The Family of God in a Post-racial World: The Palmer Lecture Series

It was fitting that SPU Assistant Professor of Theology Brian Bantum should introduce the speaker for the 54th annual Alfred S. Palmer Lecture on January 27. The speaker was J. Kameron Carter, Ph.D., associate professor of theology and black church studies at Duke Divinity School. Nine years before, Bantum had been a student of Carter’s in a class called “Race and Modernity.” Carter also sat on Bantum’s dissertation committee. “What Dr. J. Kameron Carter taught me,” Bantum said in his introduction of Carter, “was that theology was not merely about the creativity of lifting words off the page, not just about the gut-ripping truth that it can give to us, but that at its heart theology is a communal activity, something that not only transforms the words but transforms the people with whom you do it.”

Carter, author of the much acclaimed Race A Theological Account (Oxford University Press, 2008), titled his lecture “Matthew’s Melancholy, or The Scriptural Economy of Post-racial Identity” According to Matthew Arnold. “Taking as his text Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach,” his collection of essays titled Culture and Anarchy, and Daniel Defoe’s poem “The True Born Englishman,” Carter spoke of the meaning of ‘race’ in a ‘post-racial’ world — “a world of racism without races,” where, he explained, the target of racism is not skin, or biological life, but race, the “stoutness of the cultural body politic.” “Part of my work,” he said, “has been to meditate on the procedures by which Christianity gets melded to a kind of western sensibility and establishes the normal — the normal that is the beautiful, the aesthetically right.” The way Christianity does this, he says, is “by derming the other, ‘other.’”

We counteract this “normalizing Christianity” by the witness of Jesus in the world. Carter explained that in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), we must see ourselves not as the one showing mercy, but as the one in the ditch. “It’s a different kind of missionary orientation — an orientation rooted in the blessings that are resident in those that I’m meeting — because God has already reached them, even before I showed up.” We should not ask how we can improve our Christianity, says Carter. “We need to take that question off the table and press the other question: what does it mean to follow the God who has embraced us in a new family of belonging, "Jesus is telling us we are now woven inside a new structure of kin and kin, inside new bonds of who we take our people to be. He restores the bloodlines." This is the Good News, Carter explains. "We now belong to God."

An annual event at SPU since 1978, the Palmer Lecture Series "seeks to bring the best minds and hearts in Wesleyan Theology and biblical studies to campus to discuss the Christian faith from a Wesleyan perspective.” The lecturership is held in honor of Alfred Palmer, a pastoral leader in Western Washington for over half a century.

Lectio Update: Matthew and Romans

After journeying through Genesis 1–Exodus 19 Autumn Quarter under the guidance of Professor of Old Testament Frank Spina, the SPU community and beyond explored the Gospel of Matthew during Winter Quarter. Associate Professor of Theology David Nienhuis, Ph.D., served as faculty guide for the 11-week series. Nienhuis is author of Not by Paul Alone: The Formation of the Catholic Epistle Collection and the Christian Canon (Baylor University Press, 2007). Beginning March 28, Assistant Professor of Theology Daniel Castelo, Ph.D., will be leading us through a 12-week Spring Quarter study of Romans. In December 2010, Castelo was named a recipient of the prestigious Templeton Award for Theological Promise for his book The Apathetic God: Exploring the Contemporary Relevance of Divine Impassibility (Wipf and Stock, 2009).

To date, more than 2,600 people have subscribed to Lectio. Guided Bible Reading, and readers and podcast listeners come from 29 countries. For a free subscription to Lectio readings and podcasts, and information about the Center for Biblical and Theological Education, visit spu.edu/cbte.

Upcoming Events

Paul T. Walls Lecture in Wesleyan Theology

Embracing the (W)hole Gospel

Tuesday, May 10, 2011
SPU campus
Cost: $25 (includes lunch and dinner)

For more information, email cbte@spu.edu.
Discipleship in the School of Theology

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. Jesus told the 11 in Matthew 28:19. Two millennia later, the Church still places primary importance on this command. The School of Theology actively participates in multiple facets of discipleship—including faculty-led discipleship groups, Wesleyan class meetings, and one-on-one mentorships. Focusing particularly on discipleship groups, SOT faculty— including professors Daniel Castelo, Kerry Deardahl, Robert Dwivedl, Jeff Keuss, Sara Kostocs, Doug Kookala, Mike Langford, David Nienhuis, Ed Smyth, Doug Strong, and others—fulfill SPU’s mission to engage the culture and change the world. SOT faculty members believe that their personal investment in students in small-group settings maximizes students’ growth and development so that they are best able to engage the world. “Who should be engaging the culture?” asks Professor of Educational Ministry Ed Smyth, who has discipleship groups for men for 27 years. “Christians who happen to be academically trained in some professional way in their life,” he replies, answering his own question. “I believe Christians who happen to be doctors, teachers, pastors (yes, pastors), biologists, etc., will have the greatest opportunity to change the world.”

