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Inside This Edition

- **Building Bridges** - page 1
- **Celebrating the Coffeehouse's 10th Anniversary** - page 3

Fall Semester Highlights

Monday Evening Class - Mondays, 7:30pm, starting September 13
"Arts, Science and Society in an Age of Religious Reform: Early Modern Lessons for a Contemporary World"

Wednesday Director's Class - Wednesdays, Sep 1 - Nov 17, 5th Period
"The Possibility of Meaning in a Culture of Possibilities"

Friday Reading Group - Select Fridays, 5th Period
"What Next for Universities?"

This is just a sampling of what we are able to offer thanks to your generous partnership.

You may also sign up for e-considerations, our e-mail newsletter, that will provide you with regular updates during the academic year.

Visit the Study Center online at christianstudycenter.org for program details & updates.

This newsletter is a publication of the Christian Study Center of Gainesville which explores the intersection of Christian thought & academic discourse.



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Building Bridges

An interview by Laura Lynch

The Center is delighted to interview Andrea Sterk and Howard Louthan, history professors who have been great friends and advisors and instrumental in shaping our program over the years.

Laura: Let's hear how you came to the University of Florida.

Howard: We came from the University of Notre Dame. I had a tenure-track position in the history department and Andrea did not; and after we renegotiated with Florida, we were able to get a tenure-track position for both of us. This is the Holy Grail for academic couples.

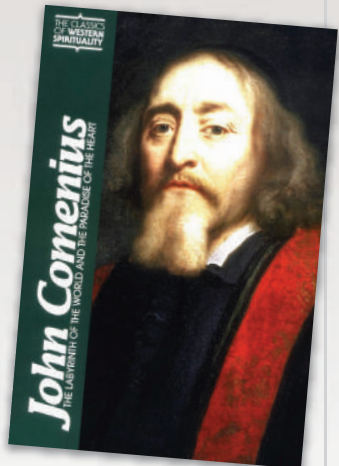
Andrea: Something that we both appreciated about coming to Florida is that we were coming to a public institution. I had taught at Calvin College for a year, and then we were at Notre Dame. We both teach in the history department, but we teach different periods. I work in the late ancient and early Medieval period, and specialize in the history of Christianity. I also see myself as kind of a bridgebuilding figure between disciplines. We're both affiliated with the religion department. I work with classics as well, and we're both also affiliate members of the Center for Medieval and Early Modern Studies. So we wear a lot of caps.

Howard: I work about a thousand years later in the Renaissance and Reformation period, specifically with Central Europe. A lot of our work is in the area of religion, so that's one of the common themes linking us together. We're always on the lookout for projects that we can collaborate on. A number of years ago we published a book together on John Comenius, a text written in an



Andrea Sterk and Howard Louthan

"A number of years ago we published a book together on John Comenius... It's a fascinating allegory about a pilgrim who is searching for meaning in life in his 17th century world."



early form of the Czech language. Most literature of the time was in Latin. It's a fascinating allegory about a pilgrim who is searching for meaning in life in his 17th century world.

Andrea: He is looking for a profession.

Howard: I think it's broader, looking for meaning, but yes, there is the professional aspect of it as he surveys the various estates in the world. He looks at the 17th century family and he looks at different professions; the lawyers, the university professors.

Andrea: And doctors.

Howard: It's really quite relevant, and he comes up with a big zero, and he sees to what extent that these professions are, in many ways, dead ends, and especially without some kind of Christian meaning to it all; it leads nowhere. Then he has this great epiphany, this great revelation in this life, and rediscovers the world through a new set of eyes, through Christian eyes, and is able to invest meaning back into the world and say, this makes a lot of sense.

Laura: That's certainly one of the purposes of our Center- to help students see their work and future vocations through Christian eyes. Would you tell us a little bit about how you understand your own work and service at the University as Christians?

Howard: We thought a little bit about this one. In some respects, I think it's a tough question to answer. I don't think we necessarily think in those terms because our whole life, our whole identity, is marked as a Christ follower. I guess it's difficult for us to parcel out, oh, here's my University self and here's my family self. It's always one big task that we see ourselves engaged in.

