morgantown, Indiana, and worshiped with Friends at Heartland, KS and Durham, ME. He offered the Sunday morning message at Valley Mills Friends and at West Branch Meetings. In July he led the morning Bible study sessions for the Quaker Men International Triennial, and offered a workshop, “Modeling the Message,” at ESR’s Leadership Conference. Along with librarian, Jane Pinzino, and Director of Admissions, Matt Hisrich, Jay co-authored an article that will appear in the Journal of Theological Education in spring 2014.

Jim Higginbotham attended the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Orlando, Florida, where he was elected Co-moderator of Disciples Peace Fellowship (DPF) and facilitated a workshop on models of conversation about controversial issues. DPF introduced a successful resolution opposing drone warfare. Jim also published an article in the American Association of Pastoral Counselors journal, Sacred Spaces titled, “Beyond Axis II: More Compassionate Views of Personal Distress.”

Ben Brazil joined ESR in July. Hired as assistant professor and director of ESR’s Ministry of Writing Program, he moved to Richmond just in time to teach an August intensive course called Writing as Craft as Mindfulness. He spent the earlier part of the summer working for the Youth Theological Initiative (YTI), a summer faith-and-justice program for older high school students. The program is affiliated with the Emory University’s Candler School of Theology. Ben earned his Masters of Theological Studies from Candler and is finishing his Ph.D. at Emory’s Graduate Division of Religion. In addition to his academic work, Ben has published in The New York Times, The Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, and other publications. He’s currently interested in writing cultural criticism, creative non-fiction, and maybe – just maybe – trying a novel. But one step at a time.

Lonnie Valentine, the new Trueblood Chair of Christian Thought, has begun work on his project “Quakers and the War Tax Concern: Unfinished Business?” This work will explore the history of Quaker thought and action around this issue and seek out what Friends are doing these days to address the war tax concern. If you know of a Quaker currently involved with the war tax question, please do ask them to get in touch with Lonnie.

One interesting connection between Earlham and the war tax concern is related to Elbert Russell who taught Bible at Earlham College from 1895 to 1917. Russell was attacked by some Quakers for his “modernist” approach to the Bible but was also supported by other Quakers. He argued for the establishment of a graduate program that would train Quaker leaders in ways different than the various Bible schools whose graduates were filling Quaker Church pastorates. He ended up as the dean of the divinity school at Duke University, and there taught Ernest Bromley, who was studying for the Presbyterian ministry. As World War II was brewing, Bromley tells of Russell talking with students about what could be done to support conscientious objection to war. When war came, Ernest Bromley decided he would refuse to pay for the automobile tax stamp that was instituted to support the war effort. Bromley ended up in jail for this, was later barred from the ministry by the Presbyterians, and he ended up joining Quakers.


Carole Spencer presented a paper entitled “Gnosticizing Tendencies in the History of Christian Spirituality” at the Quaker Theological Discussion Group, American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, November 16, 2012, in Chicago. This paper will be published in the forthcoming issue of Quaker Religious Thought.

Carole was the speaker for the United Society of Friends Women’s Meeting at Quaker Hill, in Richmond, Indiana, May 15, 2013. She was asked to speak about the nineteenth century Quaker writer and preacher, Hannah Whitall Smith (who seems to be experiencing a revival of interest lately). Her presentation was entitled “Hannah Whitall Smith: Holiness Heretic.”

On May 18, 2013 Carole led a workshop called “Living Prayer” at Lake Forest Friends Meeting, Illinoi Yearly Meeting, FGC. Marcelle Martin, the 2013 Mullen Writing Fellow at ESR co-led the workshop with Carole. In this day-long workshop participants explored various approaches to prayer in daily life, such as lectio divina, centering prayer, and healing prayer.

On October 25-26 Carole will again facilitate a workshop on “Living Prayer,” this time at Quaker Hill Conference Center in Richmond.

From June 20-23 Carole attended the Friends Association of Higher Education Annual Meeting at
Nowadays
ALUMN/AE NEWS
Suzanne Levesconte ’09 was ordained to the Episcopal priesthood in June 2012. She is now priest in charge at Trinity Episcopal Church in Hamilton, Ohio.

