



DEPARTMENT of
RELIGIOUS
STUDIES

Studying
Religion in
Culture

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA
ARTS & SCIENCES

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
Department of Religious Studies
Box 870264
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0264

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Tuscaloosa, AL
Permit 16



DEPARTMENT of
RELIGIOUS
STUDIES

In this issue:

Welcome from Chair

Early Times

Our Professors

Books of Interest

Student Articles

Religion in
Culture Lectures

Department Sponsoring
African Diaspora
Conference

Studying
Religion in
Culture

www.as.ua.edu/rel

RELIGIOUS STUDIES NEWSLETTER

Spring 2005 • Issue 2

Welcome from the Chair



Russell McCutcheon

I'm pleased to welcome you to the second issue of our Department's annual newsletter.

Since last writing this opening article, a number of newsworthy things have taken place, and I'd like to ensure that you are aware of some of the milestones that we've passed. As the Department's former Chair, **Patrick Green**, made plain in last year's newsletter, in the late 1990s we went through some significant changes. For instance, upon my arrival in August of 2001, all of the other faculty members were untenured, with the most senior having been on campus only since

1998. Readers familiar with life within a university know that this means that they were all "tenure-track"—which signifies a rigorous six year process of annual reviews that may or may not culminate in being awarded tenure (a form of job security that affords academic freedom within the university). So, I'm quite pleased to report that, as of August of 2004, three of our faculty members received this distinction: Associate Professors **Steve Jacobs** (who holds the Department of Religious Studies' Aaron Aronov Endowed Chair in Judaic Studies), **Catherine Roach** (cross-appointed to Religious Studies from New College) and **Ted Trost** (cross-appointed from our Department to New College). Moreover, as I write this introduction, Assistant Professor **Kurtis**

Schaeffer (our resident expert on the history and cultures of Tibet, who has been in our Department since 2000) has applied for tenure and promotion to the rank of Associate Professor. I look forward to reporting on his good news in next year's newsletter.

As for other developments, there's simply too many things to list. Professor Schaeffer and his wife, **Heather Swindler**, had their second child, **Max**; Professor **Gabriele Fassbeck** (who this year completes her two-year position as Visiting Assistant Professor, funded through our Aronov Endowment) led a student trip to Mobile to tour the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit; and Professor Trost released his third CD, by **Thaddaeus Quince** and the **New Originals**, entitled "The Wrest" (released by

Continued on Page 2

Student Scholarships

Due to the generosity of donors, the Department is pleased that it can award scholarships to some of our students.

Whereas the proceeds from the **Ulysses V. Goodwyn Fund** are used to support the activities of our student association, the proceeds from the **Joseph Silverstein Scholarship Fund** are awarded annually to Religious Studies majors and Judaic Studies minors who have excelled in the past year.

In 2003 the awards were either \$1000 or \$500 and were presented to: **Clay Arnold, Kim Davis, Drew Elmore, Shera Fingerman, Peter von Herrmann, Catherine Howell, Mark Hopkins, John Parrish, Kathleen Penton, Samantha Sastre, Kyle Stephens, and Tom Taylor.**

The 2004 recipients of the Silverstein Fellowship are: **Kristin Bradbury, Guy Cutting, Drew Elmore, Shera Fingerman, Katie Jo Greer, James Harrington, Josh McDonough, John Parrish, Kathleen Penton, Samantha Sastre, Matthew Satcher, and Tom Taylor.**

And, just announced, the 2005 recipients of the Silverstein Fellowship are: **Brandon Andrews, Kristin Bradbury, Andrew Elmore, Timothy Homan, Josh McDonough, Brian Robbins, Samantha Sastre, Christine Scott, Matthew Satcher, and Marianne Stanton.**

Their awards, along with a few other surprises, will be presented at the April 15, 2005, Honors Day Reception.

Amy Petersen Memorial Fund



scholarship or a book buying endowment to enhance the holdings at Gorgas Library.

Readers of last year's newsletter will already know about the unexpected death, in October 2003, of one of our most charming students, **Amy Petersen**, who is pictured here in a portrait painted by her mother, **Jo Petersen**, of Huntsville, AL. In the midst of grappling with their tragic loss, Amy's family contacted the Department to communicate their wish to establish a scholarship fund in her memory. Their hope is that it can either eventually fund a need-based student

We invite you to consider making a tax-free donation, in whatever amount, to this or any of the other scholarship and endowment funds that assist in the work of the Department of Religious Studies. In fact, donations to our Aronov Endowment are periodically made by those interested in the work being done in our Department; we are profoundly grateful for, and simultaneously humbled by, this continued interest.

More information on scholarships and donations can be found at our website: <http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/stdeskscholarships.html>.

Our thanks to Jo for allowing us to reproduce this photograph.

The Department of Religious Studies—Early Times



Dr. Joe Bettis
Former Chair

I came to Tuscaloosa in 1964, one year after **George Wallace** had "stood in the schoolhouse door" to prevent **Aatherine Lucy's** registration at the University. At the time, I had no interest in civil rights or politics. I did not come to the University of Alabama in 1964 to join the civil rights movement. I came to teach religious studies and to participate in the creation of a Department of Religious Studies. I was fresh from graduate school, full of academic arrogance, ego, and enthusiasm.

At the time, Religious Studies courses were taught by various campus ministers and listed in the Philosophy Department. The quality of the courses was mixed. **Leon Weinberger**, who was a rabbi, and a Presbyterian Campus Minister whose name I have forgotten taught respectable courses with small

enrollments. Other campus ministers taught courses that were notorious for being "an easy A" and they had very large enrollments. **Iredell Jenkins** was chair of the Philosophy Department, and he knew that this was not a good situation.

