

SENIOR CLASS 2007

Peter Berry- *From Moses to Petrus: William James' Theory of Conversion in Medieval Spain*

Jessica Chen*- *Pigs, Purity and Protection: Food Taboo in Hui Chinese and American Muslim Minority Communities*

Lily Jacobson- *Bulldozers and Eco-Magic: Neo-Paganism and Environmental Activism*

Sophia Paraschos*-*On Their Knees: Orthodox Women, Healing, and Power Through Pilgrimage*

Winston Persaud- *From Peru to Paris: Working Towards a New Jerusalem*

Sead Puskar- *"In the Name of your Lord, Read!" Islamic Education in America*

Emily Stagg- *Job's Brothers: The Reconstruction of a Jewish God in the Post-Holocaust Era*

David Transgrud- *How the Supreme Court Talks About Religion- Two Case Studies*

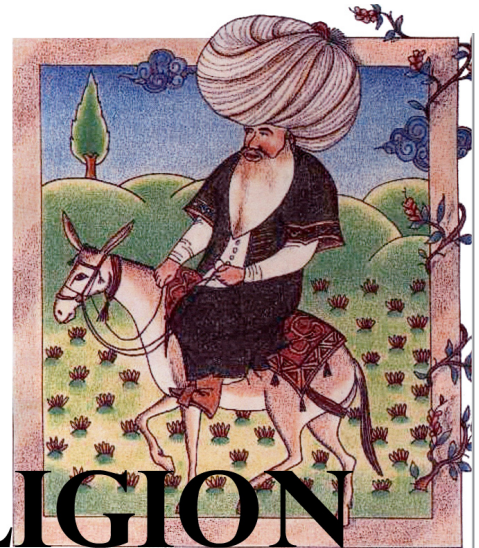
Peter Wieben- *Pointing at the Moon: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's Theravada Finger*

*-distinction

RELIGION MAJOR HONORS

Phi Beta Kappa: Jessica Chen Winston Persaud Peter Wieben	Allen and Irene Salisbury Student Fellowship Aimee Downes
Chang-Lan Fellowship Aimee Downes	Independent Research Fellowship Elisabeth Lienesch
Larson International Fellowship Margaret Cremin	Jean Schmidt Prize and Elie Wiesel Prize in Ethics Sophia Paraschos
David Maitland - Robert Will Prize Amanda Otero	Bardwell Smith Prize for Excellence in the Study of Religion Peter Wieben

laughing with RELIGION



by Peter Wieben '07

In medieval Turkey, there lived a teacher of Islam named Nasrettin Hoca, who taught using humor. Between his massive turban and his long white beard sparkled a quick wit that caused his followers to snicker at all aspects of life and religion, even death. He was so loved that after his passing, his disciples built him a lovely tomb, and carefully placed a strong lock on the door to secure Nasrettin's final resting place. Visit the tomb today, and you will find that the care of Nasrettin's students was successful; the lock is firmly in place. The iron meant to secure the door however, is gone, and the tomb is "quite open."

While we giggle at the plight of those who locked the tomb's door, the story also gives us insight into our own condition as students of religion. Most of our studies circulate around questions of ultimate concern, but our best understandings only serve to make clear what it is *continued on page 3...*



To read more about the study of Religion, the Carleton Religion Department, and Religion in the News, go to:
<http://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/religion/>

CARLETON PROFESSOR TEACHES AT CENTER FOR RELIGION INQUIRY

Emma Glidden-Lyon '08

This spring, Professor Michael McNally taught a series of classes on Native American Religious Traditions at the Center for Religious Inquiry in Minneapolis. The Center is located at St. Mark's Episcopal Church. It is an interfaith program; it is grounded in the belief that all religions have equal value and an equal claim on the truth. It provides an opportunity for those who wish to explore other forms of spirituality and religious practice. This Center is part of a national consortium with Centers for Religious Inquiry in Los Angeles and New York City. McNally presented a three-part

series to a group whom he describes as "mostly adult Episcopalians: sharp and curious, but not specialists or particularly acquainted with Native traditions."

"its crucial for people to know how little they know about ...Native communities..."

