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Department of Religion

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Newsletter

Summer 2012

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A Note from the Chair

Rob Eisen

I have just finished my first year as Chair of the Religion Department, and while all administrative positions of this sort involve their fair share of headaches and paperwork, I must say that this particular position has brought me a great deal of pleasure. I have been at GW for twenty years and have always felt that the Religion Department was one of GW's best kept secrets. We are a small department relative to other departments at GW, but every member of our faculty is deeply devoted to teaching and research, and students who take our courses regularly attest to the high quality of education we provide them. It is therefore my honor to stand at the helm of this enterprise.

There have been a number of important developments in the past year. I am thrilled to report that Kelly Pemberton and Derek Malone-France have received tenure in our department. Kelly has been with us for several years and teaches courses in Islam and Women's Studies. Derek is a more recent addition to our program. He has been named Executive Director of the writing program at GW, but he also teaches courses for us in the field of philosophy of religion, which is his area of research. We also welcome Paul Duff back to the department. After serving for several years as an Associate Dean, Paul has decided to come back to teaching courses in New Testament and early Christianity. On a sadder note, Dewey Wallace has decided to retire at the end of the coming academic year. Dewey has been in our department for forty-nine years and throughout his time with us he has been revered by colleagues and students alike as a superb teacher, scholar, and administrator. He will be very difficult to replace.

Our two annual endowed lectures were very successful. Both dealt with cutting-edge issues. In the fall, the David and Sherry Berz Lecture was given by Brannon Wheeler from the US Naval Academy in Annapolis. He spoke about the subject of martyrdom in Islam. In the spring, the Abbie Ziffren Lecture was delivered by Daniel Smith-Christopher of Loyola Marymount University in LA. He addressed the topic of religion and non-violence. Both were well-attended and were of very high quality. (More details inside.)

Finally, I am happy to report that our building has undergone some sprucing up, something that has been long overdue. We added a concrete floor in our basement, had the entire building painted, and installed wall-to-wall carpeting.

We could always use help from those of you who are able to contribute to our enterprise. We have many needs but not nearly enough resources to do everything we could be doing in teaching and research in the field of Religion. I might also emphasize just how important the subject of Religion has become in today's world. In fact, nowadays few dimensions of the human experience are as influential in our country and in the international sphere as this one. An academic program in Religion such as ours is therefore an excellent place to invest for those who want to ensure that the next generation will be prepared for the challenges that we as Americans face in the coming years. If you would like to discuss a contribution to our department, please contact me directly at eisen@gwu.edu or 202-994-6327. I would be happy to speak to you.

David and Sherry Berz Lecture, Fall 2011

In November, Professor of History Brannon Wheeler, Founder and Director of the Center for Middle East and Islamic Studies at the United States Naval Academy, delivered the Annual Berz lecture. His talk, "Martyrdom and Cosmogonic Sacrifice in Islam," analyzed the aforementioned themes in historical perspective, beginning with the model of sacrifice exemplified in the Prophet Muhammad's farewell pilgrimage to Mecca in 632. The Prophet's sacrifice of a camel, as well as his distribution of shorn hair during this event, served as a seminal moment in Islamic history that, according to Wheeler, linked the practice of Islam with the Abrahamic example of sacrifice. It also served as a model for Muslim practices and concepts of self-sacrifice (including, controversially, suicide bombing) in subsequent generations. More broadly, Wheeler drew connections between this sacrifice and myths from other Near Eastern contexts, such as that of the Mesopotamian Enuma Elish. This sacrifice of body parts, according to Wheeler, illustrates the connection between body, cosmogony, and the establishment of new social orders.

Professor Wheeler is an accomplished scholar who has written extensively on prophet-hood in Judaism and Islam, relics, and Islamic law. He is also editor of the journal *Comparative Islamic Studies* and author of many articles and books, including *Mecca and Eden: Ritual Relics, and Territory in Islam* (University of Chicago Press, 2006).



