

Religious Studies

Spring 2009 Vol. 1 Iss. 2

Picturing Religion: Undergraduate Photo Exhibit

Over the last two semesters, undergraduate religious studies major Charlotte Leigh Holbrook has been turning her photography skills toward the exploration of ritual life in two Atlanta religious communities. Leigh will share the results of this work in a photography exhibit entitled "Sacred in the City: A Photographic Exploration of Hindu and Jewish Ritual Identity in Atlanta." This exhibit includes photos from Leigh's time with the Hindu Temple of Atlanta and the Greenfield Hebrew Academy, a private Jewish day school in Atlanta. Leigh's photos capture the vitality of Hindu and Jewish life in Atlanta, particularly as expressed in ritual moments such as the practice of ancient Vedic sacrifice, the quiet of Vaishnavite devotion, the



community-wide celebration of a baby boy's circumcision, and the joy of children learning Jewish prayers. Join us on Friday, April 17, 12 p.m. - 3 p.m. in the department offices (34 Peachtree Street, 11th floor) for Leigh's exhibit, which includes both black-and-white and color photographs and an annotated guide to the exhibit. For further information, contact Dr. McClymond.



Graduate Student Successfully Defends Thesis

Congratulations to Karen Flagg, who successfully defended her masters thesis on April 3, 2009. Karen's thesis is entitled "The Red Tent: A Case Study for Modern Feminist Midrash." Her committee members were Dr. McClymond (director), Dr. Renick, and Dr. Michael Galchinsky from the Georgia State English department. Please congratulate Karen on reaching this milestone when you see her!

Dr. Ruprecht Promoted to Full Professor

Please join us in congratulating Dr. Louis A. Ruprecht, Jr., who has been awarded tenure and promoted to Full Professor at Georgia State University this Spring. Dr. Ruprecht is the first faculty member in the department to be promoted to this level, and we celebrate his many instructional and scholarly contributions to the Religious Studies program. Dr. Ruprecht's most recent works are *This Tragic Gospel: How John Corrupted the Heart of Christianity* (Jossey-Bass of Wiley Imprints, 2008) and *God Gardened East: A Gardener's Reflections on the Dynamics of Genesis* (Wipf and Stock, 2008).

Dr. Ruprecht is currently working on a manuscript, tentatively titled *Winckelmann's Secret History*, which is now being examined by several university and popular presses. Congratulations, Lou!



Letter from the Chair



It has been a busy year in the Department of Religious Studies. Along with many new faculty members, an exciting group of undergraduate and graduate students has joined us this year. In this issue of our newsletter you'll find information about some of the students' work, including presentations made at the Spring symposium. This year we'll be honoring our Undergraduate and Graduate Student Award recipients after the student paper presentations at a brief reception, and we invite all friends of the department to join us for this special event. Three of our graduate students and one of our faculty members presented their current research at SEC-SOR, the Southeastern regional conference for scholars of religion. Also, we are pleased to announce that as this letter goes to print, one graduate student has been admitted to Emory University's prestigious doctoral program in religious studies. This is the third year in a row that one of our own has been admitted to Emory.

Our faculty has been busy as well. In the last year, our faculty members have published 4 books (as well as dozens of articles and reviews), and we have presented work at conferences around the globe. This year our work was recognized when outside scholars were invited by the university to review the quality of the religious studies program overall. The reviewers commented that our department "is accomplished and thriving" and "provides outstanding instruction to both undergraduate and graduate students, exceptional service to the college, university, and profession (primarily through department members' noteworthy contributions to the American Academy of Religion), and a steady flow of important scholarly contributions to the scholarly guild."

Our "thriving department" continues to grow and develop new offerings. This year we have hired two tenure-track faculty members who will join us next Fall. We began offering our new core course, Rels 2001: "Introduction to World Religions," this Spring and we are training our graduate students to teach this course beginning Fall 2009. Despite the problems in our economy, Georgia State's student population is growing at breakneck speed. The department is prepared to meet the increasing instructional needs of the university as well as to contribute to local, national, and global scholarly conversations about religion. We encourage you to join us!

Kathryn McClymond, Ph.D.

Chair, Department of Religious Studies

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Upcoming Events

Religion, Ethics, & Politics Colloquium

This semester the Department of Religious Studies is sponsoring a weekly colloquium, bringing speakers from Georgia State, other Atlanta universities, and beyond to talk about their work with members of the community. The colloquium is attached to a formal seminar, but all of the events are free and open to the public. Most events revolve around a work-in-progress by the visitor which is pre-distributed (and available at the department reception desk, or by e-mailing vlloyd@gsu.edu). All events are held on Wednesdays at 1:30 p.m. in the Seminar Room of 34 Peachtree St., 11th Floor. Below are some of these exciting events. We hope to see you there!

