



THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROGRAM

From the Director

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It is a real pleasure to send out greetings from the new Religious Studies Program!

As many of you know, the College of Liberal Arts and the Classical and

Near Eastern Studies Department completed a major revision of the Religious Studies major last spring. This past fall, it was my privilege to be hired to launch and administer the new program. Now, with one semester under our belts, we're delighted to report the addition of 34 new students to our ranks of majors and minors. I'd like to extend a hearty welcome to these students and express my profound thanks to the many faculty, staff, and students who have assisted in getting this program up and running. In particular, we all owe an enormous thanks to Sara-Jo Kriedeman, a senior RS major, who has done extraordinary work as the student assistant to the program this year.

Many of you will recall that the previous RS major focused on antique religions of the Mediterranean. The new major, which is still housed administratively in CNES but functions autonomously, builds upon our strength in that area and expands the scope of the program to provide comprehensive study across many religious traditions, geographical locations, and time periods. The new program is *interdepartmental*, drawing from courses offered in many departments across CLA. In particular, we have developed close ties with the departments of History, Asian Languages and Literatures, Sociology, Anthropology, and Art History, along with our continuing relationship with CNES.

The centerpiece of students' major programs is a four-course *area concentration*, which can focus on a particular tradition, theme, geographical location, methodology, or time period. Even a brief sampling of current students' concentrations is illuminating:

Social Justice in the Christian Tradition
Religion in the Medieval Period
Religion in the Contemporary Middle East
Mysticism across Religious Traditions
Religion, Public Life and Politics
Early Christian Interpretation of Judaism

Many students pair their work with the study of a language associated with the religious tradition or location under examination, and many students have incorporated a study abroad experience into their programs.

Our near-term goals include providing a variety of opportunities for our new RS community to come together, including lectures, informational lunches, and end-of-the-semester parties. Keep an eye out for communications from the RELS listserv. And enjoy the rest of the semester!

Jeanne H. Kilde



Monks with prayer flags, Bhutan



How to Study Religion – And Why

By Anthony Meyer



The study of religion at the university level is frequently not what people expect it to be. All too often, the assumption is that we study the meanings of texts as they would be studied in places of worship. While this approach is appropriate for believing groups, it does not accurately characterize the approach to religion taken at the university level. Religious Studies here is not a quest for deeper faith, but the study of how religions are constructed, their function and their role in society and culture, and their influence on humanity. Religious Studies is the academic study of religion.

The new Religious Studies major offers two basic, though overlapping, approaches to the study of religion, which are built into its two-“track” system. Track I – Religion, Culture, and Society – accommodates students who wish to study a variety of religions and themes relating to religion. It emphasizes methodologies

across the liberal arts, from the humanities and fine arts to the social sciences.

Track II – Texts and Traditions – on the other hand, focuses on in-depth knowledge of a particular religious tradition, such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, or American Indian. Essential to this track is the completion of four semesters (or the equivalent) of a language appropriate to the chosen religious tradition and its sources. This track allows students to pursue in-depth study of a single tradition, while also requiring two courses on other traditions to provide breadth.

In both tracks, students study traditions from across the globe. The program retains its original strength in ancient Judaism and early Christianity, and is building new strengths in other areas: religions of China and South Asia (Buddhism, Hinduism, Daoism, Confucianism), religions of the Mediterranean and Middle East (including Islam), and religion in America, Native American philosophies, and theory of religion. For instance, students can now study religions in the contemporary Middle East in concert with language study in Arabic, Turkish, or Persian. Students design their specific programs

individually, with the help of the Director of Undergraduate Studies, to ensure that they get exactly what they are looking for in their academic study of religion.

The Religious Studies major has significant potential for the job market, providing skills and knowledge vital for work in many fields. Religious Studies majors not only develop skills in textual analysis, direct observation, critical thinking, and written and oral communication that are the hallmarks of a liberal education, but they also develop specialized knowledge of religious groups, deep cross-cultural understandings, and skills in fostering cross-cultural communication. Such knowledge and skills contribute significantly to fields ranging from public policy, government, education, and the non-profit sector, to business, medicine, the law, and religious leadership.

As our world becomes increasingly global, knowledge of religions – of diverse foundational practices and beliefs, of how various religions function socially, culturally, and politically – constitutes a solid foundation for almost any career.

The RELS Major

The field of religious studies draws from a number of academic disciplines. CLA's religious studies major was designed as an interdepartmental major to reflect this characteristic of the field.

