



*Brianne Collins poses in front of T.E. Lawrence's (Lawrence of Arabia) Seven Pillars of Wisdom in the Jordanian Desert.*

## Journey Gives Student Brianne Collins a New Direction

Throughout my time in Israel and Jordan, I cultivated my passion for history and religion. As a result of my preparation for study in Israel and my time abroad, I have discovered my passion for the Middle East and the Christians of that

---

I am confident that the Middle East will have something to do with my future research.

---

region. I have also developed a parallel interest in the Byzantine Empire and the Crusades, which I was also able to explore through the various sites we visited. As a result, I have altered my direction in life.

Originally, I was a behavioural sciences major; however, as of the fall of 2007, I officially added a second major: history. I am also planning to apply for graduate studies in history in the fall of 2009. I have not yet decided which aspect of history I will focus on, but I am confident that the Middle East will have something to do with my future research.

At present, I am looking into learning Arabic and possibly Hebrew and Greek to prepare myself for the tasks that lie ahead. Needless to say, my ventures in Israel and Jordan have made a great impact on my life. I have a love for the people of the Middle East and a heart for the victims of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Now, more than a year later, I am still processing my trip and I expect that that will not stop for quite some time. ■

## Helping British Christians Reach Out

For centuries Christianity was the faith of the British Isles: state churches were dutifully attended by the masses, the clergy administered the sacraments and provided spiritual direction to the faithful from cradle to grave, English legal codes reflected Christian moral values, and all facets of society derived their meaning, energy, and cohesion from the Christian religion.

For more than a century, however, the decline of religion – especially Christianity – in Britain has been a prominent subject of analysis. A survey conducted in 2000 entitled *Soul of Britain* claims that only 15 percent of the population attends church each week. The most pessimistic estimates, based on current rates of accelerated decline, predict that by 2016 a mere 0.6 percent will still be regular churchgoers.

Scholars debate whether Britain is actually undergoing secularization or a new spiritual revolution with no Christian orientation. However, it has clearly entered the post-Christian era.

Recently, however, some of Britain's churches have attempted to respond to this de-Christianizing trend by developing creative missional strategies for reengaging the nation with its Christian memory. Churches of several denominations in the towns of Keynsham and Saltford, near Bristol, a "sacred city" from a bygone era, are collaborating on a program called More to Life 08. Their goal is to encourage the non-churchgoing public to consider seriously the call of Jesus to an "abundant life" by discovering spiritual signposts that manifest themselves in popular passions.

Believing that "God plays in every scene of life," they are inviting their communities on a year-long journey of engagement via monthly presentations on topics of contemporary interest, such as travel, family life, sport, hope, gardening, food,

politics and media, music and the arts, and recreation.

Each month, public awareness of the particular theme is heightened both by coordinated events in schools, clubs, and neighbourhoods and by visits by prominent British media, sports, religious, and literary personalities. Olympic Gold medalist Steph Cook, former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey, “extreme” traveller Benedict Allen, and acclaimed travel writer William Dalrymple are among those scheduled to make guest appearances.

Dr Charles Nienkirchen helped start More to Life 08 by delivering a weeklong series of evening lectures in late January on that month’s theme: sacred travel. He entitled his series Sacred Travel and the Meaning of the Season of Epiphany. He spoke in several venues, including the oldest Methodist chapel in the world (in Bristol), and his lectures included such topic as The Renaissance of Wonder, The Christian Calendar as a Guide to the Inner Journey, The Meaning of Epiphany, The Magi as Our Mentors, and The Church as the Pilgrim People of God. During the day, he met with individuals and participated in small-group discussions on the nature of the spiritual quest.