The David and Sherry Berz Endowed Lecture is made possible by a gift from David Berz, BA '70, JD '73



Abbie Ziffren Memorial Lecture, Spring 2012

In March, the annual Abbie Ziffren Lecture was delivered by Daniel Smith-Christopher, Professor of Religious Studies at Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles. Smith-Christopher is a scholar of great versatility. He is a specialist in the Bible, with a focus on the Old Testament, and is also an expert on non-violence and pacifism. Among his many other interests, Smith-Christopher has also developed an expertise on the role of Scripture in African-American Gospel and the musical and lyrical traditions of Blues.

It was in his capacity as a scholar of non-violence and pacifism that we invited Smith-Christopher to deliver the Ziffren Lecture. This lecture celebrates the life of Abbie Ziffren, who taught in the Religion Department in the late 1980's and early 1990's before her untimely passing, and each year we attempt to preserve Abbie's memory by inviting a lecturer who will address our faculty and students about an area in which Abbie was interested. Non-violence was one of those areas and Smith-Christopher was asked to address this topic.

Smith-Christopher spoke on the subject of "Political Atheism and Radical Faith: The Challenge of Religious Nonviolence," in which he mapped out justifications for non-violence and pacifism in dealing with war and international conflict. The talk combined high-level academic insights with personal perspectives. Smith-Christopher affiliates with the Quaker denomination of Christianity, a denomination well-known for its pacifism, and he was very open about how that affiliation had informed his thinking.

Smith-Christopher's talk excited a great deal of discussion in the question-and-answer period. Many of the students who attended were familiar with the subject of pacifism because of coursework they had taken in the Religion Department and the Peace Studies Program at GW that touched on that topic. Pacifism, by its nature, tends to be controversial because it goes against the grain of the majority of public opinion in the US regarding war and international conflict, and some students therefore challenged Smith-Christopher's positions. Yet, whether one agreed or disagreed with Smith-Christopher's views, his presentation was appreciated by everyone for its depth and sophistication.



Visiting Scholar 2012

We are excited to welcome a visiting scholar, Serpil Sancar, to our department for 2012. Professor Sancar is visiting from Ankara University in Turkey and is here doing research for a book titled *Shifting Perspectives in Islamic Politics: Different Aspects of Islamic Women's New Public Visibility*.

We are looking forward to having Professor Sancar visiting with us for the rest of 2012 and hope to have her share her research in a lecture in the Fall semester. Please look for a piece on her and her work in more detail in next year's department newsletter!

Faculty Updates

Eyal Aviv taught a new course this past year about Buddhist ethics and was a finalist for the Bender teaching award. Professor Aviv published an article in the *Journal of the Oxford Centre of Buddhist Studies* titled "Ambitions and Negotiations: The Growing Role of Laity in 20th Century Chinese Buddhism" and is about to publish another paper titled "Religion, Historiography and Cultural Identity in the Debate over Xuyun's Biography" in *Modern China*. Professor Aviv has also presented a paper in a conference that took place in Hawaii in December. The conference concluded an international three-year project, led by Australian National University. The project has produced a book (forthcoming) to which Professor Aviv contributed an article titled: "Ouyang Jingwu: From Yogācāra scholasticism to Soteriology." Another international project that professor Aviv began this year is a comparative study of commentarial traditions between Tibetan and Chinese Buddhists. During the summer he is planning to divide his time between his book project and the study of Tibetan language.

Paul Duff contributed a chapter entitled "Revelation" to *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible*, vol. 2. (edited by Michael Coogan. Pp 256-71 Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and also published an article titled "Paul's Elusive Opponents: Reading 2 Corinthians 3 in a Non-Polemical Context," in Volume 54 of the journal *Biblical Research* (pp 37-59). He also presented a paper titled "Israel's Hardened Minds: 2 Cor 3:14a and the Development of a Theological Idea," at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in San Francisco in November.

Rob Eisen's recent book, *The Peace and Violence of Judaism: From the Bible to Modern Zionism* (Oxford University Press, 2011), has been receiving excellent reviews in popular and academic journals. His latest research has begun to focus on two new areas that are connected with this project: approaches to war in Jewish law and the role of religion in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He was invited in the spring to deliver a paper at Georgetown University for a conference on religious pluralism that was entitled, "Reflections on the Noahide Laws as a Source for Religious Pluralism." Professor Eisen has also remained active in peace-building and interfaith dialogue outside the university. He has been invited to serve on the Middle East Advisory Board for Search for Common Ground, the largest peace-building organization in the country.