Elizabeth Raid ’02 and her husband, Lou Gomez, Jr., recently were appointed as Campus Pas-
tors at Mennonite Friendship Communities, a large retirement village in South Hutchinson, Kansas. This summer she was licensed toward ordination by Western District Mennonite Conference. They continue to live in Newton, Kansas.

Malone University in Canton, Ohio.

This summer while visiting family in Portland Oregon, Carole was able to attend one session of Northwest Yearly Meeting, EFl, in Newberg, Oregon, where she heard the popular spiritual writer, Richard Foster, bring a message. Foster was a pastor in Northwest Yearly Meeting and had just written his first book, Celebration of Discipline, when Carole first joined Friends and attended her first Yearly Meeting in Newberg, Oregon over 30 years ago.

From Sept. 28 – October 2 Carole will be at Guilford College in Greensborough, N.C. meeting with students in the Quaker Leadership program, visiting the Quaker Social Testimonies Class and the Quaker Classics Class, sharing with new faculty & staff Quaker understandings of “Holy Obedience” and delivering the J. M. Ward Lecture at New Garden Friends Meeting, titled, “Hannah Whitall Smith’s Highway of Holiness: Mysticism, Heresy and Feminism in a Quaker ‘Free Lance.’”

November 22-25 Carole will be in Baltimore at the American Academy of Religion Annual Conference. She will be one of the reviewers of Paul Anderson’s new book Following Jesus: The Heart of Faith and Practice at the Quaker Theological Discussion Group. She will also be presider at the Quaker Studies Book Review Session on the new Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies, edited by Stephen Angell and Ben Pink Dandelion.

Nancy Bowen spent five weeks in East Africa this spring as part of her sabbatical. She traveled with Dr. Deborah Appler, who teaches Old Testament at Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, PA. They spent two weeks at Teofili Kisanji University (TEKU) in Mbeya, TZ and two weeks at Friends Theological College (FTC) in Kaimosi, Kenya. At TEKU they led workshops on issues of Bible, violence, and women for students and faculty of the Theological School, which trains Moravian pastors. At FTC they taught a two-week intensive on women in the Bible for Diploma level students training to be Quaker pastors. More on her work in Kenya and Tanzania will appear in a forthcoming issue of ESR Reports.

Nancy Bowen attended the 13th Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, Aug 12-19, in Oxford, England. This was the fourth time she's attended this gathering of the different branches of the Wesleyan tradition from around the world. The theme was “Wesleyan Communities and the World Beyond Christianity.” Her paper explored how the OT gives many faithful responses to how we should relate to Others, including ones that are contradictory. She met three people there who all had ESR connections! One person works for the Upper Room and knows former ESR faculty member Stephanie Ford. Another teaches US religious history at Vanderbilt and knows Steve Angell. The third is a current United Methodist Bishop who went to Earlham College back in the day and knew Hugh Barbour, Dick Davis, and Tom Mullen. Hopefully both George Fox and John Wesley would rejoice in these connections.

TEACHING & LEARNING continued from page 5

attempting to make ourselves feel better. The more we try to cheer up someone, unfortunately, the worse they often feel! Prayer is necessary at this point — turning the situation, including our own helplessness, over to God.

Good self-care is mandatory. If I don't take care of myself, then I have nothing available with which to care for others. Jesus talks about loving neighbor as we love ourselves. We too easily forget the last three words. Loving self is not easy for many of us who were brought up in a guilt-ridden faith, as I was. I am convinced, however, that we are unable to love others to any greater degree that we are able to love ourselves. God's grace and love converts us, so that we are enabled to love God and self and neighbor. Ongoing bathing in God's love and the life of the Spirit are essential to effective self-care and then effective pastoral care.

How do I teach such pastoral care? Perhaps a more accurate question is, how do I provide the space for students to be obedient to their Inner Teacher and learn to be effective in their care giving? Just as in good pastoral care, I cannot make it happen, but I can provide the space.

Space is provided by teaching from an experience-reflection model. Students have experiences — inside and outside the classroom, in their own lives and from their own history. For example, in my Introduction to Pastoral Care class, each student is required to spend an hour a week in a pastoral care relationship. In other classes, they interview persons or relate in different ways.

