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SUMMER 2006

THE SPIRE

Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Graduate Department of Religion, and Oberlin Graduate School of Theology

details from *The Word of God* Window
Benton Chapel
Vanderbilt University Divinity School
1960
conceived and executed by Robert Harmon,
of Emil Frei Associates, Incorporated,
Saint Louis, Missouri
funded by *alumni/ae* in honor of
Dean John Keith Benton

photographed by Neil Brake

For an explanation of the window's iconographic program, refer to the article titled "A Bountiful Tableau: the Laity's Primer On the Art Work of Benton Chapel" in this issue of *The Spire*.

THE SPIRE

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FEATURES

From the Dean

The Meaning of James Lawson to Vanderbilt University

For refusing the Korean War draft, he spent thirteen months in prison. For participating in activities involving nonviolent protests against segregation, he was expelled from Vanderbilt University. For his efforts to promote civil rights, he has been jailed in six states; he was arrested in 1981 for praying on the White House grounds and again in 2000 for protesting the economic sanctions against Iraq. For serving as an example of one who acts on one's conscience and lives by the courage of one's convictions, James Lawson received the 2005 Distinguished Alumnus Award from the Alumni Association of Vanderbilt University. Dean James Hudnut-Beumler delivered the following address on Wednesday evening, January 18, 2006, when the Reverend Doctor Lawson accepted the award.

DANIEL DUBOIS

There is a great old line in academic circles that goes like this: "Did you hear about that professor who left Vanderbilt for Duke?"

"Yes, it's a miracle. By moving, he improved two universities at once."

The Reverend Doctor James Lawson accomplished nothing short of a paradoxical miracle. He improved this University first by attending it and then by attaching its history to the civil rights movement.

He improved Vanderbilt a second time by getting expelled and causing a transformative crisis of conscience for Vanderbilt's faculty. And he has improved the institution a third time by allowing us, as a University, to come to a mature understanding of how he is—in service, in moral leadership, and in his resistance to evil—our finest model of how a member of the Vanderbilt community should interact with the human community.

In each of these "improvements", James Lawson has progressively helped the University find its conscience, or dare I say, its soul. To understand this triple paradox, one must first understand that Vanderbilt in 1960 was led by Chancellor Harvie Branscomb, a white moderate clergyman with a reputation for being progressive. Branscomb thought he had managed the integration situation in 1952 with a quiet agreement to allow non-whites to be admitted without fanfare to the School of Religion.

But moderation and gradualism had their tragic shortcomings. When James Lawson was arrested for resisting unjust laws and commercial practices of segregation, Nashville members of the Board of Trust demanded that he be expelled for breaking the law. The Chancellor, it is remembered, did the dirty work himself, shaking a finger at faculty and students in a closed-door meeting and saying, "Mr. Lawson is no longer a student of this University."

Branscomb, thus, proved the limits of white southern moderation. He proved, as many did, to be like the eight Birmingham clergy to whom Martin Luther King Jr. would write his famous letter and say: "I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: 'I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action'; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom."

It was acceptable for people of color to be students at the Divinity School, but they were not free to pursue justice on the terms their studies led them to believe that God set. So James Lawson was expelled, but he had work to do, and he went on with it. But for Vanderbilt, that was not the end of the story. The Divinity faculty was struck with a case of bad conscience—on whose side were they? Did they really believe the ideas they taught? Most of them offered their resignations if the decision were not reversed, and the threat spread over three months to the faculties of the School of Medicine and the College of Arts and Science. Before long Harold Stirling Vanderbilt, then chairman of the Board of Trust, was on a plane to Nashville to mediate a reversal of the decision that threatened to make a national mockery of the University that bore his family's name.

Permanently expelled from Vanderbilt, James Lawson would have done fine and well. But Vanderbilt could not be fine or well without confronting its troubled soul. In the end a deal was brokered to allow James Lawson to finish his degree and to retain the faculty.

Through this struggle, Vanderbilt's modern Divinity School was born, in which faculty would never again equivocate on justice or try to sweep questions of justice under the rug. Confrontations like this time in 1960 have a way of making you stronger if they don't kill you. As a result, the Divinity School has often been called "the conscience of the University," a reference of which it still strives to be worthy.

But tonight, Vanderbilt as a University community gets its own conscience as it celebrates and affirms that the example of love seeking justice in peace that was James Lawson in 1960 represents its finest hour and one worthy of our future as well. For that we should all be grateful.

Above: The Reverend Doctor James Lawson, D'60, pictured with Divinity School Dean James Hudnut-Beumler, received the 2005 Vanderbilt University Distinguished Alumnus Award. The Methodist minister and civil rights activist returns to campus for the 2006-2007 academic year as a Distinguished Visiting University Professor.

Our Featured Artisan

An Absence of Differentiation: Reflections of a Wondering Soul

BY ZANA ZEIGLER, MDIV3

Editor's Note: For this issue of The Spire, *we again invited student Zana Zeigler to create the work of art that would illustrate the cover of our magazine. Based upon an experience during her studies in Vietnam, Zeigler conceived the idea for constructing an altarpiece which she has titled* Be. *The image of the monument was photographed by Daniel Dubois of the University's Office of Creative Services.*

ROBIN JENSEN

Offerings for the Celebration of Wandering Souls Day

To recover from the jet lag of traveling home from Vietnam, I decided to rest for two days before I returned to my work at the Nashville Neuromuscular Center. When I resumed working, I became quite ill. I was exhausted.

While conversing with a good friend who resides in Atlanta, I complained about how wretched I felt. She remarked that not all of me "came home" and that I needed to "call in" the part of me that was still in Vietnam. She was right; I didn't feel all in one piece.

A week later, as I remained ill, my friend told me to cut off the ankle bracelet I began wearing while I was in Vietnam. I did not want to follow her advice, but I did. Perhaps it was time.

My feeling completely disintegrated could be attributed to more than sleep deprivation and jet lag. It was my rebellion against what seems like endings: the heat, sweat, hills, sore feet, chanting voices, and the ache of looking into Quynh's eyes at the airport and knowing that I shall never see her again—this woman who took my arm, as if I were a child, and taught me to cross the streets of Hanoi. It is the exquisite preciousness of having known our differences and our sameness.

Looking through my pictures, all six hundred of them, I drown in lovely, discrete, and utterly incoherent moments. I have begun reading Vietnamese historian Huu Ngoc's book *Wandering Through Vietnamese Culture.* He was among the many warm, intelligent, vivacious individuals with whom I visited and from whom I learned while in Vietnam. I also discovered a document titled "Letter from Hanoi," composed in 1928 by the French poet and soldier Jean Tardieu, who wrote:

"Never have I felt so unstable as since I have come to settle for some time in Hanoi. That must be due to the climate. It seems to me that in this country more than anywhere else, people are directly subjected to the despotic and capricious power of the elements. One feels one has become a simple puppet linked by strands of invisible thread to the whims of the sun, clouds, mist, winds, and the hours; thought changes colour; sensibility is aroused or dampens at the same time as a storm builds up, approaches, or breaks out, or dissolves. For my part, not a day has passed without my mental and physical state going through many successive phases: from tiredness to euphoria, from blissful well-being to a mysterious malaise, from perfect joy to despair. Often I have thought of what our Gide has remarked about the landscape of Africa: a lack of differentiation. Yes, that's it, here in Tonkin, too, one has the vivid impression of a nature that does not differentiate—no precise limit between one season and another…. There is also a lack of differentiation on the ground itself, in the countryside of the delta; in some places one cannot know where the rice field ends and a pond begins—and the water in the rice fields looks like that of the sea; there are small crabs and fish. There are so many surprises for a new tourist. The whole of nature, therefore, invites the foreigners, the non-adapted, to live from one day to another in a perpetual cock-and-bull story. There must be a sustained will to follow an idea for some time through so many breaks. One feels one has become more absurd than ever…"

When one's experiences make one feel absurd, perhaps that is the interval when one should turn to art. I then conceived the idea of an altarpiece as my "window" into the absurd, and from that conception, the altarpiece I have titled *Be* assumed form.

My sight line for the altarpiece emerged from my experience in Vietnam of having attended a "Celebration of Wandering Souls Day" when rites are enacted for protection from dead, "discontent wandering souls" who are seeking deliverance into peace and who could be troublesome to the living. When I arrived at the home of the hosts for the celebration, women were scurrying with plates of food for the inside and outside altars. The eldest sister in the family would chant the prayers from the Buddhist Book of Rules because she had received the most education. Six men, three to a bench, faced one another. Tea sets, plates of food, and bowls of water had been placed on a low table between them. They talked casually to one another while smoking cigarettes, and the women leaned over the men and the praying sister to place plates of food as an offering to the dead. One man answered his cell phone and left the gathering to continue his conversation.

Leaning against the wall that divided the altars inside the house from the monuments outside, I found myself irritated by the diversions of children running and cell phones ringing. I silently questioned how this could be a serious ceremony riddled with such petty distractions, but as I stood and sweated by the wall, I suddenly experienced a change in my posture; I was transformed somehow—changed, but I know not how, exactly. I am not suggesting that I have perfected the gift of insight, but the essence of the experience seems to involve surrendering and dropping judgments. I continued to stand at the wall, and at the same time that I felt inordinately happy, I also began to weep.

This experience will remain embedded always in my circuitry; I can recall immediately the images and smells of this visceral, sensate memory, but the experience also invites a discussion of social differences.

continued on page 5

Readers' Forum

Exemplary Religious Leadership

When I was an undergraduate in 1949, the Joint University Library was closed to blacks; however, the School of Religion, which had its own library on the ground floor of the JUL, chose to allow blacks to use its resources and to check out books from the JUL through the School's circulation desk. What a wonderful example of religious leadership!

Founding members of the Vanderbilt Unitarian Fellowship (now First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville), including Ron Rouse, BA'50, PhD'58, and I, believed this was not right, so we took on the project of opening the JUL to black students. We got appointments with all the JUL board members and asked them to open the library to blacks. We were told in every case that "the time was not right."

It is very rewarding to see our goals have been met with the naming of James Lawson as the 2005 Distinguished Alumnus Award recipient and that the School of Religion is still at the forefront of race relations.

E. Allan Blair, BA'52
Flagstaff, Arizona

In Praise of Don Beisswenger

The Spire continues to represent the best in journalism. I read every issue with enthusiasm. Thank you for the article "The Gift of Confinement" which reported on the heroic efforts of my early mentor Don Beisswenger. May his tribe increase!

Tom W. Boyd, MDiv'63, PhD'73
Norman, Oklahoma

It is rare to find someone who spends more energy living faith than talking about faith. Don Beisswenger is one of those individuals.

Sheryl Jaynes-Andrews, MTS'92

We live in a time that more than any other calls for a prophetic voice; we live in a time that calls us to move beyond "Churchianity" and to be people of faith and agents of change. Thank you, Don Beisswenger, for giving six months of your life and for re-kindling in me that voice that challenges our society to be moved beyond terrorism, fear, and hate and to become the spirit-breathing people of God.

Peggy L. Meade, MDiv'94
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Who would have thought of confinement for six months as a gift of opportunity for serious reflection and contemplation? I wonder who was really in jail—Don Beisswenger or the prison administrators? As a result of the article "The Gift of Confinement," peace and justice are no longer abstract words in my vocabulary. Don Beisswenger's efforts and experiences have brought concrete meaning to both words. His description of federal penitentiaries sharpens my appreciation for prison ministries sponsored by our local churches, and especially for the Better Decisions Program aimed at helping women inmates learn how to improve their lives.

Walking in Jesus' footsteps can take a lot of 'intestinal fortitude'; thanks for showing this timorous spirit how it is done with grace and courage. And special thanks to the artist Elizabeth King for her splendid cover illustration which says it all without saying a word.

David T. Irvine, G'80
Nashville, Tennessee

We have provided the *alumni* of Yale Divinity School a link to your article, "The Gift of Confinement," which includes splendid excerpts from the prison journal of Donald Beisswenger, one of our *alumni.* I know our graduates will find the story very interesting and inspiring.

