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Department of Religion

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Newsletter

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Volume 9

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Greetings from the Chair

Last spring, the Chairman of the Religion Department, Alf Hildebeitel, was awarded a Columbian Fellowship which allowed him to devote the entire year to pursue research on his latest book, and I was therefore asked to serve as Acting-Chairman in the present academic year. It has been a pleasure to serve in this role. Our department continued to thrive as a vibrant enterprise in scholarship, teaching, and service to the university as a whole, and I was honored to be at the helm.

Greg Bailey who teaches Asian religion at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia, joined us as a Visiting-Professor to take over Alf Hildebeitel's courses while he was on leave. Our offerings in Eastern Religion therefore did not suffer in Alf's absence. Balaji Hebbar, who has taught a bewildering variety of courses for us over the last several years in Eastern Religion, was awarded a Morton A. Bender Teaching Award, a university-wide award in recognition of his contributions in the classroom. We also had the privilege of hosting two superb speakers for our annual lectures: Professor Michael True who gave our Abbie Ziffren Memorial Lecture, and Dr. Leon Kass who gave our Berz Lecture.

This newsletter contains a number of items of interest. Paul Duff has written a book review on the controversial *Gospel of Judas*. Dewey Wallace provides reviews of three books: David Hempton's *Methodism: Empire of Spirit*, Russell Kirk, *An Anthology of Ghostly Tales*, and James Sharpe's *Remember: A Cultural History of Guy Fawkes Day*. Greg Bailey offers a summary of the work he has been pursuing for over twenty years in Hindu religious thought. Emily Filler, a recent graduate of ours, writes about her graduate work at the Harvard Divinity School since leaving GW and her recent escapades in Jerusalem where she has been living for the past year. Included here is also an article that appeared on-line a number of months ago in the *GW Newsletter* which reports on my collaboration with Joseph Lumbard, a former student of Religion at GW, in arranging a historic event in which King Abdullah of Jordan addressed seventy-five rabbis here in Washington in September.

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.

Robert Eisen

***GW Professor Robert Eisen and His Former Student Joseph Lumbard Work Together to Improve Inter-Faith Dialogue and Relations***

*GW News Center*

More than a decade after they shared a classroom at The George Washington University as teacher and student, GW Professor Robert Eisen and his former student, Joseph Lumbard, reunited to play a leading role in bringing together King Abdullah II of Jordan and more than 70 leading U.S. rabbis for a groundbreaking discussion about bridging the divide between Muslims and Jews.

On Sept. 20, in Washington, D.C., King Abdullah spoke to the American rabbis about the common ancestry, culture, and history that connects Jews and Muslims. King Abdullah called on Muslims and Jews to, "Strive not only for tolerance and co-existence, but

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Dewey Wallace

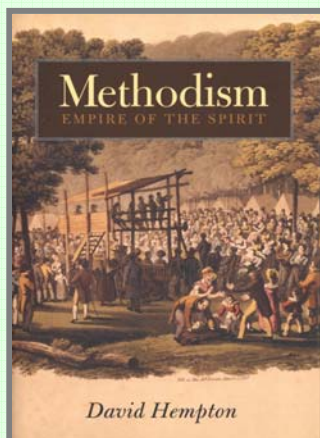
Book Reviews

Paul Duff

**David Hempton,**  
*Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*  
 (Yale University Press, 2005).

Calling this a reader's report rather than a book review enables me to comment on some of the books that I have recently read rather than just focus on analyzing one of them. I will begin with a solid scholarly book that is also accessible reading (after you get through the fairly dense introductory chapter dealing with methodology), David Hampton's *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*. This relatively brief book is packed with interesting insights into a movement and eventual domination that until about a decade ago had been somewhat surprisingly neglected in the historiography of American religion. But recently there has been a spate of good books on Methodism in the United States, and this book, which is about Methodism as a world wide community and as a distinctive religious phenomenon, is among the best. It primarily deal with the origins of Methodism and its nineteenth-century developments, as Hempton highlights the way it neatly balanced egalitarianism and authoritarianism so that its theological and organizational discipline kept it from evaporating in enthusiasm and spiritual excitement. According

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**David Kling,**  
*The Bible in History: How the Texts Have Shaped the Times*

(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

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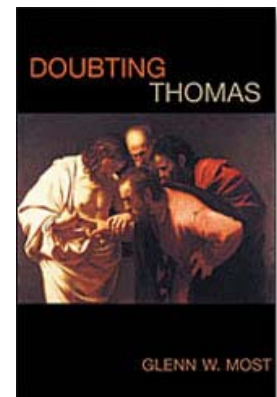
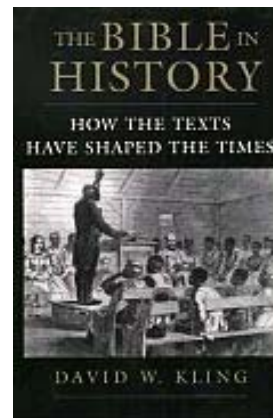
**Glenn Most,**  
*Doubting Thomas*

(Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 2005).