The crucial next step must be to reflect on that experience. Meditating on what happened; writing about it; hearing feedback from others, reading what other thinkers and writers in the discipline of pastoral care have said — all help students to look at what they did well and what they want to do differently next time. The ability to reflect on one's self, on the care-receiver, and on the relationship in a clear-eyed, unflinching fashion is the key to becoming an effective pastoral care giver. This reflection then informs our further experience. The cycle continues. Care happens.
Are you a Gutenberger or a Googler? As George Fox University visiting distinguished professor Leonard Sweet sees it in his book *Viral: How Social Networking is Poised to Ignite Revival*, the world can be divided into these two camps. On the one side are those who “feel most at home in the twenty-first century Digital Age,” and on the other are “those who arrived from the twentieth century bringing with them influences and assumptions launched long before, in the fifteenth century.”

Rather than lament this shift, Sweet embraces it – despite acknowledging he’s a Gutenberger himself. He flinches as fellow Gutenbergers rate younger generations for not being interested in the social structures many have come to see as the main institutions of society (church, Rotary Club, etc.). Instead of “bowling alone,” he suggests that Googlers are actually incredibly social – they just go about it in different ways. Instead of building organizations and edifices with exclusive membership, they use technology to reach out to as many others as they can, finding commonalities along the way. “Googlers have rewritten the rules of forming networks, connections, and relationships,” through networks such as Facebook and Twitter, says Sweet. “Googlers are the ones who have made relationships a life mission.”

The Gutenberger framework of understanding is built upon the written word. “Gutenbers value precision and rationality,” according to Sweet. “They value the meaning of words and are confident that words serve to clarify truth and make God knowable.”

Googlers don’t share this perspective. They use “the word text as a verb more than a noun.” It’s a way to establish connection rather than to establish boundaries. The current age is built for this way of seeing the world, for it is an “age of experience, participation, image, and connection.”

For Sweet, this means that Googlers are more likely to seek connection with Christ than see Jesus as a means to achieve other ends – more likely to build a community than a building. “Googlers are better positioned to encounter and engage with the Jesus of Scripture than Gutenbergers have been,” argues Sweet, “since Gutenbergers were inclined to refashion the Jesus of Palestine into a Western-size-fits-all Savior.”

This holds some important lessons for the church of the future. Gone are the days of “Ask one to be one” secret societies with high bars for participation and inclusion. Instead, “Googlers function with a twofold test of participation: (1) Am I learning something? (2) Am I contributing something? If the answer to either question is no, they get out of there quick.”

Sweet does acknowledge that both cultures have their pitfalls. Whereas certainty and grandiosity may plague the Gutenberger world, Googlers may suffer from shortened attention spans and a lack of “face-to-face” friends. But for Sweet, the adaptability, creativity, and relationality of the Googlers are vitally important if the church is to remain vital in the coming years. As he puts it, “Googlers may be the best hope for the future of the church in the West.”

So, are you a Gutenberger or a Googler?

Matt Hisrich, Director of Recruitment and Admissions

In *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War*, theologians Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini introduce an important concept that might change one’s perspective on veterans. Moral injury is more than just a recognition that “war is hell.” Combatants, whether they are fighting because they believe in the cause or because it’s a way to get an education later, face morally anguishing situations. The lines between civilians and combatants are vague and often require split-second decisions. Most veterans of war experience enormous conflicted guilt for violating their basic humanity and religious values even as they are doing what they are ordered to do and for which they are sometimes rewarded: to kill another person. Whether one is a pacifist or believes in Just War, your heart will be moved by the stories the veterans and the authors who were impacted by war. This book is a challenge to all faith communities to show compassion to
all who have been harmed by war, including those who participated in it.

Jim Higginbotham, Associate Professor of Pastoral Care

Over the course of months, I have slowly read *The Myth of American Religious Freedom*, by David Sehat. As the title suggests, Sehat offers a well-researched re-evaluation of American religious freedom, convincingly showing that this long-running American “tradition” has been honored far more in its breach than its observance. Contemporary notions of religious freedom -- as freedom from laws rooted in religion -- dates mainly from court cases of the early and mid-20th century, Sehat shows. In earlier centuries, most states’ legal systems reflected what Sehat calls a “moral establishment.” This “moral establishment” enforced a Christian version of morality without officially recognizing a particular Christian denomination. At the same time, though, it also quashed blasphemy in multiple legal cases. The anti-blasphemy logic typically went like this: social stability requires morality, and morality requires religion, so religion must be protected — but for social, not religious reasons. Sehat notes the obvious: this argument made very little sense. And yet it remained powerful deep into the 20th century. I find the book interesting because it sheds light on the present. In tracing the evolution of religious freedom from the colonial era into the 20th century, Sehat doesn’t just write a history book. Instead, he uses history to show that contemporary political rhetoric — both from the political Left and the Christian Right — rely on a mythology of American religious freedom — and a misunderstanding of American religious and political history.