Gustav Spohn
Director of Communications
Yale Divinity School
New Haven, Connecticut

Your article featuring the journal of the Reverend Donald Beisswenger moved me to tears and also to a passionate re-commitment of my life to the cause of justice for all. Our Methodist Sunday School class has been studying for five years the writings of Father Thomas Keating. I am reminded of Keating's insights as I read the prison journal of Reverend Beisswenger.

Penne J. Laubenthal, PhD'72
Athens, Alabama

My sincere thanks for the 2005 fall issue of *The Spire* with the story of my brother's imprisonment and the spiritual fallout from his work. Needless to say, I am very proud of my brother and admire his commitment to living out his faith. Vanderbilt also must be proud.

Mitzi Beisswenger Wolf

Your exploration of the talents of young Elizabeth Nicole King was masterful. Her invention of the "language of soiled linen" as a means of addressing the soiling minds of intolerance rightly must have astonished the viewers at U.T. Martin. It would anywhere. Your essay honored and communicated the radical originality of such a mind.

As Subud and other teachings recognize, the element of "shock," whether gratis or self-induced, can provide unexpected insight. The cover illustration of the mirror and the model affirm a seeing beyond, as did Don Beisswenger's discoveries during his imprisonment.

Pat Burton
Nashville, Tennessee

The Ministry of Presence

Thank you for John Thatamanil's thoughtful piece "Against Explanation and for Consolation." I have long since given up looking for an intellectual resolution to the problem of evil. With Professor Thatamanil, I have concluded that to be emotionally and spiritually present with someone who is suffering is all we can offer; moreover, it is better than an explanation. As editor and director of Forward Movement Publications for the Episcopal Church, I intend to reprint Professor Thatamanil's excellent essay in a forthcoming book of meditations for people in crisis.

Richard H. Schmidt, MDiv'70
Cincinnati, Ohio

It's No Accident—We Count You in the Fold

I have never been to Vanderbilt Divinity School. I receive *The Spire* "by accident" because I was graduated in 1945 from the Oberlin School of Theology. I write to express great appreciation for the magazine; the 2005 fall issue is really outstanding.

Roger Robison, Oberlin, BD'45
Hamilton, Montana

With Hope that We Remain Worthy

I just finished the most recent issue of *The Spire.* Of the four *alumni* publications I receive, *The Spire* is the only one I read cover to cover.

David Damon, DMin'74
Jacksonville, Florida

Our Featured Artisan, continued

There were differences—differences as obstacles—in the sense that I did not speak the same language as the hosts and the participants in the ceremony; however, this relative, material difference provided the foundation for the intense experience. Notwithstanding that difference, I came to feel a tremendous unity with the celebrants. Not sharing the same language as the hosts proved utterly irrelevant; the import of the experience was impersonal. Neither personal history nor content was involved or even of marginal interest—personal history, likes, dislikes, background, education, and language became non-present. Time and its partner, history, were immaterial to this experience.

An altar serves as a structure that holds and preserves the ideas, images, objects, and memories that have their own lives—a place where they may be. I divided the interior space of the altarpiece into sections to represent the principal themes from my studies in Vietnam—globalization, ecology, economics, and colonialism. By using Styrofoam, glue, paper, wire, beads, bamboo from Pier I, and computer-manipulated photographs, I constructed three-dimensional objects that could be moved by the viewer. I like the idea that there is no one, single perspective from which the elements of the altarpiece can be perceived.

I incorporated a group portrait of the Divinity School delegation within a lower register of the altarpiece because it seems appropriate to represent our collective identity on a work of art that celebrates transformation. The photograph also features a monk and nuns from a Buddhist center in Hanoi and the director of the USA Society, a group dedicated to reconciliation and friendship between Vietnam and the United States.

The altar is subdivided into areas dedicated to the interrelated themes of religion, worship, and ritual; ecology and indigenous resources; tourism, Westernization and globalization; cultural transformations; and the intention to create and recognize community. All the elements are surrounded by a collaged border of North and South Vietnamese flags, American flags, land maps, statistics, and names of the dead from "The American War," known to us as the Vietnam War. The shredded texture of the paper complements a monument created against a backdrop of politics, the War Powers Resolution, and casualties of human lives—casualties of the earth.

The *Be* altarpiece invites physical contact, and I want the viewer to reach and turn the elements while reading the fragments of texts. Perhaps time will collapse for you as it did for me while standing at the wall during the Celebration of Wandering Souls Day and you will experience what Tardieu describes as a "lack of differentiation." There is no foreseeable ending to the enrichments of which my memories of Vietnam may speak, but that is the objective of immersion learning in field education.

A native of Fort Wayne, Indiana, Zeigler earned a baccalaureate in art education from Florida International University in Miami and the master of fine arts degree from the University of Georgia. She is the founder of the Nashville Neuromuscular Center, a clinic specializing in the holistic therapy of soft tissue pain and dysfunction. Prior to her enrollment at the Divinity School, Zeigler served as a staff minister for the congregation at Religious Science of Nashville. She will fulfill the requirements for the master of divinity degree at the conclusion of the 2006 fall semester.

Around the QUADRANGLE

A Period of Consequences

Vanderbilt Divinity School's commitment to promoting "an ecologically wholesome world" and to educating student theologians about the effects of environmental destruction was reinforced in a public lecture delivered by the Honorable Al Gore on the first day of classes for the 2006 spring semester. The forty-fifth Vice President of the United States and former Tennessee senator addressed the topic "Global Climate Change" in a multimedia presentation on the environmental crisis confronting the world.

"If we do nothing about global warming," Gore stated, "then you mark my words—it's going to be a bitter cup we'll be forced to drink over and over again. This is not a political issue; it's a moral issue. What gives us the right in our generation to lay this curse on our children? To do so would be deeply and unforgivably immoral."

During his lecture, Gore demonstrated the direct correlation between temperature and carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere and cited the sobering statistic—confirmed by Antarctic ice core samples—that carbon dioxide is at its highest level in more than 400,000 years. Among the consequences of global warming he discussed are rising ocean waters that may inundate costal regions, rising ocean temperatures that may lead to stronger, more frequent hurricanes, and changes in the ocean currents that could transform Europe from a temperate to an icy continent. To emphasize the urgency of his argument, Gore also quoted from Winston Churchill's speech delivered on November 12, 1936, in response to Germany's reoccupation of the Rhineland: "The era of procrastination, of half measures, of soothing and baffling expedients, of delays, is coming to a close. In its place we are entering a period of consequences."


DANIEL DUBOIS

Gore concluded his lecture by refuting the notion that repairing the environment is beyond human capability. "We accomplished a major environmental victory at the conclusion of the last century with the ozone layer; scientists told us it would never heal, but we took the lead—with a Republican president and a Democratic Congress—and the rest of the world followed. The earth's ozone layer, once thought irretrievably damaged, is on the road to recovery."

Three members of the Vice-President's family are *alumni/ae* of the University. His deceased mother, Pauline, JD'36, was the tenth woman to be graduated from Vanderbilt Law School; his late sister, Nancy, earned her baccalaureate in 1960 from the College of Arts and Science; and his wife, Mary Elizabeth (Tipper), received a master's degree in psychology from Peabody College in 1976. While Gore was pursuing his baccalaureate at Harvard University, he enrolled at Vanderbilt in the summer of 1968 to study the history of the Middle East and the history of architecture. Upon returning from Vietnam, he enrolled in the Graduate School before entering the Law School.

NEIL BRAKE

Arc of Hope

"I am trying *to become* a Christian," proclaimed renowned literary artist Maya Angelou in her lecture titled "Rainbow in the Cloud" delivered on February 27, 2006, to an audience of 3,500 in Memorial Gymnasium.

"I become uncomfortable when I hear someone say, 'I *am* a Christian.' I have to work, always, to become a Christian," she stated when commenting on the challenges of leading a charitable life.

In a presentation which included recitations of poems by Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, and Edna St. Vincent Millay, Angelou exchanged her reflections on hope, promise, love, and tolerance.

"When it looked like the sun wasn't gon' shine anymore," sang Angelou, "God put a rainbow in the clouds."

She reminded the students that a rainbow—embedded in the clouds—represents hope and that Vanderbilt is like a rainbow because education can offer the promise of hope. The author also encouraged students to remember how they unknowingly could be a rainbow for another person.

"A simple greeting of 'hello' or the gesture of a smile could make a significant difference in the life of someone who doesn't think the sun will shine anymore."

Angelou's lecture was arranged by the Vanderbilt University Speakers Committee, an organization charged with the responsibility of encouraging reflection and dialogue on contemporary issues by inviting distinguished speakers to the campus.


STEVE GREEN


STEVE GREEN

Soul Incision musicians Robert Early and Steven Smartt demonstrate their soulful moves during the band's performance at the 2006 Commencement Party before Kool and the Gang take the stage.

Soulful Inspiration

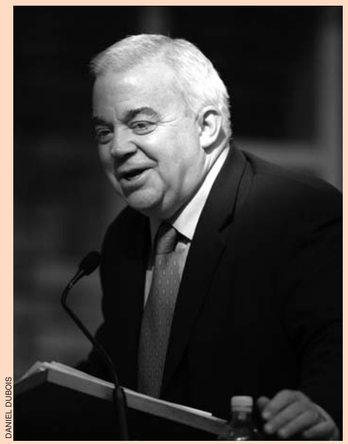
By day they are known by their formal titles—associate vice chancellor, assistant provost, executive vice president, systems engineer, physician liaison, and vocal instructor. On stage they help comprise the band Soul Incision and are fearless advocates of the motto, "It's never too late to rock 'n' roll!"

The band—whose name represents the fusion of Memphis and Motown soul tunes from the '60s and '70s with their vocations in the University and the Medical Center—showcased its talents during the 2006 Commencement Party. The Divinity School counts trumpeter Robert Early among the members of the *alumni/ae* community; Early, BA'71, MDiv'76, serves as executive associate vice chancellor for development and *alumni* relations for the University.

The other band members featured in the photograph include trumpeter Steven Smartt, BME'71, MME'72, assistant provost for graduate education and research; guitarist Norman Urmy, retired executive vice president for clinical affairs at VUMC; saxophonist and guitarist Jeffrey Byrd, systems engineer for VUMC Informatics; vocalist Deborah Kemp, physician liaison program; and Carol Byrd, child and adolescent vocal instructor.

"A university student should be encouraged to approach education not as a means for constructing a résumé but as an opportunity to discern one's vocation and the passions in one's gut, soul, and heart," remarked the Reverend Jim Wallis during the 2005 Cole Lectures at Vanderbilt Divinity School. "The purpose of a university's career center should not be to advise students on how to assemble their assets in order to climb the highest rung of the career ladder; students should be encouraged to discover their gifts and to use those gifts in response to the crushing needs of the world."

The editor-in-chief of Sojourners *magazine, Wallis also serves as the convener of Call to Renewal, a national, ecumenical federation of churches and faith-based organizations dedicated to overcoming poverty by changing the direction of public policy.*


DANIEL DUBOIS

KATE BARRY

Theologian Laurel C. Schneider, PhD'97, returned to her alma mater in March to deliver the thirty-second annual Antoinette Brown Lecture. An associate professor of theology, ethics, and culture at the Chicago Theological Seminary, Schneider presented "When Hell Freezes Over: Feminism, Ontology, and Multiplicity." Benefactor Sylvia Sanders Kelley, BA'54, established the annual lectureship in 1974 to commemorate the life of the first woman in the United States to be ordained to the Christian ministry. The text of Schneider's lecture is published in this issue of The Spire.

KATE BARRY

Molly Mattingly, MDV3, and Jennifer Downs, MDiv'06, coordinators for the 2006 Antoinette Brown Lecture, presented Professor Schneider with a framed poster created for the lecture by Chris Collins, a senior graphic designer for the University.

Faculty Kudos

Susan Hylen, Mellon Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, is the coauthor of *John: Westminster Bible Companion* by Westminster John Knox Press. Hylen co-wrote the commentary with Gail R. O'Day, associate dean of faculty and academic affairs and the A.H. Shatford Professor of Preaching and New Testament at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

Paul J. DeHart, associate professor of theology, is the author of *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* by Blackwell Publishing.