They tried me out for a year and then decided to create a separate Religious Studies Department and asked me to chair it. I was promoted to Associate Professor, and my annual salary was raised from \$7,000 to \$14,000. I was also given tenure, a decision that I suspect many administrators and faculty members later came to regret.

To inaugurate the Department we held a series of Lectures. **Joseph Campbell, Franklin Littell, Stanley Hopper, and Will Herberg** gave outstanding lectures. We were going to publish them but it didn't happen. We did, however, make a department. I wrote a proposal to the Danforth Foundation and on the recommendation of their consultant, Prof. **Van Harvey**, they gave us a grant. I hired an old friend, **Pat Green**, and I

also hired **Leon Weinberger**. The other campus ministers were invited not to teach any more. There was unhappiness about that. Oh well. Three good teachers with solid credentials: we were on our way.

But it was impossible to remain in the Ivory Tower. Civil Rights were everywhere. The Selma March unfolded that year—March 21, 1965. I can still clearly remember standing in my kitchen and receiving a call from my grad school friends, **Jim Sessions, Bruce Felker, and Don Jones**, saying that they were at that moment in the Newark Airport, on their way to Selma. When I said I would meet them, they told me not to come. "We will leave Alabama after the march," they said, "You will still be there." I hung up the phone and cried. (I believe Jim still runs a poverty center in Knoxville and Don recently retired from a professorship at Drew University.)

The Presbyterian Campus Minister and **Al Nelson**, Professor of Sociology and

Continued on Page 2

Continued, Welcome

Wreckloose Recordings).

And, although I've taken up most of my allotted space singing the praises of our faculty members, you'll notice that, once again, our newsletter prominently features the accomplishments of our students—some still here and some continuing their studies in other settings. As a small undergraduate department with a collection of nationally respected scholars, we pride ourselves on serving the needs of our students—helping them to become acquainted with some new thoughts—while also producing innovative scholarship.

Happy reading. ■

Continued, Early Times

got me involved. Al and I met in his home with **Jo Malisham** and **Ross Bonner**, local members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Al would close his blinds before the four of us met, and Ross and Jo came in through the back door. Tuscaloosa was the home of **Bobby Shelton**, Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. My real education was beginning.

Al was targeted for a time by the Klan, but after Jo Malisham parked his truck in front of Al's house for a few days, the threat receded. I carried a gun, but I was afraid I would blow my own foot off, so I got a Doberman who went with me everywhere—even, for a time, to class.

While there may be those who do not want to remember those days—full of fear, anxiety, struggle—they need to be recorded. The administrators—**Frank Rose**, **David Matthews**, **Alex Pow**, **Jeff Bennett**—were useless. They resisted every advance and then took credit for the victories won by the nameless courageous. **Bear Bryant** could have made a huge difference, but he refused to recruit black players, even when given the opportunity to field potentially great athletes. Later, of course, when there was no risk, the Bear joined the parade.

For every vicious act of hate there was a victorious act of love, and for every coward who capitulated to the forces of racism there was a hero who stood up: **T. Y. Rogers**, later killed in Georgia in an automobile accident that may not have been an accident; **Bill Herzfeld**, now Bishop Herzfeld; **Jo Malisham**; **Ross Bonner**; **Mrs. Green**, from First African Baptist Church; **Al Nelson**; **Jeff Buttram**; **Ray Fowler**; and so many others.

I had not been in Tuscaloosa long before I heard the name of T. Y. Rogers. He was the local SCLC leader and minister of First African Baptist Church, where the congregation had been tear-gassed by the Tuscaloosa police a year or so earlier. I was warned repeatedly that T.Y. Rogers was a radical troublemaker, a very bad dude to be avoided at all costs.

I expected a black hulk, breathing fire and smoke. But when I finally met T.Y., I found him to be a mild, even rather timid, though courageous Baptist minister. He was a graduate of Crozer Theological Seminary, a devoted husband and father, and a quiet, thoughtful, inspiring man. He, along with Bill Herzfeld, who is now a Lutheran Bishop, were the leaders of the civil rights movement in Tuscaloosa.

Dr. Martin Luther King was murdered on April 4, 1968. A memorial service was held a few days later at Tuscaloosa's First African Baptist Church, as services were held at black churches throughout the South. In attendance were about 3000 black people and about three whites. The church holds about 300, so there was quite a mass of people outside. I tried to hide inside, behind a post. But as the black ministers entered, one (Rev. Godfrey) saw me. "Hey Rev. Bettis," he said, "do you want to march with the ministers?" That was the last thing I wanted to do. But I did. And I am proud of it.

T. Y. preached an incredibly powerful sermon. Here is something of what he said: "I was on the balcony. And I held Martin's head in my lap, and I felt Martin's blood in my hands, and I knew that Martin was dead. But Martin is not dead. When we march today, Martin will march with us and will continue to lead us. I knelt on the balcony. And I held Martin, and I knew Martin was dead. But Martin is not dead. . . ."

T.Y.'s cadences continued to echo in the church and outside as they gave voice to unspeakable grief.

After the sermon, 3000 people marched down the main street of Tuscaloosa, from First African Baptist Church, past the office of **Bobby Shelton** and the Ku Klux Klan, to the courthouse. The march was led by six black ministers—and me. There is a picture somewhere in the archives of the Tuscaloosa newspaper.

Meanwhile, back at the Department, there were still three faculty members. I had been lobbying the administration for another position, but given my extracurricular activities—some of which were admirably shared by Pat and Leon—I was finding it difficult to get additional budget for office supplies, much less a new position.

But then **Dean Fred Conner** told all the department heads that the University could no longer avoid hiring a black faculty member. Fred said that he was holding a line open for the first department that could recruit a black prospect. I saw this as a way to build our Department. I asked T.Y. if he would accept an appointment. He said yes, so I told Dean Conner that I had a black prospect, with good credentials, who would take the appointment. He was very pleased and asked me who. When I told him, he just looked stunned—incapable—and said, "No." End of story. (Fred was a good man—he was just reflecting administration policy and position.)