April 8, Dr. R. Drew Smith, Morehouse College

April 15, Professor Tina Pippin, Agnes Scott College

April 22, Professor Timothy Jackson, Emory University

April 27, Professor George Shulman, New York University

"American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture"

Religious Studies Student Symposium

Each year the department holds the Annual Religious Studies Student Symposium, a fun and intellectually stimulating forum where students present their work to an audience of their peers, professors, friends, and family. With a format modeled on that of an academic conference (including blind review of paper submissions), the symposium features student papers on a range of subjects.

This year's symposium will be held on Thursday, April 16, at 4:00 p.m. in the Troy Moore Library located in the General Classroom Building room 939. All are invited to come and hear our student's work, share in the conversations, reunite with old classmates and professors, and enjoy the free sweets.

New University President Takes Office



As of 1 January 2009, Dr. Mark P. Becker has taken his place as Georgia State University's seventh president following President Carl V. Patton's 16 years of exemplary service. Becker, 50, served previously as executive vice president for academic affairs and provost at the University of South Carolina from 2004 to 2008, as a biostatistics professor, dean of the School of Public Health, and assistant vice president of Public Health, Preparedness and Emergency Response at the University of Minnesota for three years.

Becker says that he will bring to his presidency "energy, a passion for and a commitment to public higher education as well as significant academic leadership experience in both established and up-and-coming public research universities." "Georgia State is poised to advance as one of our nation's leading urban public research universities," continues Becker. "There is the opportunity, building on its location in Atlanta and the tremendous progress made under President Patton's leadership, for the university to enhance Atlanta's national and global structure." Becker is married to Laura Voisinet and has two children, Matthew (22) and Julia (18). He enjoys outdoor activities such as hiking, whitewater rafting and any opportunity to experience or learn about new cultures.

New Faculty Members to Join Department



We are delighted to report the Religious Studies Search Committee's unanimous decision to offer our position in the Religions of the Americas to Isaac Weiner, who is currently completing his dissertation at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Mr. Weiner is currently on a Louisville Institute Dissertation Fellowship for the 2008-2009 academic year and plans to defend in May of 2009.

Isaac Weiner brings a wide range of scholarly interests to us, interests that will complement certain departmental strengths as well as move us in new directions. His dissertation project, "Religion Out Loud: Religious Sound, Public Space, and American Law," offers a brilliant series of case studies on the way that the noises religious communities make are regulated--and more importantly, imagined--within the U.S. legal system that is so often called upon to adjudicate inter-religious disputes, especially in tightly bounded urban spaces. As a lifelong musician and classical conductor, Isaac Weiner brings sharpened sensitivities to the play of sound in religious and secular contexts, as well as remarkable versatility in reading the way that U.S. courts of law grapple with such questions.

Mr. Weiner also brings rich teaching experience to the position. He served as co-creator of a religious studies program at the Berkeley Prep School in Tampa, Florida prior to returning to Chapel Hill for his graduate work. He has taught several different courses at the undergraduate level on religion and science and the changing face of religious pluralism, and he has proposed exciting new initiatives to the religious studies department here at Georgia State University.

We are also pleased to announce that our second new hire, Molly Bassett, will also be joining the faculty in Fall 2009 as an Assistant Professor. Molly will complete her doctoral work this Spring at the University of California, Santa Barbara, working with Dr. Rudy Busto, Dr. David Gordon White, Dr. Jeanette Favrot Peterson, and Dr. David Carrasco. Her research focuses on Mesoamerican religious communities with an emphasis on material culture understood through anthropological and historical methodologies. Her dissertation is titled "The Fate of Earthly Things: Mexica-Aztec Deities and Their Representation."

We are delighted to welcome both Isaac and Molly to our growing community at Georgia State!

If you would like to receive your copy of the Department of Religious Studies Newsletter electronically, please email ftthomas@gsu.edu.



New Director of Graduate Studies Named



The Department of Religious Studies is pleased to announce Dr. Vincent Lloyd as the new Director of Graduate Studies. Dr. Lloyd joined the department fall 2008. His enthusiasm for academic excellence will continue to serve the department in his new position.

Faculty Update

Faculty Member Appointed Chairman of AAR Committee

Dr. Renick has recently been appointed chair of the American Academy of Religion's Job Placement Task Force, where he will lead efforts to study and address the changing job market for scholars in the field. His committee is working on a set of best practices for the posting of graduation and placement statistics by graduate programs in religion.