Dean James Hudnut-Beumler announces the following appointments to the faculty of Vanderbilt University Divinity School:

Paul C.H. Lim, Ph.D., *assistant professor of church history*

Barbara McClure, Ph.D., *assistant professor of pastoral counseling and pastoral theology*

Graham Reside, Ph.D., *director of the Cal Turner Program in Moral Leadership*

Senior lecturers James P. Byrd, Alice Wells Hunt, and Jay Geller have been appointed to the rank of assistant professor. Byrd, PhD'99, serves as assistant dean for the graduate department of religion and teaches courses in American religious history. The associate dean for academic affairs, Hunt, PhD'03, offers courses in Hebrew Bible. Geller, who earned his doctorate from Duke University, teaches courses in modern Jewish culture.

From Mortarboard to Ranger Hat

When Jennifer Lynn Compton announced to her family and friends that she had decided to seek admission to a divinity school instead of becoming an environmental engineer, no one was more surprised than she.

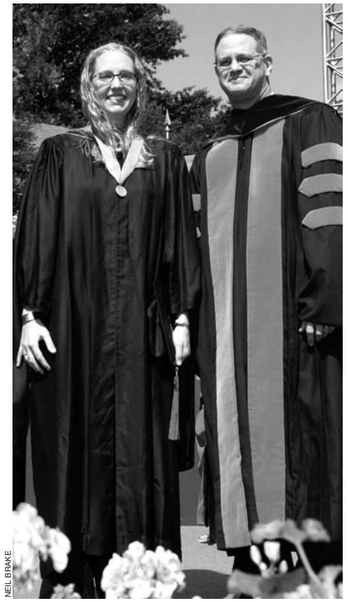
Upon receiving her baccalaureate in psychology from Birmingham-Southern College where she was graduated first in her class, Compton was awarded a Rotary Fellowship to study environmental engineering in Australia. She had imagined having a career that allowed her to work in the outdoors—a passion that had developed during twelve years at summer church camp, the family vacations to the Grand Canyon, and twenty-two days of cross-country dog sledding during an Outward Bound expedition in Minnesota. She always concluded any discussion of her career plans with the statement, "And one day I would like to attend divinity school."

Although Compton was aware of the lucrative employment opportunities that she could pursue as an engineer, she began to realize that her interest in theology was more than a fleeting impulse—that theological education could be reconciled with her interest in the environment and could prepare her to become a steward of Creation.

Of the institutions to which she sought admission, Vanderbilt University Divinity School attracted Compton initially because of the opportunity to receive a theological education within a research university. When she read in the *Catalogue* about the Divinity School's unequivocal commitment to the environment, she knew that her calling to serve the environment could be developed at an institution whose mission included "active participation in the struggles of individuals and groups for a healthier, more just, more humane, and more ecologically wholesome world" and "a concern for the effects of environmental destruction and for the securing of equal opportunity for all individuals, peoples, and creatures to enjoy God's gifts."

Convinced of Compton's academic promise and of her leadership abilities for the Church, the administration and faculty selected her as a Carpenter Scholar and awarded her a full-tuition scholarship. Three years later, she distinguished herself by becoming the eighty-seventh Founder's Medalist in the School's history. Compton also received the William A. Newcomb Prize for best representing the Divinity School's paradigm of "the minister as theologian" and for earning honors on her master of divinity project titled "Gathering Up the Fragments: An Ecological Theology of the Eucharist for the United Methodist Church."

Two days after she was graduated, Compton traded her mortarboard for the ranger hat that she will wear while working for the United States Department of the Interior as a ranger in the Rocky Mountain National Park of Colorado.



NEIL BRAKE

For first honors in the Divinity School's class of 2006, Jennifer Lynn Compton received the Founder's Medal from Dean James Hudnut-Beumler. A candidate for ordination in the United Methodist Church, Compton is working during the summer as a ranger in the Rocky Mountain National Park of Colorado.

"Jennifer is a quiet model of discipline for scholarship and dedication to the wounded environment," remarks Douglas Meeks, the Cal Turner Chancellor's Chair in Wesleyan Studies and Professor of Theology. "The hallmark of her studies at Vanderbilt has been not only her academic excellence but also her passion for bringing diverse people together for sustained communication and communion of spirit."

Associate Professor of Theology John Thatamanil states, "Academic work for Jennifer has never been a mere intellectual exercise; she engages in theology for the sake of personal and world transformation. Her double passion for recovering a deep notion of sanctification and ecological well-being has guided her work at the Divinity School. It is no wonder that she is at home in the wild spaces of our national parks and in the wild spaces of the classroom."

"I want to help educate visitors to our nation's parks so they can be more than tourists—I want them to become guests of the wilderness and to learn how they can co-exist respectfully with the earth. As I leave the Oberlin Quadrangle for the Continental Divide to begin my vocation as an interpreter of the land, I depart with a greater understanding of the important relationship between ecology and theology."

– Jennifer Compton

When Hell Freezes Over

Feminism, Ontology, and Multiplicity

BY LAUREL C. SCHNEIDER, PHD'97

Editor's Note: When alumna Laurel C. Schneider concluded her delivery of the thirty-second annual Antoinette Brown Lecture on Thursday evening, March 16, 2006, Dean James Hudnut-Beumler described her presentation as "a tour de force." We are pleased to publish the text of her inspirational lecture for our readers.

It is truly a pleasure and an honor to be at Vanderbilt Divinity School, this time not as a student, but as a speaker. Being here now, with the obligation of bringing to you some of my own most current thinking in the area of feminism and theology, I cannot help being reminded of that time, before the dissertation, that would establish an intellectual path that has led me back here, to you. So I am here both now, and then. Time and space are, as we know, sometimes fluid, sometimes circular.

My current project, close to completion, is an investigation of divine multiplicity, following directly from the challenges to feminist theology that I laid out in the conclusion of my last book, *Re-Imagining the Divine.* In this lecture, I will describe some of my reasons for the project, and then lift up a couple of the ideas that I have developed therein. In particular, I will focus on material from a chapter that shares the title of this lecture, *When Hell Freezes Over.* This chapter occurs at a pivotal point in the middle of the book, marking both the end of my critique of the logic of the One and the turn to multiplicity as a mode of thinking, in particular, toward Christian incarnational divinity.

The Challenge to Move Beyond Monotheism

For those of you who are familiar with the critique of feminist theology that I developed in my book *Re-Imagining the Divine,* you know that I conclude that work with a challenge to feminist theologians like myself. If we are to take the variety of women's experiences seriously at the same time that we argue for an iconoclastic metaphoric theology, we must engage in what I now call supple reasoning. By this I mean we must affirm the incompleteness and inadequacy of all of our concepts of divinity—thence comes our ability to criticize the patriarchal images of God—but we must also affirm the freedom and openness of divinity to become *really there* in the multiplicity of embodied experience.

My own methodological argument for supple reasoning in that project led me to a suspicion that, up to that point at least, Christian feminist theology remained unable to engage the theological possibilities resident in a concept of divinity that is free to become *actually* embodied and discernible in women's experiences of divinity (whether mystical, liturgical, or prosaic). The Re-Imagining Conference in 1993 and feminist theological responses to it in the bitter aftermath of that gathering, also made clear that white feminist theologians generally understood divinity to become *metaphorically* embodied and discernible in women's experiences, but not concretely so. As a Protestant, educated in the non-foundationalism and critical theory that has been a hallmark of this School, I agree with the apophatic principle of negative theology that insists the divine is not ever subject to our concepts and claims. Nevertheless, I am also enough of a feminist concerned about the marginalization of women's experience and voices to know that if you take away the authority of direct experience, you take away from the marginalized and excluded every authority by which they can criticize the tradition that excludes them—so effectively have they been excluded from the other typical poles of authority: namely Scripture, tradition, and even reason. I, therefore, became increasingly worried about the tendency resident in strong apophatic or metaphorical claims to diminish the embodied experience and so authority of women. Such diminishment, valid as it may be for preservation of the Protestant principle of apophasis, is also, or so I began to suspect, with the likes of Anne Hutchinson, a mode of ecclesial social control of women, not to mention a contradiction of historical Protestant openness to divine freedom.

To broach talk in Christian theology of divinity that is free to be *really there,* not abstractly functional or distantly well-behaved, is to speak of the divine as, in some way, accessible to perception and recognition in the here and now. This means taking up the difficult philosophical challenge of affirming some kind of ontological thereness to divinity, to affirm, dare I say it, divine *presence,* even in the aftermath of important critiques of the very possibility of such. This affirmation speaks directly to what Edward Farley has so aptly dubbed "our passion for the real,"[i] a passion that necessitates a certain poetic license and exposes a constitutive vulnerability of theology to foolishness. Passion for the real may lead us, inexorably, more to the kataphatic, the *via positiva,* rather than to its constitutive and necessarily-also-true other, the apophatic, or *via negativa.* For the degraded, the marginalized, and the excluded, the demand of silence that apophasis requires is little more than business as usual anyway. What is more, the divide between the "is" and the "is not" is suspect. This so-called divide is one of many props for the monotheistic logic of the One and so becomes downright incoherent outside of that logic, outside of that particular logos.

… Christian metaphysics, somewhere along the long road of its intellectual history, got stuck in the ontological ice of trinitarian monotheism and has not been able to thaw itself out sufficiently to re-enter openly the world and make sense to everyday people.

What Farley suggests by means of a passion for the real is an anthropological claim that the human drive for authentic meaning is both our genius and our greatest vulnerability. We cannot help but tell stories to ourselves, to weave vast webs of meaning around ourselves like blankets on a cold night. Our passion for the real is the psychic fuel that drives our grand schemes and narratives about life; it also drives our arrogant gestures toward reduction, definition, and mastery. I find this anthropological claim persuasive. It is my own passion for the real, for that which I can assert in all honesty to be "true," that drives me away from the patent unreality of the medieval synthesis, the Westminster Confession and its impassible, perfectly reduced divine.

After extensive study of the historical development of monotheistic and monadic ideas in the Hellenized ancient world, I have come to realize that the feminist theological problem lies much less in the metaphoric maleness of God than it does in the ontological reduction of divinity to a totality—a One—that in the particular history of our shared religious traditions can *only* be conceived of as male. It is the One that got gendered in Aristotelian teleology and late, post-exilic Israelite cosmology, rendering the female as other to the divine. As this clarity emerged in my research, I began to see that a deeply critical approach to the maleness of God was not accompanied, in Christian feminist theology anyway, by an equally critical approach to the logic of the One that produced it. Furthermore, while criticism of ontologies of the One has flourished among indigenous story-tellers for centuries and among French philosophers for a number of years now, the suspicion that monotheism structures and mandates much of what feminist theology purports to challenge has been very slow to emerge.

As a consequence, I have come to the conclusion that feminist and womanist theologies in particular must get our hands really dirty in ontological foolishness if we are to have any hope of effecting meaningful change in the deep structures of race-gender disfunction in the long trajectory of Christian imagining. For one thing, the time is ripe. In the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Ellen Armour recently deployed Heidegger's use of the "fourfold" to make the point that "Man," boundaried by his "others" is foundering.[ii] In part, I suspect, this means that "Man" is turning out to *be* His others, and so in turn He *isn't.* The center, so they say, does not hold. The One, or "Man," configured as the ontological center of both human and divine, has been the imaginative sum of Christian theology since the scattered stories of Jesus coalesced into a cosmology. Of course, it also goes back further than that—cosmic Christian monotheism is the joint product of separate Hebrew and Greek cosmic innovations in response to sustained and devastating war traumas. But now, modern human being, understood as "Man," understood as the One, is dissolving—in science, philosophy, and theology—ontological re-imagining is already occurring. As usual, we theologians are scrambling to keep up.

This is the Antoinette Brown Lecture, honoring the work of women in religious leadership and theology, and so let me say something a little more personal about why it is that I think that *women* must—or, with a nod to Monique Wittig and the rest of us gender nomads, why those constructed as "other" to the normative category of "man" must—take up the foolish challenge of theological ontology. The reason that I take it up can be traced to at least three broadly conceived sources. First, there is the philosophical influence of my teachers here, who, although they cautioned regularly and appropriately against ontological moves, were themselves philosophically bold and unapologetically imaginative.