So I asked Fred if I could have some recruiting funds. He said given the trouble I had caused, he could not give me any funds to recruit. I went to see my friend **Ray Fowler**, head of Psychology, whose department was large and had discretionary funds. We announced a series of lectures on "Psychology and Black Religion in the South" and invited several distinguished black academics to form an advisory board. I remember **Jim Cheek** and **Hosea Williams**. This group helped us recruit a black faculty member. Thus **Dorsey Blake** became the fourth member of the Department of Religious Studies, teaching with us from 1972-77, and the first black faculty member at the University of Alabama.

There was more. These were the days of the anti-



The Rev. Dr. Dorsey O. Blake taught in the Department of Religious Studies from 1972-77. Since 1994, he has been minister of The Church for The Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco. Founded in 1944, this church was the nation's first interracial and interfaith congregation. Dr. Blake writes:

"The years in Alabama were profoundly educational and significantly influenced my spiritual journey. I thank Dr. Bettis for his pioneering efforts."

Vietnam War protests. For ten days at one point during the anti-war demonstrations, I could not leave home for fear of being arrested by Alabama State Troopers or attacked by the Klan. I wasn't sure which would be worse. Students chained themselves to the flagpole in front of the student center. It was rumored that the CIA burned the ROTC building in order to create a pretext for the National Guard to occupy the campus. Universities were closed across the country. The University of Alabama was kept open by a large contingent of heavily armed National Guard troops. It was not a happy time.

The government had decided that the draft would be selective depending on a student's grades. Only students with low grades would be drafted. I didn't think I wanted my grades used that way, so I told a class that I would give everyone an "A." One of the most moving experiences of my life happened in class the next day. A student asked to speak. She said that a number of women in the class had talked. They were afraid that blanket A's would not work and would get me in trouble. The women had all agreed that they would accept lower grades to make the record look legitimate. I still remember their courage and my tears of respect for them.

In 1968 I sat behind Atherine Lucy at her graduation. George Wallace's stand in the schoolhouse door had failed. Another student, who majored in Sociology and Religious Studies, became the first black sheriff in Green County since Reconstruction. In this context of civil rights and war protests, the Department of Religious Studies began forty years ago with a commitment to academic excellence, religious toleration, and social justice. In those days we debated how these interests were to mesh. Whereas some academics then and now believe that academic objectivity requires a distancing from issues of social justice, the Department of Religious Studies was begun with a belief that academic rigor and social activism can and must inform each other in creative and vital ways. How else were we to understand then the intricate relations between white religion, black religion, civil rights, and the Vietnam War? And how else are we to understand today and really impact the unfolding events surrounding Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in the Middle East?

From what I can tell at a distance, the Department continues to thrive. I feel certain that the debate remains lively. ■

Why Major in Religious Studies? Three Students' Journeys



Stephanie Cusimano

In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes discussed the dialectic a cultural mythologist faces when confronted simultaneously with both object and knowledge. Barthes writes, "we constantly drift between the object and its demystification . . . for if we penetrate the object, we liberate it but we destroy it; and if we acknowledge its full weight, we respect it, but we restore it to a state that is still mystified." My personal odyssey through Religious Studies left me with a similar vertigo, drifting between my history and my existential experience.

Since I was a small child I attended a United Methodist church several times weekly with my mother. I always harbored a great fascination with doctrine and church history. At twelve I thought I might become a church historian and prayed dutifully that my true Christian vocation would be revealed. When I began in the Religious Studies Department I retained a nebulous interest in Theology and Christian history. The spring of my sophomore year I studied at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Jerusalem hemorrhages expressions of religiosity: a colorful Coptic mass outside the Holy Sepulcher, Orthodox Jewish men and women davening at the Wailing Wall, Muslim men performing the ablution outside the Al-Aqsa mosque before noon-time prayer, evangelical pilgrims attending the Stations of the Cross scattered along the Via Dolorosa. In the North of the country there are small Druze villages, Roman and Crusader sites, and the gardens of the Baha'u'llah. In the South, the Judean Desert is home to Bedouin tribes, Christian monasteries, Qumran, and secular kibbutzim. In the Palestinian territories there are the magnificent ancient cities of Bethlehem and Jericho and vibrant local markets. The landscape blooms with the prodigious beauty of diversity, of histories and traditions. However, the sacred canopy laid across the land is sheer and does not conceal the scars of conflict and violence and the economic inequality that persists for the Palestinians. I returned to the United States with images of astonishing beauty, but also with the sense of a world no longer animated by anything other than socio-economic forces. The faculty at UA helped me to ground my observations in social theory, and I began to see religion as a vital form of social behavior.

Despite my adamant agnosticism, I remain interested in the positive function of symbolic thinking in modern society. I approach religious myth as a device that assists a culture in naturalizing its history and social behaviors. While not discounting the more disturbing capacity of myth to communicate ideology in order to advance political and social hegemony, I am fascinated by the role of symbolic interaction in manufacturing social solidarity. There is an imperfect match between how practitioners of a particular tradition behave toward one another and the behaviors they direct outward to practitioners of opposing traditions. Nevertheless, certain religious myths (forgiveness, sanctuary, charity) improve the fitness of a

group by creating a hospitable ground for social interaction. The capacity of religions to facilitate social cohesion leaves me optimistic and eager to continue my studies in graduate school. ■

Editor's Note: Stephanie Cusimano has applied for Fall 2005 admission to several M.A. programs in Anthropology and Folklore Studies at universities across the country.



