

The George Washington University
Department of Religion

2106 G Street NW, Washington DC 20052
P: 202-994-6325, F: 202-994-9379
E-mail: religion@gwu.edu, Web: www.gwu.edu/~religion

Newsletter

A Note from the Chair

This year's top news, mentioned more fully elsewhere in this newsletter, is that the Religion Department has twice over won recognition this spring for the university's most prized annual honor. When he came to GW, President Stephen Joel Trachtenberg established three prizes, for teaching, community service, and scholarship, in the name of his parents to be awarded each spring and publicly announced at GW's Mall Commencement Ceremony. This year Religion Professors Dewey Wallace and Harry E. Yeide, Jr. received the Teaching and Community Service Awards respectively. As far as I know, such double recognition within one department among forty-three others, and a small department to boot, is unprecedented in the decade and a half of these awards. It brought considerable notice from colleagues and administrators.

This issue of the newsletter also contains a number of other items of interest: an electronic journal of Religion BA and MA students' papers edited by the Department's graduating major Will Donovan; faculty updates; book reviews; and senior honor thesis topics.

This year found me back at chairing after a year off with a Columbian Teaching Fellowship. Last year's acting Chair Rob Eisen left things in superb shape, and immediately put his freshly honed administrative skills to the task of taking on the position of Director of Judaic Studies, replacing our close colleague Marc Saperstein, who, from the standpoint of working so closely over the years with the Religion Department, is certainly missed by our faculty and students, but who is also to be congratulated for his appointment to his new position at Leo Baeck College in London.

This tenth successive annual issue of our newsletter also deserves some recognition itself as a landmark. As a yearly event in departmental planning and cooperation, it is something students, departmental faculty, faculty and administrators elsewhere around the university, alumni, and friends of the department all take pleasure in. Comments for improvements and things you would like to see more of are welcome. We should all thank our Department's Executive Aide Amanda Warner for her fine work in overseeing its production this year and last.

Finally, we are always in need of donations to support our initiatives. If you would like to contribute, we would be most thankful. You are welcome to contact me to discuss projects that could use your help. ❖

Alf Hildebeitel

Dewey Wallace, Jr. Receives 2007 Trachtenberg Teaching Award

Here are some highlights of the kinds of things the Oscar and Shoshana Trachtenberg Prize for Teaching selection committee had in hand to consider in choosing Dewey Wallace as is awardee this year. The Department was pleased to support Dewey's nomination for this year's Trachtenberg Award for teaching, and the chair included the following comments (excerpted and slightly edited for current purposes) in his recommendation cover letter:

The pleasure of recommending Professor Wallace is matched by a conviction that Professor Wallace merits this award, even deserves it. With the department having nominated him twice before since 2002, what is striking and deserving of mention from reviewing these two prior dossiers is how the picture of an engaging and creative, indeed, loved and admired

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Spring 2007

Volume 10

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Dewey Wallace

Book Reviews

Alf Hildebeitel

A Reader's Report

Once again for the Religion Department Newsletter I have chosen to provide a reader's report rather than a book review, and will comment on books I have read during the past year that might be of interest to our readers.

The first book on this year's list is Jonathan Riley-Smith, *A History of the Crusades*, which was first published in 1987 but in 2005 was reprinted in a considerably altered second edition (New Haven: Yale University Press). Riley-Smith has a reputation as one of the leading historians of this subject. His book covers a long sweep of time, beginning with the first preaching of a crusade in 1095 and continuing to what the author terms the old age of the crusading movement well past the medieval era down to 1798. It also covers a larger sweep of space than usual, including crusades against the Albigensian heretics in France, against the Moors in Spain, and against late surviving pagans in the Baltic region. Riley-Smith thinks there was a vigorous crusading movement right up to the early years of the sixteenth century. But what strikes me as most important about this book, particularly in the light of current discussions of holy war, is Riley Smith's conviction that crusading was primarily a religious movement focused on crusading as pilgrimage and penance. He notes the emergence in the twelfth century of a Christian piety and theology of holy war, endorsed by popes and theologians, which was a new departure from the earlier Christian employment of the image of warfare as a metaphor for the struggles of the spiritual life.