In the past year, two books that deal with Christian interpretations of the Bible have come to my attention. The first is David Kling's, *The Bible in History: How the Texts Have Shaped the Times* and the second is Glenn Most's, *Doubting Thomas*. Both books are engaging and accessible. Kling's work concerns itself with a variety of texts or themes from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament while Most's work focuses on one New Testament episode (Doubting Thomas).

Kling's work contains eight separate studies in Christian Biblical interpretation. The work is subtitled, *How the Texts Have Shaped the Times*, but it would be just as appropriately labeled, *How the Texts Have Shaped the Times and How the Times Have Shaped the Texts*. This is because Kling demonstrates not only how the interpretation of a particular biblical text may have affected a specific period of time, but also how a particular historical era could bring to light a new way of reading a biblical text.

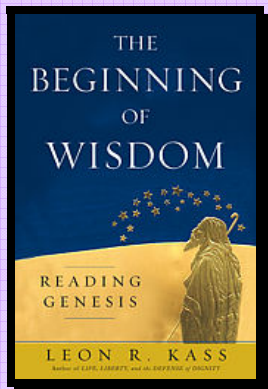
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## Berz Lecture, 2006



This year's David and Sherry Berz Lecture was given in March by Dr. Leon Kass who holds an academic appointment at the University of Chicago and until recently was Chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics. Dr. Kass gave a lecture based on a chapter in his recent book, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis*. The lecture was entitled, "The (Super?) Human Roots of Law and Justice: Lessons from the Book of Genesis." Kass presented a reading of Genesis 9 in which Noah is given a series of laws, including the prohibition against murder. Kass ruminated on the relationship between law, religion, and justice, as he drew out literary and philosophical insights from the text.



## Ziffren Memorial Lecture

October 22, 2003

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 Michael True, who is professor emeritus at Assumption College, serves on the Executive Committee of the International Peace Research Association Foundation, and is author of several books. His talk, entitled "Building a Peace Culture," discussed the UN Decade for the Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World (2001-2010), how it reflects recent peace initiatives around the globe, and what it can teach us about the inter-discipline of peace and conflict studies. In his presentation, True also reflected on the politics and strategy of nonviolent direct action in the works of Adam Curle, Elise Boulding, Gene Sharp, and the Albert Einstein Institution.

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

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## Faculty Updates

**Paul Duff** delivered a paper with William Frawley entitled “The World as Instrument” at the Centennial Global Education Convention at the National University of Singapore in August, 2005. The paper detailed the Dean’s Scholars in Globalization program that the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences currently runs out of its Office of Undergraduate Studies.

**Robert Eisen** is in the process of co-editing a book with Charles Manekin at the University of Maryland entitled *Jewish Philosophy and the Hebrew Bible* which will be published with the University of Maryland Press. His article “Joseph ibn Kaspi on the Book of Job,” appeared in the *Jewish Studies Quarterly*. He continues to do much extra-curricular work in religion and international conflict. In addition to the event he planned for King Abdullah of Jordan, he was invited by the American Embassy in Tel Aviv to give a presentation at a graduate seminar at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on religion and international conflict and to meet with various peace groups in Israel. In March, he was invited to participate in a conference in Rome involving American Jews and Christians, and Iranian clerics, and he delivered a paper, “Just Cause for War in Judaism.” Professor Eisen has also continued his initiatives in adult Jewish education. He was scholar-in-residence for a weekend at Temple Emmanuel Synagogue in Kensington, Maryland, where he discussed the theme of “The Holocaust in Jewish Theology.” He also delivered a public lecture, “Strategies for Jewish-Muslim Reconciliation,” for the Foundation for Jewish Studies at the Ohr Kodesh Synagogue in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