Not only do discipleship groups provide students an opportunity for growth in community, but they also shape the lives of teachers. “Small-group involvement deepens my awareness of the real issues with which students struggle,” says Professor of Theological Studies Kerry Dearborn, “which enriches my prayer life and my ability to make more helpful counseling connections when teaching in the classroom.”

“A movement has started to bring alumni together to discuss the integration of faith into the workplace.”

SBE/SOT Connect: Faith in Work

Husband and wife Tyler and Kimberlee Gordine graduated from SPU in 2008. Kim works at a real estate office, and Tyler works in Admissions at SPU. They love to have fellow graduates over to their tiny condo for dinner and conversation.

One way or another, the conversation tends toward a discussion of lives as young professionals. A common trend in these conversations centers on how difficult it can be to apply the ethical truths learned at SPU to the circumstantial situations that arise in the workplace. Many of the Gordines’ friends who are School of Theology alumni are currently employed in the business world, and many who studied in the School of Business are serving in ministry. Most, however, live somewhere in between. Ultimately, these alumni long for the help of Christian community as they address day-to-day challenges.

A movement has started to bring young alumni together to discuss the integration of faith into the workplace. Many students took Christian Ethics or Business Ethics at SPU, and have a desire for further perspective on these topics. SPU’s School of Theology and School of Business and Economics hope to encourage their graduates (and others) to join together in groups for the purpose of redefining thought in the help of community. They are calling this venture “SBE/SOT Connect.”

Gatherings will consist of one-on-one small-group cadres for young alumni to network, reconnect with the university, and continue to refine how to live like Christ in the workplace. The community time will be guided by a short reading from theology or the business world. If you are interested in becoming a part of SBE/SOT Connect or would like more information, email Jason Williams at janewilliams.senate@gmail.com.

TSU Lectures: A Faithful Interpretation of Scripture; God’s Role in Conversion

In February the PSU Theology Student Union (TSU) hosted two free public lectures on intriguing and important topics. Both drew large audiences. The first, on February 2, was titled “Reading Scripture in a Divided Church,” and featured one of the world’s leading scholars on the theological interpretation of the Bible — Stephen Fowl, Ph.D., professor of New Testament at Loyola University Maryland. Fowl is co-author of Reading in Communion (Wipf & Stock, 1999), and author of The Theological Interpretation of Scripture (Cascade Books, 2004), Philippines: The Missions of the Nineteenth Century (Cascade Books, 2005), and Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation (Wipf & Stock, 2005).

Fowl spoke of the practices of forgiveness and reconciliation as “essential for engaging Scripture without dividing the Body of Christ” — a body that has been divided for more than 500 years. Church division, he says, is the result, fundamentally, of a failure of love, and “in much more closely tied to a failure to maintain a certain form of common life rather than to irreconcilable disputes over how to interpret this or that scriptural text.”

The second lecture was a look at “Divine and Human Action in Conversion” on February 14, featuring William J. Abraham, D.D., D.Phil. Abraham is the Albert C. Outler Professor of Wesley Studies in the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. He is the author of Creating the Threshold of Divine Revelation (Eerdmans, 2007); Grace and Conversion in Christian Theology (Clarendon Press, 1998); and The Logic of Evangelism (Eerdmans, 1989). In the light of John Wesley’s systematic rejection of Calvinism as a faith in an essay titled “Predestination Calmly Reconsidered,” Abraham focused on the conversion narrative of Tantia Goricheva, a young student of philosophy in Leningrad who had led a live-transforming encounter with the living God while claiming the Lord’s Prayer and doing yoga.

Abraham explained that Goricheva in describing her conversion used conventional “evangelical conversion” terminology, including “the wind of the Spirit blows where it wills.” "Being born again,” “second birth,” “my heart was opened,” and “new creation through grace alone.” Yet, he noted, “Tantia Goricheva knew absolutely nothing of the world of conventional evangelical pieties.”

In examining her “exclusionary cosmic language,” Abraham then examined from a Wesleyan standpoint the question, “How might we begin to unravel acceptions in which God and God alone is said to be the cause of our salvation?”

Created by SPU School of Theology students, the Theology Student Union is a student-run organization of undergraduates theology majors and minors who are “intentionally reflecting and acting upon God’s self-revelation to humanity, particularly as it relates to, critiques, and envelopes our culture.” The TSU seeks to create a bond among School of Theology students through discretion and participation in events and forums inside and outside the classroom. SPU Assistant Professor of Old Testament Bo Lim serves as TSU advisor.