Alf Hiltebeitel published three books this past academic year: *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative*. South Asia Research Series, Patrick Olivelle, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); *Reading the Fifth Veda: Studies on the Mahābhārata—Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel*, vol.1. Vishva Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, eds. Numen Book Series, Studies in the History of Religions: Texts and Sources in the History of Religions, Vol. 131. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2011); and *When the Goddess Was a Woman: Mahābhārata Ethnographies—Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel*, vol. 2. Vishva Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, eds. Same series, Vol. 132.). He also published four articles, including "Just My Imagination? Puzzling through a Duryodhana Festival near Dharmapuri, Tamilnadu." In Hilary Rodriguez, ed. *Hinduism in Practice*. 87-103. London: Routledge, 2011 (a book for undergraduate students on how scholars in different fields approach fieldwork on religious practices in India); and "You Have to Read the Whole Thing': Some Reflections on Madeleine Biardeau's *Mahābhārata*," from «*Du texte au terrain, du terrain au texte: dialogues disciplinaires autour de l'œuvre de Madeleine Biardeau*» Journée du Centre d'Étude de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud. Paris, April 5, 2011.

In January 2012, Alf was one of three co-chairs, with Adam Bowles, University of Brisbane, and Simon Brodbeck, University of Cardiff, of the "Epics and Purāṇās" section of the 15th World Sanskrit Conference in New Delhi. He also gave several conference presentations throughout the year, including the plenary keynote address at the 6th Annual Meeting of the South

Asian Studies Association, April 14, 2012, in Claremont CA. At the 6th Annual Meeting of the South Asian Studies Association (SASA), he received the SASA-Exemplar Award for Academic Excellence and a Certificate of Academic Excellence from the Claremont Graduate University, Claremont University, Claremont, CA.

Xiaofei Kang developed two new courses this year, "Women and Religion in China," and "Religion in Modern China." She began research and writing for a new project on women, gender and religion in the twentieth century Communist discourse of revolution. She presented some of the preliminary findings at the Conference on Women, Gender and Chinese Religions in June 2011 at the University of Macau, and at the Fairbank Center of Harvard University in April 2012. In addition, she is co-editing the Macau conference volume for publication and is writing an article on women and religion in twentieth century China for a collaborative book project entitled the "Construction of Contemporary China." In terms of service to the academic community, she serves on the AAR's International Connection Committee and two steering committees. She also joined the GWU team to set up the Confucian Institute.

Derek Malone-France transitioned from interim to permanent Executive Director of the University Writing Program at GW and received tenure in Religion. Derek published two books this year. His monograph, *Faith, Fallibility, and the Virtue of Anxiety: An Essay in Religion and Political Liberalism* was published by Palgrave MacMilan. And his two-volume edited anthology, *Political Dissent--A Global Reader, Vol. 1: Ancient to Early-Modern Sources & Vol. 2: Modern Sources*, was published by Lexington Books. Derek also gave an invited lecture at American University in January titled "Judging Abraham: Faith, Coercion, and Autonomy in the Public Sphere" and delivered a paper titled "Religion, Nationalism, and Democratic Citizenship" at the annual meeting of the Society for Philosophy of Religion in March. He also served as a Referee for the prestigious Kluge Prize at the Library of Congress.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr spent most of his research time last year as editor-in-chief of the *Study/Quran*, to be published by Harper. The editors hope to have the work go to press in June of this Year. Also he has just finished proofreading vol. IV of the *Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, which is planned to appear this year. He also published three books, including *Muslims and Christians in the New Millennium*, foreword by Osman Bakar, Kuala Lumpur, International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies, 2011. He gave several public lectures, including a talk at Princeton University in February titled "The Prophet Mohammad (PBU), His Spiritual Life and Path," a talk at the State Department in Washington, DC titled "The Asian and Abrahamic Religions: A Divine Encounter in American," and two lectures in London in November: "Islam and the Question of Peace" at Imperial College, London, and "Islam and the West: Yesterday, Today, And Tomorrow" at University College, London.