**Alf Hildebeitel** was on leave from teaching this year as a Columbian Research Fellow to work on a book on the topic of dharma. He spoke on the topic at GW in February under the title “Dharma as Civil Discourse: Buddhist and Brahmanical Views.” He also presented papers at conferences in Dubrovnik in September 2005 and Seattle and Pittsburg in March and April 2006. His publications this year include the following: “Not Without Subtales: Telling Laws and Truths in the Sanskrit Epics,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy*; “Buddhism and the Mahabharata,” *Boundaries, Dynamics, and the Construction of Traditions in South Asia*; “Weighting Orality and Writing in the Sanskrit Epics,” in *Epics, Khilas, and Puranas: Continuities and Ruptures*; “Mahabharata” and “Ramayana,” in the *Encyclopedia of India*, Vol.3; and “More Rethinking the Mahabharata: Towards a Politics of Bhakti,” in the *Indo-Iranian Journal*.

**Tom Michael** spent the preceding year actively developing his courses while striving to make some time to continue his work on his second book. This book looks at the role of shamanism in early China from a comparative perspective. He gave a series of talks at Purdue University in March about his first book, *The Pristine Dao*. He will give a paper at the end of May at the Third International Conference on Daoist Studies in Munich, Germany, before going to China to pursue further research, which he hopes will allow him to make further progress on his research on shamanism.

**Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr** has three books in preparation under the following titles: *Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy*, *An Anthology of the Philosophy of Persia*, and *In the Garden of Truth*. He published the following articles in the past year: “Islam” in *The World Almanac—The Book of Facts* (New York: World Almanac Books, 2005), pp. 14-16; “Man and Nature: Quest for Renewed Understanding,” in *Sophia*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2004), pp. 5-14; and “Kathleen Raine and Tradition,” *Temenos Academy Review*, no. 7 (2004), pp. 179-85. Among many papers presented during the year, he spoke on “The Concept of Knowledge in the Islamic Intellectual Tradition and the Critique of the Modern Concept of Knowledge” in Istanbul, Turkey, April 5, 2005, and, most recently, on “Some Thoughts on Muslim Scholars in America in Relation to the Islamic World” at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington DC, on May 11, 2005.

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**Kelly Pemberton** introduced a new graduate course last fall, titled “Global Islamic Feminisms.” This year she continues to work on previous research projects, including two articles on gender, print culture, and Islamic networks in Indo-Pakistan. In November, 2005, she presented a paper entitled “An Assembly of Love Songs: Gender, Genre, and Performance in Contemporary Sufi Practice” at the Middle East Studies Association Conference, held in Washington, DC. In February, 2006, she gave a presentation for a workshop on teaching Islam at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD, along with Professor Ahmed Souaiaia of the University of Iowa. Recently, she completed several entries for the *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures* volume V, edited by Suad Joseph and others, and published by Brill Academic Publisher, and Pearson books. Last January she visited Bogazici University in Istanbul, Turkey under the auspices of the GW-Bogazici partnership for preliminary research on a project on print culture and Islam in cross-cultural context. She hopes to return to Istanbul this summer to continue this research in collaboration with colleagues at Bogazici University.

**Dewey Wallace** reports the following activities since the last newsletter. Twenty four of his entries were published in the *Encyclopedia of Puritanism*, many of which were biographical descriptions of various Puritan leaders and others of which were on theological movements and topics, such as “Arminianism,” “Anti-Trinitarianism,” “Soteriology,” and, longest of all, “Sin.” Sent to the publisher is an article on Daniel Whitby for *The Historical Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*. Three of Wallace’s book reviews were published in *Church History* and *The Journal of Presbyterian History*. He has almost finished an article on “Polemical Divinity and Theological Controversy” for Cambridge University Press’s projected *Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, a volume in a series of “companions” which consist of about fifteen articles on aspects of some movement or thinker. In the spring semester he repeated a new course from a year ago on “Religion in Recent America,” teaching it this time as a writing course in the University’s “WID”—“writing in the discipline”—program. The course covers religion in the United States during the last fifty years.