My second choice is another book that raises issues of the spiritual life in relation to war, Richard Carwardine's *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005). The author, a professor of American history at Oxford University, has received praise from leading Lincoln scholars for his addition to the literature about this president, the roots of whose rise to power and greatness he explores. There has been much dispute about Lincoln's religion, and it is this aspect of the book that I want to feature in these comments. Carwardine is known for several earlier books dealing with American religion, especially his *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (1997), and has a thorough grasp of this aspect of the culture of the United States at an earlier time when the term "evangelical" had a very different tone than now—

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The Self-Possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization.

Frederick M. Smith (Columbia University Press, 2006)

I would like to recommend an important new and path-breaking book on the theme of possession in South Asian religions. While erudite, it also reads comfortably and has evident comparative potential beyond what it covers well enough itself, which includes Daoist possession rituals, Tibetan texts, New Age channeling, and overtones of possession in numerous features of Christianity.

The book was begun in 1992, after which its author was seen and heard on the subject in various pre-manifestations, and appears now on the inside jacket with a parrot on his shoulder named Papageno who, the author tells me via e-mail from the Himalayas, "sings Mozart arias (albeit a little off-key) and Sanskrit mantras." As the title suggests, Smith speaks primarily from one side of a divide as a Sanskritist and textualist to other Indologists (Sanskritists, historians of religions), among whom possession has been little noticed, infrequently studied, and never theorized across the breadth of Sanskrit literature. On the other side, Smith takes up the rich documentation of varieties of possession in South Asian ethnographies and attempts to speak to ethnographers as well. He attributes the double obscuration of possession in Sanskrit and other early Indo-Aryan literatures to "Academic and Brahmanical Orthodoxies" (the title of Chapter 1) that have erased it from consideration in the name of normative and essentialized Hinduisms (with some parallels in Buddhism and Jainism). Although others have acknowledged this divide and bridged it to varying degrees with reference to specific types of possession, Smith is the first to map varieties of possession on both its sides, to propose that the divide can be negotiated with benefit to those on either side as well as those attempting to straddle it, and to consider the range of theoretical options open to interpreting South Asian possession in both its textual and ethnographic manifestations. In providing a cognitive map of possession on this prodigious scale, the book is a landmark work of inspired sleuthing and impressive erudition that will long merit appreciative consideration.

The book also has comparative value in terms of

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Berz Lecture, 2007

This year's annual David and Sherry Berz Lecture was given in April by Carl W. Ernst, the William R. Kennan, Jr., Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A prominent scholar in Islamic studies, Ernst's most recent books are *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), and, co-authored with Bruce B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: Chishti Sufism in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2002). The lecture was entitled "Sufism and Globalization: Methodological Reflections on a Changing Field of Study." Ernst spoke about ways in which Sufism figures as a globalizing element in various national and sectarian cultures within the Muslim world and outside it. ❖



Ziffren Memorial Lecture 2006

Each year, the GW Religion Department holds a commemorative lecture to honor Abbie Ziffren, deceased friend and colleague of the department. These lectures are delivered on topics about which Abbie cared deeply.

This year's Abbie Ziffren Memorial Lecture was given by Christopher Key Chapple, Professor of Theological Studies and Associate Academic Vice President, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles. The title of his talk was "India, Nonviolence, and Environment." Chapple, who has authored and edited numerous books on ecology, nonviolence to animals, peace studies, and yoga in relation to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, talked on the intersection of these concerns, and how ecology and non-violence are positioned in different religious and political cultures. ❖

☞ A book has been published in Abbie's honor; please see page 10.

Faculty Updates

Paul Duff was selected to the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas and has published “, ‘The Synagogue of Satan’: Crisis Mongering in the Revelation of John” in *The Reality of the Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 39, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2006): 147-68.

