

compiled by Amanda Fraser



Rabbi Rami Questions Hate in our Scriptures

Last month I attended the last of a series of talks offered by Rabbi Rami Shapiro, scholar-in-residence at Congregation Micah. Rabbi Rami is Greater Nashville's most provocative and thought-inspiring spiritual teacher and mystic, as well as a sought-after international speaker on world religions.

His recent series at Congregation Micah explored the sacred texts of the "Abrahamic" faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. During the last few meetings centered on Islam, Rami and Congregation Micah's rabbis also invited representatives of the Nashville Islamic Center to offer comments on the Qur'an.

What made this series of talks and discussions stand out was the gale of emotion and consternation expressed by some of the Jewish and Christian attendees. This was evidenced by a slew of strong emails that were sent to Micah's rabbis as well as Rabbi Rami prior to the final evening of the series.

To provide a little background, one objective of the class was to explore issues created by sections of the Torah, the New Testament, and the Qur'an that display hate or violence directed toward its sister religions.

For example, the Qur'an offers: "Muslims are warned against befriending Jews..." (5:51). The Jews are ...cursed by Allah, and they will be destroyed" (4:47), "The Jews ridiculed Muhammad" (2:104, 4:46), and "Jews...try to lure Muslims away from Islam" (3:99).

The New Testament proclaims, "Jews persecute all prophets who foretold the coming of Christ who they have betrayed and murdered (Acts 7:51-

53). 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 states that Jews persecute Christians in order to prevent them from bringing salvation to the Gentiles, and this way have earned the wrath of God that is about to be heaped upon them.

And the Torah offers, "But in the cities of these peoples [Canaan] that the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall utterly destroy them...as the Lord your God has commanded; that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices" (Deut. 20-10-18).

So the question that seems to have raised the ire of some attendees became, "Does God/Allah teach hate?"

It appears clear from the scriptures cited above that "all three Abrahamic faiths worship a god of war." Likewise in our times, all three threaten to "engulf the entire world in a thermonuclear bonfire of theological vanities."

Rami's answer to this question was this: "God does not teach hate. People teach hate because doing so furthers their ends. Putting their own hate into the mouth of God is a powerful way of promoting their own agenda." This is what compilers of our sacred texts, in many cases, have done—in order to win adherents to their new religions and justify waging war against their enemies.

He suggests that "until we confront the violence sanctioned by our sacred texts, and root out human evil masquerading as divine will, we cannot free ourselves from committing atrocities in the name of God."

The response from that evening's attendees was thoughtful and engaged. One woman recommended that a group of people review our sacred texts and remove sections that attribute statements of hate and condoned violence to God/Allah. A powerful suggestion. A representative

Because there is nothing besides God's body,
I try to show reverence for all things.
~ Hafiz

from the Islamic Center of Nashville volunteered to host representatives of Nashville's rabbis at the Islamic Center for dialogue. Another attendee spoke about how many of today's Muslim students have never been introduced to the inflammatory or Jew-hating language in the Qur'an. A typical response is "that's crap" (choosing not to honor the questionable language). There was much proactive hope in the group.



Three Gods Walk into a Bar

On April 16-18 and Apr 22-25, the People's Branch Theatre will present Three Gods Walk into a Bar at the Belcourt Theater.

The setting is a bar in Mount Olympus over Easter weekend: The Gods "don't have many worshippers left, they can't get their thunderbolts to work, and suddenly they're in the middle of a hostile takeover and they have 48 hours to vacate the premises." (www.belcourt.org)

Billed as "a funny and touching way to explore some of the deepest questions we as a species ask ourselves", this play looks tenderly at the struggles of organized religion, including Christianity.

Showtime is 7:30. Tickets are \$18 and \$10 for students and seniors. April 22's Wednesday showing offers a "Pay-What-You-Can" night. For more info, visit www.belcourt.org or call 615-846-3150. Hope to see you there!



Sojourners on Nashville's Musical Activists

Be sure to check out the April issue of *Sojourners* magazine for a



wonderful story on Nashville's spiritual activism music scene. Featuring artists like Derek Webb, Emmylou Harris, Jars of Clay, Ashley Cleveland — author Bob Smietana (*Tennessean* religion writer) captures the spirit of Nashville's musicians with a con-



science.

The article emphasizes these artists' commitment to, not only singing, but initiating projects that actually help the poor and work to restore justice in urban and international settings. These projects include Blood:Water Mission (digging wells in impoverished African communities), Compassion International (child sponsorship), and The Home Foundation (eradicating sex trafficking).

But don't read it here, read about it in *Sojourners*, the consistently inspiring journal of faith and politics edited by Jim Wallis. Jim is America's favorite moderate/progressive evangelical spokesperson, and author of the best selling *God's Politics*. *Sojourners* can

also be accessed at www.sojo.net where it offers a wonderful e-newsletter.



Inter-Faith Ordination

If helping others is a natural part of your desire to fulfill your life's purpose, consider an Inter-Faith

Ministry with the Congregational Church of Practical Theology. The C.C.P.T. is a nationally recognized church that has offered a self-paced Inter-Faith Seminary Program since 1970. The C.C.P.T. National Headquarters is located in Nashville.

Serving as an Inter-Faith Minister may be an important and fulfilling part of your spiritual growth as well as enhancing your professional goals. This Seminary program appeals to counselors, holistic health practitioners, and individuals seeking to enhance the mind-body-spirit balance in their lives.

For more information, call 615-662-4592 and speak with Rev. Pam Winkler, Ph.D. Seminary students enrolling this Spring will be ordained during the 2009 C.C.P.T. Ministerial Conference held in September at the Nashville Gaylord Opryland Conference Center.



Nashville Clergy support Metro General Hospital

If you are a pastor, imam, rabbi, sanga

leader, or other worship leader and feel led to support efforts by local clergy to secure needed federal aid for Metro Nashville General Hospital, please contact the recently formed coalition of congregations. Among those initiating action to maintain Metro General's important services are Rev. Henry Blaze, 615-292-3362 or hblaze@comcast.net; Rev. Judi Hoffman; Rev. Jay Voorhes; Rev. Jerry Maynard; and a growing list of concerned clergy. You can also contact Tony Garr at tgarr@thcc2.org.

"The Metro General – Meharry Medical College partnership is a unique national health care resource that is deserving of federal financial support," said Reverend Blaze. Please contact one of these individuals to confirm the status of this issue and support this much needed community safety-net.

If you would like to publicize your worship service, spiritual organization, meditation group, or upcoming event, please send an email to Spirit News at namastar@netzero.net, or call Amanda at 615-297-5390.