Shane Sharp

The newly-tenured **Dr. Roach** has asked me to contribute to the newsletter a small piece about why I chose to major in Religious Studies and what I experienced in the department. I generally do not like talking about myself. (The last time I wrote to the department, they posted what I had said on the website. For those of you who have seen it, I seem to be a braggart. Trust me, I am not. The reason I was bragging was because I thought it could help the department deal with the ACHE people, whose acronym could not be more correct.) Since this essay was requested by Dr. Roach, I decided to write it, because she is a major reason why I have gotten as far as I have to date.

My interest in religion began in childhood. My Southern Baptist mother made sure that my sisters and I went to church as often as we could. Now, while most of the children in church did not seem to want to be there, I actually enjoyed going and learning about the Bible and the message of Jesus Christ.

However, I soon had a falling out with my church and with religion in general due to some of the hypocrisies I perceived among my fellow church members. After that, there was a small latency period where I had no interest in religion at all and saw it as a waste of time. This latency period ended during high school when for some reason that I cannot remember I began to think about the problem of evil. I just could not reconcile all of the pain and suffering around me and in the world in general with the belief in a god who was omnipotent, omniscient, and morally good. At the same time, I began to question the stance of the Southern Baptist Church that the only way to achieve salvation was through a firm belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ. These issues awoke my dormant interest in religion, and I began to read the Bible and to learn about the other religions of the world with fervor. Because of this awakening of my interest in religion, when I entered The University of Alabama in the fall of 1997 I decided that one of my two majors would be Religious Studies.

My decision could not have been a better one. I found in the department intelligent instructors and stimulating courses that allowed me to experience a broad range of topics in Religious Studies and that addressed the questions that had been troubling me for some time. I also found supportive professors who saw talent in me when I did not. They gave me the confidence and encouragement that I needed to

pursue graduate work in Religion, and for that I will always be thankful.

After leaving the department, I went on to get my Master's degree in Religion from Vanderbilt University. While there I wrote a thesis on how religion affects the behavior of intimate partner abuse victims. After graduating, I decided to pursue a doctorate in Sociology from the University of Wisconsin—Madison. I plan to continue my work on intimate partner abuse and religion here, as well as to work more generally in the Sociology of Religion. ■



Kristin Bradbury

All of my life, I have known that I wanted to be a physician in order to heal the afflicted. Yet I also knew that I did not want to follow in the footsteps of so many of my peers by earning a Biology degree. I wanted to do something different. I wanted my time as an undergraduate to be spent learning something that I am not only truly interested in, but also a subject that I would not have the opportunity to study in-depth in the future. I chose to major in Religious Studies.

The majority of outsiders to this field probably confuse this department with theology. However, in the words of **Dr. Jacobs**, "This is not Sunday School." Similarly, it is not my intention to proselytize to my future patients. There are many religious and spiritual issues pertaining to the practice of medicine. It is necessary for doctors to possess a valid concern for the spiritual as well as the physical aspect of the patient. While there is much to say regarding faith healing and the power of prayer in healing, I am even more fascinated by how people use their religious or spiritual background—be it consciously or not—when making decisions regarding their health. My undergraduate education has provided me with lessons in understanding cultures and what it essentially means to be human. Not all of my patients will be of the same religious background or culture as me. It will thus be important for me to recognize the pluralistic nature of patients' views and not treat them as if they are all the same. Furthermore, an individual's culture often determines his or her attitudes toward medical treatment, terminal illness, and even death.

In my efforts to treat the *whole* person, I must gain as much insight as possible. Being a Religious Studies student, I have been given ample opportunity to cultivate my critical thinking skills and to learn the ever-important skill of asking the right questions, so as to become a better listener and communicator. The field of medicine is not cut and dry. There are many results that are unexplainable by simple science alone. In the words of Albert Einstein, "*Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.*" There is a remarkable degree of truth in both fields, and a truly successful physician can balance both. ■

Editor's Note: Kristin Bradbury has applied for admission to medical school, starting in Fall 2005.



Religion and the Domestication of Dissent, or How to Live in a Less than Perfect Nation. Russell McCutcheon (Equinox Publishers, 2005).

In their efforts to appropriate blame and channel retaliatory action in the post September 11 world, scholars and pundits alike have used a series of rhetorical techniques to great effect, manufacturing an image of Islam, the proverbial Other, that is highly conducive to the needs of liberal democracies but hardly a reflection of any one of the many “authentic” Islams. This effect has largely been achieved by ignoring the many differences within Islamic movements and asserting that social identities are based on a stable, uniform kernel that moves unchanged throughout history and across the globe. This inevitably results in caricatures that have many uses; in dominant group’s portraits of dissenting or marginal groups it tends towards their demonization. In this wide-ranging essay—which considers a variety of sites, from contemporary film and art to the War on Terror—McCutcheon asks the reader to consider how the classifications we use to name and thereby negotiate our social worlds—foremost among them the classification “religion” itself—are implicitly political and are being wielded in the public arena to carry out generally undisclosed/under-analyzed social work.

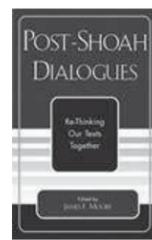


Jacking In to the Matrix Franchise: Cultural Reception and Interpretation. Edited by William Doty and Matthew Kapell (Continuum, 2004).

The book appeared early in the summer and sold nearly 4,000 copies the first month. It contains a wide range of analyses and responses to the franchise components from colleagues who apply their various disciplinary specialties. The president of *The Journal of Popular Culture* praised the book as “the best by far” among the books published on the *Matrix* franchise. Doty’s contribution to the volume compares the franchise to the aim of Richard Wagner to create in Bayreuth “ein Gesamtkunstwerk”: a total environment for the arts, including the opera house (the first theatre to darken the windows for performances), the music, the mythological development, the drama, the dancing—even the statuary on the grounds and the food in the restaurants. **Theodore Trost** also has an essay in this book. He co-authored “Story, Product, Franchise: Images of Postmodern Cinema” with Professor **Bruce Isaacs** of the University of Sydney in Australia.