One of the issues, though, that we thought about, and maybe this gets to the answer to the question, in a slightly different way, and I think Andrea mentioned it a little bit earlier when she described

Continued on page 2

Building Bridges (continued from page 1)

herself as kind of a bridge person, we both see ourselves as bridges between the University and the Christian world to some degree. One of the things that I think we see as a common theme of what we're trying to do is not only help explain Christianity to the University, but also help the Christian world understand the University. It can offer a lot to the church.

Andrea: In general, in the Christian community, I think especially in the South, there tends to be a bit more hostility or sort of an antagonistic view of the churches toward the University, and vice versa, perhaps. But I feel like especially in that setting, this role of building bridges and helping the church communities to understand the University and the University to understand Christianity, in all of its breadth and depth, is a role that we really feel like we can play. Of course, the Christian Study Center has been a great help in that regard.

Howard: As historians I think one of the themes we've tried to think through and develop in our own sort of ministry is helping people understand that Christianity is always embedded in a specific culture, a specific time, and a specific place. Distinguishing between culture and Christianity and thinking through these issues is very complicated, but it's very important for people to do so. Christianity is very much shaped by the culture. And what is culture? What may be neutral to the faith? And what can change throughout the centuries, and what is essential? It's a very important set of questions for Christians to think through.

Laura: As you work in this culture and this place you mentioned some partnerships that you have developed. Andrea, could you tell us about the series that involved several groups working together?

Andrea: Yes. I think it's a good example of trying to bridge the University and the Christian, or various religious communities in the Gainesville area. With a colleague, and with the help of several colleagues, I was involved in putting together a series called "Faithful Narratives: The Challenge of Religion in History," in which we brought twelve nationally or internationally known historians. They addressed a variety of topics in a public lecture series dealing with issues of how do we understand Christian belief or Islamic belief or Jewish-Christian relations in the particular periods that we focused on. A number of guests also spoke at the Center and in small groups and seminars. The Christian Study Center, of course, was involved in this whole series, supporting it financially, advertising it, and so on. It was a very nice collaboration that brought together not only students and faculty from across the University, but a lot of folks in various religious communities in and around Gainesville.

Howard: We're doing a series in the fall that's going to have a smaller scope and a bit different focus but will be well worth your time. The program is "Arts, Science and Society in an Age of Religious Reform: Early Modern Lessons for a Contemporary World." We have eight speakers, and nearly all of them are members of the faculty here at UF.

It's exciting to see to what extent the Christian Study Center has been able to develop and encourage and foster this type of discussion within the University. It's not just putting on a show and



Mark Noll at the Faithful Narratives series

inviting people to come, but it's a real place where serious dialogue can take place. Richard has done a really good job of trying to develop these relationships with people at the University, and I'm really looking forward to the class. In the planning stage it's been very positive as I have discussions with my colleagues.

Laura: I know the Christian Study Center truly wants to contribute to the work of the University. This will be part of it.

Andrea: I think the Christian Study Center has done an excellent job of connecting and of drawing out Christian faculty, and also addressing issues in a way that both students and faculty can find engaging and relevant and challenging to their own intellectual life as well as spiritual life. I think it really plays a distinctive role that none of the other Christian ministries do.

Howard: I think there is a natural skepticism with many of the faculty towards Christianity. I think it's been a really pleasant revelation for them to see what the Christian Study Center is a place where there is a more open discussion and honest give and take about important issues and a very thoughtful place. And we've both been pleased with that.

Laura: Do you have anymore thoughts about the Center?

Howard: Andrea and I were just saying, it's a place for students. It's a place for faculty, and we think both of those areas are growing and good. We would like to see it as a place for churches as well. That's where we've sort of been discouraged spiritually. We would like to see more thoughtful church communities in Gainesville.

Andrea: More Christians from the community who would come to some of these talks. I think there is a lot that they can benefit from, and it's sort of a shame. It seems like the University community is much more engaged, and to some extent that makes sense because that's the primary audience of the Study Center, but it would be nice to see more folks from the churches come out and let themselves be challenged by some of the speakers who come in, who may not be coming from exactly the same perspective, but have things to challenge our thinking. We would like to see the church learning from the academy as much as we would like to see the academy learning more about Christianity and from the church.

