Welcome from Chair
Early Times
Review: Under the Banner of Heaven
Religious Studies and the Liberal Arts Degree
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Books of Interest

The Department of Religious Studies—Early Times

It began with a man on a motorcycle smoking a cigar.

Joe Bettis, a recently minted Ph.D. from Princeton, was hired by the College of Arts and Sciences to start a Department of Religious Studies. It was 1964, a few years after the Supreme Court had declared that teaching “about” religion was permissible in state-supported universities. Across America, and especially in the South, state universities were quick to respond.

Within a few years departments were started at the University of Florida, Florida State, Georgia, and Tennessee. Bettis and Leon Weinberger were appointed to the first inter-racial committee that Alabama had ever had. The Ku Klux Klan was still very much a part of the local culture, and both men were targeted by that group as “liberal trouble makers.”

In 1969 the department became a three-person operation with the hiring of Patrick Green. He arrived just a few months before the university-wide demonstration that next spring against the bombing of Cambodia and the killings at Kent State. Three members of the department were on the so-called Faculty Student Coalition, a group that attempted to negotiate a settlement with the administration. But the administration refused to talk with the students. But a settlement was not to be. After the longest running demonstration of its kind in the United States, the embarrassing administration declared an end to the academic year and sent the students home—which finally ended the protests.

A year or so later the department hired Mr. Dorsey Blake, a Ph.D. candidate from Berkeley, who was one of the first black faculty members to be appointed by the University. (The basketball team had been “integrated” two years before and football was soon to follow.) His classes on “Black Churches” were immediately popular among both black and white students, but his efforts to visit various local churches with his class were not as successful. Two white churches turned the students away, telling them to go to their “own” church. However, after the story ran in the Tuscaloosa News, the group was welcomed by a number of other churches, including Calvary Baptist and First Methodist.

Joe Bettis left in 1973 to become an Associate Dean of the School of Public Affairs at the University of Nebraska. Green became Chair at that time and Joe McCowan was hired to teach Phenomenology of Religion and Ethics (which Bettis had taught). McCowan was also the first faculty member to teach a course-oriented to Feminist Studies. Indeed the early “Bis” saw a cultural shift in Religious Studies. While courses in Old and New Testament were popular (who retired three years ago), to open the newsletter with an anecdotal history of the Department, which will surely bring back memories for some current professors. While courses in Old and New Testament were popular today, a recent Ph.D. candidate from Berkeley, who was one of the first black faculty members to be appointed by the University.

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Review: Under the Banner of Heaven

Jon Krakauer has forged a career by telling the stories of people who choose to be inimical to others. Included among his tales is the disastrous 1985 attempt to scale Mt. Everest (Tina 1997). In his most recent book, Under the Banner of Heaven, Krakauer examines a subject where the line between rationality and irrationality is much more porous, and thus more subjective faith and fanaticism. Under the Banner of Heaven opens by chronicling the 1984 murder of a suburban Utah woman, named Brenda LeBaron. We then follow husband Ron and daughter, Erica. Their murders were committed by Ron and Dan Lafferty—her brothers-in-law—because they believed themselves ordered to do so by God. Under the Banner of Heaven is an attempt to understand the context in which this crime was committed, delving deeply into the history of Mormonism and fundamentalism. Krakauer makes an element of the only major religion heretical on U.S. soil. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) and the Mormon Fundamentalists are each convinced that the other represents a perversion of God’s true revelation. Among their discussions is the Insider-Outsider Problem in Relating Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown—Aronov Lecture Delivered by Jonathan Z. Smith

Professor Jonathan Z. Smith, of the University of Chicago, presented the Aronov Lecture (photo below) on December 2, 2003 by Niko Cerise. Photo Editor, EOs.A. (Alaska).

God’s Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible by Stephen B. Spiro (University of Michigan Press, 2003). The book analyzes about the textual evolution of the King James translation of the Bible. The book examines the historical process by which the text has been produced over time, including the influence of political, social, and religious factors. The book is highly recommended for those interested in the history of the Bible and the development of religious thought.