Teaching About the Holocaust: Essays by College and University Teachers. Edited by Samuel Totten, Paul Bartrop, and Steven Jacobs (Praeger Publishers, 2004).

This collection of fourteen essays by renowned scholars in the field of Holocaust studies seeks to reflect on the experience of teaching and researching this complicated and emotional topic. Contained within are the pioneering stories of those presently engaged in the work of Holocaust education. Separately, they represent a variety of disciplines and orientations. Collectively, they give evidence of the strong commitment to continue this important work, and the moral and ethical demands such teaching, writing, and research place upon all who engage in it. Different perspectives from historical, philosophical, and religious frameworks come together to create a unique contribution to the literature on the Holocaust. Educators discuss what they teach, their methodologies and theoretical orientations and reflect on their own journeys that brought them to this field.



Post-Shoah Dialogues: Re-Thinking Our Texts Together. Edited by James Moore, Zev Garber, Henry Knight, and Steven Jacobs (University Press of America, 2004).

The “Midrash Group” of the Scholar’s Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches has met annually over the last decade to discuss ways for Christians and Jews to find meaning and direction in and from sacred texts after the Holocaust. *Post Shoah Dialogues* is a sample of four different dialogue sessions of the “Midrash Group.” The idea for a Jewish-Christian dialogue on texts grew out of an ongoing conversation between the four scholars represented in this volume. The essays, focusing on texts matched from Hebrew and Christian scriptures, allow Christians and Jews to read the texts together in such a way as to respect the authentic identity of each other, respect the deep questions arising from the Shoah, and to open avenues for more dialogue.



Himalayan Hermitess: The Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun. Kurtis R. Schaeffer (Oxford University Press, 2004).

Himalayan Hermitess is a vivid account of the life and times of a Buddhist nun living on the borderlands of Tibetan culture. Orgyan Chokyi (1675-1729) spent her life in Dolpo, the highest inhabited region of the Nepal Himalayas. Illiterate and expressly forbidden by her master to write her own life story, Orgyan Chokyi received divine inspiration, defied tradition, and composed one of the most engaging autobiographies of the Tibetan literary tradition. *The Life of Orgyan Chokyi* is the oldest known autobiography authored by a Tibetan woman, and thus holds a critical place in both

Tibetan and Buddhist literature. In it she tells of the sufferings of her youth, the struggle to escape menial labor and become a hermitess, her dreams and visionary experiences, her relationships with other nuns, the painstaking work of contemplative practice, and her hard-won social autonomy and high-mountain solitude. The book offers a compelling vision of the relation between gender, the body, and suffering from a female Buddhist practitioner’s perspective.



Busy in Retirement

Editor’s Note: Although **Dr. William Doty** has been officially retired from the Department of Religious Studies since 2001, he continues to be as active as ever. Students in both *New College* and the *Blount Undergraduate Initiative* have benefited from his innovative and interdisciplinary courses involving mythology, film, religious studies, and cultural studies. As the following report from Dr. Doty indicates, his travel and publication schedule has been active as well.

Sometimes publication pipelines disgorge projects that have stacked up a bit. That was the case this past summer. “**What’s a Myth? Nomological, Topological, and Taxonomic Explorations**” had its origins on a paper napkin at a luncheon at Indiana University’s Folklore Institute. The essay looks at the various ways that myths are classified and ranked, and it appeared recently in *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*.

Another piece grew out of a presentation at the Mythic Journeys conference in Atlanta in June: “**Orpheus: The Shamanic-Mantic Kitharôdos (Singing Lyreplayer)**.” It was published in *Spring: A Journal of Archetype and Culture*. In the article, I explore how this Greek figure can be treated as having shamanic features. He remains so important in the arts today because he exists between and is related to both the nocturnal, frenzied Dionysos and the intellectual, cool Apollon.

Myth: A Handbook is part of the Greenwood Folklore Handbooks series—one of those expensive hardbound reference volumes that appear in many school and college libraries around the world. That’s somewhat unfortunate, because it is priced accordingly, but it’s my most accessible volume on myth to date, with illustrations and its own mini-anthology of unusual myths. I also do more here with films and pop culture than anywhere else.■

Attention Graduates

We’d like to know what you’re doing. We have devoted a page on our website to news about graduates and we’d like to see this page grow. So please visit our web site, <http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/relgraduates.html>, and send us some news, even a photo or two that we can use.

Religious Studies and Religious Vocation



Samantha Sastre

I was one of those upstart adolescents who had it all figured out in high school. Oh yes, I was all ready to apply to my dream colleges and prepare for a four year Theology program like I had always hoped. After a thorough Catholic college education, I planned on becoming a religious sister. Yes, that’s right, a nun. Yes, nuns still exist and are real people with real lives. But I digress.

Anyway, things don’t always work out like we plan. Though I was accepted to all of them, my dream schools were all a bit too pricey for me. When an unsolicited scholarship letter came from the University of Alabama, I just could not pass it up. Divine intervention, perhaps? The world may never know.

With this change in college choices came another change: what should I major in now? Since Theology is not a degree offered by the state-sponsored University of Alabama, I chose what I assumed would be the next logical major: Religious Studies. Now as a naïve, Sunday school educated Christian girl, I had no idea what I was getting into. To quote **Dr. Jacob’s** oft-repeated reminder from my Intro to the Hebrew Bible course, “This ain’t Sunday school!” After just one REL course, I realized that Religious Studies was not at all like Theology, but I found myself truly enjoying it regardless.