Robert Eisen: In the past year, Professor Eisen has put the finishing touches on a volume he is editing with Charles Manekin on the University of Maryland, entitled *Philosophers and the Hebrew Bible*. He has also begun work on a new book deal with Jewish concepts of peace and violence. In the coming academic year, he will be on sabbatical and will be devoting the entire year to that project. He will be supported in part by a grant from the United States Institute of Peace. This past year, Professor Eisen also took up duties as Director of the Judaic Studies Program at GW. He has plans to expand that program substantially in the coming years and has begun a fund-raising campaign for that purpose. He hopes to raise funds for a number of new positions, including one in Hebrew Bible that would be held jointly with the Religion Department, and to found a Center for Judaic Studies.

Alf Hildebeitel continued work on a book on *dharma*, for which he had an AY 2005-06 Columbian Research Fellowship. This March he was invited to Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids, Michigan, to address students in a course based on his own work, and to give the Synoptic Lecture for the Department of Liberal Studies, titled “Is the Goddess a Feminist? Women and Dharma.” He also gave papers at the 13th World Sanskrit Conference in Edinburgh (July 2006) and the American Oriental Society in San Antonio (March 2007). Professor Hildebeitel taught a Dean’s seminar for freshmen in the Fall of 2006 entitled “Dharma in Hinduism and Buddhism” based on research done during his 2005-06 Columbian Fellowship. The following articles by him came out this past year: “On Reading Fitzgerald’s Vyasa,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 125, 2: 241-61; “The Narayaniya and the Early Reading Communities of the Mahabharata,” In Patrick Olivelle, ed. *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.227-55; “Ashvaghosha’s *Buddhacarita*: The First Known Close and Critical Reading of the Brahmanical Sanskrit Epics,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 34: 229-86; “Krishna and the Death of Karna,” in Edwin Bryant, ed. *Krishna: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 23-76; and “Krishna in the Mahabharata: The Death of Karna,” in Edwin F. Bryant, ed., *Krishna: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 23-76.

Tom Michael: I have been continuing work on my second book; this book is about early Chinese shamanism. I have translated relevant sections on this topic from some 20 early Chinese texts, and some from 20 modern Chinese language studies. I also attended a conference on the Daodejing in China at the end of April. For this conference, I had written a paper on certain aspects of the archetype of the early Chinese Sage; I expect to continue work on this paper, which will also incorporate studies of other early Chinese archetypes, namely the King and the General.

Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr has published two books, *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy*, 2006, and *The Pilgrimage of Life and the Wisdom of Rumi*, 2007, and has three forthcoming: *In the Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam’s Mystical Tradition*, summer 2007; and *The Anthology of Philosophy of Persia, Vol. IV and V*. He has translated numerous articles and books into other languages such as *Ebedi Hikmatin Peshinde*, by Harun Tan (ed.) 2007. Dr. Nasr has written the following articles: “Bearing Witness to the One God” and “Our Great Challenge” in *The Life of Meaning*, by Bob Abernethy and William Bole, 2007; and the introduction to *The Sacred Foundations of Justice in Islam: The Teachings of Ali ibn Talib*, by M. Ali Lakhani (ed.), 2007. Dr. Nasr was interviewed for the article “Scripture, Society and Traditional Wisdom” by Michael Barnes Norton in *The Journal of Philosophy and Scripture*, V. 2, issue 1, Fall 2004. He has also presented numerous papers and given lectures in Washington DC, New York, and Turkey.

Kelly Pemberton had a busy and active summer and fall. In the summer of 2006, she gave a talk at GW for Fulbright scholars titled “The Changing Landscape of NGO and International Aid Partnerships in Morocco.” Last semester, she developed two new courses, *Topics in the Qur’an* and *Global Religious Feminisms*. Professor Pemberton also co-designed a concept for a women’s leadership training initiative in Asia and the Near East for Higher Education in Development (HED) and USAID along with Professor Filomina Steady of Wellesley College. The concept will serve as guidance for USAID missions in various countries in Asia and the Near East. In connection with this concept design, she presented a paper at the annual South Asia Conference at the

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Faculty Updates, continued from page 4