Irene Oh's article, "Islamic Voices and the Reconsideration of Human Rights," appeared in the *Journal of Church and State* and her entry on "Islamic Conceptions of Human Rights," came out in the *Routledge Handbook of Human Rights*. She also presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in November in San Francisco, and at the Society of Christian Ethics/Society for the Study of Muslim Ethics Annual Meetings in January 2012 in Washington, DC, where she shared some new work on Islam and the Environment. Irene has been newly appointed to the Board of Editors for the *Journal of Religious Ethics*. Irene will be on maternity leave in the Fall Semester 2012 and on Sabbatical for the Spring Semester 2013.

Faculty updates continue on pg. 6

Kelly Pemberton received tenure in May and was promoted to Associate Professor of Religion and Women's Studies. This spring, she offered a new class, "Gender and Islamic Activism," for upper-level undergraduate and graduate students. The course looks through the lens of social movement theory to evaluate the forms and meanings of Islamic activism globally. Afeefa Syeed, Senior Advisor for Culture and Development, Middle East and Asia Bureaus, USAID, offered a guest lecture in the course on women activists in Yemen. Social movement theory also provided the rubric for investigating shifts towards interfaith activism and universalizing narratives among Chishti Sufis in Ajmer, India, the topic of Professor Pemberton's chapter, "Sufis and Social Activism: a Chishti Response to Communal Strife in India Today." The chapter was published earlier this spring, 2012, in the volume, *In Search of South Asian Sufis*, edited by Clinton Bennett and Charles Ramsey. In addition to this chapter, Professor Pemberton published "Reclaiming Muslim Space in 21st-Century Turkey: Popular Didactic Writing for Women," in *Near East Quarterly* online last August, 2011 (<http://www.neareastquarterly.com/index.php/august-2011-issue-v/>). Speaking of Turkey, she is currently sponsoring a visiting scholar from Ankara University in Turkey, Professor Serpil Sancar, about whom you can read more on page 3 of this newsletter. Finally, Professor Pemberton gave two guest lectures at the Foreign Service Institute: one last fall on Sufism in South Asia, and one this spring on Women in Islam. The topic of Women in Islam is the central theme, and title, of her brand new blog, <http://womenandgenderinislam.wordpress.com/>. She hopes that you will take a look and feel free to leave comments!

Dewey Wallace has been on sabbatical leave during the 2011-12 academic year. He researched, wrote, and submitted an invited chapter on John Bunyan's theology for Oxford University Press's forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of John Bunyan*. He is also researching and gathering materials for a book tentatively entitled "Preachers and Puritans" that will explore the varying interpretations of Puritanism by nineteenth century American clergy in denominations of Puritan heritage, especially Congregationalists and Unitarians. He was one of three editors and author of two chapters for *Capital Witness: A History of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington DC*, published in December 2011, which tells the story of one of the first churches in the nation's capital. Founded in 1803, this congregation included Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln among its worshippers and later played an important role in the civil rights and anti-war movements. In September he attended the Folger Shakespeare Library conference commemorating the publication in 1611 of the King James Translation of the Bible.



Update from Irene Oh, director of Peace Studies:

The Peace Studies Program at GWU continues to thrive. The program was approved for a major in the Fall 2011, and has grown in three years from 3 minors to over 20 majors and minors. The website for the Peace Studies Program has been updated, and we now have a Facebook page. Students in the program continue to participate in the many opportunities offered to Peace Studies, including special invitations to events at the State Department and World Bank. Student Andrew Silva was selected to present his original research at a national peace research conference at Notre Dame. The Introduction to Peace Studies course (PSTD 1010) has been approved for both Fall and Spring course offerings due to very high demand. Because Irene Oh will be on leave for the 2012-13 school year, Professor Kip Kosek (American Studies) will serve as Interim Director. We are excited to have Alexandra Carroll, a recent PhD from Catholic University, teach PSTD courses for the next year.