The religious studies major offers two tracks. Track I (Religion, Culture, and Society) offers opportunities to focus thematically on the social or cultural contexts and ramifications of religion. Track II (Text and Traditions) allows in-depth, text-based focus on a specific religious tradition.

For more information, please visit our website:
<http://religiousstudies.umn.edu/>



Dome and minaret at sunset



Interdisciplinary Cooperation & Indispensable Skills

From politics to medicine to linguistics, religion is a topic, often controversial, that is raised time and time again. To understand the policies of much of the Middle East, it is essential to understand religious beliefs and the place those beliefs have in governments. Much of the same can be said of policies in the United States and the rest of the world. Yet, of even deeper importance than influence on the political front is how religions pervade our everyday lives. Indeed, religion is all around us all the time. It is an essential part of how we function and also how we dysfunction.

As such, the Religious Studies Program draws upon authorities, professors, and courses from many different disciplines, departments, and majors. The perspectives and expertise that they provide advance the work that is done within the program. In turn, the valuable work of Religious Studies contributes to other fields as well. This mutual cooperation among fields makes our work not merely relevant but also incredibly interesting.

Because the Religious Studies Program values its interdisciplinary resources, the

skills that one learns in Religious Studies are broadly versatile. Understanding social interaction and the historical development of religio-political outlooks, tracing the geographical migration and reach of groups over time, reading texts in ways that emphasize social contexts and intended audiences are only a few of the skills that are developed in the Religious Studies major. Majors and minors in the program benefit greatly from the flexibility, skills, and solid education that this interdisciplinary approach provides. Upon graduation, they are well-prepared to move into focused training in a host of fields.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES FACULTY AND STAFF

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Religious Studies Program

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Others TBA



Studying Religion Abroad

By Korla Masters

This past fall, I spent four months in Central America with Augsburg College's Center for Global Education. During October, we (myself and the seventeen other students I studied with) lived in El Salvador and studied liberation theology. We learned about the importance of *context* in both the study and practice of liberation theology. As a result we spent much of our time meeting with people who have formed the academic basis of this theology – Jon Sobrino, Dean Brackley, and Padre Fernando Cardinal (in Nicaragua) – as well as those whose



Korla Masters (right), with two children and Rebekah Ludolph (left) in the community of El Sontule, Nicaragua.

daily lives are given to its practice in Base Christian Communities. Often our host families for short-term stays were survivors of massacres brought upon them by the national military, whose main slogans ran along the lines of “be a patriot, kill a priest.” (And the armies did – by the dozens.)

While liberation theology was our specific focus in El Salvador, we were able to observe throughout the semester the degree to which religion has impacted people's lives through decades of civil war, poverty, and oppression at the hands of US-supported dictatorships. We also saw the continued interplay between church bodies and officials and government structures in the post-war years. For example, Padre Cardinal served as the Minister of Education in the Nicaraguan government during the 1980s and oversaw a national literacy project that reduced illiteracy by

41% (from 52 to 11%) over the course of a year. Similarly, we learned about Bishop Juan Gerardi, a Guatemalan human rights advocate killed after presenting a study on war crimes two years after Guatemala's civil war ended in 1996.

Studying abroad strikes me as particularly important for students of religion because of *exposure*. When in a new context, one cannot help but be challenged and stretched. When talking about re-entry (to the US), we often used the metaphor of puzzle pieces, as in “I feel like I'm shaped differently now than when I left – I'm not sure exactly how I might fit into the space I left behind.” This sort of growth seems similar to that which we seek as students and especially as religious studies students.

Harold C. Anderson Scholarship

Sophomores and juniors majoring in Religious Studies are invited to apply for a scholarship honoring the memory of Dr. Harold C. Anderson. The Harold C. Anderson scholarship is funded by friends who wish to commemorate Dr. Anderson's generosity and support of students of the University of Minnesota as well as his interest in Religious Studies.

Each spring the Religious Studies Program will grant one or more awards to eligible students pursuing study in Religious Studies at the University of Minnesota.

**Next Application Deadline:
April 2010**

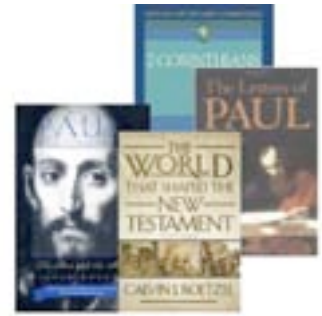
Students who wish to apply should submit (1) a two page statement of

personal and academic goals in Religious Studies, (2) a one page statement of education-related financial need, (3) a transcript (which may be unofficial), and (4) the names of two faculty members who are willing to provide a reference (a letter is not necessary). Questions can be directed to Professor Jeanne Kilde, the Director the Religious Studies Program.