I am in my third year now and, though I am not as sure as I once was about becoming a religious sister, I still feel very fortunate to have been in this department and I know I have benefited from the things I have learned here. Once a very close-minded individual, I know my ideas about Christianity and other world religions have changed drastically for the better. Instead of writing off a religion such as Hinduism as something strange and foreign, I can

now carry on a dialogue about Krishna with a friend of mine who was raised Hindu or discuss early Jewish/Christian separations with a Jewish friend. Understanding the different religions practiced by my friends has allowed me to get to know them better as people and relate to them in a new way.

With my degree in Religious Studies, I hope to work towards ecumenical causes and understanding between various religions. Though America has been termed a “melting pot” of culture, including differences in religion, I think many Americans choose to isolate themselves from the unfamiliar. Misconceptions and half truths about different religions are far too prevalent, and I want to do something about it. Though I have so much more to learn, the Religious Studies program at UA has given me knowledge I never thought I would have and a foundation to build upon. I will leave here in a year and a half with a fuller appreciation of the diversity of humankind and the beliefs that drive us all. I will leave here with new ideas and new knowledge. Lastly, I will leave here with a fabulous REL t-shirt, a mug, and a mousepad. It doesn’t get much better than this!■



Tonya Daniel

Religious studies? Your major was religious studies?” Telling someone what my college major was always elicits this response. Of course, the immediate follow-up question is, “why religious studies?” Religion is a dynamic subject, and I

enjoy learning the particulars of the different faiths. It is a sensitive topic to broach with most people. Therefore, I welcome inquires about my liberal arts education because they give me an opportunity to discuss religion and my choice of it for my major.

My decision to join the esteemed individuals in Manly Hall was based on two reasons. First, religious studies offers a global look at ideologies. It is the perfect arena for students to learn about the be-

liefs and cultures of different societies and it gives others the opportunity to gain knowledge from your experiences, thereby helping to shatter the walls that exist between groups. In a pluralistic society, this understanding is valuable for someone who desires to live an apologetic life: it strengthens faith as well as the ability to relate to others. Second, a liberal arts background establishes a strong academic foundation that prepares the student for graduate work or research. The intriguing courses foster an environment where a keen student can develop her research and writing skills. My passionate interest in theology combined with my commitment to attend divinity school prompted my selecting religious studies as a major.

Whether one chooses to stay in the field of religious studies or venture into new territory, an undergraduate degree qualifies one for a number of positions. Since my graduation from the department a few years ago, I took time away from the academy to focus on ministry work in West Alabama. I am the founder and coordinator of a ministry that does social outreach in this area and that provides fellowship activities for adults. I also work with a social justice ministry that helps oppressed communities through direct services and grass roots policy changes. My religious studies background aids in my work with non-profit organizations and social services because I am conversant with different views. I use my knowledge to develop contemporary, creative approaches to problems and concerns that affect socially and economically distressed neighborhoods. This important community organization work restores power to once disenfranchised communities. When power is returned to the people, the people then produce leaders.

I assure all religious studies majors and minors that there are many avenues they can take as graduates. I chose to remain in the field of theology and to be a voice for African-Americans by speaking out against social injustices. My plans now are to enter divinity school this fall where I will begin the next phase in my ministry.■

Books of Interest—Recommended Readings by Our Professors

Seán Freyne, a leading scholar of Greco-Roman era Galilee, in his latest book **Jesus a Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus Story** (Continuum Press, 2004), employs his rich literary and archaeological knowledge of Galilee to create a consistent portrait of Jesus in his Galilean context. **Dr. Fassbeck** recommends that anybody who is interested in understanding how regional factors shaped Jesus’s message as well as the formation of earliest Christian traditions should add this important work to the collection on his/her night table.

Dr. Jacobs is currently reading (and enjoying?) Philip Roth’s new novel **The Plot Against America**, which has generated an enormous amount of interest among those not only concerned with anti-Semitism, but with our current political-military climate as well. He quite easily recommends it to

those reading our Newsletter.

The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Voodoo, by Shannon R. Turlington (Alpha, 2002), can be ordered at www.idiotsguides.com. **Dr. Murphy** says this book is a *very* readable, yet very accurate, introduction to what is perhaps the most misunderstood and unfairly maligned religion in the world. A good read.

Dr. Trost recommends Stephen A. Marini’s new book **Sacred Song in America: Religion, Music, and Public Culture** (University of Illinois Press, 2003). It is a very readable and interesting contribution on the fascinating interrelation of music and religion in America.

Dr. Schaeffer recommends **Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History** (Yale

University Press, 2004). The American Constitution firmly separates church and state. Yet religion lies at the heart of American politics. In *Hellfire Nation*, James Morone recasts American history as a moral epic and shows how fears of sin and dreams of virtue defined the shape of the nation.

Strip City: A Stripper’s Farewell Journey Across America, by Lily Burana (Talk Miramax Books, 2001), is one of the most interesting and well-written texts from the recent slew of memoirs and books about exotic dance. **Dr. Roach** recommends this insightful insider account of the adult entertainment industry as a way to help readers reflect on the current popularity of “stripper phenomena,” from Janet Jackson’s half-time “wardrobe malfunction” to MTV music videos to the neo-burlesque movement to stripper aerobic classes at your nearby gym.

Department Sponsoring International Conference

The Department of Religious Studies is proud to be hosting a conference on **The African Diaspora and the Study of Religion**. This international conference from April 7-8, 2005 at The University of Alabama's Bryant Conference Center is devoted to the work of young scholars studying the history, spread, and influence of African cultures. The conference is free and open to the public.

Presentations focus on the place of African cultures within the academic study of religion—including, but not limited to, indigenous African religions, African Christianities, African forms of Islam, religions of African-Americans, Afro-Caribbean religions, and Afro-Brazilian religions. The conference investigates such questions as:

• In what ways has the academic study of religion contributed to the understanding of the cultures of Africa?

• In what ways has the academy neglected Africa and its influences—and at what cost, socially, epistemologically, politically, racially, and culturally?