Second, there is my own social construction as a white lesbian woman, reared by the United Methodists to resist racism, classism, and even sexism, but expelled from full participation in that communion for *being* who and what I am. And third, I can trace the reasons for doing this work in part to my reading of Bonhoeffer, Whitehead, Daly, and Cone in college and seeing therein openings for theological thought and faith that are not dependent upon ecclesial imprimatur. They introduced me to thought and faith that indeed might be read against institutional self-authorization. But that is not all. Soon after that, I read Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, and Barth (among others), and faced head-on the long trajectory of theological justification for reductive oneness in Christian concepts of the divine. Of course I also devoured feminist and liberation thought, poetry and literature. But I became increasingly troubled by too-ready dismissals of Daly's outrageous ontological moves or of Cone's too-Black Jesus.

I also wondered, over time, at the failure of inclusive language efforts to change practices and beliefs, resulting in the fading away of inclusive language efforts themselves. Protest so quickly became accommodation, and I began to wonder if the issues of liberation that concern Asian, Latina, White, Black feminists, and Womanists will eventually take us into the dissolution of "Man" that is already occurring, which means into the dissolution of the logic that also names us and within which we scrabble for footing and voice. Engaging in imaginative figurations of being beyond the logic of the One is dangerous. It is not only dangerous to the figuration of "Man" that is already dissolving, but it is dangerous to the somewhat satisfying figuration of the heroic Other. In an onto-logic of One, only One is meant to survive. *We* believe we were never meant to survive, but the center holds only so long as the figuration of the Other—as our otherness—survives. Are we all ready, really, to shed our otherness for something beyond the One-Other divide? What might *reality* look like through, as Ellen Armour suggests, that looking glass?

Dante astray in the Dusky Wood
illustration by Gustave Doré
(1833-1883)

We can take heart in the fact that divine oneness has never actually succeeded in *being* One. This is partly a reference to Christian notions of Trinity, and it is partly a reference to the pesky irreducibility of the incarnate worlds that we are, that we become, and that we engage. Despite modern Western scientific method, which is explicitly based on assumptions, ontological oneness, *reality* has always, over and over again, failed to *be* One. Ontological oneness that is teleologically gendered as the asexually reproducing Father God, is the horizon of being-itself and as such, it defines the Good and the True. But still the world returns—resilient, supple, too excessively embodied and porous ever to be one. In the tight antiphony of divine oneness and worldly manyness within the logic of the One/many divide, it makes sense that heaven is the structure of oneness, and hell its necessary other.

Before turning to the topic of Hell and ice, I want to continue paving the path there by naming a couple of the key characteristics of ontological oneness that structures the One/many divide, which is how I characterize the problem facing feminist and other incarnation theologies. Then I will move on to what I am proposing in my current work is a possible passage into another, more supple logic (among many possible passages) through the queer looking glass of Heaven and Hell.

Ontology that is shaped by the logic of the One has a number of important characteristics, all of which, in becoming imprinted on the Christian imagination, also shape the cultural and scientific imaginations of the world dominated by Christianity. First, as I have already intimated, the logic of the One is dualistic (it may be more accurate to name it the logic of the One/many divide rather than the logic of the One, to keep its dualism to the fore. For the time being, however, I will adhere to the shorter "logic of the One").[iii] In order to account for difference, change, and ambiguity that continually recurs, reality within the horizon of the One necessarily falls into the true (real) and false (unreal) in order both to cope with the ambiguity of experience, and to support the singularity of truth. This has led, in Western thought, to a splitting of the empirical from the intuitive. That which is real is confined to the tests of empirical observation and repeatability. The strange, the fleeting, the anomalous, the felt—the unverifiable, in other words—are, therefore, 'real' in their effects only, if they are not deferred altogether.

For example, let me tell you a story that Howard Harrod introduced to me when I had the unmatchable experience of teaching with him here. A. I. Hallowell, a Euro-American anthropologist living among the Great Lakes Ojibwa in the mid-twentieth century, heard several stories about rocks that became animate and intervened dramatically in the history of the people. Looking for a principle, or rule regarding the living and non-living, he politely asked the elder with whom he conversed if the stories about these rocks meant that all rocks are alive. The old man looked at him with pity. "No, of course the rocks are not alive," the elder answered. "But *some* are."[iv]

The implication was that Hallowell's own thinking was not supple enough to understand what to the Ojibwe was self-evident. Of course rocks are not alive. Just look at them. But *some* are. How else could they do what they do? The evidence lies in experience unencumbered by too many shutters. Ontology shaped by the logic of the One, in order to derive universal principles, must shutter anomalous experience, or else look for a universal law that will accommodate it. The truth that some rocks are alive, or that rocks are alive sometimes, fails the test of universality altogether and so must be relegated within the horizon of the One to the realm of collective imagining or creative fiction.[v]

When a true/false dualism is rigidly enforced (rocks are either sentient or they are not, God either exists or does not), existence is normatively reduced to the verifiable. Put most simply, if no one can verify it, if it cannot be universalized, it does not exist. Without the possibility of ontological both-and answers, of shape-shifting and other forms of ontological multiplicity, there is only being within the horizon of the same, of the One. So many non-Western cultures like the Ojibwe, that are open to many other possibilities for existence, make the finality of true-or-false a non-sequitur, a bit of nonsense.

It is this eternal deepfreeze regulated by Satan's wings that Dante offers out of the riches of his medieval dream-vision, constituting for him the true meaning of damnation. The worst fate, beyond which no greater punishment can be imagined, is the absence of movement, of warmth, and of change.

The Reduction of Otherness to the One

A second characteristic of ontology that is shaped by the logic of the One is that it is reductive, meaning that existence itself must conform to a single explanation, or understanding. The rule of Occam's Razor and the related quest among some physicists for a "Theory of Everything" have a resonance in the deepest heart of Pythagoras's mystical infatuation with the number one and in Christian notions of a singular, unchanging God. It is possible that the imaginative overlap of a single created cosmos knit together by discernably universal laws under a single divine principle succeeds in science even more effectively than in religion because scientific exploration roots the concept of oneness in the self-referencing rules of simplicity and non-contradiction. Scientific principles of reductive simplicity and non-contradiction, which we might even refer to as doctrines, cause science to appear as if faith has little or nothing to do with the question of reality (until rocks speak, that is). As Marcelo Gleiser notes, "Platonism echoes strongly in the offices of theoretical physicists, especially those preoccupied with questions of cosmic origin. Stephen Hawking has equated understanding the origin of the universe to knowing 'the mind of God'."[vi]

Simplicity, in theology and in society, is an economy of identity. Sameness becomes the basis for establishing real from unreal. Something is 'real' if it is the 'same as' (not anomalous or strange to) the known. And so, the reducibility of reality to simplicity, or oneness, effects a negation of difference as a basic tenet of reality itself. Otherness, especially otherness that cannot be somehow resolved into a recognizable frame of the One, indicates an error in knowledge or in judgment precisely because fundamental *otherness is not real.* Or, we should say, fundamental otherness cannot be real in a uni-verse.

If Western Christian ontology is built on a reductive basis, then there should be no surprise when philosophers become obsessed with the question of otherness. If to *be* is to *be the same,* then *to be other* is a frightful loss of existence (remember the dualism—if to be the same is to be, then it must follow that to be other is to not-be). It is only within the logic of the One that the category of Other can come to hold such negative power, such fascination, horror, or attraction.

It is easy to get stuck attempting to articulate this supposed Other *as other,* and forget that within a different logic, a resistant logic of 'becoming,' perhaps, or a fluid logic of multiplicity, there is no One against which the Other is projected as grotesque nemesis.[vii] The Other is neither projected nor contradicted by the One in a more shifty ontology of multiplicity. There… simply… *are.* What is the Other unmoored from its master One? An unruly cacophony of anomalies? A fertile depth? A swamp of unknowing? An unending matrix of possibility and so a multitude of truths? This is the fear, isn't it?

What will happen to the horizon of Western thought if we were to realize that the One fails, again and again to *be* One? What if we see that the One is, paradoxically, constructed by its own exclusions of external and internal contradiction, and this exclusive move *itself* divides and multiplies the One? We could say, then, that the One never *really* was one by virtue of its necessary exclusions. Indeed, it is this claim that will carry us at last off the deep end into the overdue realm of imagining divine multiplicity. But, in the meantime (the mean time of imperial Christian metaphysics) the One which is not one, nevertheless, has asserted itself over and against the always recurring multiplicity at the heart of what could be and sometimes even has been (and dare we say should be?) Christian incarnational imagining.

The ontological horizon of Western Christian Oneness, even in the closed systems of most formulations of Trinity, funds a deep cultural anxiety about identity, sameness, origins, and pedigree/roots. The One that denies its own constitutive multiplicity also denies and suppresses hybridity or contradiction. There is a genealogical trace running through the Constantinian doctrinal consolidation, the Augustinian constraint on trinitarian openness, the medieval scholastics' stratification and legalization of eternity, the early modern scientists' conflation of nature, law, and stasis, and contemporary strivings after a scientific "theory of everything" that relies entirely on oneness. This is a fundament *that had to be made* for imperial consolidation and 'Westward expansion.' It is, I suggest, an ontology of ice, whose fluid dynamics we have forgotten even exist.

Dante and Virgil Penetrating the Forest
watercolor by William Blake
(1757–1827)

In other words, what I am saying is that Christian metaphysics, somewhere along the long road of its intellectual history, got stuck in the ontological ice of trinitarian monotheism and has not been able to thaw itself out sufficiently to re-enter openly the world and make sense to everyday people. To call it ontological ice is, of course, to be metaphorical. Ice is water—the solution necessary for life—a richly malleable substance, infinitely shape-shifty when it is warm and especially when it is hot. Ice is just water appearing to be still. We might say, for metaphoric purposes, that ice aspires to stasis. It does so via the absence of warmth. What a lovely metaphor this is for the problem of the One in Christian theology! It is lovely because I want to suggest that the problem of the One in Christian theology could be viewed, from a certain poetic angle, as a problem of too little warmth.

There is a story that brilliantly illustrates this point. The place is Italy, the time around the year 1300 C.E. An educated, middle-aged man was exiled from his native city-state of Florence, having ended up on the wrong side of the Guelph/Ghibelline power struggles there. While in Rome on diplomatic business for his White Guelph clan and constituents, he learned that the pope had secretly conspired with the Black Guelphs and Ghibellines to kill or exile his kindred. In this Hatfield/McCoy-like drama, the man also learned that if he *ever* returned home to Florence, he would be burned alive.[viii] So rather than meet that painful fate, he wandered the length and breadth of the Italian-speaking countryside, mourned his lost city and family, and wrote about Hell. The man is Alighieri Dante, and the writing is the *Inferno,* the first volume in his trilogy *The Divine Comedy.*

Whether approached as populist criticism of a corrupt government and church or as indigenous art, whether a theological vision or as the first blockbuster hit of the Italian *hoi polloi* (Dante wrote in Italian, the cadence and language of the street and countryside, not in Latin, the language of the church and its doctors) the *Inferno* is a rich, robust, and bawdy read. In addition, the poem offers one angry and broken-hearted man's vision of the deepest heart of Hell that, beyond explicit (and satisfyingly vivid) excoriations of the medieval church's hypocrisy and corruption, paints a striking and provocative picture of the limits of the church's metaphysics.

The *Inferno* begins in the middle of Dante's life, in the middle of a wood, in the middle of the world.

> *Half-way through the story of my life*
> *I came to in a gloomy wood…*[ix]

This opening is not unlike the many creation stories of native North America that begin more or less in the middle, quite simply, with the words "There was a village," or "Hare [Trickster] was on his way to a village."[x] There is no obsession here with absolute beginnings and endings. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is concerned, from the very first stanza of the *Inferno,* with being in the middle, faced with complexity and the multiplicity of options that characterize even the meanest life. One could say that the three parts of the trilogy form an allegory of relational consequences—a geography and ontology of

The Inscription over the Gate
watercolor by William Blake
(1757–1827)

human enmeshment in world, bodies, relations, and divinity (both monstrous and tame).

Dante relates his attempts to climb out of the dark valley in which he first finds himself, only to find that his way is blocked by various monstrous animal servants of the story. He is rescued, however, by the appearance of the long-dead pagan poet Virgil, who informs Dante that the only way out of his current fix—the only way to find his way—is through Hell itself. He has, one could say, removed the blinders on his mundane life and glimpses, through the porosity of dream, vision, and the poet's pen a closely abutting world of difference. This is a non-reductive awakening to difference that Voltaire, Bacon, and the princes of après-colonial Reason would thoroughly have rejected. It is not, however, an awakening that would startle the majority of the peoples of the earth whose primary point of reference is not the narrow vision of Western empiricism.