Dr Nienkirchen was “humbled” by the invitation to speak at More to Life 08. “It was an honour,” he said, “to be asked to contribute to such a soulful, missional experiment.” He sees this British project as being “relevant to churches in all western countries undergoing revitalization who are seeking to connect in a winsome, incarnational way with their host societies in which ‘Christendom’ has mostly, if not completely, evaporated.” He hopes that the methods of redemptive, community engagement embodied in More to Life 08, though conceived in a British context, will offer some inspiration and guidance for the future of “Christendom-trapped,” Canadian churches that are trying to sustain a vibrant spiritual presence in a country that is also undergoing cultural transformation. **E**



*Dr Charles Nienkirchen (left) in dialogue with a member of the Turkish community in Istanbul during a Down Ancient Paths experience.*

## Opening the Rich, Spiritual Treasury of Christianity

This edition of anthem features the thought and work of Dr Charles Nienkirchen, Professor of Christian History and Spirituality at Ambrose.

In addition to his teaching load at Ambrose, Dr Nienkirchen, (PhD, University of Waterloo) is a longtime Visiting Professor of Christian Spirituality at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto. He has also taught courses on Christian spirituality at numerous colleges, seminaries, and universities across Canada and the United States. In addition, he has served as a scholar-in-residence at Oxford University, England and Tantar Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem. Most recently, he was visiting professor in Residence at Tamilnadu Theological Seminary in Madurai, South India. He is also on the faculty of The Pecos Benedictine Abbey School for Spiritual Direction near Santa Fe, New Mexico.

For over 25 years, Charles has expressed his commitment to promoting spiritual renewal through conferences, public lectures, newspaper interviews, television appearances, and conducting

ecumenical retreats for numerous churches and Christian organizations. As a world traveller and participant in Christian-Muslim dialogue, his personal and professional pursuits have taken him across North America, to Central America, the British Isles, Western and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

His travel study program, Down Ancient Paths, which recently won an award from the Government of Alberta, is designed to expose students and lifelong learners among clergy and laity to the rich spiritual treasury of the oldest traditions of Christianity. His publications include *A.B. Simpson and the Pentecostal Movement: A Study in Continuity, Crisis, and Change* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1992) and numerous other scholarly and popular articles on selected aspects of Christian history and spirituality.

As Canadian evangelicals seek to reach a society that is increasingly spiritual but decreasingly Christian, Dr Nienkirchen points out ways in which we can reconnect our communities with Christ and takes us on a journey through our Christian past. **E**

*Dr Charles Nienkirchen helps missionaries increase effectiveness by raising their understanding of religion and culture.*



## Missionaries Gain Better Understanding of Religion and Culture

In November, 2007, Gerald and Dorothy Hogenbirk, Regional Developers for the C&MA in Central Asia, Europe, and the Middle East gathered with 33 C&MA field workers for a six-day conference near Budapest, Hungary. The keynote speaker was Dr Charles Nienkirchen, Professor of History and Christian Spirituality at Ambrose. The objective of the conference was to increase the participants' effectiveness by raising their understanding of the religions and cultures of the countries in which they serve.

Dr Nienkirchen lectured on the following topics: The Geopolitical Landscape of the World in 2007: No Illusions about the World in Which We Really Live; World Christianity: Current Global Trajectories and Regional Mosaics; Christ Versus Muhammad: Addressing the Islamic Challenge; Down Ancient Paths: A Personal Quest for Christian Antiquity in the Context of Postmodern Spirituality. He also made himself available for spiritual consultation with individual missionaries. In reflecting on the event, Dr Nienkirchen

noted that it had "provided an opportunity for international workers to have an experience of continuing education which is not always available to them in their locations of service."

---

**We were all amazed at his grasp of the issues and his ability to be able to bring this together in a succinct, practical and understandable way.**

---

In a letter to Dr George Durance, Gerald Hogenbrink summed up the experience of those in attendance. "We want to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to you for allowing Dr Charles Nienkirchen to be the guest lecturer, mentor, and friend for our leaders. We were all amazed at his grasp of the issues and his ability to be able to bring this together in a succinct, practical, and

understandable way. Not only did he take the time to prepare and lecture, but [he also] listened to our 33 leaders. He customized helpful suggestions at points of need in personal consultations. Charles' academic excellence and passionate heart for God and His work blessed us all beyond measure. Words cannot express our collective gratitude for Charles and to you both for allowing him to clear his schedule for this crucial leadership gathering... We would be very hard pressed to find anyone apart from Charles who could have given us this unique blend of expertise in history, present trends in this vast region, as well as spiritual formation."