Discernment Weekend

Is God calling me to a seminary education? If so, where should I go? What program is right for me? On February 25–26, the School of Theology facilitated a new event called “Discernment Weekend” for prospective students who were asking themselves these very questions. The goal for the weekend was to create an environment that would help them discern their vocation. Meeting faculty, staff, current students, ministry partners, and Dean of Theology Doug Strong, students encountered the theological interpretation of the Bible created by SPU School of Theology students, the Theology Student Union, and the TSU advisor. The weekend, “Interruption,” was intentional. While “interview” or “experience weekend” implies that one must either interview well or earn an entrance or simply perceive the benefits of the program, “discernment” points toward the will of God, both individually and corporately. The event was named “Discernment Weekend” to encourage this kind of reflection when prospective students consider entering the Master of Divinity or Master of Arts in Theology Program at Seattle Pacific. By the end of the weekend, 18 prospective students and their spouses had received information, interaction, prayer, and commissioning to discern God’s will for their lives — in this program or otherwise. It was a blessed weekend for all.

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The faculty and I enjoyed the chance to see so many of our alumni. We’re now planning the School of Theology alumni breakfast for the Saturday morning of next year’s Homecoming in January 2012, and we hope that you’ll join us!

Together in Christ's service,

Doug Strong
Dean, School of Theology

Parachurch Tuition Benefit Program

While many local congregations heed the call of serving local communities and sending missionaries to the ends of the earth, parachurch organizations seek similar ends outside church walls. Typically crossing denominational lines, these organizations engage in both social welfare and evangelism. Providing further opportunity to connect with local Christian organizations, the School of Theology is pleased to announce the Parachurch Tuition Benefit Program.

The program offers a 50 percent discount on tuition for full-time and part-time staff employed at InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, The Navigators, Young Life, Youth for Christ, Campus Crusade for Christ, and World Vision, allowing Seattle Pacific University to become a competitive destination for parachurch employees seeking further education. This attractive proposal presents new opportunities for local parachurch organizations to allow employees access to a seminary education, simultaneously allowing SPU to become an affordable destination for parachurch employees seeking further education.

Dean Doug Strong

School of Theology

Dean and Associate Professor Receive Tenure

The granting of tenure is a significant event for both a university and a professor. Whenever a university grants tenure to a professor, it indicates a mutual commitment: the university’s long-term commitment to encourage the instruction and research of the professor, and the professor’s commitment to further the mission of the university. Thus, the School of Theology is pleased to announce that David Nienhuis, SPU associate professor of New Testament studies, and Doug Strong, SPU School of Theology dean and professor of the history of Christianity, have been granted tenure. Dr. Strong, an ordained United Methodist pastor who has served as dean of the School of Theology since 2007, earned his master of divinity and doctorate from Princeton Theological Seminary and his doctorate from the University of Aberdeen.

David Nienhuis

From The Dean

During SPU’s 2011 Homecoming celebration in January, the School of Theology hosted its second annual complimentary alumni breakfast. What a great opportunity for alumni from different classes to come together in order to catch up with old friends, to reconnect with School of Theology faculty, to meet with people they hadn’t known previously, and to find out about many of the happenings in the School. After eating, all the alumni had a time to share what they were doing and bring everyone up to date on their current activities. Tyler Gostine (class of 2008) and Brooke Willis (class of 2009) made a presentation on the “SBE/SOT Connect” program (see the article about the program in this issue) — inviting all young alumni (classes 2001–10) to attend a monthly Connect group, where alumni will gather to network with one another for fellowship and to talk about the integration of faith and work in their lives.

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Tyler Gostine

The Undergraduate Major Capstone Course

A distinctive of the graduate program in theology at SPU is its threefold emphasis on Academy, Abbey, and Apostolate. While we believe that a graduate program needs to be academically rigorous, we also believe that our students need to be sent out into the surrounding community (as part of the apostolate), and to be formed and transformed in relationships with one another (as happens within a monastery or abbey). These three things are important for our undergraduate students. The Academy is a given, and with SPU’s motto of “Engaging the culture, changing the world,” it seems natural to think about being sent out as apostles. But what is it about our undergraduate program that resembles an abbey? This past fall, Assistant Professor of Theological Studies Sara Koensig found the answer in a Capstone class she team-taught with Dean Doug Strong. Here is her report:

“Every student with a major in the School of Theology is required to take a ‘Capstone’ class at the end of his or her undergraduate education. This class asks the students to look back on what they have learned during their entire undergraduate career, and also look forward to their future vocation. The 10 seniors in this fall’s class were amazing individuals. Their life experiences — both painful and joyful — had shaped them in profound ways. They felt called to announce that David Nienhuis, SPU associate professor of New Testament studies, and Doug Strong, SPU School of Theology dean and professor of the

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