• What contribution to our knowledge of religion as an aspect of human culture can be made by the study of African history and its contemporary societies?

• How do current studies of African and African-diaspora cultures reflect or contest methodological or theoretical issues of contemporary concern in the social sciences and the humanities more broadly?

Co-sponsors include the Office of the Provost, the College of Arts & Sciences, African American Studies, Capstone International Program, External Degree, the Honors College, New College, Student Affairs, and the Departments of American Studies, Anthropology, History, and Women's Studies.

Dr. Wilson J. Moses, Ferree Professor in American History at Pennsylvania State University, is the keynote speaker for the conference, with concluding remarks provided by **Dr. Eddie Glaude Jr.**, Professor in the Religion Department at



Princeton University. Twelve junior scholars from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and from across the United States are presenting their research as well. **Dr. Theodore Trost** is Chair of the Program Committee for the conference.

Students at The University of Alabama also had the option of registering for this conference as a two-day, one credit hour course for the Spring 2005 semester. In order to receive this course credit, students register in advance, complete preparatory readings, attend the full conference, participate in a student-only discussion with keynote speaker Dr. Wilson Moses, and write response papers on the material. **Dr. Catherine Roach** directs this aspect of the conference.

More details on the conference are available at the departmental website: <http://www.as.ua.edu/rel/africanconference.>

Religion in Culture Lectures



Lunchtime Discussion on *The Passion of the Christ*

On Tuesday, November 9, 2004, the Department of Religious Studies hosted **Prof. Julie Ingersoll**, of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, at the University of North Florida. Prof. Ingersoll—who had previously visited the University of Alabama to deliver a public lecture in March of 2002—visited **Prof. McCutcheon's** REL 213 class earlier in the day to discuss with them her book, *Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battles* (New York University Press, 2003).

During lunch, REL majors and minors, along with interested faculty and staff, were invited to discuss with Prof. Ingersoll her chapter in the recently published essay collection, *After the Passion is Gone: American Religious Consequences* (AltaMira Press, 2004).

Along with a chapter written by **Leslie Smith** (a current doctoral student in the study of religion at the University of California, Santa Barbara) entitled "Living in the World but not of the World: Understanding Evangelical Support for The Passion of the Christ," the participants had already read Prof. Ingersoll's chapter in the book: "Is it Finished? The Passion of the Christ and the Fault Lines in American Christianity." In this essay she describes the different reactions to the film among various sub-groups within U.S. Christianity, countering the prevalent notion that there was such a thing as a uniform "Christian response" to the film. Coupled with Smith's pre-distributed chapter—which outlined the manner in which emotionalism and consumerism are joined in the film—Prof. Ingersoll's essay inspired a substantive and lively 90 minute lunchtime discussion. ■



On Thursday evening, December 2, 2004, **Prof. Paul Bartrop** delivered a public "Religion in Culture" lecture entitled, "Genocide: A Social Problem or a Defining Characteristic of the Modern World?" The lecture was attended by members of the univer-

sity community as well as by approximately eighty students, many of whom are enrolled in Religious Studies classes this semester.

Earlier in the week, Prof. Bartrop guest lectured in two of **Prof. Jacob's** classes, including his Blount Undergraduate Initiative course on the study of genocide.

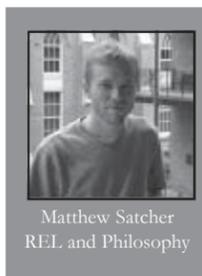
Prof. Bartrop is a Research Fellow in the Faculty of Arts at Deakin University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, and a member of the teaching staff at Bialik College, Melbourne, teaching in such areas as History, International Studies, Comparative Genocide

Studies and courses on the history of Judaism. He has previously been a Scholar-in-Residence at the Martin-Springer Institute for Teaching the Holocaust, Tolerance, and Humanitarian Values at Northern Arizona University, and a Visiting Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Among Prof. Bartrop's publications are (with Samuel Totten and Steven Jacobs) the edited volume, *Teaching about the Holocaust: Essays by College and University Teachers* as well as his book *Surviving the Camps: Unity in Adversity During the Holocaust*. His current projects include a book entitled *Meanings of Genocide: Essays on a Misunderstood Concept* and (along with Samuel Totten, Steven Jacobs and Henry Huttenbach) *A Dictionary of Genocide*. ■



It is a tradition that, at the conclusion of our public lectures, we present our guest with a framed flyer advertising the lecture; another copy is hung in the Department's main office. Flyers from our lecture therefore populate university offices around the country and across the world.



Matthew Satcher
REL and Philosophy

2004 Student Essay Competition

The Department is pleased to announce that **Matthew Satcher**—a double major in REL and Philosophy—won the Alabama Philosophical Society's 2004 Student Essay Competition for his paper entitled "Proper Function Theory, Religious Exclusivism and the Challenge of Religious Diversity."

In the paper, Matthew attempts to rebut Albin Plantinga's well known defense of religious exclusivism, as contained in his appropriately titled essay, "A Defense of Religious Exclusivism." Matthew first tackled Plantinga's essay with his final project for **Dr. Catherine Roach's** REL 344 class, God and Moral Reasoning, in the Fall of 2003.

Matthew presented his paper at a plenary session of the Alabama Philosophical Society's annual conference in Mobile on Oct. 29, 2004. The Department is pleased to have been able to help Matthew travel to Mobile to participate in this conference.