*Faculty Spotlight

Featuring Professor Calvin J. Roetzel



Professor Roetzel is an internationally recognized scholar of the Apostle Paul. He has written countless books, articles, and essays on the subject. His book *Paul: The Man and the Myth* being selected as “Best Popular Book Relating to the New Testament, 1997-98” by the Biblical Archaeology Society. Another of his books, *The Letter of Paul: Conversations in Context*, is a key resource for students studying the New Testament.

After receiving his B.D. from Perkins School of Theology, and his PhD from Duke University, Professor Roetzel went on to teach in the Religious Studies department at Macalester College. Then in 2005 he became the Sundet Professor of New Testament Studies in the CNES Department here at the U of M. In the fall of 2007 he organized an international conference on the topic of Sanctified Violence.

A driving force behind the new Religious Studies major, Professor Roetzel is a valuable asset to its continuing growth and success. He is known on campus for his sense of humor, kind heart, and tireless care for his students.

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You are known for your work on the Apostle Paul. What first sparked your interest?

“When I was in graduate school, I was married and we had two children. I had to have a topic I could finish within a year, and I knew [Paul’s] letters were full of problems. So it was easy to find a problem to work on. Once I got into him, I was hooked. I was fascinated by his fertile mind, the kinds of

issue he was dealing with, his impact on this new religious movement [Christianity], and the ongoing sense of damage that can be done by interpreting [Paul] wrong.”

What are you currently working on?

“I just finished the 5th edition of *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context*. It was first published in ’75 for undergraduates who had not a clue how to read letters that are 2000 years old, and it still has a life.

Lately, my interests have been turning towards how power is understood in the ancient world, how it’s dealt with, and devices for survival in situations where people are oppressed. A conference we held in the fall of ’07 dealt entirely with this question.

For almost a generation, I’ve been working on the process of law – such a critical issue for today’s world. Next year I’ll be on leave working on a project that deals with law, something that has interested me for 20 years.”

Why do you think the study of religion is important in today’s world?

“The world today has been shrunk by travel and technology. It seems to me that in order to be a good citizen of that world, one needs to know something about religion. So many fields are touched or informed by some sort of religious assumptions. Think about law, environmental science, and language used in medicine. They all have strong religious overtones.”

What advice can you offer to those who decide to pursue a career in Religious Studies?

“The same advice I would give to a student of English, History, Art, or any other. An undergraduate degree is not designed to be the culminating degree of one’s career. Many of my students have gone into law, medicine, nursing, carpentry, and even nuclear science. An undergraduate degree is something that will help you evolve, involve, and understand a wider world. “

What’s been most rewarding about teaching Religious Studies at the University of Minnesota?

“Seeing what happens to your students is the most rewarding part of not just teaching Religious Studies, but of teaching, period. Watching people make enormous progress intellectually, seeing them do great things, and staying in touch over the years – if you had some little part in that, it makes you very happy. And it’s not only the best students, but also those who have overcome incredible difficulties to achieve great things. To see human growth is most rewarding.

With the economy struggling, people talk about money invested in the stock market and retirement, but it’s infinitely more important to invest in human life. Those assets never go down. And I feel so fortunate to have had some role to play in that.”



* Student Spotlight

Featuring: Andy Gerstenberger

Andy is a third year student double majoring in Asian Languages and Religious Studies (Track II: Texts and Traditions) and minoring in History. He plans on graduating at the end of next year and then moving on to graduate school.

course opened my eyes to a whole new way of looking at not only religion, but also societal trends and constructs in general."



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When did you decide to enroll in the religious studies major?

"Pretty much as soon as I found out the new religious studies major existed."

What are you focusing on in your major?

"I've been all over the board, but right now I'm primarily studying South Asian religious history and, more specifically, the effects that modern capitalism has had on the development of Indian religion and society."

intellectual consciousness on the individual level, the cultural level, and on the level of society in general. As we begin to interact more and more with our foreign neighbors in this ever globalizing world, it is becoming ever more crucial that we understand the factors that lay at the root of our ideological and philosophical differences. Before we can hope to understand another culture's actions, we must first understand the ideological forces that are guiding those actions, and religion has historically proven itself to be one of the more immediate and overarching of these forces."

Why did you decide to become an RELS major?

"The new major gives me the opportunity to study all of the things that interest me most, religion, history, literature, and theory, without all of the restrictions and less-than-appealing requirements that some majors have."

