

# FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

## PTS Campus Community Responds to September 11

### Muslim Imam Leads Chapel Service

by Barbara A. Chaapel

“The only way forward is the way of reconciliation and trust,” said Richard Young, PTS professor of the history of religions, speaking in Miller Chapel two weeks after the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. “Salaam and Shalom must include all people. We must open ourselves to each other and in so doing, we open ourselves to God.”

Attempting to enact those commitments, the Seminary invited Imam Hamad Chebli, the leader of the Islamic Society of Central New Jersey, to speak in the daily chapel service on September 28. It was the first time a non-Christian has led a chapel service at the Seminary in at least twenty years, and perhaps ever.

Refusing Young’s offer to remove the Bible from the pulpit before he spoke, Chebli told worshipers that the Torah, the New Testament, and the Qur’an all reveal the same God, and were all given to the human community for edification. “None of them teaches violence or gives permission to take up the sword,” the imam said, urging students to read all three with open hearts and minds.

At the end of his remarks, he presented PTS president Thomas W. Gillespie with a copy of the Qur’an.

Following the chapel service, Chebli, a native of Lebanon who was educated in Cairo, addressed Young’s class on comparative missiology.

He began by defining terms: The word Allah means God, but a God beyond symbolism or gender or the capacity of the

human mind to know. The word Islam means peace. The word *jihad*, which most English-speaking people translate as “holy war,” in fact means “struggle”—not in the sense of fighting, but in the sense of struggling against ignorance and injustice. “We are waging *jihad* right now in this classroom against ignorance,” he told the students. He also said that there is no verse in the Qur’an that gives a Muslim permission to kill or to destroy property under the concept of *jihad*.

He corrected other misconceptions about Islam and about Arabs. Arabs make up less than two percent of Muslims, he said. Eight million Muslims live in the United

States, four million of whom were born here. These citizens, he said, are proud to be Americans. “Muslims not only were here before Christopher Columbus arrived, many also came with Christopher

Columbus,” he said. He urged students not to generalize about all Muslims, just as one cannot generalize about all Jews or all Christians. “Among people of all faiths there are infidels and fanatics,” he said. “Just as there were people of all faiths, including Muslims, killed in the World Trade Center.”

In response to questions about why Muslim fundamentalists consider America the enemy, Chebli explained that there are five basic elements in Islam that must be protected. They are the soul (“pornography would threaten the soul”), the mind (“alcohol and drugs impose on the mind”), property (“invasion of people’s property by authorities is a threat”), religion (“one cannot destroy either churches or mosques”), and community (“the ability to live within one’s tradition is essential”). While he said that the terrorists were not motivated by the ideals of

Islam, nor did he justify the violence, he did suggest that there were reasons for it. “We must look for the roots of the violence and ask why these fanatics and terrorists believe their lives are worth nothing,” he said. “There is a reason. If we find it, we will be safe.”

Chebli urged the PTS community to continue dialogue with Muslims and people of other faiths and to learn more about Islam. Young and his faculty colleagues Nancy Duff, Paul Rorem, Mark Taylor, and student Kiran Young attended a Friday prayer service at Chebli’s mosque the week of the attacks. Young himself had traveled there on September 11, “when things were falling apart, to express my concern.”



Imam Chebli (left) presents a copy of the Qur’an to President Gillespie.

Photo: Chrissie Knight

### Trustees Address Faith, Civil Liberties, and Security

PTS trustees Justin Johnson, a Pennsylvania Superior Court justice, and Tom Johnson, an attorney for Kirkpatrick & Lockhart in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, made a presentation titled “Faith, Civil Liberties, and Security” at the Seminary almost exactly a month after the September 11 attacks.

Noting the Japanese internment after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Tom Johnson said, “We don’t have the very best record of striking the balance in the right places.” So with an increased need for security, he asserted, comes a need to be vigilant in maintaining those civil liberties crucial to the health of American society.

Specifically discussed were the antiterrorism act of 2001, the implications of new law enforcement technology, search and seizure laws, racial profiling, national identification cards, and freedom of speech.