**Harry Yeide:** My interests in the current year are probably caught by reviewing some of the trips that I have made for academic reasons. In the beginning of 2006, I went to Stuttgart and Tuebingen Germany, and discussed with relevant scholars a recently discovered partial copy of the autobiography of Friedrich Christoph Oetinger. I have been working on an English translation of that work, but there are four different texts that are mentioned by past authors, and two that have been published in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While no great importance has been attached to this text, my interest was naturally drawn to find out more about it. In March, I participated in a forum organized by a cluster of small colleges in the upper Midwest that honors the Nobel Peace Prize recipients and invites students to engage in peace-making. In May, I expect to participate at a meeting dealing with human rights in a number of African countries; the meeting is being held in Wuerzburg, Germany. And in late June, I will go to Calgary Canada to attend the annual meeting of the International Peace Research Association. Thus, I continue to be deeply engaged with the interface between the religious and human moral life. \*

## Adjunct Faculty Updates

**Balaji Hebbar** trained Fairfax County Public School high school teachers on how to teach Hinduism and Buddhism in the classroom. He lectured at NYU Medical School and Harvard Medical School on Hindu bioethics. He has also been selected to receive the Bender Teaching Award.

**Edwin Hostetter** gave a public talk entitled “Dead Sea Scrolls” at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Point of Rocks, MD (June 9<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006). He also had 3 articles published: “Beersheba,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, edited by Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M. Williamson (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 113-116; “Significant Noncanonical Books,” in *Scripture: An Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretations*, edited by Michael J. Gorman (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 91-101; and “The Antitheodicy of a Man in the Land of Uz,” in *Expository Times* 116 (2004-2005), 334-335.

**Mohammed Faghfoory’s** translation of Professor Nasr’s *Religion and the Order of Nature* into Persian has become a best-seller in Iran and its second edition is coming out before the end of spring. He attended a conference in Kabul, Afghanistan organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with the Asia Foundation between July 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 29<sup>th</sup> and presented three papers on: “Masculinity and Femininity in Islam,” “Human Rights in Islam and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Similarities and differences,” and “The Meaning and Historical Development of the concept of Jihad.” He has also completed a monograph titled *Introduction to Shi’i Commentaries on the Qur’an* and it is in press. Finally, he completed a translation of *Tuhfeh-ye ‘Abadi: A Shi’i perspective on Sufism*. This is a 17<sup>th</sup> century text of over 600 pages. Both of these studies will be available before the end of the next year. \*

***The Saga of the Ganeśa Purāna****Greg Bailey*

Ganeśa is the fat bellied Hindu god, instantly recognizable because of his elephant head placed on a human body. He has been extremely popular in Western and Southern India for many centuries and is also becoming increasingly popular in the West judging from the increasing numbers of images available in shops selling Indian goods. Ganeśa is the god to be mentioned at the beginning of all undertakings such as new jobs, long trips and it is mandatory that he should be the first god to be invoked at the beginning of each devotional ritual. This idea is beautifully expressed in a cricketing analogy I found printed on a T-shirt bought recently in South India. Printed next to an image of Ganeśa holding a cricket ball in his hands are the words "Opening the bowling in all pujas."

Most of what is known about the mythology of this god comes from a body of medieval texts composed in Sanskrit and named Purāna. These texts are huge repositories of mythology, social and ritual instructions, creation myths and many other seemingly non-religious subjects. Two are dedicated to Ganeśa and I have just completed a translation and study of the one called simply Ganeśa Purāna. This text, composed in Sanskrit, possibly dates back to the fourteenth century and in eleven thousand verses contains a full body of often humorous myths about Ganeśa plus some complete descriptions of how he should be worshipped and what things should be used in rituals to be performed for him. Of course, he is considered the top god in the Hindu pantheon in this text, a position taken by gods like Visnu, Śiva and the goddess in other purānas.

This project has taken over twenty years to complete, far longer than I had originally anticipated. Initially I traveled to Pune in Western India and collected five manuscripts which I supplemented with other from South India and London. It was on the basis of these plus some printed editions of the text and one translation into a modern Indian language that I was able to accomplish the translation which is being published in Germany with and abridged Indian edition.

Despite the popularity of Ganeśa himself his purāna is scarcely heard of in its original form but is known mainly from summaries composed in modern Indian languages. Yet I am confident that when the Indian edition of the translation alone is published in India many devotees of the god will take the opportunity to read the text that has been inaccessible to them for so long. \*

### Theta Alpha Kappa Congratulations to our 2006 Inductees!

Emily Axford  
Yousef Casewit  
Suanne Edmiston  
Laila Khalid  
Matthew Kunkes  
Blair Lazarus  
Katelin Mason  
Michael McDonough  
Gia Madeleine Mostserratt  
Maria Schwedhelm  
Avneet Sodhi  
Margaret Vo  
Jonathan Zakheim  
Diane Zimmerman



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to Hempton, Methodism fit the expanding free market in religion characteristic of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain, British colonies such as Canada and Australia, and especially the United States. Hempton has many insightful things to say about Methodism and music, Methodism as a women's movement, its missionary expansion, and its eventual legacy in the late twentieth-century Pentecostal explosion (even while as a denomination it had moved into the mainline of more liberal Protestantism.)