**Theta Alpha Kappa
Congratulations to our 2012 Inductees!**

Sama'a Al-Hamdani
Omar Bacchouche
Nikhita Dattani
Matthew DeGioia
Danielle Kahn
Jai Mirchandani
Kathryn Mixon
Nupur Moondra
Sarah Moore
Kimia Ramezani
Behnam Taleblu
Shaun Vaid
Divya Venkat



Yeide Prize, 2012

This year's recipient of the Harry Yeide Prize for Excellence in the Field of Religious Studies is **Sama'a Al-Hamdani**. Sama'a says:

Prior to living in Washington DC, I lived in Russia, the Netherlands, Yemen and New York City. I am the first person to graduate with a Peace Studies major from GWU. I speak Arabic, English and now adequate Spanish. I have a minor in Women's Studies. While studying religion, I enjoyed learning the subtle complexities of how Abrahamic religions view women and how our human interpretations can manipulate faith to approve or disapprove of certain behaviors. I am very certain that I will go to graduate school; at the moment I am interested in the field of Conflict Resolution; however, I will probably take a year off and work.

Currently, I am writing a blog (yemeniaty.blogspot.com) that focuses on Yemeni affairs after the revolution that monitors female participation or lack of it in the political process. To me, and probably many of those who live in Asia and the Middle East, politics and religion remain intertwined with each other without clear boundaries. Therefore, when I studied religion, not only did I gain insight on how different people view and experience the metaphysical, I also learned their perspective on the world.



A special thank you to our donors who funded this prize. The department continues to welcome contributions to this fund in recognition of Harry's scholarship, leadership, and friendship. If you would like to preserve Harry's presence in our department, please see the last page of this newsletter for how to contribute.

Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr Prize for Islamic Studies

The Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr Prize for Islamic Studies was established in the Department of Religion in 2010. The undergraduate prizes are awarded to Religion majors in their junior or senior years who have demonstrated an interest in Islamic and Shi'i studies and a commitment to interfaith comparison and understanding including the study of Islam and of at least one other religious tradition.

This year's undergraduate prize was awarded to **Jeffrey Shenfeld**. Jeffrey says that his specific interests in religion stem from having attended Jewish day schools growing up and seeing the prominence religion played in both individual lives and in society as a whole. "I was excited at the opportunity to learn the intricacies of many other religions outside of Judaism in an academic setting," he says.

Next year Jeffrey will be attending a Post-Baccalaureate Program to enhance his scientific education and clinical/volunteer experience, after which he will be applying to medical school. He hopes to one day be a physician.

Congratulations to our latest Nasr Prize recipient!

Special Thanks

We thank the following people for their contributions and support during the 2011-2012 academic year (July 1, 2011-June 30, 2012)

Mr. Sean M. Akins, BA '03

Dr. Paul Brooks Duff

Mrs. Alexis E. Lumbard, BA '03

Dr. Jim Rider, MBA '72

Mrs. Janet G. Schlotzhauer, BS '60

Dr. Wesley Schlotzhauer, Jr., BA '59

Mrs. Carolyn Hetzer Zuttel, BA '78



Reflections on John Bunyan

Dewey Wallace

John Bunyan is no stranger to me. I read *The Pilgrim's Progress* as an undergraduate, have taught it and his autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* in GW classes and elsewhere, have discussed him in three of my published books, wrote a review essay on the multi-volume Oxford University Press facsimile edition of his *Miscellaneous Works* in 1993, and spent the first half of my current sabbatical year researching and writing an invited chapter for a book that Oxford University Press will publish as the *Oxford Handbook of John Bunyan*. This chapter describes and analyzes the theology of John Bunyan and required my examination of his many theological treatises (12 of the 13 volumes in the *Miscellaneous Works*). And it was a special treat for me to visit the Bedford, England, meeting-house in which Bunyan preached, and where worshippers still gather surrounded by stained-glass windows depicting scenes from *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

John Bunyan (1628-1688), whose better known narratives in addition to *Grace Abounding* and *The Pilgrim's Progress* include the wonderfully titled *Life and Death of Mr. Badman*, was once a household name in the English speaking world, and, indeed, beyond it (*The Pilgrim's Progress* has been translated into more than one hundred languages). In nineteenth-century America, among the poor and on the frontier, if a family owned 2 or 3 books, in addition to a Bible and perhaps a dictionary or almanac, would be *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Huck Finn found a copy at one of the places where he stayed and "read considerable in it," commenting that it was "about a man that left his family it didn't say why," a bit of Mark Twain's irony, since the whole book is about that "why"! In *Little Women* the daughters play "pilgrim." Nathaniel Hawthorne in his short story "The Celestial Railroad" provided a reverse parody as the pilgrims travel by train to a place of increasing smoke and fire. C. S. Lewis, in a more serious vein, also reversed the story in *The Pilgrim's Regress*.