University of Wisconsin, Madison. The paper has been revised and will be published as an article titled "Perfecting Women in the New Age of Ignorance: Emerging Patterns of Reformist Rhetoric in South Asia" in the journal *Gender and Language* this fall. Another article on "Gender" will be published in Jamal Elias' forthcoming book, *Keywords for the Study of Islam*. Her anthology, co-edited with Professor Michael Nijhawan of York University and titled *Shared Idioms, Sacred Symbols and the Articulation of Identities in South Asia*, will be published by Routledge Books in the summer of 2008. Most recently, Professor Pemberton was awarded a 2007 GW University Facilitating Fund fellowship for research towards a book project on Islamic didactic texts for women in a global comparative context. The project will take her to Cairo and Istanbul for archival research and interviews with the publishers and authors of these texts

Dewey Wallace continues to work on a book dealing with varieties of late seventeenth-century English Calvinism and hopes to complete the final version of its last chapter this summer. In November he organized and led a religious sites tour for the meetings of the American Academy of Religion in Washington. The tour centered on the theme of Religion and the American Presidency, and stopped at seven churches attended by American Presidents. The tour-takers filled three buses. In April he attended the conference of the American Society of Church History in Salt Lake City, which included a large component of Mormon history. He was the 2007 recipient of the Oscar and Shoshana Trachtenberg Award for excellence in undergraduate teaching, in connection with which he gave a lecture for the university community in April on "Interpretation in American Religious History."

Harry Yeide: Since I have been told that I am to receive the Trachtenberg Service Award this spring, I thought it might be helpful to list a few of my service engagements to the University. I have found a lot of meaning and satisfaction in these kinds of service, and wish that I could describe them in ways that might inspire others. Some of this has been in the form of direct service to students outside the classroom. Some of the nicest persons I have ever met have been advisees that I was fortunate to know. I am certain that all of my colleagues do some of this, but I have been doing a lot of it for many years. Indeed, I did this before we had Freshman Advising Workshops, and I have done it since as well. While there are other sorts of advising that I have done, it is the advising relation with entering students that has been the richest experience. Yes, I am aware that for many of our entering students, this has been more of a pain than a pleasure. But others have experienced their beginning of University study as a real rite of passage, and have been willing to share some of their excitement and difficulties with me. Another form of service in which I have been involved for a long time has been as a member of the Joint Committee of Faculty and Students. As the name suggests, this is one group in which faculty and students share mutual concerns, and learn from one another. Since we have to transmit our wisdom and policy proposals to the University Senate, frankly a lot of good ideas never get enacted as policies. But a lot of bad ideas get eliminated, and some of the good ones survive. A hardy perennial has been discussing the many issues surrounding academic integrity; it seems to be something in which we all believe, but not in the same way nor with the same force. Not surprisingly, it is being discussed again this year, and some new ideas are being introduced. Another form of service that claims my time has been presented by various committees in our Hospital that seek to assure moral behaviors. For some years, I was a member of our Institutional Review Board that examines all proposed research studies for ethical problems. I was then asked to serve on a special ethics committee for our NICU, the Newborn Intensive Care Unit. One of the greatest pleasure I have ever had was attending the Halloween parties for past patients, seeing and hearing very active kids that a decade earlier would not have survived. I now serve with the "adult" Hospital Ethics Committee, where we develop some Hospital policies and respond to calls for help with bedside advising. Here we see one of the important interfaces between our University and the City, although the shift in Hospital ownership has rendered that a little less direct than was previously the case. No doubt, you have, if you have gotten this far, heard more than enough of my adventures in service at GWU so I will spare you others. And some of you have, no doubt, better stories you could share. But if you have been holding back on seeking to do service. TRY IT. YOU'LL LIKE IT!!! ❖

Special Thanks

We thank the following people for their contributions and support

Mr. Karim Afshar

Mrs. Dolores Bedford
Clarke

Mr. and Mrs. David
R. Berz

Dr. Henry J. Ferry

The Rev. Irving W.
Lindenblad

Dr. Jonathan A.
Lindsey

Dr. Wesley
Schlotzhauer, Jr.