Dante did not live with the benefit of Newtonian mechanics or a fully realized scientific ontology of oneness. We might say that his world was in fact closer to the outer edges of our own, where the fluidities and surprises of quantum mechanics are being explored, where reductive, ontological oneness is coming under question. For him, the fabric holding the realm of potentiality within the realm of actuality, the realm of sleep within the realm of waking, the realm of story within the realm of fact, had not yet been fully rent. The story of his journey, he tells us, is true because it is so fabulous. He expects doubt, but is writing centuries before the faith of Western science established its dogmas and lists of heresies. Dante enlists the credulity of his audience by sharing their incredulity. It may also be the case that the quality of fable suggests, in the *Inferno* especially, a truth that is very hard to accept. Throughout the world, fables and parables have often borne the most startling and dangerous messages, wrapped in cloaks of poetry, art, and storytelling. In the case of Dante's inferno, I suggest that the difficult truth lies quite literally in the center of Hell, namely, that *the metaphysics of absolute and eternal stasis on which the monotheistic doctrine of God is founded, is a lie.*

From Dante's gates of Hell, where the weak-willed and undecided are condemned to flit about in eager crowds chasing meaningless banners, from the descending rings of imagined horror, from the excrement-filled swimming pits, the glued lovers and the shape-shifters, to the deepest core where Satan is fixed in exile, Dante's vision is much more than a ribald catalog of retribution for particular wrongs (though it is that, as well). Despite their groans and tears, there is an unmistakable humor and lilt to the damned—while they must suffer to satisfy the vengeful imagination of the living—they create a kind of community of excess within which there are certain taboo pleasures. From pit to pit and punishment to punishment, the damned indulge, like masochists in an S/M scene, in obedience, subterfuge, gossip, or complaint. They interact, gibe, change form, deceive, and, to put it simply, seem to get by with what little they have. If this is Hell, then Hell is life itself in all of the myriad ways that human beings are caught up in webs and pits of greed, need, guilty pleasure, and excess.

Granted, nobody seems to be having *fun* in Dante's inferno (except perhaps for the demonic keepers), but the torments of the damned seem less cruel, allegorically speaking, than merely consequential: the people throughout the *Inferno* are simply experiencing the consequences of choices they have made. This is what gives the journey its pleasure: many of the pits entail the intimate consequences one might secretly wish on rude neighbors, bad bosses, coworkers, ex-lovers or the occasional cardinal and pope. It is a fantasy of consequence, less along the lines of Eliza Doolittle's rageful vision of a royal firing squad that takes out Professor Higgins, and more along the lines of 'be careful what you wish for.' In some cases the damned receive the very thing they sought in life, but in spades. This seems to be a vision of intimately embodied consequence. What is unspeakably cruel, however, is the unendingness of the consequence. Indeed, I want to argue that the theme of eternity is the only truly horrifying dimension of Dante's journey through Hell.

From his very first steps, Dante reveals to us that eternity is the banal evil that Hell is. The rest is creativity and an excess of life (a quality distinctly missing in his later *Paradiso*). As Virgil guides Dante from the gloomy wood to Hell's entrance, they pass under a gate engraved with the famous words:

> *'Before me there was nothing made to be,*
> *except eternity; eternal I endure;*
> *all hope abandon, ye who go through me.'*[xi]

This is a remarkable theological claim: *nothing* but eternity itself (God, presumably) existed before Hell and its gates. Eternity created Hell first, out of itself, perhaps because Hell is all that Eternity *can* create. Eternity is, by definition, devoid of change and so it is devoid of the punctuations in sameness that temporality bestows on the living with such generosity. As Kierkegaard notes in his own critique of things eternal, "[e]xistence without motion is unthinkable, and motion is unthinkable *sub specie aeterni*."[xii] The eternal and change (motion) are absolutely incompatible. So from the very first lines, Dante leads us into a queer place: eternity created Hell first because that is what eternity is. What a marvelously rich exposé and condemnation all at once of the deadly canker at the heart of Christian metaphysics! The deadly canker, the ontos of Hell, is stasis, which is Eternity, which is God.

From infernal pit to pit, round and round toward the center, Dante treats us, however, to a carnival of bodily excess. We meet those who in life sought illicit love, those who lied, those who pilfered, those who did not meet their debts, and those whose souls live in Hell but whose bodies still walk around in life. Each suffers a 'poetic' justice and is pitiful, comic, and human. Toward the end of his journey through this Vaudeville of human consequence, after a narrow escape from the pit of excrement, close encounters with body snatchers, and various other funhouse delights (many of which could, from a certain allegorical angle, describe a day in the life of parents of active toddlers) the fires die out, giving way at the very center to a vast, still lake of ice. Who knew? A snowball does stand a very good chance in Hell. The most damned of the damned lie frozen in the deepest pit with Satan himself mired at their center, the only movement a slow fanning of his massive, frigid wings.

It is this eternal deepfreeze regulated by Satan's wings that Dante offers out of the riches of his medieval dream-vision, constituting for him the true meaning of damnation. The worst fate, beyond which no greater punishment can be imagined, is the absence of movement, of warmth, and of change. It is not stench and heat, putrification, entanglement, complaint, tears, or wasp-stings. It is not endless labor or being upended in a hole and having one's feet set on fire. It is not even walking ever forward while looking ever back. No, far worse than a body that experiences pain, remorse, or change is what lies at the center of Hell. The eight circles, from the gate to the penultimate pits of Malebolge are big messes of consequence. But *Hell*, understood as true torment, itself really begins when the two traveling poets see their own breath, as their own warmth is sucked out of them.

Dante reserves this place of ice for betrayers who, in his own partisan grief, he can never imagine forgiving. Whether or not the frozen lake of the deepest pit of Hell is the proper place for those who betray fundamental trusts is an interesting question, but at issue here is less the matter of who is frozen into that lake and more the vivid image of the ice itself as supreme punishment. The chill of the place comes through the verse—*"a lake so cold it was not wet, but looked like glass instead"*—in which the bodies of the most damned are locked.

Unconcerned about the modernist separation of fact from fiction, the poet and storyteller can sometimes more directly, effectively, and artfully expose lies and fabrications on which the dominant institutions, cultures, classes, races, genders, religious authorities, and nations sometimes rely for their power.

At the outer edge of the lake, as their tears freeze in their eyes, the damned still gibe, confide, bellow in anger and insult one another with wit. They are cold, they are stuck in the ice up to their lips, but they are still full of life. And that makes this scene at the edge of the lake not quite the horror it is perhaps meant to describe. Anyone who has lived through a northern winter has experienced, at one time or another, the bitter cold that causes the body to become *"numb in thought and deed"*.[xiii] In one sense, as elsewhere in the *Inferno,* the Hell depicted here in the final circle cannot be the elements, for they are experienced elsewhere. Even a Florentine, who may only have experienced bitter cold through the stories of northern travelers, knows that if Hell is the cold (or the excrement, or the fires, or the hot sands, or the wind) then Hell is life itself.

As in the first eight circles, the real difference here, of course, is not the elements but unchanging eternity that traps them. And because the poet paints a vivid picture, the stillness at the center of the lake confirms it. As Virgil leads Dante across the lake (occasionally treading on an unsuspecting head) the chill deepens, and the stillness grows; there is no more banter from the damned. Dante himself becomes so cold he cannot tell if he is dead or alive. True damnation, this suggests, is stasis. But here is what is startling. In Dante's rendering of the Christian metaphysical story, the ice of Hell is the fundament upon which the eternity that Heaven claims for itself is built.

Or so it would seem. Remarkably, Dante discovers that this most hellish place of enforced stillness in Hell actually isn't. Still, that is. It is a trick of *motion*, of the cooling action of Satan's massive wings. The ice is not in fact integral to the place, but it is the product of continuous effort on the part of the so-called Prince of the prisoners. What is more, it is literally through the body of the devil that the two travelers find their way to Heaven. And what a queer vision this becomes! Hell is, for the most part, a hot, smelly, messy place. It is every bit the *body* in motion or in labor. Satan, the keeper and prime penitent of Hell, himself supposedly a prisoner, is frozen in the center of the lake of ice that he himself maintains *for the sake of eternity.* Located in the frozen center of the deepest pit, Dante soon finds out that Satan himself is the pivot on which all else, including Heaven, rests!

In the beginning, Virgil brings Dante to Hell in order to help him get out of the woods and on the right path in his life. Why is this trip to Hell necessary? The answer is not obvious, at least not until we get to this central point of the *Inferno* and ride on Virgil's shoulders down and apparently into the hairy, bound body, where "hip meets thigh", no less, of *"the former Beautiful Aristocrat,"*[xiv] (that would be Satan.) There we find ourselves turned around, with Dante, looking *"beyond a rounded opening, of store on store of things of Heavenly delight"*.[xv] Satan is

God's mirror. There is, in the pivotal groin of God's reviled Other, a rounded opening through which one may glimpse heaven. Satan is the closeted, transversible, sexual body of God, the opening, the vagina, the key to Heaven. So in a queer way, Satan, here, *is* God, to the extent that eternity—one of God's other names in Christian metaphysics—is motored in Hell.

The Divine Comedy is just a medieval story. It is a story built on a theological imagination, however, that still shows up in the language of Christian piety and is grounded in Dante's reading of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. From the vantage point of where we now sit, whether he meant it to or not, Dante's *Divine Comedy* is really a profound critique of the metaphysics of Christian monotheism. Satan becomes God. Indeed, it cannot be otherwise because in the logic of the One, God can have no Other, no contradiction. Dante's Satan is

A good story told only once is a prelude without the song….We should seek to inspire courage in those who would tell new or retell old tales of divine flux, fertility, multiplicity, and depth.

God's repressed mess. The Hell, Satanic figure, and multitude of the damned that Christians have imagined as the container for their fears of real life and messy consequence reveal "in the end" a repressed face of Heaven, of God, and of the blessed.

Perhaps, therefore, the bodies of the damned, who are enmeshed in a vast humor of consequence in Hell, are not the *opposite* of the blessed saints sipping their nectar in Heaven, but they are the saints themselves. The *Inferno* is the closet of *Paradiso;* Hell and even Purgatory are the indispensable containers of the repressed fluidity and ambiguity of Heaven, the very repression of which makes Heaven's monolithic claim to superiority possible. *Paradiso,* Dante's vision of Heaven that inspired millions of Christians in the centuries after him, is a very sterile place. But the *Inferno* reveals to us that the purity of the saints depends upon repression and removal of all excess. The *Inferno* also reveals to us that eternity is the projected head of Oz, requiring mechanical coolant. Presumably if Satan would still his wings, Hell would melt and there would be no center or root left, only a many chambered nautilus of naughty life flowing in the fertile fluids and fire of the living.

So why *doesn't* Dante's Satan let the ice melt, disrupting the Heaven from which he supposedly has been expelled? Perhaps he cannot do so and keep up the façade of his difference from the god of Oneness. Perhaps, as mirror and repressed same/shame of the god of Oneness, he motors the very structure that keeps the façade of Eternity from slipping, the waters of life from thawing. Perhaps, in other words, as the keeper of God's closet, Satan *is* God and so requires the masquerade of Hell in order to project the façade of Heaven.

Here's an image: The satanic snowball melting in Hell might cause Heaven's blushing rose rouge to sweat and run, revealing the Vaudeville just under the surface of high art. Without a solid base in Hell to hold up the scaffolding of Heaven, the ascending seats of celestial light might slip and tilt into one another, snapping an angelic wing or two. The beatific smiles of the blessed might become strained as their disavowed secret pleasures tumble up and out of a closet stuffed too full of life. The smell of thawed meat drifts in under the tape-loop of harp sonatas, which begin to sound just a bit juke-jointish.

The ice at the core of Hell, mirrored in the serene rose of Heaven, is both a metaphor for the disease of stasis at the core of Christian metaphysics and a queer dismantling of it at the same time. Ice, after all, is not a permanent condition, and that is the joke of Hell's eternity. *Ice can melt.* The stasis of ice is a partiality: it morphs into the very shape-shifting fluidity and flux that it appears to repress.