Bunyan was not so widely read at first, although he found readers among England's dissenting Baptists and Congregationalists, who would not conform to the ritual and episcopal governance of the Church of England. Elites on the other hand, sneered at Bunyan. The philosopher David Hume declared that to like Bunyan's books indicated bad taste. But Bunyan answered "the captious reader" in advance, averring that "I intended this Book as little for thee, as the Goldsmith intendeth his Jewels and Rings for the Snowt [sic] of a Sow." Bunyan said he wrote for those who have "shallow Purses, short Memories, and but little time to spare," not for the well-born.

The tide turned with a growing appreciation of the lively and vivid prose of Bunyan by such literary arbiters as Samuel Johnson, Robert Southey, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, himself no mean theologian as well as poet and critic. Coleridge influentially distinguished the Bunyan of Parnassus (a mountain peak sacred to Apollo and the muses, patrons of the arts) from the Bunyan of the conventicle (the drab meetings for Dissenter worship). Thus, one side of Bunyan could be admitted to the literary salons; the other kept at bay as what Matthew Arnold later called cultural "Philistines." Coleridge in his own life had exchanged the conventicle for the "sweetness and light" of Anglican worship.

If Coleridge's distinction still prevailed, a handbook to Bunyan would perhaps not have needed a chapter on his theology, and I would not have written this essay. The dismantling of Coleridge's distinction has come from several directions. One was a growing appreciation of a wider canon of English literature that included more vernacular writings expressing the outlook of the downtrodden. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, written while Bunyan was imprisoned for illegal preaching, is prison literature, like some of the letters of the Apostle Paul--there are a few items of jailhouse memorabilia in the museum attached to the Bunyan meeting-house in Bedford. No one has pushed this aspect of Bunyan more than the English Marxist historian Christopher Hill, whose biography of Bunyan in its American edition bears the title *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church* (Norton paperback, 1990), a reference to his wife's

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declaration before a judge that her husband, “a tinker and a poor man” “could have no justice.” Hill claims that in the Taiping rebellion in China, whose leader had been influenced by the Chinese translation of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, it became “the first little red book” of Chinese radicalism.

Another direction taken in rethinking Bunyan has been to assert the essential importance of his theological ideas for the shaping of his great narratives. This is especially clear in the definitive and magisterial biography by Richard Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford University Press, 2008), which explores the Bunyan of the conventicle and his theology, and in Michael Davies’ scintillating *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

Central in the shaping of Bunyan’s theology were his discovery of Luther’s doctrine of justification by grace through faith, his commitment to a version of Puritan covenant theology that stressed the distinction of law and grace, the influence on him of the thoroughgoing Calvinism of the Baptist and Congregationalist dissenters, and his insistence that he followed scripture alone, relying only on the Bible and a concordance. Many have found his theology a repellent theology of terror and judgment; taking a cue from another remark of Coleridge, “that Calvinism is practically a far, far more soothing and consoling system” than a theology of free will for which salvation depended on human effort, I think that the heart of Bunyan’s religion was to bring the comfort and renewal of divine grace to the worst of those hopelessly enmeshed in sin, as it had for him. Thus predestination, not an emphasis of Bunyan, nonetheless lurks in the background as the comfortable assurance that believers rest in the hand of God. Some emphases are surprising: Bunyan stressed the real, suffering humanity of Christ, sounding like the ancient anti-Gnostic Christian writers in his repeated insistence on the fleshliness of the incarnate Christ; and he frequently returned to the theme of the eternal risen Christ’s continual intercession with God the father on behalf of sinners for whom he died. Finally, Bunyan had little interest in a formal Christianity of church and sacraments: reputed a Baptist, and preferring adult believers’ baptism, as pastor of the Bedford meeting he nonetheless accepted into membership those who could testify to a personal experience of grace, whether they had been baptized as infants or as adults, or even refused baptism as “unspiritual.”