Ms. Heather M.
Young



Wallace Reader's Report, continued from page 2

referring to a broad mainstream of reformist and progressive Protestantism that was a dominant force in the nation's culture. Lincoln's religious views have been much disputed between those who point to Lincoln's early reputation as a religious skeptic and those who paint him as conventionally Christian; but neither of these approaches fits all the evidence. Carwardine, with his understanding of the nuances of the religion of Lincoln's time, seems to me to get it about right: Lincoln, a village skeptic when a young lawyer, though thoroughly versed in the Bible, becomes more appreciative of organized religion when he has his first contacts with learned clergy, develops as a politician in the context of a Whig reformism saturated with evangelical Protestant idealism, and in the crisis of the Civil War develops a reliance upon prayer and a profound sense of divine providence. By that time a regular churchgoer, he nonetheless never professes the specifics of Christian orthodoxy and accordingly did not join the Presbyterian churches he attended, and of which his wife was a member.

My third selection, a novel, might seem to change the focus of this report, but alas, it does not. Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2005) won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, and recounts the stories of three Congregationalist ministers in the Midwest (through the memories of the third as he approaches his seventy-seventh birthday) who wrestle with an ancestral legacy of abolition and civil war. Novels about ministers (think of Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry*), as one reviewer of *Gilead* observed, usually portray them as absurd, dimwitted or hypocritical; but this novel presents a theologically informed protagonist who muses on the likes of St. Augustine and Calvin while struggling in his spiritual life with questions about violence in the service of a good cause and the possibility of change for those who have chosen the wrong path in life. I won't attempt to discuss the plot; suffice it to say that I, at least, found it hard to put down.

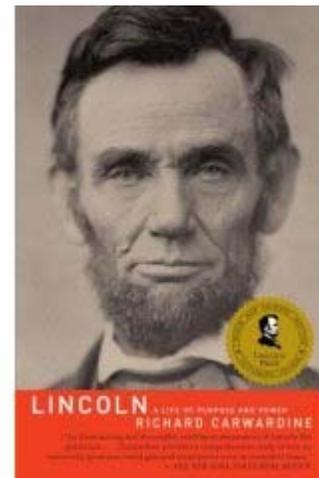
My next choice perhaps shifts the ground of this report a bit, as it relates to the task of finding common ground in conflict through understanding of the "other." F. E. Peters first published *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, over twenty-five years ago; long ago I had read the author's earlier work of the Hellenistic east, and was aware of his multi-volume works on the monotheistic religions and their sacred texts, but I never read this book because I pictured it as a book for beginners in the study of religion. However, *The Children of Abraham* appeared in a revised edition in 2004 and a few months ago I picked it up at a chance, and was immediately absorbed. In less than 200 pages this book analyzes in an insightful way what was for me familiar material as it calls attention to differences and commonalities among these religions in the interest of better relations among them based not on irenic platitudes but on deeper understanding. It is a great read for busy former religion majors who want a refresher without condescending to standard textbook accounts—and for all I know perhaps many readers of this report already have read it!

Finally, and I cannot resist quoting the old Monty Python TV show, "now for something altogether different," I turn to a book which deals with the interface of religion and natural science, a subject in which I am the merest tyro but nonetheless have been doing some reading lately. And when I think about the recent brouhaha regarding evolution in the public schools, perhaps I have not moved so far from the theme of conflict as one might think at first impression.

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**Theta Alpha Kappa
Congratulations to our 2007
Inductees!**

- Nabil Ali
- Prashast Gandiga
- Christopher Gross
- Ashley Larrimore
- Stephanie Lococo
- Hasita Patel
- Rosanna Picascia
- Betsy Roth
- Kavitha Swaminathan
- Sean Trainor
- Stephanie Trudeau
- Rachael Whitley
- Jenny Wiviott
- Alexandra Zimmerman



Wallace Reader's Review, continued from page 6

The book I want to recommend is Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006). Against the backdrop of an account of his own journey from atheism to an evangelical conversion experience, Collins, who was the director of the Human Genome Project of the National Institutes of Health, presents a double case. For his fellow believers, he wants to insist that there is no intelligent option apart from the acceptance of the overwhelming evidence for biological evolution in more or less Darwinian terms; for anti-religious scientists (whom he thinks a minority of scientists—and who are represented by Richard Dawkins, with whom Collins had a public debate that was reported on extensively in Time magazine) he wants to insist that a religious perspective is entirely compatible with a commitment to the findings of modern evolutionary science. Insofar as he goes beyond this argument and becomes a specifically Christian apologist, Collins follows the lead of C. S. Lewis, whose arguments he repeats with some updating—particularly related to the ramifications of the “big bang” origin of the universe. It is a brief book, popularly written, but will nonetheless introduce some to the complexities of evolutionary theory. The language of God mentioned in the title, by the way, is DNA.