As I have stated, *The Divine Comedy,* is a story crafted out of a particular time and place, reflecting the anxieties, hopes, faith, and humor of that time and place. Most of all, it reflects the edifice of medieval Christian belief in a three-storey universe, and the masquerade required for One God to hold it all together. Perhaps Dante intended the very critique that I have argued is present in his tale, or perhaps he strove the best he could to keep the masquerade of monotheistic stasis going. But, at least from the vantage point of the depths, from a tehomic sensibility, the ice gives him away. The Christian God of Eternal Stasis is not only dead, He never was. Perhaps the Christian story of Jesus' divinity should have made that point clear from the start, but theologians everywhere have an unfortunate tendency to absolve the obvious from their contemplations. Nietzsche is right: theologians tend to take themselves too seriously and forget the utter necessity of laughter for clearing the cobwebs of self-important fabrications.

Theology needs the storyteller's genius for traipsing past the guarded gates of social, political, or theological doctrine to what images and beliefs actually own the grounds. Unconcerned about the modernist separation of fact from fiction, the poet and storyteller can sometimes more directly, effectively, and artfully expose lies and fabrications on which the dominant institutions, cultures, classes, races, genders, religious authorities, and nations sometimes rely for their power. If Dante intended us to shudder at the pits of Malebolge, and long for the unchanging spheres of *Paradiso,* he also could not help but show us the Dr. Seuss-like edifice of Christian metaphysics in which Eternity is a clumsy fabrication that exacts—and has indeed exacted—a horrifying cost on bodies (of people and of water). Good storytellers seem effortlessly to make their tales do double duty this way. They provide a narrative that always offers more than the sum of the events. Like the Babylonian stories of Tiamat and Marduk, the African accounts of Ogun, Hare, and Isis, the many tales of Jesus, the Buddha, the Prophet, the Underground Railroad, the white whale, the murdered martyr, and on and on, there is—always—something more going on to be gleaned from the good (or should I say honest?) storyteller's story. This is one of the things that make stories so wonderful, philosophically speaking, and make good stories philosophically interesting. It is also what makes the art and ritual of retelling them so important. A good story told only once is a prelude without the song.

The spiritual quest of theology—to articulate the old stories today in ways that help us better to see and to be open to the creating, loving, and evolving divinity that flows in the world (that is, the world's flow)—makes it clear that *Christians have not gotten our own story quite right.* The good news is that part of getting it "right" lies not in getting it right in any absolute or final sense (*that* would be a reduction to certainty), but the good news is that getting it "right" lies in a supple posture

The Cooling Action of Satan's Massive Wings
illustration by Gustave Doré
(1833-1883)

toward truth and toward the stories we have been given to tell, again. Getting out of the ice on our quest for a poetic metaphysics of multiplicity and flux is going to require some new tools for theologians: humility, humor, doggedness, and a willingness to start over, again and again.

Catherine Keller has suggested that we turn to the watery Deep. I agree. The *Tehom* of Genesis 1:2, ever giving birth to new life and new reality, ever folding in and pulling down, ever enveloping and ever pushing out, is a fully orthodox concept of the Divine that lacks nothing but our ability to tell the stories about it that will help us to stop resisting the life we have been given, to stop freezing the truths that flow through us, to stop dying before our time. In her brilliant commentary on this jewel of a verse, Keller suggests that the waters of the deep, fluid and rich with becoming, cause the "founding certainties" of "the Roman sense of order," and I would add its sere metaphysics of One, to tremble.[xvi] Stories that gesture toward change, relativity, and interconnection as the substance, the ontos, of existence may not only help us rediscover the presence of God but thereby reorder our daily lives, our values and priorities in community, politics, and religion. Going off the deep end, however, is frightening if you are not used to it, or if you are used to believing that the place on which you are standing is not already moving.

As Keller is careful to point out, *Tehom* is not just a synonym for water. Water, however, embodies some of the qualities of flux, indeterminacy, and potentiality that have been ascribed historically to the chaotic deep of Genesis 1. Prosaic, everyday water may, therefore, be just the substance we need to begin again to think ontologically about the divine. Certainly Keller's study of *tehomic* potentiality and watery depth in Scripture, Kabbalah, theology, and literature suggests this: "creation takes place *within* a fluid interdimensionality".[xvii] The chaotic something, the deep, has traditionally been characterized in terms of fluidity, like a vast ocean of potentiality and flux, and also vilified as the root and source of evil. Keller points to the doctrine of *ex nihilo* as a core doctrine aimed against the birthing powers and fertile blood of women and so against both femaleness and bodiliness in dominant Christian theology. The space, she argues, between tehomophobia and gynophobia is very slight.

So let us begin there. Let rich and complex fluids swirl in to this again-beginning for theology-in-thaw. Shifting matter of the Deep. Shaper, destroyer, and redistributor of land. Source and surface of the divine face. Without absolute beginning or absolute end—water flows through bodies, giving them substance and presence. Close to fifty percent of the substance of human bodies is water. The percentage is even higher among plants. And individual cells in humans and other animals are often over eighty percent water.[xviii] Without the fluid properties of water and oil that plump cells and shape flesh, we all blow into dust. Life is, quite literally, fluid. And divinity, our tradition and Scriptures tell us, is life-itself.

With that in mind, it makes sense that an ontology of stasis too long attributed to divinity does not match—or grace—the ontology of *life* that is characterized by multiplicity and flux. And so the task is to think about what the characteristics of a tehomophilic metaphysics might be. We seek a metaphysical posture, (or frame, map, dialect, story), from which to explore ethics and hope in *this* world of flux and change. In my current work, I argue for a number of orienting, or jumping off points, for imagining such an ontology of multiplicity.

Time permits me to name but not to develop here the characteristics of divine multiplicity. Before naming those characteristics I will say, however, that there is a certain difficulty in *thinking* an ontology of multiplicity without slipping into foreclosing universals, the old ontology of the One/many divide. And so, I have almost concluded, like the first generation of Minjung theologians, Nelle Morton, some Womanists I know, and maybe a gospel writer or two, that we are best served, methodologically, by the multivalence of story than by the aporias of even the most open philosophical theologies. Perhaps, therefore, I contradict myself by still daring to gesture conceptually in the direction of multiplicity. But, as Walt Whitman wrote in *Song of Myself,* "do I contract myself? Very well, then I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes."[xix]

So, what are these postures and dialects of ontological multiplicity? In addition to those of thaw (fluid becoming), and the multivalence of story, I suggest three additional characteristics of what I will call divine multiplicity. The first is porosity. With the first generations of feminist and Womanist theologians who argued that being is communal, who cast suspicion on the spirit-body divide, this is a notion of deep interconnection where particles become waves.

Second, with Rosi Braidotti and Gilles Deleuze, I suggest that ontological multiplicity is acentered, nomadic, and rhizomatic.[xx] The early feminist and Womanist writers also offered this insight through their work years ago: divinity as verb, as relation, as unshouted courage, as the color purple (not an abstract color, but one that is *living* in a rhizomatic field of weeds).[xxi]

Finally, divine multiplicity is non-reductive, characterized by heterogeneity, event, shape-shifting, and impossible exchange. If there is a shorthand for all of these gestures, I would call it *profligate divine incarnation.* Inspired by feminist process theologians like

Shades Imbedded in the Frozen Lake
drawing by Frederico Lebrun
(1900-1964)

Catherine Keller, feminist liberation theologians like Ivone Gebara, feminist philosophers and poets like Audre Lorde, Luce Irigaray and Mary Daly, I believe in the possibility of a thaw in Christian metaphysics. What is more, poetry, tough thinking, humor, and the ontological suspicions of those unafraid of bodies or of change are the tools required for navigating our way clear of the (master's) house of eternity. We need these tools to begin—again—to exchange the dominology of One for the resurgence of the complex, or as Irigaray puts it, exchanging the elementary for the elemental.[xxii]

In conclusion, I recommend that theologians who wish to move beyond the One/many divide in search of always-returning, always parousiac divine incarnation should now do three things. We should be concerned with our own poverty of story-telling about divinity in the world today. We should seek to inspire courage in those who would tell new or retell old tales of divine flux, fertility, multiplicity, and depth. Finally, in order to do this, theologians should begin—again—to *think* a metaphysics of flux and multiplicity that articulates a more plausible and energizing framework than an arid story of One. Only then can theology begin, again, to connect ancient and contemporary stories of divinity to the deeply mattering world that we actually inhabit.

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i Edward Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 106-8.

ii Ellen Armour, "Theology in Modernity's Wake" in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* Vol. 74, pp. 7-15.

iii I am particularly grateful to John Thatanamil for this insight.

iv Hallowell, A. Irving, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," in *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, ed. Stanley Diamond (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 24 (essay pp. 19-52)

v Many Native American ontological claims have been designated by anthropological scholarship as cultural, while the religious was historically reserved—via anthropological presuppositions—to those traditions and practices that honored the modern religious-secular divide. Most Native American beliefs and practices clearly do not support the divide. As, post-Newton, science and religion prop each other up in their supposed opposition, so Native American and other non-modern understandings blow the opposition up. Among others, see Howard Harrod, *Becoming and Remaining a People: Native American Religions on the Northern Plains* (Phoenix: University of Arizona Press, 1995) or Calvin Luther Martin, *The Way of the Human Being* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1999).

vi Marcelo Gleiser, "Cosmic Birth: Must Modern Day Cosmologists be Mythmakers to Explain Creation?" in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Spring 2005), p. 24.

vii Since the writings of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche blew into theological discourse, notions of "becoming" have attracted philosophical attention, especially as a way through the aporias of analytical attention to being. Heidegger represents one route, while Whitehead, of course, developed "becoming" in an evolutionary, mechanical fashion. Finally, feminist thinkers, like Luce Irigaray and Catherine Keller take "becoming" in more explicitly embodied senses of fluidity and multiplicity.

viii Carson, Ciaran. "Introduction" *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri* (London: Granta Books, 2002) xiii.

ix Canto I:1-2. *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri* (London: Granta Books, 2002), translated by Ciaran Carson, p. 1. All quotations from *The Inferno* come from Carson's translation.

x Dana Barry, "Penobscot Creation" in *The People and Their River*, A video produced by the Penobscot Nation, Indian Island, ME.

xi Canto III:7-9, p. 15.

xii Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, translated by Hong… pg. 308.

xiii Canto XXXIV:22, p. 238.

xiv Ibid., line 18.

xv Canto XXXIV:136-8, p. 243.

xvi Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (NY: Routledge Press, 2003), pp. 6 & 15.

xvii Ibid., p. 177.

xviii Actual calculations of the percentage of water in human bodies are complex, making 50% overall a relatively safe number, despite the fact that individual cells contain 75-80% water. "The percent water in the entire body by weight varies with age, sex, and physical conditioning. Heart and lung contain the most water, about 80%. Fat (about 20%) and bone (about 43%) are among the lowest. Therefore, the total body is an average of all organs, blood, and extracellular fluids. Several physiology texts place average young men at 60% water, and young women at 50% water, the difference due to relatively more fat in females. Thus, a 70 kg young man has about 42 kg (or 42 liters) or water. With age fat increases and muscle decreases, so that in old age the body may contain only 45% water. Infants, by contrast, average 73% or more." John Morris, responding to an Oregon school child on the *Science Education Partnership* website sponsored by the Covallis School District 509J, Oregon State University, and Hewlett Packard Corp. (*http://www.seps.org/oracle/oracle.archive/Life_Science.Biochem/2001.06/000991410254.7589.html*)

xix Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, 51. (NY: Bantam Classics, reissue edition, 1983), p. 72.

xx See Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Toward a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002); see also Gilles Deleuze and Felix Gauttari *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* translated by Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

xxi For God as Verb, see Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); for God as Relation, see Carter Heyward *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation* (Lanham MD: Univ. Press of America, 1982); for the concept of unshouted courage, see Katie Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988); for divinity in relation to the color purple, see Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (NY: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1982).

xxii See Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions*, translated by Joanne Collie and Judith Still (NY: Routledge, 1992).