He thinks that it is easier to teach a group of people who have their own religious commitments than a group who might be more "invested in appropriating directly what they learn from Native religious into their own eclectic

spirituality," so this group at the Center turned out to be great for Professor McNally's lectures. Professor McNally shared the lecture time with a Lakota friend, in order to provide multiple perspectives on the subject, and tried very hard to "teach against the grain of stereotypes of Native religions." He believes that his three-part series is very important, because "its crucial for people to know how little they know about the complex and sophisticated and still relevant religious traditions of Native communities in their midst." ■



zen

and kierkegaard

by Peter Wieben '07

The crowd that gathered in the Athenaeum was mixed. Some, interested in the playfully paradoxical philosophy of Zen Buddhism, hoped for Eshin Nishimura to bring the tradition to a Western audience. Others, there for the Kierkegaard, were looking for a new angle from which to view an old favorite. Perhaps others were skeptical, or just curious. Nishimura's humble story of self discovery did not disappoint. Rather than offering a strong argument about the nature of Zen or Kierkegaard, Nishimura focused on his own quest for meaning, a quest that was not without setbacks. In fact, his narrative really began when his undergraduate thesis—arguing for the merits of Zen's existentialism over Kierkegaard's—was trashed by his advisors. It was then, he explained, that he began looking more

deeply into Christian philosophy in an effort to understand it meaningfully. His talk explained his attempts to reconcile the teachings of Zen and Kierkegaard, probing the nature of the human condition from both sides. His conversation of the self was especially intriguing, as he drew parallels between Kierkegaard's meeting of the soul and the body and a poem by Wu-Men, which offers that the true human self is snow in winter, leaves in spring, a sparrow in summer, and the moon in autumn. His message, overall, was that Kierkegaard had something to offer a Zen monk, and that Zen had something to offer Christians. Of course, the first step towards finding such undertstanding, is honest looking. ■

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we do not know. Our locks have been carefully placed, but the door to the big questions still, at times, swings open. The best thing to do in this situation is laugh. Luckily, we can find our own doors to be as funny as Nasrettin's; after all, he probably would have laughed.

This term's display case features times that we have laughed with religion. Among the entries are a cartoon claiming that God "is backing off the ten commandments," because Moses "took his comments out of context," and a figure of the Buddha, defender of

non-attachment, drinking coffee and chatting on his cell phone. If you are in need of some relief from the weight of eternity, stop by the religion lounge. After all, the ultimate cannot always erupt into our

material realm without slipping on some sort of transcendent banana peel, and we are probably better off not trying overly hard to stifle our giggles. ■



Spring '07 display case

from the Chair:

ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM PROF. ROGER JACKSON

ASUKA SANGO TO JOIN FACULTY

I'm delighted to announce that Asuka Sango will join the department next fall as our tenure-track specialist in East Asian Religions. Asuka will be defending her dissertation, "The Golden Light Sutra in Buddhist Ritual" this summer at Princeton University. It focuses on ritualized debate practices in Heian period Japan. A native of Tokyo, Asuka attended International Christian University in her hometown, then earned a B.A. in Religion from Wittenberg University in Ohio and an M.A. East Asian Religions from the University of Illinois. Next year, Asuka will be offering Religion in Japanese Culture and Women in Buddhism in the fall, a new introductory course surveying East Asian religions and a seminar on Buddhism and Ecology in the winter, and Introduction to Religion in the spring. We're very fortunate to have someone of Asuka's caliber joining us, and I hope that all of you who are at Carleton will join me in welcoming her warmly when she arrives next fall. ■

PROF. BASHIR TO TEACH AT STANFORD

It is with great regret that I write to announce that Prof. Shahzad Bashir has accepted a position at Stanford University, beginning in the fall of 2007. It is an extraordinary opportunity for Shahzad, as he will be instrumental in the creation of a new interdisciplinary Islamic Studies Program at Stanford, one of the great research universities in the world.

Formally, Shahzad will be on a year's leave of absence from Carleton for 2007-2008, which means that, should he decide some time in the course of the next year to return to Carleton in the fall of 2008, he may do so. We can only hope that he will!

A gentleman, a scholar, and as fine a teacher and colleague as there is, Shahzad is irreplaceable, but if he does remain at Stanford, we plan to launch a full-scale tenure-track search for an Islamicist in 2008-2009, with an eye to having that person in place by the fall of 2009.