I hope I have provided suggestions for reading that will be helpful to some of you who receive this newsletter! ❖

Wallace Teaching Award, continued from page 1

teacher fills out while the excellence of his teaching, if anything, only grows more and more evident and appreciated.

The letters from current GW undergraduate students in this present dossier bear out the front end of such an assessment beautifully, and, incidentally, also bear out the range of Professor Wallace's campus reputation as one that goes well beyond Religion majors and minors, and well beyond those who started out with an interest in religion. Dewey draws people in not only to a fascination with the subject, but to a memorable and singular classroom experience.

In the support letters from students, one notes their consistent appreciation of Wallace's ways of combining seasoned wit and scholarly depth with classroom freshness, good humor, and accessibility. Readers of these letters may wonder who got to shout “Anathema” at the class's reenactment of the Council of Nicaea, but there is no doubting that it was a memorable class. One will also detect that Wallace has retooled his pedagogical skills to the task of teaching a memorable WID class.

We close on the note of his former student and now college president, William Fox, that appears as his recent e-mail subject heading (attached to his letter): “Dewey extraordinaire.” ❖

Hiltebeitel Book Review, continued from page 2

method, since one hears frequently that scholars of religion should attempt to bridge the gaps between text and field and text and practice. Toward that end Smith mentions that he has discussed possession in “more than 170 Sanskrit texts” (592), ranging from Veda through epic; the *Yogasutras*, *Brahmasutra*, Samkhya and related texts; Sanskrit fiction, drama, and aesthetic theory; puranas and bhakti commentary; Ayurveda medical texts, and tantra. Smith recognizes the *Mahabharata* as “the single text in South Asian literary history with the greatest concentration of possession” (250), and is appreciative of the way its story is tied in with local possession rituals in both north and south India.

Smith's most stunningly revealing and original discussion, however, probably comes in Chapter 11, titled “Tantra and the Diaspora of Childhood Possession.” Here, while also exploring fascinating parallels in the Chinese Daoist *aweishe* ritual, which seems to draw its name from the key Sanskrit possession term *avesha*, Smith takes up the “hitherto unrecognized” term *svasthavesha* (“possession of one who is in a good state of [mental and physical] health”) (416-17), that describes oracular possession brought on by a medium in a young boy or girl. Smith also reports on some interesting fieldwork of his own on Ayurvedic treatments of possession by *mantravadin* exorcists in Kerala.

I do have some reservations. I believe Smith is too quick to dismiss sociological and psychoanalytic explanations of possession that stress individual oppression and dissociation. In the former case, he finds I. M. Lewis's approach “inadmissible in these early Indic texts and contexts” for its emphasis on powerlessness and oppression (264). And he is, for my taste, repeatedly too dismissive of studies by Sudhir Kakar, Robert Goldman, A. K. Ramanujan, and Jeffrey Masson that bring Freud into the discussion, once calling them 1970s “period pieces” (501, 565 n. 111). Each of the works cited, as well as contemporary ones by Gananath Obeyesekere that somehow missed this cut, will be worth studying in connection with possession for a long time. But *The Self-Possessed* is big enough to have interesting answers to these reservations, and is rich in nuanced analysis, implication, and entrancing reading.

Fred Smith teaches in the Department of Religious Studies of the University of Iowa. ❖

Congratulations to our 2007 Graduates!

Emily Axford
 Sanjana Ballal
 Christopher Beatty
 Francesca Blanco
 Jenna Burnett
 Edward Chapman
 Amar Chauhan
 Adeel Chowdhry
 William Donovan
 Megan Dunkelberg
 Rachel Hollander
 Morgan Jacobs
 Jason Kane
 Emily Karrs
 Julia Kenyon
 Matthew Kunkes
 Ashley Larrimore
 Laura Mirsch
 Bryce Pardo
 Rosanna Picascia
 Sam Sadle
 Kavitha Swaminathan
 Lydia Terrill
 Sean Trainor
 Stephanie Trudeau
 Emily Wall
 Samantha Wasserman
 Evan Young
 Alexandra Zimmerman



Professor Dewey Wallace speaking with 2007 Religion graduates.