What do you plan to do after graduation?

"I'm hoping to go to graduate school to study religious theory, most likely within the context of South Asian intellectual history."

What has been your favorite RELS class?

"Definitely Calvin Roetzel's Theory and Methods of Religious Studies. The

Why do you think the study of religion is important?

"Religion and thinking about religion have and continue to be two of the major factors in the evolution of

On the Cutting Edge: Ann Waltner and Tanyangzi

By Anthony Meyer

Ann Waltner is a Religious Studies Steering Committee member, Professor of History and of Asian Languages and Literatures, and the Director of the Institute for Advanced Study. Her focus and field of work deals mainly with eastern religions, specifically pertaining to China. At the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS), Ann's goal is to create environments that facilitate faculty research. Often times, this means reaching outside

of the box and expanding the usual boundaries of scholarship. This entails the inclusion of undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty alike. Like the Religious Studies Program as a whole, the Institute for Advanced Study works closely with many fields and disciplines. Ann Waltner and her staff at IAS work hard to foster revolutionary ideas while articulating them in ways that can be readily understood by the

educated public.

One such idea is Professor Waltner's personal project dealing with an incredible, albeit little-known, event in Chinese history. During the 16th century in China, a young, charismatic individual rose up to become a religious inspiration to many Chinese people. This person's achievement was complicated by many situations

Continued on page 7...



including the preeminence of Confucianism in China during this period and the overall skepticism of the Buddhist and Daoist gods. Not least of this individual's stumbling blocks was the fact that she was a woman.

What could a woman have done to have transcended a patriarchal, Confucianist existence in 16th century China? At the end of her life, this woman, named Tanyangzi, ascended to heaven and achieved immortality. Before dismissing this story as merely another legend, one must note that historical records attest that some 100,000 people were witnesses to this event. In fact, as reported by her disciples – which included her own father and his closest friends – and critics of her “cult” alike, the event's occurrence was not under dispute. What the event meant, however, very much was.

Four men from the prestigious Wong

family later attempted to author a biography of Tanyangzi, but this effort was stopped short by the bureaucrats in China who said that it would “seduce men's minds away from Confucianism.” This ideological resistance coupled with a later impostor claiming to be Tanyangzi transformed her very public event into a mere urban legend. Ann Waltner has been working diligently to unearth the story of Tanyangzi and to understand her impact on China today. Electrifying the research even further is Professor Waltner's recent discovery of several letters written by Tanyangzi herself. What this new development will mean for the ultimate conclusion of Waltner's piece is yet to be seen. Yet, what is certain is that, whatever the conclusion, the tale of Tanyangzi and her movement that has existed in China as a legend will soon be transformed into history once again. And for this, we have Ann Waltner to thank.

The "Look" of Freedom: Embodiment and the Nature and Meaning of Black Religion

A Recent Lecture by Dr. Anthony



In February the Religious Studies Program was proud to sponsor a lecture this by Dr. Anthony Pinn, Arnold Professor of Humanities and Professor of Religious Studies at Rice University.

His lecture dealt primarily with the nature and meaning of black religion, which he explained, has little do with doctrines and creeds and more to do with the nature and meaning of black bodies. By using Civil Rights Movement activities and strategies as a case study, his lecture argued for the importance of the aesthetics of black bodies as a primary arena in which religious issues are defined and worked out.

Pinn holds a M.Div. from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. in Religion from Harvard University. His professional commitments also involve work as the Executive Director of the Society for the Study of Black Religion and co-chair of the American Academy of Religion's Black Theology Group. Pinn is the author/editor of seventeen books, including *Why, Lord?: Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (1995); *By These Hands: A Documentary History of African American Humanism* (2001); and *African American Humanist Principles: Living and Thinking Like the Children of Nimrod* (2004).

The Department of African American & African Studies and The Institute for Advanced Study co-sponsored the event.

EVENTS



*
Wednesday, April 22nd
*Deciphering a Dead Sea Scroll and
Reconstructing the History of Jewish Liturgy*

Sponsored by the Center for Jewish Studies
*

Friday, April 24th
Rules for Martyrs in Early Judaism and Christianity
A lecture by Bruce Chilton

Sponsored by CNES
*

Thursday, May 14th
Religious Studies Teaching Colloquia For Faculty and Graduate Students

*
Monday, May 4th
RELIGIOUS STUDIES END OF SEMESTER CELEBRATION

12:00 PM in Nicholson RM #135

RELS students, as well as students interested in RELS, are invited to attend.
*



RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROGRAM

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Would you like to be on our email list? Let us know.

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