Continued on page 3

News & Notes

Study Center Coffeehouse's Ten Year Anniversary



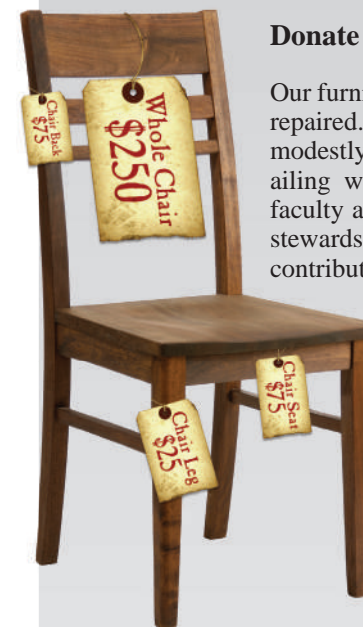
Congratulations to our coffeehouse, first known as The Oxford Coffee Company or more affectionately, The Ox, and more recently as Pascal's. Although the coffeehouse is not a money-making enterprise, it is a critical part of our service to the university community and creates those vital "third spaces" that provide benefits well beyond the monetary in our culture. We deeply appreciate everyone who has contributed to the coffeehouse over the years and the names of previous managers such as Joffre, Alex, Jared and Nick come happily to mind.

Our current manager, Laurie Goddard comments, "I must tip my hat to the many men and women who helped to create such a unique and vital addition to the Christian Study Center. The past ten years have shown that Pascal's is committed to excellent coffee. Through the course of various employees, the coffee bar, which serves Sweetwater organic, fair trade, locally roasted coffee, has continually given thoughtful consideration to the entire coffee process, from our coffee's origins to the final touches of a latte. As we enter into our eleventh year, I am assured that Pascal's will continue to be an important part of the CSC and the university neighborhood."



Laurie Goddard, Manager

Donate to Our Chair Project!



"You'd be tired too, if someone sat on you for ten years."

Special Gifts

We would like to thank Linda and David Hagar for their gift given in honor of daughter, Sarah Evangelisti.

Our furniture is well used and well worn. It was been patched, pieced, and repaired. Although we were able to collect some funds in the past to modestly furnish the classroom we have not been able to replace the long ailing wooden furniture in the building. Students, small groups, and faculty all enjoy use of the building and we look forward to being good stewards of the building with which we are entrusted. Please help us by contributing to our chair fund for the TENTH ANNIVERSARY!

Encouragements

Friend and advisor to the Center, Professor Norman Lewis, was named University of Florida Teacher of the Year for 2010! Norm worked as a journalist and editor for 25 years but after receiving a PhD from University of Maryland in 2007, he became an assistant professor of journalism at UF. Congratulations, Norm.

Board member emeritus, and long-time advisor John Sommerville, continues to speak around the country, as well as serve the Center. His newest book, published by Eerdmans, is titled *Religious Ideas for Secular Universities*.



A thought from Blaise Pascal, the 17th century philosopher and mathematician in whose honor the coffeehouse is named:

"Knowing God without knowing our own wretchedness makes for pride. Knowing our own wretchedness without knowing God makes for despair. Knowing Jesus Christ strikes the balance because he shows us both God and our own wretchedness." *Pensées*

Building Bridges (continued from page 2)

Laura: I know I've been challenged. There is certainly not a monolithic opinion, as you know.

Andrea: Even pastors from the community could really benefit from some of this, especially when you're in a university town like Gainesville. One would hope there are people from all of the churches who are going to be a little bit more involved with the intellectual issues that the Center brings to the floor.

Howard: God calls us to love Him with our heart, soul and mind, and I'm not sure how well we do with the mind bit. This is something that, especially in a University town, you would hope that more congregations, more leaders in the Christian community, would be taking some initiative, and the Christian Study Center is one of the few venues that we have, I think, that really does this with any real sense of depth. So that's been good and we are thankful for it.