Ben Brazil, Assistant Professor and Director of the Ministry of Writing Program

In *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*, Reza Aslan argues that Jesus was an apocalyptic messianic figure who believed that God was soon to intervene with violence to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. He further argues that Paul, the most significant shaper of early Christian tradition, along with most of the rest of the New Testament books, sought to hide this Jesus and turn him into one who had nothing to say about worldly political and economic issues. Jesus’ Kingdom “was not of this world.” Aslan writes that the books of the New Testament sought to distance themselves from the Jewish struggle to free Israel from the Roman occupation “by erasing, as much as possible, any hint of radicalism or violence, revolution or zealotry, from the story of Jesus” (149). In this, Aslan disagrees with others currently working in examining the Jesus in the Gospels and Paul’s writings, such as John Dominic Crossan and Richard Horsley, who argue that while Jesus was certainly zealous and a revolutionary, he was nonviolent and believed that the Kingdom was present and that the disciples were charged to go and build this Kingdom in the here and now. Aslan does agree that Jesus was not “a violent revolutionary, bent on armed rebellion” (79). Where he differs with these other scholars is in arguing that Jesus awaited God’s wrathful intervention to throw out the Roman oppressors and the Jewish elite collaborators. It would make a fine adult study class to read these books that wrestle with what we can discern about Jesus and early Christianity. More vitally, as Crossan poses the question: “Is your God violent or nonviolent?” I would add: “Is your God present on earth or somewhere else?”

Lonnie Valentine, Trueblood Chair of Christian Thought

This fall, Oxford University Press will publish a book which Stephen Angell co-edited with Ben Pink Dandelion: *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*. The Press states that “This volume provides an indispensable reference work for the study of Quakerism. It is global in its perspectives and interdisciplinary in its approach whilst offering the reader a clear narrative through the academic debates. In addition to an in-depth survey of historical readings of Quakerism, the *Handbook* provides a treatment of the group’s key theological premises and its links with wider Christian thinking. Quakerism’s distinctive ecclesiastical forms and practices are analyzed, and its social, economic, political, and ethical outcomes examined. Each of the 37 chapters considers broader religious, social, and cultural contexts and provides suggestions for further reading.” Steve would be glad to email any reader of ESR Reports a flier for a 20% discount off the $175.00 list price of the book (discount applies only if the book is ordered directly from the press prior to Dec. 31). Chapter authors in this book include three current ESR faculty: Carole Dale Spencer’s “Quakers in Theological Context;” Stephen W. Angell’s “God, Christ, and the Light;” and Lonnie Valentine’s “Quakers, War, and Peacemaking.” ESR alums Michael Birkel, Max Carter, Mary Garman, David Johns, Howard Macy, and Lloyd Lee Wilson also contributed chapters to this volume.

This book will be reviewed at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Baltimore, Maryland, on Nov. 24. Ann Riggs, Paul Anderson, Jon Kershner, and Matthew Hedstrom will contribute reviews, and both Steve Angell and Ben Pink Dandelion will each make a response to the reviews.

Stephen Angell, Geraldine Leatherock Professor of Quaker Studies
ESR will welcome an array of inspiring speakers to campus during the 2013-14 year.

The third annual *Leadership Conference* took place over the weekend of August 16-18. The conference was well-attended with about 75 people taking part. The theme this year was *Friendly Marketing: Message, Motive, and Means*. The conference got off to a great start with the Friday evening keynote address by Ian Joyce, who focused on the need for marketing with integrity. The Saturday activities began with Thom Jeavons addressing the issue of implementing marketing principles to promote Quakerism. The panel discussions and workshops presented opportunities for attendees to hear from and discuss with many business professionals and leaders of Quaker organizations. One participant commented, “Overall, a fabulous conference – well organized, interesting and thought-provoking workshops and anchor sessions.” Another remarked, “Terrific opportunity and a real challenge to my paradigm and beliefs.” To read more about the conference or to watch the recorded videos of the sessions, go to this page: http://esr.earlham.edu/content/2013-leadership-conference. We hope you will plan to attend next year’s conference.