The Religion Department welcomes news and updates from students and alumni, including address changes. Please direct correspondence to:

Religion Department	P 202-994-6325
2106 G Street NW	F 202-994-9379
Washington, DC 20052	religion@gwu.edu

On the web: www.gwu.edu/~religion

Senior Honors Theses

“Two Different Approaches to Emptiness: Freedom as Enlightenment and Freedom as Anguish”

Rosanna Picascia

My thesis explores the notion of *sūnyatā*, or emptiness, in the second century Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna’s “*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*,” and compares it to the notion of Nothingness seen in twentieth century existentialist philosopher Sartre’s “*Being and Nothingness*.” I argue that although both philosophers start off with the same basic ontological presuppositions, an essenceless world, they arrive at immensely different consequences for what this means for human existence.

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Adjunct Faculty Updates

Reverend Ani Kunga Chodron has lately been working on final editing of the sixth-century Madhyamika Buddhist classic *Madhyamikavatara* by Chandrakirti and a commentary on that work by the fourteenth century Tibetan scholar Rendawa Zhonnu Lodu. She completed the translation together with Venerable Lama Kalsang Gyaltsen under a grant from the Yeshe Dorje Foundation. Her recent publication of a two-volume set of *Bodhisattvacharavatara* (Engaging in the Conduct of the Bodhisattvas) by Santideva with a commentary by Sazang Mati Panchen has been selling well. This set of books will be the focus of a new course at GW this year titled *Buddhist Philosophies* (Religion 190). Ani Kunga will chair a panel at the International Association of Buddhist Studies meeting to be held at Emory University in June 2008 titled *Santideva's Bodhicaryavatara: Examining a Great Mahayana Classic in Social and Historical Context*. The panel will include papers that she is researching together with students in her GW courses on Buddhism which examine Santideva's life in historical context, and provide data on how Santideva's works are currently studied in Tibetan monastic colleges in India.

Megan Davis has presented a paper entitled "Teaching Social Justice in the Corporate University: Deploying the Teachings of Jesus and Marx In the Era of Unchecked Global Capitalism" at the regional AAR meeting in Baltimore last month and at the Rethinking Marxism conference in Amherst, MA in October. This paper, produced by both Megan and Natalie Houghtby-Haddon for their Religion course "Marx and Faith," has been accepted for publication in the February 2008 CSSR Bulletin.

Mohammed Faghfoory gave eight lectures, both locally and internationally, on topics such as Islamic art, peace studies, and Sufism. He also published two books, *Dastur al-Muluk: A Manual of the Safavid Administration and Religious Institutions* (Mazda Publishers, CA 2006) and *Tuhfah-yi Abbasi: The Golden Chain of Sufism in Shi'ite Islam* (University Press of America, June 2007). He wrote a review of *Justice and Remembrance: The Life and Teachings of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib* (Muslim News Archives, London, forthcoming).

Steven Glazer has presented two lectures on "Hasidism: Now and Then" at the Smithsonian. He also lectured at the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem in July 2006 and will be returning in 2007.

Edwin Hostetter has joined the Central Maryland Ecumenical Council board of directors, delivered two talks ("Islamic Allegiance to God" and "Decoding the Da Vinci Code"), and published two book reviews (of *I Have Written to the King, My Lord*, and of *Rhetoric and Social Justice in Isaiah*).