Congratulations, Matthew! ■

Our Professors & Staff

Dr. Russell McCutcheon was recently elected to the position of Executive Secretary of the North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR), a scholarly association affiliated with the International Association for the History of Religions—a meeting of which was held in Tokyo in March 2005. At this meeting, McCutcheon presented two papers representing his current research. As well, over the past year he has presented invited lectures at the University of Arizona, the University of Chicago, Syracuse University, Wilfred Laurier University, the University of Regina, and the University of Alberta. In addition to regularly teaching such classes as REL 100 Introduction to Religious Studies (for which REL minor **Marianne Stanton** assisted him during the Fall of 2004 semester) and upper-level courses devoted to such topics as the sociology of religion and theories of religion, myth, and ritual, he edits two book series for Equinox Publishers of London, UK—one devoted to original works in social theory and the other an anthology series designed for class use. More information on these two book series can be found at the publisher's web site: <http://www.equinoxpub.com/homemain.asp>.



Dr. Tim Murphy taught a new course in the fall of 2004 titled "Religious Existentialism" which covered major thinkers/writers such as Soren Kierkegaard, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Elie Wiesel. He also taught another new course, "Theories of Religion" which covered some of the major schools of contemporary theory. He continues work on two book manuscripts. One is a critical history of the phenomenology of religion. The other is titled *In hoc signo vices* [By this sign you shall conquer]: *Elements of a Semiotic Theory of Religion*; it aims to be an original contribution to the on-going attempt to explain religion. After that, his next two planned books are *Nietzsche and Jesus Christ* and *Religion and the Rhetoric of Supremacy*.

Dr. Gabriele Fassbeck has continued work on her major research project concerning private religion in the Greco-Roman era. She is currently highlighting the representation of family religion in early Jewish texts. In 2004, she disseminated her work in lectures that focused particularly on the apocryphal book of Tobit. The *Journal for the Study of Judaism* will publish her article "Tobit's Religious Universe Between Kinship Loyalty and the Law of Moses" in its upcoming issue. In another contribution, to be published in the *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästinavereins*, Dr. Fassbeck analyzes a decorated clay chalice of the Early Iron Age, unearthed during the 1999 excavation season of Tel Kinrot, Galilee, against the background of contemporary cult vessels. Classes taught by Dr. Fassbeck in the department included an advanced undergraduate seminar on "Separation Processes Between Early Christianity and Ancient Judaism" which successfully introduced students to the impressive regional diversity of both Judaism and Christianity in Roman times.



2004 was a busy year for **Dr. Steven Jacobs**. He came out with three new books: *Dismantling the Big Lie: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (co-authored with Mark Weitzman of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, www.ktav.com); *Teaching About the Holocaust: Essays by College and University Teachers* (co-edited with Samuel Totten and Paul Bartrop, www.greenwoodpress.com); and *Post-Shoah Dialogues: Re-Thinking Our Texts Together* (co-authored with James Moore, Zev Garber,



and Henry Knight, www.upa.com). He also had several chapters in other publications and reviews. Current projects include two more books. Dr. Jacobs is now proofreading and re-editing a collection of his own essays on the Holocaust for publication in 2005 as *In Search of Yesterday: The Holocaust and the Quest for Meaning* (University Press of America), and he is editing a collection of essays called *Genocide in God's Name: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* for submission to a publisher who has expressed strong interest in the collection.

Dr. Ted Trost attended the "Religion and Media Workshop" at the American Academy of Religion's annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas, in November 2004. As a member of the Steering Committee for the Religion, Film, and Visual Culture section of the AAR, he also helped plan presentations for next year's AAR meeting in Philadelphia. He is putting the finishing touches on the book *Teaching African American Religions* (Oxford, 2005), which he co-edited with **Caroline Jones Medine** of the University of Georgia. He also had a co-authored chapter appear in a new book on The Matrix franchise of movies. Dr. Trost continues to teach courses in Bible, American religious history, and religion and film in the department and has been busy coordinating the logistics for the department's international **African Diaspora and the Study of Religion** conference, which will take place in Tuscaloosa on April 7 & 8, 2005.



Dr. Kurtis Schaeffer specializes in the cultural history of Buddhism in Tibet and the Himalayas. His recent research interests include the social history of books in Tibet, women's autobiography in Tibetan Buddhism, and the scholarly medical traditions of Tibet. He is also a contrib-

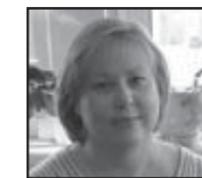


uting member of the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library (www.thdl.org) and the co-chair of the Tibetan and Himalayan Religions Group at the American Academy of Religion (www.as.ua.edu/rel/aarthrg). In 2004 he gave academic lectures at Harvard University, the University of Virginia, University of British Columbia in Canada, and University of London in England.

Dr. Catherine Roach works in the area of ethics, gender, and popular culture. She has been teaching courses this year on "God and Moral Reasoning" and an introduction to religious studies on "The Problem of Evil." In her cross-appointment in **New College**, she taught environmental ethics and, in partnership with a local organic farm co-op, a hands-on course in sustainable farming. She has a chapter on advertising imagery forthcoming in the anthology *Eco-Cultures: Cultural Studies and the Environment*. Her manuscript on exotic dance, *Take It Off! Stripping, Sex, and Society*, continues to grow, and she plans to finish it by the end of 2005. In Fall 2004, she and **Dr. Marie Griffith** of Princeton University proposed that a new unit on "Religion and Sexuality" be created as part of our annual professional conference, the American Academy of Religion. Their proposal was accepted, and Drs. Roach and Griffith were named co-chairs of this new program unit for 2005-2007.



Betty Dickey, the long-time senior staff member in the Department of Religious Studies, spent a great deal of her time last summer overseeing the relocation and refurbishment of the main office, student lounge, and library of the department. Photos of the lounge and library can be found on the Religious Studies website. And for the first time Ms. Dickey attended the American Academy of Religion Annual Conference in San Antonio, Texas last November. At the conference, she participated in a workshop discussing how the commercialization of the academic profession impacts small departments such as ours.



Student workers: (left to right) **Marianne Stanton, Samantha Sastre, Christine Scott, and Josh McDonough**



4