In the meantime, I am happy to announce that William Elison (ABD, University of Chicago) will be teaching for us next year. Will



Professor Bashir

(who taught at Carleton for two terms in 2001-2002) is an expert on contemporary religious practice in South Asia, including that of Islam. He and I will share Islamic duties next year. In the fall, I will offer Introduction to Islam, a course I taught for a decade until Shahzad's arrival, while Will takes over my Religions of South Asia course. In the winter, Will will offer a course on Islam in South Asia, along with a course on visual cultures of South Asia. In the spring, he will teach a course on Hindu and Muslim saints, along with the standard course on Hindu Traditions. Will is a creative scholar and an engaging teacher, and will be a most welcome (re)addition to our ranks. ■

from Carleton to Carleton:
**an INTERVIEW
 WITH AIMEE
 BURANT**



Emma Glidden-Lyon '08

Can you tell me about your path towards becoming a Religion Professor?

I came to Carleton in 1991 planning to study political science. The Berlin Wall had fallen during my senior year of high school and I was fascinated by the transformations in international politics. As it turned out, however, the social sciences didn't address my interests nearly as well as the interdisciplinary and cultural bent of the study of religion. As a religion major, I was able to study history, anthropology, literature, philosophy – all at once! I had more questions about religion when I graduated than when I began the major, which is probably as it should be. That drove me to graduate work in Christianity, which had been my area of focus at Carleton. Graduate study added a lot of historical and philosophical depth to my work, and by concentrating on ethics I was able to combine my interests in politics with my work in religion. Teaching in the College of the University of Chicago, I found I loved being in the classroom, and this term at Carleton has definitely confirmed that.

Were you a religion major when you attended Carleton?

Yes. When I was trying to decide whether to major in religion, my father quoted Joseph Campbell to me: "Follow your bliss."

And I'm so glad he did, despite my doubts about Campbell! I spent my college years asking the questions that were most important to me. What better way to prepare for life after college?

What is it like to be back on the campus, only now as an academic?

The intellectual enthusiasm and honest curiosity of the students is no different than it was fifteen years ago, and that's heartening. As part of the faculty, I also see how intensely engaged Carleton professors are as teachers, and I have a renewed appreciation for that.

Your specialty, modern Christian theology and ethics with an emphasis on politics, seems particularly relevant in today's world. How do you view the connection between the two and where do you see your studies going in that regard?

I think the line between religious thought and political thought is a blurry one that should be crossed by scholars whenever possible. Certainly Christian thinkers have always addressed politics as part of their concern about how people should live in the world. That Christians do so today is nothing new. My work focuses on the historical connections between past Christian thought on politics and how we think and

talk about political issues like national identity today.

How do you view the connection between religion and nationalism? What is the difference between religious nationalism and civil religion?

First, it's important to make a distinction between national identity and nationalism. Typically, scholars treat the first as a kind of cultural identity and the second as a political movement motivated and justified by that identity. Religion is an important element of many national identities, and thus it appears in many nationalisms as well. Some scholars have argued that nationalism actually is a religion, but I wouldn't put it that way. However, some nationalisms aim to establish nation-states defined in terms of a specific religious identity, be it Christian or Buddhist or Muslim, etc. Categorizing such movements as "religious nationalism" draws attention to how they unite religious and national identities. Civil religion, on the other hand, is used to describe more generically "religious" practices and beliefs that have the civic community itself as their object and that are, at least in theory, non-specific enough to embrace adherents of various religious traditions. Practices like the national prayer breakfasts or beliefs about America as one nation "under God" are typical examples of civil religion in the United States.

What do you plan to do next?

I hope to wrap up the dissertation in 2008 and find gainful employment as a professor of religion. If I'm lucky, I'll have students almost as good as those at Carleton. ■

SPRING '07 SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Prof. Aimee Burant

- History of Christian Thought
- Religion and Nationalism

Prof. Roger Jackson

- Intro to Religion
- Tibetan Buddhism

Prof. Michael McNally

- Native American Religious Freedom
- Religion and American Public Life

Prof. Shahzad Bashir

- Sufism
- Muhammad and the Qur'an

Prof. Louis Newman

- Judaism, Christianity, Islam
- Intro to Judaism

We invite both your comments and your news updates for future issues of NumeNews. Please contact Jill Tollefson at (507)646-4232, jtollefs@carleton.edu