Books of Interest—Recommended Readings by Our Professors

Religious Studies majors Kim Davis and John Parrish join Professor Tim Murphy during the reception. Although the workload is tough, I feel that the class is very rewarding. My other class is “A Psychology of Religion,” which examines issues such as psychological intervention, profiling, and the impact of mental illnesses on the justice system. I Love being in the United Kingdom and Europe, there are a few things to keep in mind. Remember that in England french fries are called, chips, and they should always be kept on the left hand side of the stairs or you may find yourself being pushed down them! Cheers!

Marianne Stanton is a Junior, and former President of the Religious Studies Student Association, who is doing a minor in RLE while completing her major in Psychology.

 UA Students Studying Abroad

Maritime Stanton

Why study abroad? Some say for adventure, others for learning about a new culture, and still others believe it allows them to travel the world while still receiving college credit. All three of these ideas play a part in why students such as Matthew Stoten, a junior at the University of New England in Newcastle-upon-Yarmouth, England, through the University of Alabama’s Capstone International Program, and Katherine Kinneman, a sophomore at the University of New England in Portsmouth, England, through the University of Alabama’s Capstone International Program.

Stoten is a criminology major and Kinneman is a psychology major. Both spent their Fall 2003 semester in England and each spent their Spring 2004 semester in Australia.

Continued from page 1

Testament, the History of Western Reli-
gions and Comparative Religions contin-
ued to be offered, Black Religion, Feminist Theology, and Revolutionary Theology and the first early modern, 17th through early 19th century version of Biblical interpretation, was a course that some students who were interested in Biblical studies could take.

While the first semester of the “arresting state in the red flag state,” which will contain the paper he de-

Professor Smith met with Katherine Lee, reporter for The Tuscaloosa News, in the Department lounge.

In 1996, Krakauer was a member of the team that made an attempt to scale Mount Everest. His book, Into Thin Air, examines the disaster that befell the team and provides insights into the mental processes that led to the disaster. The book is a powerful examination of the human mind and the limits of human endurance.

To see more of the recent developments. We have established an Endowment for the Humanities,” Krakauer states, “In the late ’70s his position was lost to “proration,” a drastic reduction in funding that was directly affected the university. Indeed, “Alabama” and “USC” are often used as examples of the most successful restructuring programs.”

One thing that has remained consistently true. The de-

Even more recently, Steve Jacobs came to fill the Chair in Judaic Studies, while Kurt Schaeffer came to fill the Chair in Buddhist Studies.

Although the fund is currently in its very early stages, we would like to encourage you to consider making a donation—of any amount, whatsoever—so that the Department can develop this fund and be able to assist some of our students who are in financial need.

In addition, Krakauer offers no solutions; he does, however, provide insights into the most general topic of extremism, given the topic of his previous books, Krakauer may be uniquely qualified to offer his con-

Community of Dismantle: A History of Alternar- rations in America by Stephen J. Stein (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003). Stein has written a highly readable book documenting the influence of marginalized religious groups throughout U.S. history, from Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island, who argued for “soul liberty,” to the Church of Scientology, Jim Jones, and David Koresh.


development: “In any human endeavor, some- one is likely to use a name to make the activity with such concentrated focus and single-mindedness the and the stories of those who are immersed within religious communities. Krakauer devotes a good deal of attention to the role that openmindedness and language and command of the facts result in a co-

He recently ordered to do so by God. Under the Banner of Heaven is an attempt to understand the context in which this crime was committed, delving deeply into the history of Mormonism and fundamentalism. Krakauer makes an element of the only major religion heretical on U.S. soil. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) and the Mormon Fundamentalists are each convinced that the other represents a perversion of God’s true revelation. Among their discussions is the Insider-Outsider Problem in


The Goddess: Power, Sexuality, and the Femi-

nities Divine by Shahrin Ookoon (University of Michigan Press, 2003). This book is highly illustrated with dozens of beautiful color illustrations depicting goddesses from around the world. It explores the significant role of the “feminine divine” from the Great Mother of the Paleolithic period to Woman and Goddess goddsWW today.

The Lost Letters of Penampum: A story of the famous queen of the lovelier and more noble races of the island of Penampum," which introduces the world of first cen-

tric Christianity in the eastern Mediterranean. Ros-

study will find a wealth of historical information drawn from most recent scholarship while immerasing them- selves in a light-hearted written novel.