Randy Kloetzli published an article titled "Nous and Nirvana; Conversations with Plotinus--An Essay in Buddhist Cosmology," in the journal *Philosophy East and West*, Vol 57, No. 2 (April 2007), pp. 140-177. A pre-publication version provided material for discussion in his "Comparative Religious Cosmologies" course. ❖

Ergo Est: The Religion Department's New Undergraduate Publication

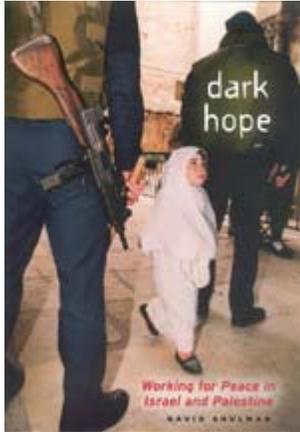
By Will Donovan

Ergo Est is the culmination of a year-long discussion among students in our Religion department. As a generation of students of religion here at George Washington has grown in confidence and ability, it has also grown as a small community. At the beginning of this semester, several of us noticed two peculiar problems plaguing that community. First, that though our work was growing stronger, we shared little of our growth with anyone beyond our professors. Second, that the Religion department here at GW has developed several "tracks" that otherwise meet only on occasion.

Ergo Est as a project is designed to rectify both of these problems, while simultaneously ensuring that this community retains something of its holistic identity. For many of us graduating and moving on, Ergo Est will serve as an eye inside our alma mater. For those who will stay to continue their education at GW, it will provide a firmament by which the community of students of religion can continue to find its footing. Ultimately, we must share the goal of building bridges between the tracks so that more and more students share their work and their ideas.

"Ergo Est" is Latin, in English meaning "Therefore it is." We chose this title for our publication because of the unique scope of our department and its students, for even as Ergo Est can mean "Therefore it is" in the most general of manners, the statement also can obviously be applied to many different religious understandings of reality and divinity. Obviously it brings to mind creation stories such as Genesis, and as an affirmation it also points towards Western Religion's identifiable God as a whole. Yet simultaneously, its ambiguity points as well to the more subtle identity of the formless realities of the Eastern Religions.

With a panel of ten students and a dedicated administrative staff, all religion Majors and Masters candidates, we have represented the entirety of our community here; God Willing, we have also ensured the publication's longevity. I invite you to visit the Religion Department's website at <http://www.gwu.edu/~religion> where Ergo Est is published for all to see. If you would like to request a hard-copy, please e-mail ergoest@gmail.com. ❖



***Dark Hope: Working for Peace in
Israel and Palestine***

David Shulman

(University of Chicago Press, 2007)

Dedicated to the memory of Abbie Ziffren,
former adjunct professor of the GWU
Department of Religion.

David Shulman gave a talk in 1998 for
GWU's Department of Religion Abbie
Ziffren Memorial Lecture, entitled
"Making God Present: A South Indian
Pilgrimage." David has been described as
Abbie's intellectual, spiritual, and moral
mentor and was her dissertation advisor at
University of Wisconsin, Madison. He is
the Renee Lang Professor of Humanistic
Studies at The Hebrew University of
Jerusalem.

Senior Honors Theses, continued from page 8

**"A Kinship Forgotten, A Rebellion
Overlooked: Evangelical Influences on
English Romanticism, The Lake Poets'
Critique of Empiricism and the Peculiar
Reception of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's
Aids to Reflection"**

Sean Trainor

This paper focuses on the way in which
elements of evangelical thought found their way
into the writings of the so-called Lake Poets:
William Wordsworth, Robert Southey, and
Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It argues that
evangelicalism shared an empirical
epistemology with the Lake Poets' professed
influences among eighteenth century
rationalists. As such, the Lake Poets could
move back and forth between the rational and
evangelical strands of empiricism, integrating
elements of both into a new artistic vision. It
also deals with Coleridge's later rejection of
empiricism, the expression of this anti-
empiricism in the theology of his *Aids to
Reflection*, and posits several reasons for the
English public's failure to notice the
epistemological import of his argument.

**"Shi'ite Martyrdom Theology: Its Spiritual,
Cultural, and Political Manifestations in
Islamic History"**

Alexandra Zimmerman

This thesis is an exploration of martyrdom
theology from its origins in the Qur'an to its
political utilizations in modern Iranian history.
It specifically examines the cultural aspects,
such as literature and rituals, that have helped to
keep the martyrdom of Imam Husayn alive in
the Shi'ite consciousness. It also discusses how
different political organizations and leaders
have used martyrdom as a political tool and
why it is such an effective political device. ❖

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