Hempton attributes some of Methodism's success to its lively sense of the supernatural presence of divine things in the midst of the lives of believers. Another kind of supernatural presence is paramount in a collection of supernatural tales by Russell Kirk entitled *Ancestral Shadows: An Anthology of Ghostly Tales*, published by Eerdmans in 2004. Eerdmans is a prominent publisher of theological literature, but as a press has had a long interest in the intersection of religion and literature, as evidenced by this volume. Kirk, better known as a leading intellectual in American conservative thought in an earlier generation, has in this volume shaped some really spooky tales in which the underlying themes are thoroughly theological. Rudolf Otto's classic *The Idea of the Holy* called attention to the way in which scary stories elicit a response similar to confrontation with the sacred, and these stories brilliantly operate on that borderline of the sacred and the ghostly. Spooky houses, weird clergy, and the pervasiveness of radical evil suffuse these stories and make them ideal for an armchair thrill before bedtime.

Our contemporary fright is terrorism, and James Sharpe's *Remember, Remember: A Cultural History of Guy Fawkes Day* (Harvard University Press, 2005) is a scintillating tale not only of that event of November 5, 1605, when extremist Catholic plotters filled the space under the English Parliament with barrels of gunpowder so that they could blow up King, Court, and Parliament in one fell swoop, but also of the continuing commemoration of the event in the British world (it was celebrated in colonial Boston as "Pope's Day"). The plot was discovered, the plotters hung, drawn, and quartered, including one Guy Fawkes, whose name became attached to the event and gave rise to the common idiom of a "guy," a "guy" being an effigy of Fawkes that children took with them when they knocked on doors and asked for a treat on the anniversary of the plot's discovery. The author tells the story of the original event so that it is placed in the history of terrorist activity, but he also shows how in its later history its commemoration became a focus for anti-catholic prejudice until the twentieth century that aspect of it gradually faded, to be increasingly replaced with Halloween. The titled comes from the rhyme that the author remembers having been taught him as a child:

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Of the eight separate studies, some focus on a single passage (e.g., Matt 16: 18-19, in which Jesus states, "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church") while others center on a cluster of texts that me up a theme or motif (e.g., the Exodus theme in African-American biblical interpretation). Still others focus on a particular tradition's way of reading all or part of the Bible (e.g., the Anabaptists use of the Sermon on the Mount as a kind of canon within the canon or the particular way that Pentecostals read certain New Testament texts). In each of these studies, Kling looks at the interpretation of the text before the historical point at which a new interpretation arose, the moment in history when a hermeneutical shift took place, and the new interpretation's affect on the tradition in the years that follow.

This is a well written and accessible work. While a book of this kind could easily have become too focused on particular times and texts, Kling avoids that trap. Kling packs much more into each of the studies than one might initially expect. For instance, in the discussion of Bernard and the Song of Songs (chapter 3), Kling also includes an examination of the various ways throughout history that the Christian tradition has attempted to make sense of this difficult work.

While all of Kling's chapters are solid, Kling is at his best in the later chapters of the book when he deals with the period from the Reformation until the present. Although specialists might not find much that is new to them in the chapters that touch their academic focus, for most others, the book should prove useful and interesting.

While Kling's book looks at the interpretations of various biblical texts, Glenn Most's *Doubting Thomas* focuses on only one. Thomas's encounter with the risen Jesus appears in only one gospel and it occupies a mere six verses (John 20:24-29). Nevertheless, the figure of Doubting Thomas has played a significant role in the art and literature of the past two millennia. Most look at the way that this story is used but he is most interested in focusing on the ambiguities that have surrounded Thomas throughout history.

Ambiguity appears first in the biblical account. In John's gospel, it is not clear whether Thomas touched Jesus' wounds or not when afforded the opportunity. Most claim that the gospel implies that Thomas did *not* touch Jesus' wounds. But, the text does not definitively say one way or another. This ambiguity plays out in the subsequent history of the figure of Doubting Thomas.

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## Congratulations to our 2006 Graduates!