The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolera-

tion in Medieval Spain. Read-

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the University of Michigan Press, 2003). This book is highly illustrated with dozens of beautiful color illustrations depicting goddesses from around the world. It explores the significant role of the “feminine divine” from the Great Mother of the Paleolithic period to Woman and Goddess goddsWW today.
In this first complete biography, Douglas Horton and the Ecumenical Impulse in American Religion, (Harvard, 2002) by Theodore L. Tent, we are introduced to an extensive study of the often-surprisingly unheralded twentieth-century religious leader. Throughout his life, Horton worked tirelessly for church and world unity under the banner of ecumenicism, and his efforts bore fruit in a variety of venues. Horton introduced Americans to the work of Swiss theologian Karl Barth through his translation of The Word of God and the Word of Man. He was the chair of the denominational merger that formed the United Church of Christ in 1957. He also presided over the transition of the Harvard Divinity School from a near moribund institution to a distinguished center of religious learning. Toward the end of his life, Horton continued his ecumenical work with the Universalist Unitarian Church, which he served as a pastor.

Mother / Nature: Popular Culture and the Environment in India (Indiana, 2003) explores our relationship with nature as a metaphor for the way we approach the natural world. The book discusses the nature of the paradigm, or a model to understand and manipulate it. Nature is people and their productions. "We are not separate from nature," Horton said. "We make it the vehicle by which humans interpret the world."

Religious Studies and the Liberal Arts Degree

That person walking toward you on the Quad looks familiar. It is a girl you went to high school with and haven't seen since graduation. She recognizes you too, waves to get your attention and stops to chat for a minute before you go your separate ways again. After reestablishing pleasantness comes the inevitable question, "What are you majoring in?" Horton said that "motherhood" and "mothering" carry within a wave of cultural baggage. Horton observed that "motherhood" and "mothering" can be either positive or negative experiences, depending on the context. In some cases, it can be empowering, allowing women to assert their independence and autonomy. In other cases, it can be oppressive, limiting women's choices and opportunities. Horton concluded that "motherhood" and "mothering" can be both positive and negative experiences, depending on the context.
The Religion in Culture Lecture Series invites scholars to address the role played by religious beliefs and practices in creating and contesting culture. Below are a few candid shots taken during the lectures and the receptions which followed. Check our website for upcoming lectures which are sponsored on a regular basis, www.as.ua.edu/rel/events.html. The Department thanks you to Professors Ted Trust, Betty Dickey and Donna Martin for organizing these events.

Professor Mindy Nancarrow, of the Art Department (left, with Professor William Dooley, Chair of the Art Department), who presented a lecture in January 2004, on depictions of the Virgin Mary in seventeenth-century Spanish art.

Attending the reception following Professor Nancarrow’s lecture are: Tim Bailes and Drew Elmore (REL majors) and Professors Gabriele Fassbeck and Mark Jacobs.

Our Professors

Russell McCutcheon, who joined the faculty in 2002, has been working on books with Oxford University Publishers, of the UK, in which one of his own books will appear, later in 2004. His most recent book, The Holocaust and Judaism: Structure, Meaning, sitting in the oblong, unbound object of religious influence. In Spring 2004 he is teaching REL 235 Native American Religions. In this course participants will survey several specific indigenous cultures, including the urban theocratic system of the Aztecs, the aymaran people at the base of the Andes, the Hopi, and the Native American Church. Finally, they will look at some contemporary expressions of Native American religion, including Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel, Ceremony.

Gabriele Fassbeck, Visiting Professor from Paris, is in her last of the two last semesters, studied Professors Gabriele Fassbeck and Mark Jacobs.

Catherine Roach has two current projects. One is a history of American environmental and feminist ethics. She has an article under review at the journal Enviromental Philosophy called “Ducks, Bogs, and Guns: Stewardship Ethics in Newfoundland.” This research has as its focus on the era of the Second World Period. She is interested in synthesizing the text into a scholarly and evidence-based argument pertaining to this topic. In this vein she hopes to join the Keaner Regional Project’s archaeological survey which will focus on domestic remains from the Hellenistic and Roman periods along the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Guy Cutting, REL major, on the veranda talking with Professor Cathy Pagani and Professor Maarten Hooi of the History Department (middle background).