Alf Hildebeitel, along with Howard University Professor of English T.P. Mahadevan, will be offering a new year-long course series on Indian literature here at GW. In the Fall semester 2012 they will co-teach a course on “The Rg Veda and Vedic Religion,” (which Professor Mahadevan specializes in) followed in Spring semester 2013 by a course on “The Mahabharata” (for which Professor Hildebeitel is renowned.)

Professor Hildebeitel says, “We hope to attract a good cadre of students over the two-semester stretch, but each course will be open to students who choose just one of them. Our aim is to draw students into state-of-the-art conversations on these two topics.” He adds that “the courses will put GW students on the pulse of live scholarly conversations getting worldwide recognition.”

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2012 GRADUATES!

Nikhita M. Dattani
 Fady Y. Hijji
 Danielle B. Kahn
 Kristopher D. Kotek
 Justin M. Lanciault
 Mashael J. Makhadmi
 Dominic Martinez
 Jai A. Mirchandani
 Kathryn M. Mixon
 Nupur Moondra
 Urvi V. Patel
 Matthew C. Pearson
 Kimia Ramezani
 Carly R. Schuster
 Jeffrey Shenfeld
 Behnam B. Taleblu
 Tanay R. Tewani
 Shaun B. Vaid



The Religion Department welcomes news and updates from students and alumni.

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For alumni updates and address changes, please visit:
<http://alumni.gwu.edu/connect/update/index.html>



Graduating major Justin Lanciault along with faculty Alf Hildebeitel, Derek Malone-France, and Xiaofei Kang

MA Program Graduate, Spring/Summer 2012

M.A. thesis Laila Khalid Ghauri

The lack of scholarly investigation into the life and poetic works of the 14th century female Kashmiri mystic, Lal Ded (also known as Lalla, Laleshwari, and Lalla 'Arifah), is surprising given the influence she continues to exert on Sufi and Hindu devotional traditions of north India. Laila Khalid Ghauri's M.A. thesis addresses this lacuna by investigating Lalla's life and work as the sign of a new direction in the conceptual universes of Kashmiri Shaivite and Islamic Sufi thought. Arguing that modern debates over Lalla Arifah's religious identity as either Hindu or Muslim miss the basic message conveyed in her *vaakhs*, or poetic works, Ghauri points out that Lalla's own search for God necessitated her move beyond the world of forms and identities to a single Truth. Nonetheless, the *vaakhs* also suggest a strong influence in Lalla's work from both Kashmiri Shaivism and Islamic Sufism. This influence is manifest in her understanding of the Divine – as Shiva in his contradictory aspects of ascetic and family man, creator and destroyer, masculine and feminine; and as the unmanifest Creator with no equal, the one who has decreed the End of Days to call humankind to mindfulness. Her *vaakhs* address both Hindus and Muslims in their language and vocabulary and promote an inter-religious dialogue that, as Ghauri demonstrates, roots her firmly in the religious and cultural fabric of Kashmir, positions her as a model of faith for both Hindus and Muslims, and paints her as an advocate of moving beyond the world of appearances to realize the Ultimate Truth. In these respects, Lalla's poetry suggests the possibility of peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Hindus through a shared faith in the Divine.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR GRADUATE STUDENTS FOR THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS!

Department of Religion Contributions

Gifts to the Department of Religion allow us to provide support for faculty and student research and academic travel, graduate student fellowships, and student enrichment activities, including guest speakers, visiting faculty, and symposia. Each gift, no matter how large or small, makes a positive impact on our educational mission and furthers our standing as one of the nation's top liberal arts colleges at one of the world's preeminent universities.

You can make your gift to the Department in a number of ways:

- Securely online at www.gwu.edu/give2gw. Just choose “other” under designation and type in the name of the department.
- By mailing your check, made out to The George Washington University and with the name of the department in the memo line, to:
The George Washington University
2100 M Street NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20052
- By phone by calling the GW Annual Fund at 1-800-789-2611.

Donations for the Yeide Fund should be designated “Religion Department-Yeide Fund” in the memo line

Thank you for your support!

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