Walking the Path of Reconciliation

The hillside of Cat Cat Village in Sa Pa, Vietnam

Editor's Note: Of the eleven students from Vanderbilt University Divinity School who traveled to Vietnam during the summer of 2005, only one had reached young adulthood by April 30, 1975, when tanks driven by the North Vietnamese Army entered Saigon and toppled the United States-backed South Vietnamese regime. Another student had entered her adolescence while another had not celebrated his second birthday. Eight members of the VDS delegation had not been born when Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Minh City. The first images they saw of Vietnam were from news tapes or history textbooks.

Thirty years after the capitulation of South Vietnam, the United States is now Vietnam's largest single trading partner; bilateral trade between the countries has reached $4 billion, and the former enemies now find themselves united by commerce. Exploring the relationship between the two countries were recent graduates Lindsay Blackwelder, Dana Irwin, Amanda Owen, and Ryan Owen, and current students Angela Howard, April Larson, Will Matthews, Nicole Lemon, Ben Papa, Kimberly Hibbard, and Zana Zeigler. They were accompanied by Trudy Stringer, assistant dean for student life and associate director of field education, and Robin Jensen, the Luce Chancellor's Professor of the History of Christian Art and Worship. *The Spire* gratefully acknowledges the generosity of Professor Jensen in permitting us to illustrate four of the students' theological reflections with photographs from her portfolio.

What is in a *Name?*

BY WILL MATTHEWS, MDIV3

"… O! be some other name:

What's in a name? that which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet…"

Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, II, ii, 42-44

There is a disconcerting section in the Gospel of Mark that has been dubbed "The Little Apocalypse." In the thirteenth chapter, the Evangelist foretells the end of time and writes of desolation, sacrilege, and suffering—days when the sun will be darkened and the moon will provide no light—when the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers in heaven will be shaken.

I become uncomfortable when reading these verses in Mark's Gospel.

But amid the violent images of destruction and darkness, Mark also presents to us a profound insight that may very well answer a question that often challenges our faith: Where in the world is God?

"Be alert," Mark records Jesus as saying. "Be alert, for I have already told you everything."

My full Christian name is William Charles Matthews. If you were to travel to San Diego, California, and visit the naval cemetery located on the grounds of the United States naval base, perhaps you would discover a tombstone bearing the inscription of my name—William Charles Matthews. The tombstone commemorates my father's brother who also was his best friend—my uncle and the man for whom I am named.

Uncle Bill died in 1978, the year before I was born. He was flying an F-14 fighter jet on a routine training mission off the San Diego coast when the aircraft malfunctioned and plummeted into the Pacific Ocean.

He had attended the Naval Academy in Annapolis in the early 1960s—not because of any militaristic leanings, as my father tells the story, but because he was in love with the idea of flying. Enrolling in the Academy to receive training as a naval pilot, according to Dad, was the way for Uncle Bill to achieve his ambition to become an aviator.

But as with most every soldier, my uncle never envisioned what his service would entail. After he was graduated with commendation from Annapolis, Uncle Bill continued his education when he entered the war zones in Vietnam.

My father finds it difficult to read the letters my uncle composed during the war. His correspondence is riddled with regret, remorse, and outright disgust for what he witnessed in Vietnam. Reading Uncle Bill's letters, I understand that he wished he did not have to be part of a war machine, but he had little choice but to follow orders. And perhaps the most galling of those orders was to drop from his F-14 fighter jet the chemical Agent Orange that American companies designed to destroy the dense Vietnamese jungles serving as hideouts for Vietcong soldiers.

Four decades later, the effects of Agent Orange on the Vietnamese population remain horrific. One and even two generations later, children of family members who were exposed directly to Agent Orange are being born with severe physical deformities and mental incapacities.

One year ago, William Charles Matthews traveled to Vietnam—not my uncle, but I, his namesake—for the first time, but somehow, strangely, on a return trip.

During the second week of the journey I took with twelve colleagues and professors from Vanderbilt University Divinity School, I visited a place called Friendship Village, a sprawling campus on the outskirts of Hanoi for children suffering from the effects of Agent Orange. We served as firsthand witnesses to the ramifications of the war America waged in Vietnam.

Left: Children of Friendship Village; Right: Making flowers

The experience at Friendship Village resulted in our becoming consumed by sickening feelings of guilt for the atrocities that had been perpetrated upon these children by the nation we call home, the world's lone superpower. And I felt especially guilty, knowing the man for whom I am named was an integral part of the horrors of the war.

But what is important about this narrative is not the fact that we were there, or even the feelings that we felt while we were there. The import of this story lies in the ways we were welcomed by the director of Friendship Village, who was overjoyed that we had made the trip and who had prepared for us a table with a feast lavish enough to feed a group twice our size.

There were bowls and bowls of steaming rice and noodles, plates piled high with egg rolls, freshly caught fish cooked whole, sautéed beef, beer, and a half-dozen bottles of fine wine.

But we could barely eat.

Crippled with shame, we did not feel as though we even deserved to be there, much less partake in the splendid meal that had been prepared for us. What right did we have to be afforded that privilege? What right did we have to be accorded such hospitality? And why in the world would the director of the village be so nice to us? We were, after all, Americans. We were representatives of the country that had created the necessity for this village. What right did we have?

Left: Learning to embroider; Right: The second generation of Agent Orange

… the man for whom I am named was an integral part of the horrors of the war.

What was reaffirmed for me that day by the director of Friendship Village is that God's work in the world is not carried out retributively. We do not always receive what we believe we deserve—in fact, we rarely do. And thank God.

Reconciliation transcends logic; it transcends even our inner sense of what is just and right. Reconciliation creates a place for healing; it creates a table at which all are welcome, always; and it creates a new and common path on which we can all begin to trod together, even for two countries that not so long ago had been engaged in brutal conflict against each another. Reconciliation transcends names.

The director of Friendship Village was an ambassador of reconciliation that day in a way that was so profound that it initially escaped us. In the midst of pain, suffering, and dislocation—in the midst of shame and guilt, despair and anger—in the darkest of dark moments—the director of the village loved us, welcomed us, and prepared for us a table that was beyond our highest expectations.

"Be alert, stay awake," our God of renewal, rebirth and reconciliation seemingly was screaming at us that day.

But we did not hear.

And so we just sat there at that table, staring at but hardly eating the meal that had been prepared.

"Be alert," Jesus said. "Be alert, for I have already told you everything."

Prior to his matriculation at the Divinity School, Will Matthews was an investigative reporter for the Inland Valley Daily Bulletin *in Ontario, California. He received his baccalaureate in journalism from Chapman University where he served as editor-in-chief of the student newspaper.*

Unto the Breach of the Comfort Zone

BY BENJAMIN PAPA, BA'95, MDIV3

"Once more unto the breach, dear friends…"

Shakespeare's King Henry V, III, 1, 1

As part of the Divinity School's travel seminar to Vietnam, our class met one morning with two representatives of the United States Embassy in Hanoi. After making an informative presentation about their work in Vietnam, the U.S. government officials answered a number of practical and theoretical questions from the students, primarily about issues of economics and globalization.

At the conclusion of the session, my colleague, Dana Irwin, asked one of the officials about his previously stated position that Vietnam would be better off in many respects if the country were to adopt certain American, or Western, ideas and policies. Dana inquired about the ecological impact of globalization in light of his opinion on this issue. Specifically, she wanted to know if the embassy's position considered the widespread environmental abuses that are associated with Western policies and thinking.

The official responded that the idea of "ecology," or caring for the earth in any sustained or intentional way, is essentially a Western conception. He argued that there was nothing intrinsic to traditional Vietnamese culture that supported an ecological consciousness; instead, the relatively low amount of environmental damage that has occurred is the result of the country's economy not involving industries that pollute the environment. Traditional farming and agricultural economies do not, by their nature, pollute the environment as much as more modern industrial economies. The official suggested that given the opportunity to industrialize, regardless of whether the change pollutes the environment, that Vietnam would seize such an opportunity.

As I listened to the officials' report, I also was reminded of how uncomfortable I had become in Vietnam by what I perceived to be a lower level of public sanitation. I realized very quickly how spoiled I am by such seemingly core aspects of American life as well-drained streets, relatively clean public restrooms, and the absence of humans urinating in the streets. I felt as though I were walking

My social location as an educated upper-middle-class person living in the most affluent society in the world is obviously central to my experience of Vietnam as "dirty."

on the proverbial eggshells as I carefully navigated the streets and sidewalks to avoid the ubiquitous streams and puddles of standing water. On different occasions, I was aware of an unpleasant odor, especially when we were in the open-air market or other particularly crowded areas of town. I was uncomfortable enough with the visible garbage and other pollution floating in Halong Bay that I could not bring myself to swim in the bay with my colleagues although I knew the cool water would feel like a blessing in the pervasive heat and humidity.

I think my uneasiness with the level of general cleanliness in Vietnam primed me for the insights I received from our talk at the embassy. In other words, my lived experience in Vietnam supported the government official's response to Dana's question: Vietnam was not a pristine Garden of Eden waiting to be destroyed by American economic policies. Instead, one could argue that Vietnam could learn from America's public sanitation practices.

My social location as an educated upper-middle-class person living in the most affluent society in the world is obviously central to my experience of Vietnam as "dirty." Even in Vietnam as I was experiencing the mild anxiety that the sanitation raised for me, I was aware of the classist and "privileged" nature of my response to my experience. I am accustomed to a level of cleanliness that is "over the top" in terms of what humans need to be healthy, and perhaps what is most ironic in view of my ecological commitments is that many of the chemicals and detergents that are used to maintain an ultra-clean public sphere are themselves destructive to the ground water.

On a more practical level, my experience at the embassy helped me excavate a perception about society that I held that is not supported by reality; namely, I was operating under the assumption that Western culture, with its industrialization and profit-centered philosophy, was intrinsically linked to indifference to the environment whereas more traditional cultures such as Vietnam maintained a self-understanding that respected

Left: Hanoi street scene; Lower left: Hmong woman spinning; Above: Rooster on the Cat Cat hillside

the earth. My experience at the embassy helped me to understand that, in fact, the opposite may be true.

This experience helped me uncover a stereotypical paradigm from which I perceived the world. I was operating under the "liberal" view that argues that globalization is bad and that traditional culture is good when the reality is much more complex. During a conversation following our trip to the embassy, another peer, Ryan Owen, reminded me that the United States has some of the most environmentally friendly laws of any country in the world. Most public spaces in all but the poorest parts of American society are at least relatively well-maintained. On the other hand, the Vietnamese do not even have a word for the conception of ecology or caring for the environment.

Given my experience of Vietnam as a less-than-clean country, I had to be careful not to make the transition from my personal discomfort to a broader and more sinister judgment of the value of the people with whom I came into contact by virtue of how "clean" I perceived them or their environment to be. Certainly, my "comfort zone" was breached by much of what I saw, felt, and smelled in the context of public sanitation in Vietnam, and this breach ultimately proved to be a beneficial experience.

A number of theological issues have arisen for me out of my experience at the embassy. On a broader level, I was reminded in a new way of the theological importance of caring for the earth. So many people simply do not see the ways in which our caring for the planet relates to religious living—ushering in the Christian Kingdom of God, being agents of the Jewish principle of tikkun olam, or reaching out in Buddhist loving-kindness. We cannot assume that people of any culture or tradition "get it" when it comes to the importance of caring for creation.

Theologians Sally McFague and Rosemary Radford Ruether argue for the connection between a religious life and a life of care and protection for the environment. As a religious person interested in ecology, I need to be aware of the need to meet people in their location in terms of their theologies in order to be able to communicate effectively and prophetically with them. I must consider, but not rely upon, such superfluous notions as whether they have a more "Western" or more "Eastern" worldview. The way people see themselves in relation to the need to care for the planet cannot be described within neat categories.

On a more personal level, I strive to be a compassionate person who sees people for whom they are. I realize that I have work to accomplish, theologically, if I am to be able to reach out to the world's poor without being distracted by shallow considerations such as hygiene. For some reason, I never saw this as a particular concern for me, and admittedly, I may have been hypersensitive to these issues in Vietnam because of being in such a different world; however, if I am to work to heal the world—to co-create with God a better planet—I need to be able to connect with people who are different from me, even if that connection is personally unpleasant at times.