His article, "Religious Studies in a Post 9/11 World," is forthcoming in *Liberal Education*. You can read his regular contributions to *Christian Century*, which recently includes "Liberty of Conscience: In Defense of America's Tradition of Religious Equality" (February 2009), "Divided By Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration" (January 2009), "JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters" (October 2008) and a forthcoming piece on Obama's brand of liberalism.

Department Members Present at Annual Conference

The 2009 Southeastern Regional Meeting of the American Academy of Religion took place in Durham, North Carolina on March 13-15, 2009. Several members of our department presented their work.

Kenny Smith

"Wiccan Fundamentalism?" Religion in America II Session with theme: Re-Imagining Religion and Religious Identity

Holly Adams Phillips

"To Cover Our Daughters: A Modern Chastity Ritual in Evangelical America," Women and Religion I Session with theme: Interpretations of Chastity

Sherry L. Morton

"Shaping Hindu Bodies: The Vedic and Tantric Bodies," Religions of Asia III Session with theme: Changing Contexts and the Religions of Asia

Kate Daley-Bailey

"Irreverent Entertainment or Serious Satire? The Portrayal of Jesus in Comedy Central's South Park," Religion, Culture and the Arts III Session with theme: Blessed Be the Cheesemakers: Comic and Satirical Portrayals of Religious Figures in Popular Art, Literature, and Culture

Student News

Annual Student Awards Announced

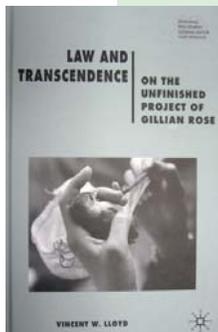
Each year three outstanding students in the department are formally recognized during the annual Student Symposium event. The 2009 Honorees are:

John Sullivan, Robert Arrington Undergraduate Award
Michael Karlin, Timothy Renick Graduate Award
Sherry Morton, Outstanding GTA Award

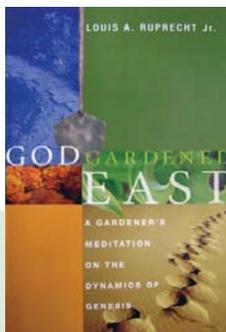
All three of these awards are specific to the Department of Religious Studies and only students in the department are eligible to receive the awards. The Robert Arrington Undergraduate Award and the Timothy Renick Graduate Award were established in 2004 by Katherine B. Moore, a former undergraduate student in the department, through the Katherine B. Moore Religious Studies Endowment. These, along with the Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award, are given to the highest-achieving students in each area.

Faculty Bookshelf

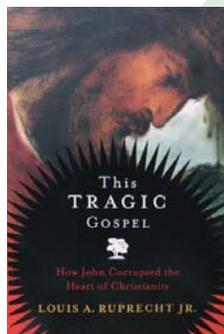
Law and Transcendence: On the Unfinished Project of Gillian Rose, by Dr. Vincent Lloyd



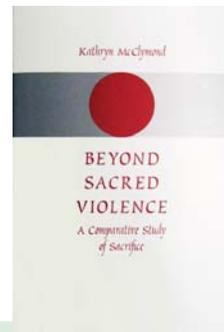
God Gardened East, by Dr. Louis A. Ruprect, Jr.



This Tragic Gospel: How John Corrupted the Heart of Christianity, by Dr. Louis A. Ruprect, Jr.



Beyond Sacred Violence, by Dr. Kathryn McClymond



Alumni Work

From Atlanta To Acupuncture

By Polly Maliongas

I had no idea where my studies through the Georgia State University Religious Studies program would lead me. After eight years of night classes in another program, I began to realize my zest for my current program waned. Along with some personal life transitions, I decided to take a term off and re-evaluate where I was spending my energy. At this time, I also began to practice qigong and taiji. This practice gave movement to a stagnant body and mind, providing a new perspective. I began looking over the programs offered at Georgia State and discovered Religious Studies. This brought a spark to my heart and I thought this would be a way to nourish my mind and spirit. With this transfer of study, breath came back to my life and I felt the excitement for learning that once existed. The course work brought a sense of expansion to my mind and life as I found professors who were excited about their material and brought inspiration, guidance and empowerment to their students.

After graduation I stepped into what was a natural progression of study with my interest in Eastern philosophy and qigong and taiji, I enrolled in a program to study Chinese Medicine. The courses I took at Georgia State provided me with a solid foundation in Eastern philosophy and laid the groundwork for this next step of studies and the next four years of my life. During the first theory class, I found myself bestowing accolades on the Georgia State program and such feelings of gratitude for this introduction and foundation to Eastern thought.