In the next few months the Hogenbirks are planning regional follow up strategy discussions based upon what was gleaned from the time together with Dr Nienkirchen. **■**

## Future Down Ancient Paths Opportunities

- Ethiopia: January, 2010
- Summer School in the Holy Land (Israel/Jordan/Syria): May, 2010
- Oberammergau Passion Play: July, 2010
- Holy Days and Holidays in Egypt: December, 2010 – January, 2011
- Summer School in the “Other” Holy Land (Turkey and Patmos): May, 2011
- Celtic Landscapes: July, 2011
- Ancient Christian Traditions in North Africa: January, 2012

## Down Ancient Paths Highlights

- Hiking in the Negev Desert near Mamshit in Israel with a seasoned Jewish guide, Allan Rabinowitz, to contemplate desert themes in the Old Testament
- Singing in the Church of St. Polycarp in Izmir (Smyrna)
- At sunrise, on a chartered boat heading to the holy island of Patmos, listening to Dr Paul Spilsbury's stimulating lecture on the main themes of the Book of Revelation
- Riding camels and climbing Mt. Sinai under a full winter moon in a star-studded sky
- Being the second international group to cross the border between Greek and Turkish Cyprus after its mysterious opening in 2004. The border had been closed for over 30 years due to hostilities
- Silent meditative moments at the Church of Dominus Flevit on the Mt. of Olives overlooking the Old City of Jerusalem;
- Hot air ballooning over the world famous cave churches of Cappadocia in central Turkey;
- Experiencing an “Elijah-style” lecture on desert spirituality by Rev. Dr Panayiotis Papageorgiou in the mist shrouded hilltop ruins of the Monastery of St. Simon Stylite the Younger outside of Antioch in eastern Turkey
- A conversation with Hasan Abu Nimah (Director of the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies and Jordan's past Ambassador to the United Nations and the Vatican) in Amman, Jordan, through which we were able to gain an Arab perspective on the conflict between Islam and the West
- Cruising the waters of the Nile River to observe peasant life as it was in biblical times
- Discussing the biblical narrative on the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-13) in the late afternoon setting sun at a palace of the Queen of Sheba on the outskirts of Ethiopia's holy city of Axum (where the Ark of the Covenant is said to reside). We also compared the details of the biblical account with the one recounted in the Kebr Nagast, the Ethiopian national epic



*Dr Paul Spilsbury Ambrose Dean of Theology speaks to a group in Ethiopia during a session at the site of the palace of the Queen of Sheba. Dr Spilsbury co-lead this Down Ancient Paths trip with Dr Nienkirchen (lower right).*

# What Down Ancient Paths Means to Me

**M**y journey down ancient paths with Dr Charles Nienkirchen had a significant and lasting impact on my life, and particularly on my vocational journey. In searching for the early church, I discovered the connection between suffering and Christian hospitality. Vocationally, this has led me to explore the ways people engage in the activities of peace and community in post-conflict settings.

– Julie (Kerr) Kaye (BA '05)  
*Julie is teaching sociology at Ambrose.*

My adventures with Down Ancient Paths have been my most valuable educational experiences. Since my travels, the Bible has been brought to life in a way I could not have imagined before I ventured to these historic lands. We traveled with and studied under countless experts who expanded our minds and facilitated our personal transformation. There is definitely no better way to learn or to travel. I would

recommend Down Ancient Paths to anyone.

– David Klassen (BA '07)  
*Dave is currently in Nairobi, Kenya, with Youngsters 4 Christ.*

My opportunity to visit the country of Turkey was one of the most formative experiences of my life. It encouraged me to re-read and reconsider the lives of first-century Christians and churches in a way that has deeply impacted my faith. It challenged my perception of the world of the New Testament, and as a result, has greatly influenced my academic life. It opened up to me parts of the world and parts of myself that I would not have discovered without the experience of travel.

– Sherri Trautwein (BTh '03)  
*Sherri works at McMaster University on the public relations/recruitment team and is heading for doctoral studies at Toronto School of Theology.* 