On Monday, October 7, our annual *Pastors Conference* featured presentations from two keynote speakers. This year’s theme, *Rest Rediscovered*, was explored by award-winning musician and worship leader, Fran McKendree, and experienced retreat leader, Brenda Jank. Fran’s session, *Rest Redefined*, guided attendees through a musical and contemplative worship experience. Brenda Jank’s session, *Rest Rediscovered*, reacquainted attendees with “the peace and quiet our souls have tried to live without” through exploring rhythms of rest that are restorative and life-giving. It was a wonderful day of rest, Sabbath, and meaningful conversation for those in attendance.

During the week of October 7, we welcomed C. Wess Daniels to campus as our *Fall Friend in Residence*. Daniels is the pastor of Camas Friends Church in Camas, Washington and has a Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary. During his time with us, he shared about his spiritual journey during Common Meal, met one-on-one with students, brought...
has outgrown the old recruitment fair model. Business as usual isn’t an option.

Faculty continue to experience their own growth and transformation as well. As they critique new ideas and wrestle with current issues, the learning process naturally leads them to new places. Of course, those changes affect their participation in the life of the school, further accelerating ESR’s movement to new places.

In this issue of ESR Reports, two faculty members offer reflections on transformations that are changing how they contribute to our work together. As you will see, there is no standing still!

Author Jana Riess will be the keynote speaker for this year’s Ministry of Writing Colloquium on November 1-2. Her keynote, “Writing through Failure,” will look at writing as a spiritual practice, one that includes “failure” as an important step toward growth. “Maturity for a writer,” Riess shares, “and anyone on the spiritual path, means coming to terms with failure and finding ways to incorporate its teachings into our writing and our lives.” The Colloquium will also offer a choice of workshops from published authors on topics including “Field Guide for your Creative Journey,” “Writing Our Image of God,” and “The Art of the Interview: Spicing up Nonfiction.” Attendees will also be able to share their own writing during the open mic on Saturday evening.

Looking toward to Spring 2014, our visiting Wilson lecturer will be Rev. Rita Nakashima Brock, Research Professor of Theology and Culture and Founding Co-Director of The Soul Repair Center. She will speak on the theme Soul Repair from the Moral Injury of War on Monday, February 17. The Spirituality Gathering on Saturday, March 1 will feature Cynthia Bourgeault, a modern day mystic, Episcopal priest, writer, and internationally known retreat leader. We hope you can join us on campus and be inspired.
The expression “life is a journey” may sound like a worn out expression to your ears. Words like “transformation” or “change” may have lost power because they are used so often. If I were to tell you that change is ongoing at ESR, you might be tempted to yawn, certain that you’ve heard it all before. After all, what else would you expect from a school that once used “an invitation to transformation” as its tagline?

Often when ESR refers to transformation, it is speaking of the effect of theological education on our students. Deep learning that produces new insights breaks the learner open to new possibilities and altered ways of being. It doesn’t end there.

ESR as an organization continues to be transformed. The Apostle Paul’s words about “seeing through a glass darkenly” describe well the view of seminary education from the dean’s office. There are days when I’m hard pressed to predict where it is going! The landscape of theological education is changing and ESR will be changed as well!

First and foremost is the question of the place of faith in society. As dedication to organized religion wanes among many, replaced by an amorphous desire to “spiritual not religious,” schools like ESR are affected. From where shall our students come, particularly if much of the younger generation opts out of religious life? For what purpose will they attend? In what context will they find meaningful avenues of service?

Thanks to the powers that be in the world of higher education, tremendous time and resources must be spent on the practice of assessment of learning. To be sure, there is value to assessment in reasonable doses. At its best, assessment beckons us to become better teachers and more efficient institutions. It provides accountability. Unfortunately, assessment demands we’ve passed the point of reason, but this change is likely here to stay.

Technology is another place that affords opportunities for change, and not just in the classroom. We connect with our constituents in ways other than traditional print format. Different advertising strategies must be developed. Recruitment of new students...