As I continue to study Chinese Medicine theory and qigong philosophy, I fall upon the words of Master Liu He, instructor at the Ling Gui International Healing Qigong School. She states, "The study of Chinese medicine and qigong is like reading/studying the Daodejing. The first time through is a superficial layer and as you continue to read/study you develop a deeper understanding." By studying at Georgia State, I received this superficial layer to the mindset of Eastern philosophy. This allowed my mind to expand, open my perspectives, and change the way I learned. During my time studying Chinese medicine at the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine, I found myself sharing what I learned of Eastern philosophy with fellow students, while those with science backgrounds shared their foundations. Working together we combined our knowledge and perspectives. Please do not think this was a school of Utopia – grueling and sometimes tedious memorization comprised many hours of life, and working closely with your fellow students can be quite challenging and an education in itself. My true education now begins as I apply the textbook theory and philosophy to patients, students, and everyday life!

Polly Maliongas graduated from GSU in '99. She completed her Masters of Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine in 2006, is a Diplomate of Oriental Medicine and a licensed Acupuncturist in the state of Oregon.

Living In Silence

By Clint Sabom

It doesn't take long for Silence to begin to work its spell. You see your own mind all too clearly – its irritations, its schemes, its patterns. A healthy calm eases your senses. Your body feels warm, liquid. And you want to sleep constantly. Eventually, you think of the outside world again – the noisy one – and you realize suddenly what you always knew but never wanted to admit: You've been moving way too fast for way too long.

After graduating from Georgia State, at a time when many of my peers were getting married and beginning careers, I journeyed to Wisconsin, in the dead of winter, to spend six months living and praying with a silent community of Benedictine monks and nuns. I approached them randomly by e-mail one night when I was google-searching monasteries on-line in my Atlanta apartment. For many years, I had been curious about monastic life – the piety, the meditations, and most especially, the silence. I made it clear to the community that I didn't want to become a monk; I merely wanted to live as one for six months. Although at first they sounded surprised at such a request, over time, after several lengthy phone conversations, The Order of Julian of Norwich accepted me and welcomed me in like an old friend.

Six months in a monastery transpired like several lifetimes. Initially, the adjustment proved difficult, but ultimately, monastic life became my norm, and the outside, secular world appeared to be the more difficult one. I woke up around 5:30 each morning, prayed six times a day in the chapel with the rest of the Order, worked in the yard (shoveling snow or mowing) for three hours a day, and enjoyed about five hours of quiet-alone time each day. Prayer offices usually lasted about thirty minutes each and were chanted, sung, or spoken. The only exception was 'still prayer' – a thirty minute period of silent contemplation towards the end of the evening. Most meals were eaten in silence. Minimal talking, or 'lesser silence,' was allowed during the work period so that tasks could get assigned and completed, and 'greater silence' (talk only if it is an emergency) was enacted during the late evening and early morning. Yet, while monastic life carried itself out in highly-disciplined, highly-ascetic rhythms, the monks and nuns at the monastery were unusually laid-back and easy to be around. Acceptance and peace rang silently through the walls; nothing was that big of a deal; every little thing – as the old song goes – was going to be alright.

The intellectual life of the Order would cause some academics to spin dizzily with cognitive vertigo. In addition to traditional Christian literature (Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican), the brothers and sisters read healthy doses of Buddhism, Taoism, Zen teachings, Sufism, Hasidic Judaism, and even popular New Age authors such as Ken Wilber and Eckhart Tolle. Officially, the Order belongs to the Episcopal Church, though the ancient Rule of St. Benedict – give or take 1500 years – provides the outlines for their contemplative way of life. About once a month the introverted intensity of monastic life would become too much, and I would leave the monastery grounds for excursions into the city, which I referred to sardonically as "dancing in Babylon." This basically involved me renting a cheap hotel room in Madison and going out to the bars and getting thoroughly saturated. Enlightenment comes in all forms.

By and large, the lessons and gifts from my time at the monastery are too many to describe in one article. But above all, I learned that it is simply enough just to be. Just being present to existence, without needing anything extra, is not only possible, it's also enjoyable. Perhaps it took six months of silence in a monastery for me to realize this, but the Silence there is also here, even in the midst of noisy Atlanta streets. Just listen.

Clint Sabom graduated from Georgia State in 2006 summa cum laude, with a BA in Religious Studies. He is writing a book about his experiences at the monastery.

Attention Alumni!

Are you a graduate of the Department of Religious Studies? Have you been recently promoted, accepted a new position, or worked on an interesting project either personally or professionally? We want to hear all about it!

Send your news to: fthomas@gsu.edu or mail to Felicia Thomas, Department of Religious Studies, Georgia State University, P.O. Box 4089, Atlanta, GA 30302-4089

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Area of Study _____ Year graduated _____

Employer _____

Position _____

News item to share _____

Department of Religious Studies Newsletter

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