Attending the reception following Professor Cathy Pagani’s lecture are: Tim Bailes and Drew Elmore (REL majors) and Professor Maarten Hooi of the History Department (middle background).

Faculty Member Awarded National Research Fellowship

Throughout 2004 Professor Kurtis Schaeffer’s work has been freed from his teaching duties to pursue his research on Buddhism and culture in pre-modern Tibet. He was enabled to devote himself exclusively to his scholarship because he was chosen as one of fifteen recipients in the inaugural national competition for the Charles A. Ryndak Research Fellowship. This fellowship, which is funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in honor of Charles A. Ryndak, and which is administered by the Program in Asian Studies, is designed to give assistant professors in the humanities and related social sciences whose scholarship has advanced their fields and who have well designed and carefully developed plans for

Theodore J. Jacobs is currently working on a book on genocide. His forthcoming book, The Holocaust and Religious Belief, is based on his dissertation and was completed in 1999. His Ph.D. dissertation, The Creation of an Intergroup Model of the Crises of the Crime of Genocide, examines the role of religion in creating, maintaining, and promoting the criminal acts that constitute genocide. In Spring 2004 he is teaching REL 235 Native American Religions. In this course participants will survey several specific indigenous cultures, including the urban theocratic system of the Aztecs, the aymaran people at the base of the Andes, the Hopi, and the Native American Church. Finally, they will look at some contemporary expressions of Native American religion, including Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel, Ceremony.

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Kurtis R. Schaeffer returns to teaching this Spring semester, 2004, after a year on research leave (see below). He is teaching an introduction to Buddhism and the Department’s senior seminar, in which he and our graduating majors are reading the works of the important historian of religion, Jonathan Z. Smith. Schaeffer’s current research is focused on the history of the book in Tibet.

Professor Mindy Nancarrow of the Art Department is a recent graduate who majored in REL and was awarded a Master’s degree in Art History. She is currently completing a book on the iconography of the Virgin Mary in seventeenth-century Spanish art.

Professor Cathy Pagani of the Art Department, who presented a lecture in October 2003, on “The Stone Mandalas of Bodh Gaya.”

Dr. Tim Murphy is currently working on a book entitled, Phenomenology, Gnosticism, & Ignatius. This work surveys the history of the “gnostic anthropology of religion,” an approach that emerged in the 1890s with the emergence of religious and advocates a static system of religious education. This approach is criticized in light of contemporary postcolonial theory as relying on a historically specific, Eurocentric type of religion, seeing it as an essential, unchanging essence of religion. In Spring 2004 he is teaching REL 235 Native American Religions. In this course participants will survey several specific indigenous cultures, including the urban theocratic system of the Aztecs, the aymaran people at the base of the Andes, the Hopi, and the Native American Church. Finally, they will look at some contemporary expressions of Native American religion, including Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel, Ceremony.

James Apple, a recent graduate of the Department of Religion, has been teaching several courses on religious anthropology, environmental ethics, and the politics of religion. He is currently working on a book entitled, Phenomenology, Gnosticism, & Ignatius. This work surveys the history of the “gnostic anthropology of religion,” an approach that emerged in the 1890s with the emergence of religious and advocates a static system of religious education. This approach is criticized in light of contemporary postcolonial theory as relying on a historically specific, Eurocentric type of religion, seeing it as an essential, unchanging essence of religion. In Spring 2004 he is teaching REL 235 Native American Religions. In this course participants will survey several specific indigenous cultures, including the urban theocratic system of the Aztecs, the aymaran people at the base of the Andes, the Hopi, and the Native American Church. Finally, they will look at some contemporary expressions of Native American religion, including Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel, Ceremony.

Acknowledgments

We'd like to express our debt to the people who help to make the Department a reality: Betty Dickey, our Senior Office Associate, keeps us on track and Donna Martin, Office Associate, formatted the newsletter. As well, our student assistants deserve mention: Kim Davis (REL major), Casey Matz (Judicial Studies minor), Sarah Jones, and John Parrish (REL major). We also wish to thank the offices of the College of Arts & Sciences, the Department was able to hire him Dr. James Apple to replace Prof. Schaeffer in our classroom for all of 2003.

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