But their concern extended beyond the law. “For me, as a Presbyterian, it’s my responsibility—if not as an attorney,

## Student Life Changed in Turbulent Times

by Erika Marksbury

PTS students are diverse in their reactions to the events of September 11, and they've decorated their dormitory room doors in ways that reflect not only that diversity but also their yearnings for both peace and justice. Posters that call for "Justice Not Vengeance" can be seen on many doors, as can American flags or the oft-quoted "God Bless America." Others proclaim "Not in My Name," display sermon transcripts, or offer drawings of doves. But the attacks on the United States inspired students to do more than just redecorate their doors; on campus now exists a renewed yearning to understand both neighbors and selves, and a profound desire to learn how to minister in this context.

Students who were on campus a week before classes started joined faculty and staff on the afternoon of September 11 for a



Tom Johnson (left) and Justin Johnson

Photo: Beth Godfrey

if not as a judge, then certainly as a man of God—to speak out when I see oppression anywhere," said Justin Johnson. "And we're in a time right now when it's so easy to condemn people who are not in a position to defend themselves. It's so easy in trying to make up for the grief that we feel to strike out at somebody. This is the kind of opportunity that's available to our denomination and that's available to each of us...to stand up for the downtrodden."

Students, faculty, staff, and trustees welcomed this opportunity to discuss—as Americans and as Christians—issues important to the future of the nation.

hastily called service in a crowded Miller Chapel. It was a somber and moving service of song, Scripture, and prayers offered by those in attendance. The PTS community came together in a moment of shock and grief to be in God's presence.

In following weeks the campus responded in myriad ways. Perhaps the most creative outreach effort was the joint concert of three bands—The Perfect Woman (PTS students Keeva Kase, Todd Kennedy, Jonas Hayes, and Jeff Bryan), Million Time Winner (led by PTS Ph.D. student Christian Andrews), and Fooled by April (out of Boston)—held at the Princeton University graduate school bar near the Seminary. Originally planned as a benefit for another cause, the event changed course. Kase said, "The day of the attacks we decided to shift our cause to help benefit the attack victims." At the end of the night, pooling together proceeds from the cover charge, the doormen's pay, and their own pay for the evening, the bands had raised \$1,200. Kase approached President Gillespie and asked if the Seminary could double the amount raised; Gillespie increased the donation total to \$5,000, which was sent to Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church's (NYC) fund serving "particularly the families of service workers and support staff who are unlikely to have good pensions, portfolios, etc." "All in all," Kase said, "it was a great event."

PTS students have taken time to look inward as well—especially those doing field education in New York City churches, as they learn how to minister in a changing world. Middler Katy Doyle said, "Doing field ed in New York City is allowing me to experience the mourning, the pain, the compassion, the dedication, and the rebirth of the city. September 11 has become a much more personal experience for me because I'm ministering to people for whom it was more than just the day of the terrorist attacks—it was the day their loved ones died and their city changed forever. What I'm learning and experiencing in the city will have an everlasting effect on my ministry."

There is also a communal effort to understand these issues. Seminarians for Social Change, a student-led group, hosted a dinner discussion for students to think

through the events together and how they, as Christians dedicated to peace, could respond. Junior Stephanie Hoylman said, "Perhaps the tendency is to prefer a more active response to such issues; in this case, discussion seemed to be the most positive and appropriate. I found it very healing just to realize that a lot of other people are also experiencing an uncertainty about how to react to the situation in our nation."

Preaching in chapel, and even in preaching classes, now incorporates reflections on the attacks. Students organize impromptu prayer meetings, such as on the night the United States began bombing Afghanistan, when about 20 students gathered in the chapel. And professors' prayers to open class often ask for God's guidance and mercy as the community attempts to learn in the aftermath of these events. The Office of the Dean of Student Affairs and the faculty's Church and Society Committee offered "For Such a Time As This," a series of faculty-led forums dealing with issues such as the just war theory, revelation in a time of mass death, the theology of the cross, and the church and patriotism.

At the just war forum, a student asked whether or not students preparing to be pastors could consider the "war" on terrorism just and offer their support of it. Fred Tittle, an M.Div. senior retired from the Marine Corps with ground combat experience, responded, "As students preparing to be pastors, our concern shouldn't be whether this war is just or unjust. Instead, we should be concerned about the people in our congregations who will be serving in it, regardless of that question, and who will need healing."

Not an area of study or campus life remains untouched by these events. The campus community has drawn together to help one another understand and cope as best they can. And while students are seeking healing for themselves, they are now constantly aware that the church they are training to lead is one that will offer the challenges and opportunities of an unpredictable and too often pain-stricken world. ■

*Erika Marksbury is a PTS M.Div. middler and a part-time editorial assistant in the Office of Communications/Publications.*