Paulina Abaunza

Hiba Arshad

Sanjay Bhatia

Michael Brandes

Faris Casewit

Suanne Edmiston

Sarah Gillespie

Shirine Habash

Ricky Harika

Erica Kaplan

Blair Lazarus

Jessica Lynd

Seema Mishra

Noah Moline

Robert Pauls

Sophia Rafiqi

Sarah Rubenfield

Ashley Slye

Avneet Sodhi

Margaret Vo

Kimberly Votruba

Virginia Young

Jonathan Zakheim

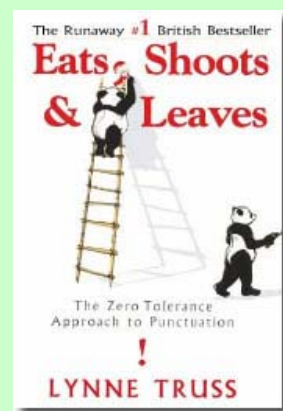
Niels von Deuten

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Remember, rememeber, the fifth of November  
Gunpowder, Treason, and Plot  
I see no reason why gunpowder treason  
Should ever be forgot.



I never thought I would read a book about punctuation; but I received a copy of *Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* by Lynne Truss (Gotham Books, 2003) as a present from one of my sons, and this brief book, which was a best seller in Britain, makes learning about punctuation fun. It also has some quirky examples of the theological issues punctuating the Bible in different ways can raise, a serious problem when one considers the absence of punctuation in ancient biblical manuscripts.



It is my pleasure to recommend these books to readers of this newsletter. \*



### *The Gospel of Judas*

Paul Duff

With great fanfare, the National Geographic Society recently announced the publication of the lost Gospel of Judas. This gospel was mentioned by the second century Christian bishop Irenaeus in his *Against Heresies* but no copies of it have survived until now.

The Gospel of Judas is not really a gospel (if by gospel one means a narrative of the life and death of Jesus). Rather, it is a dialogue between Jesus and Judas. It is a Gnostic document (probably from the second century), written in Coptic (although probably translated from a Greek original). It is highly unlikely that it presents anything close to a historically accurate dialogue between Jesus and Judas. Nevertheless, it is still a significant document because it is a genuine Gnostic text.

Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we knew of many ancient Gnostic texts (primarily from the church fathers who attempted to discredit them) but we had access to very few. Most did not survive antiquity. In 1946, however, an ancient Gnostic library containing dozens of texts was unearthed at Nag Hammadi in Egypt. The Gnostic manuscripts are from the fourth century although many of the texts were originally penned as early as the second century. The Gospel of Judas—also a fourth century manuscript of a text that was written centuries earlier—represents another addition to our collection of Gnostic texts.

The Gospel of Judas surfaced in Egypt in the 1970's. At the time, an antiquities dealer was asking 3 million dollars for it (and a few other manuscripts), an unheard of sum for a few ancient papyrus documents, regardless of their significance. In the early 1980's, a few interested scholars were permitted to briefly examine the manuscripts. They estimated their value to be somewhere between \$50,000 and \$100,000. Since a deal could not be brokered with the seller at that time, the Gospel of Judas manuscript literally rotted in a bank vault (on Long Island) for a number of years. Due to the greed of dealers, academic turf battles, and well-meaning but disastrous attempts (by amateurs) to preserve the manuscript, it very nearly did not survive. Perhaps as interesting as the gospel itself is the story of its travels over the last 30 some years. This is chronicled in Herbert Krosney's, *The Lost Gospel: The Quest for the Gospel of Judas Iscariot* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2006), available from the National Geographic Society.

The Gospel of Judas is relatively brief (probably no more than 4,000 words in the English translation) and it can be downloaded for free from the National Geographic Society (<http://www9.nationalgeographic.com/lostgospel/document.html>)

For those interested, the Coptic text can also be downloaded from the same site. Despite the attractive price of the downloadable text, however, I would recommend *The Gospel of Judas*, edited by Rodolphe Kasser, Marvin Meyer, and Gregor Wurst (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2006). Although this volume offers the same translation that can be downloaded for free, it also contains excellent annotations and interesting commentary. It is available from the National Geographic website together with the Krosney book (mentioned above) for less than \$30 (<http://www9.nationalgeographic.com/>). \*

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For instance, the narrative works centering on Thomas (*The Infancy Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Thomas, the Book of Thomas the Contender, The Acts of Thomas, and The Apocalypse of Thomas*), assume that Thomas did *not* touch Jesus. Since this narrative tradition had a decidedly Gnostic bent, the assumption that Thomas did not touch Jesus is hardly surprising. This is because Gnostics considered the flesh to be part of the realm of evil and, as a result, they assumed that Jesus' resurrected body was immaterial spirit.

Anti-Gnostic narrative texts, to the contrary, assumed that Thomas did touch Jesus' wounds as did the non-narrative (exegetical) works that mention Thomas. In fact, Tertullian used the Doubting Thomas episode to argue (against Marcion) for the materiality of Jesus' resurrected body. Probably because of the conflicts with the Gnostics, by medieval times, there was consensus that Thomas took Jesus up on his offer to examine his wounds. The consensus held until the time of the Reformation when the (by now traditional) interpretation came into question.

Besides looking at texts, Most also examines a variety of visual depictions of Doubting Thomas. Most is particularly interested in Caravaggio's painting, *Doubting Thomas* and devotes a considerable amount of space to it. Although, in this painting there is no disputing that Thomas touches Jesus (Thomas's finger is unambiguously in the wound of Jesus's side), nevertheless the painting masterfully illustrates the tension between faith and doubt.

Overall, although this is a somewhat quirky book, it is fascinating. Experts will find plenty of material to quibble about. Regardless, though, Most's *Doubting Thomas* is thought-provoking and consistently interesting. Particularly noteworthy in my view is the penultimate chapter on the relic of Thomas's finger (which is on display at the Basilica of Santa Croce in Rome—a photo of which appears as the book's frontpiece) and the ambiguities and ironies that surround it. \*

## Department of Religion Contribution Form

Enclosed please find my contribution\* to the  
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The George Washington University.

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**Please complete this form and return with  
your contribution to:**

Advancement Services  
2033 K Street NW  
Suite 310  
The George Washington University  
Washington, DC 20052

**\*Checks should be made payable to GW  
Religion Department**

*Thanks for your support!*

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for true acceptance. Our communities must see each other as sharing a common heritage, and a common future. It is only by adopting this attitude that we can combat the extremist threat and live in peace with each other.”

As a young man growing up in Washington, D.C., Joseph Lumbard was not sure he wanted to go to college. After high school he took a year-and-a-half off, and then decided to attend GW, for the most part because his mother worked at the University and he could obtain a free education.

Some may find it hard to imagine that an American who was not sure he wanted to attend college, and who converted to Islam in his 20s, would become the Special Advisor for Interfaith Affairs to His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. Yet, that is the position Lumbard holds today.

“At GW I found great professors in religious studies,” explained Lumbard. “After taking their courses I knew I wanted to continue on in this field.”

While earning a bachelor’s degree in English literature and religious studies (1993) and a master’s degree in religious studies (1995) at GW, the religion department faculty helped Lumbard come to the realization that “world religions are complimentary, not contradictory,” as he puts it.

One of those professors working with Lumbard was Robert Eisen, now a GW associate professor of religion and chair of the religion department.

The mutual admiration and respect developed between a Jewish professor and his Muslim student at The George Washington University helped ensure that the Islamic monarch of a Middle Eastern country was able to share those significant words with an audience of American Jewish rabbis. The two kept in touch sporadically as Lumbard continued his studies at Yale University, and a few years after Lumbard left GW, Eisen found another American convert to Islam in his class. It was Lumbard’s wife. The connection was re-established between teacher and student.

Lumbard’s scholarship, which involves the application of traditional teachings of Islam to the issues of today, brought him to the American University in Cairo in 2003. His unique ability to communicate with both those in the Arab world and those in the United States made him the ideal candidate to fill an advisory role for King Abdullah. Lumbard became King Abdullah’s Special Advisor for Interfaith Affairs in March 2005.

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**One of Our Recent Graduates Reminisces***Emily Filler*

In 1999, I entered GW with a load of books, plenty of curiosity, and a vague idea that I might like to study religion. Seven years later, I write this from Jerusalem, Israel, where I am still studying religion in its many forms. It was in GW's Religion Department that my broad interest was nurtured and developed, and my commitment not only to religious texts and history, but to pluralism and religious dialogue, began.

After leaving GW, I went directly to graduate school at Harvard University, intending to concentrate on the Bible and its early interpretations by Jews and Christians. In my first year, however, I took a class in modern Jewish thought, and was drawn in to the more recent, though equally complex, world of the Jewish *Haskalah*, or Enlightenment, and the changes it brought in Europe and America. And to my interest in ancient Israel was added a new one: the new State of Israel, a product of the modern ideals of rationalism and statehood as much as age-old religious convictions. A professor at Harvard encouraged me to take a year in Israel before going into my Ph.D, to "live in the rhythms of the Jewish year." So after my Masters degree, I left school (for the first time!) and headed off to the Middle East.

I had been well-prepared by friends and teachers for the modernity of the state of Israel, so I wasn't disappointed, as others I know had been, by the sight of cars and coffee shops, instead of camels and prophets on every street corner. My first week in Israel was spent on a dusty kibbutz in the center of the country, in the home of a unique couple. American *olim* (immigrants) of thirty years, the husband had founded a pluralistic Jewish educational park; his wife served as the unofficial rabbi of the kibbutz. They were happy to introduce me to the country, and encouraged my early attempts to communicate in Hebrew.

Soon, though, I went south, to Jerusalem, where I was planning on living and working for the year. I found an apartment, a job (teaching English), and some friends, and began to explore the city. I heard the siren that marks the beginning of Shabbat, and saw the way the streets cleared out and everyone - no matter their level of Jewish observance -

went home for the weekend. My second Shabbat in Jerusalem, I walked over the Old City and wandered around the ancient walls of the city, where I met two older couples, Mormons, traveling together. All five of us ended up walking over to the Kotel, the Western Wall, to pray and people-watch. It seemed a fitting (if somewhat quirky) introduction to Jerusalem, a city which so many different faiths have called holy.

What have I done this year? I have taught English language and literature, done a lot of babysitting on the side,

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In his unique position, Lumbard impressed upon the Jordanian leadership the importance of working with the international Jewish community. King Abdullah and others supported the idea, but to help with the execution Lumbard called upon his former professor.

Eisen and Lumbard brainstormed ideas, and sought the assistance of Rabbi Marc Gopin, James H. Laue Professor of Religion, Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University. This team hatched the idea of planning a meeting between King Abdullah and American rabbis. With some help from former U.S. Ambassador to Jordan Edward W. "Skip" Gnehm Jr., who is currently the Kuwait Chair for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Affairs at GW's Elliott School of International Affairs, the team was able to execute the event as planned.

While Jordan is a predominantly Muslim country, according to Lumbard and Eisen, King Abdullah recognizes the need to bring about a better understanding and more inter-religious dialogue, particularly among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Eisen said that in King Abdullah he sees "the potential to be a bridge builder between Jews and Muslims; potential like no other leader I know in the Arab or Muslim world today."

"My relationship with Joseph is symbolic of what is possible," said Eisen. "When we talk, you don't get the sense that we are from different religious communities."

Sometimes the divide between student and teacher can seem as large as the divide between people of different religious faiths. As Eisen and Lumbard have proven—whether you are a Jew and a Muslim, or a professor and a student—with an open heart and the willingness to listen, people from different worlds can break down the barriers that divide them. \*



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and dealt with incessant Israeli bureaucracy, in pursuit of a work visa. But that by no means covers it. I have met Christians here, mostly priests and pilgrims. I have met Muslims here, and talked with them about their different Israel experiences. I have traveled in the West Bank and seen the security fence that Israel is building and the way it affects the lives of the Palestinians who live behind it. And of course, I have lived “in the rhythms of the Jewish year,” where Saturday is the holiest day of the week; where Yom Kippur means crowds in the streets at night in their white clothing; and where at 11 am on Yom Ha-Shoah, the day of Holocaust remembrance, a siren blares, cars stop in the middle of the street, and everyone stands in silence. In my year here, I have worked and interacted with Jews of all backgrounds, from those with Brazilian art hung jauntily on their walls, to those whose walls are empty save for prominent pictures of bearded rabbis. I have become conversational (and argumentative) in Hebrew.

When I come home this summer, it will be with a renewed commitment to and appreciation of the study of religion. If there is one thing that my time here has reminded me of, it is that the faiths and ideologies I have studied do not exist in a vacuum; rather, they are living expressions of real people with real and complex lives. And as I look forward to reassuming the life of a graduate student, I hope that my future academic work will reflect the complicated, yet often very beautiful, realities of the Judaism (and Christianity, and Islam, and many others) that I have experienced here. \*



### Balaji Hebbar Receives the 2006 Bender Teaching Award

Professor Balaji Hebbar has been selected for a 2006 Bender Teaching Award. The Bender Teaching Awards are presented annually to faculty in recognition of their outstanding teaching efforts and include a \$500 award for professional development. Professor Hebbar will be recognized at the Fall Faculty Assembly.



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