To use a biblical example from the Christian tradition, this experience and its implications brought me face to face with a part of myself that is somewhat like the "rich young ruler" in the Gospels. Like the biblical character, I am anxious to be a godly person who lives out his religious and spiritual values; however, like the young man from Scripture, I also have an Achilles heel when it comes to bringing those values to life. For him, it was parting with his material riches. For me, it seems to be about a willingness to be uncomfortable—to get dirty and sweaty and smelly—in the name of reaching out to the marginalized.

Tying this personal dimension back to the larger ecological one, it is only when I am able to connect with people in an open-hearted way that I will be able to work with them to heal the planet. If I am preoccupied with whether or not the bathroom down the hall has been cleaned lately, I will miss the point and the chance to make a difference in raising awareness around issues of environmental protection.

Upon earning a baccalaureate in psychology from Vanderbilt University where he served as program coordinator of Project Dialogue, Ben Papa received the doctor of jurisprudence from the Ohio State University.

Take a *Walk* with Me

BY KIMBERLY HIBBARD, MTS2

"…as we walk,

To our own selves bend we our needful talk."

Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida, IV, iv, 138-139

Take a morning walk with me, before the August heat becomes unbearable. From the lobby of the ATS Hotel in Hanoi, we walk past the guard standing at the double doors and follow the driveway through the gated entrance, past another guard in his military garb. Turning left, we walk down the street past the dimly lit shop where the elderly woman is eager to sell us bottled water or cigarettes. At the corner, we veer around a group of men drinking tea as they squat or sit at small tables. Walking until we reach the corner with the sheet-metal fence, we turn right, crossing the street with confidence: the trick is to walk in a straight line at a steady pace—don't hesitate or the drivers of the motorbikes, buses, cars, and bicycles will not know how to anticipate our movement and make room for us.

We continue until we see the Opera House, the large impressive yellow building where it is easy to imagine men in tuxedos and women in formal gowns as they step out of carriages and enter the building. Here we cross the street before we reach the roundabout; we can use the crosswalks, but beware, these are new features of Hanoi's streets and are no guarantee that traffic will stop for us. Now it's straight ahead to Hoan Kiem Lake, past art galleries, a stationery store, and a large bookstore across the street. We can't miss the lake on our right, the place where all the people are gathered.

Now that we're here, my suggestion is to fall into the flow of people who are moving counter-clockwise around the lake. Don't power-walk or run, but fall into the rhythm of those around you—slightly faster than a stroll will be just fine. If walking doesn't interest you, you have other choices as well. Perhaps you'd like to join one of the many groups practicing tai chi, or maybe you can join a game of badminton. You might join those bouncing and bopping to American pop music; "Love Potion Number 9" seems to be a popular tune. Don't worry about your fitness level or age; it doesn't seem to matter. As you reach the top of the lake, you can stop and watch the group of women dancing as they wave fans; if you'd like to try it for yourself, there is a beginners' group that meets at the other end of the lake. Or if you'd rather do something less physical, you can move closer to the lake's edge and sit on one of the many benches and meditate or simply watch all the activity. Whatever you decide to do, I hope you feel as I do—that here the barriers of language, nationality, gender, and class have disappeared—here, we are just two more people in the community that forms around the lake each morning.

Seeing one another other only in terms of race, gender, age, economic status, political persuasion, or religious affiliation has kept us as a nation from creating community.

To be part of a community, to be in relationship with others is, according to theologian Edward Farley, a universal, elemental desire. We seek, Farley contends, an affirmation of self from others. Perhaps it is this need for community, and not just a need for physical exercise, that draws people to Hoan Kiem Lake. I know that such a desire drew me to the lake; I longed to be in community with my fellow travelers and with the people of Vietnam. But the longing for community was not just for an affirmation of self but also of a worldview that considers all parts of Creation as interconnected. Such a worldview suggests that the health of the planet and the possibility for peace lie in our ability to understand ourselves to be and to live as part of a single community. Entering into the flow of morning activity at this lake, described by the *Rough Guide to Vietnam* as the "soul" of Hanoi, left me hopeful that such community is possible.

But take another morning walk with me, this time in the cool mountain air of the northern Vietnamese village of Sa Pa on market day. Hmong women and young girls in traditional dress gather in groups on the street outside our hotel. Some are carrying

Hmong women waiting for transport

infants in fabric slings across their backs, and all are trying to sell their wares. As we walk the short distance to the open-air market, we are accosted by the villagers.

"Buy me!" the young girl demands as she thrusts a handful of "friendship" bracelets in front of us.

We hesitate—a mistake, for now we are surrounded.

"Buy me," another young girl pleads as she holds up pairs of silver hoop earrings stamped with various designs.

"Buy me, buy blanket," says the older woman who holds up a length of fabric made of hand-dyed swatches of indigo interspersed with embroidered sections in bright oranges, pinks, and reds.

"No, no thank you," we respond and shake our heads as we try to move forward on our walk. But the women and young girls are persistent.

"Buy me!"

"You like?"

"Not much for you!"

"No, no thank you," we say again and again. And then, "NO!" dropping all attempts at politeness.

The group of Hmong women and girls wander off to sell their goods to other tourists. Not wanting to repeat this experience, we walk the rest of the way to the market without making eye contact with those who call out "Buy me!" nor do we hesitate when items are thrust in front of us. Distinctly aware of the barriers between us and them—American and Vietnamese, "rich" and "poor," buyer and seller—we finally turn off the main street and enter the open-air market.

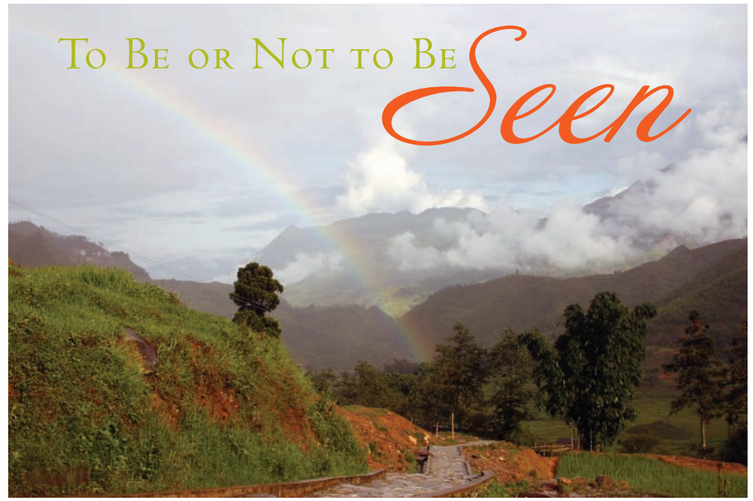
Despite our desire for community, we often find that it is difficult to create. A central cause of our difficulty, Farley suggests, is that our desire for community is thwarted when the other reduces us to an aspect of our being. Just as the Hmong women and young girls seemed to reduce me to the "rich American consumer," it was easy for me to see them only in terms of their ethnicity and gender. And it was not only in Sa Pa this reduction occurred. Whether in meetings with officials or in casual interactions, I often saw those with whom we met only in terms of nationality or profession, and I often felt as if I were seen in a similar way. "They" were Vietnamese, directors, professors, waiters, shopkeepers, religious leaders; "I" was American, a member of a delegation, a student, a consumer, a Christian. Perhaps the language barrier was a contributing factor, but I suspect that even if we had spoken the same language we still would have found it easy to see each other only partially.

The difficulty in forming community is not limited to the international sphere. Our history and current events demonstrate that it is a national problem as well. Seeing one another other only in terms of race, gender, age, economic status, political persuasion, or religious affiliation has kept us as a nation from creating community. And the problem persists when we look closer to home. Violence in our schools, pockets of poverty in our cities, and partisan politics in our government offices point to our failure to build community.

Given the difficulties in forming community and our repeated failures, it would be easy to lose hope that our desire for community—a desire to be known, to know the other, and to see ourselves as part of a larger whole—will ever be realized. But when I feel such hopelessness descending, I remember experiences that have left me feeling that community is possible: walking around Hoan Kiem Lake, sharing a meal with my fellow travelers, sitting across the table from a Buddhist monk, and joining my voice in congregational prayer. Such experiences encourage me to ask of the other, "Take a walk with me and let us come to know one another."

Before enrolling in Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Kimberly Hibbard served as director of the language center at Volunteer State Community College in Gallatin, Tennessee. She earned the baccalaureate in fine arts from the University of Arizona and the master of arts in English from Lamar University.

To Be or Not to Be *Seen*



BY NICOLE LEMON, MDIV3

"To be, or not to be: that is the question…"

Shakespeare's Tragedy of Hamlet,

Prince of Denmark, III, i, 56

From the moment I arrive, they begin to stare. In pagodas, in markets, on any street from Hanoi to Sa Pa—morning, noon, and night—stares abound. Their stares are not inviting but cold and distant.

As I walk the busy streets and carefully traverse the lanes of traffic, I become increasingly sensitive to the stares I receive. At times, these stares are accompanied by the mockery and ridicule of pointing and laughter. I perceive that I am no longer seen as a subject; I am perceived as an object.

On the last day of our trip, we travel approximately two hours outside of Hanoi to visit the home of a Vietnamese man and his family. The center of their modest home is adorned with elaborate altars. As the family prepares a generous feast, I engage in conversation with my colleagues. While talking, I suddenly begin to feel uneasy. I look up and find myself arrested in a mutual gaze with our host. In the sheer uneasiness of the moment, I offer him a smile and hope he will reciprocate the gesture. He does not; there is no response other than a strangely prolonged gaze.

As the gaze continues, I begin to question what this man may be thinking; I question what has prompted his gaze. I usually turn from a gaze after five seconds, but for some reason, I am resisting this urge. Perhaps he expects me to turn away from him; perhaps this is why I resist. The longer the gaze lasts, it becomes more than merely a mutual gaze; it becomes an oppositional gaze. I begin to feel that he is opposed to my presence. In response, I oppose his expectation that I will divert my eyes. Finally, the Vietnamese man sharply turns his head and looks away from me. The strangely prolonged gaze has ended.

When it is time to leave the home, my travel companions and I gather around our host to bid farewell. Still trying to make sense of the gaze, I intentionally stand next to him. He immediately walks toward another member of the group and shakes her hand. He continues to shake everyone's hand but does not shake mine. It is as if I am not even there. I am present but not seen.

In our face-to-face encounters, we sometimes meet each other eye-to-eye, yet we fail to see each other. The man's cold stare and even colder indifference stung me like the bitter cold of a New York City mid-December evening. A year later, I still remember the painful awkwardness of that moment; I doubt that I will ever forget it. This was not rejection because rejection implies acknowledgment—unfavorable acknowledgment, but

acknowledgement, nonetheless. This man was completely indifferent toward my presence. I realized at the end of our visit that for as long as he stared, this man still did not see me.

While the stares I receive from most people in Hanoi are cold and distant, the gazes assume a different character in Sa Pa, a beautiful mountainous region of villages that various ethnic minorities call home. When we arrive in Cat Cat Village, home to the Hmong people, I am greeted with warm and welcoming stares by the people walking to the market to sell their goods.

During our sojourn, I have a brief, yet unforgettable exchange with a young woman. I ask her to tell me how she identifies herself. Before the young woman can respond to my question, our tour guide, standing in close proximity, declares, "She is Vietnamese."

Immediately, and with conviction, the young woman responds, "No! I am not Vietnamese; you are Vietnamese!" Her sharp retort still echoes in my ears.

As I reflect upon the young woman's response, I consider the possible reason for the man's gaze. I perceive his gaze to be a reminder of the harsh reality of racial prejudice that transforms human subjects who are seen into inanimate objects that are merely present. Moreover, I question whether or not he would have treated this young woman with the same indifference with which he treated me.

I am compelled to consider the possibility that ethnic minorities in Vietnam experience the same prejudice people of color experience in the United States.

Although our group had many meetings during our trip, we never discussed the possibility of ethnic prejudice in Vietnam. I am compelled to consider the possibility that ethnic minorities in Vietnam experience the same prejudice people of color experience in the United States. Perhaps it is this similar experience that made the young woman choose not to identify herself as Vietnamese, just as I choose not to identify myself as American; I simply live in America. I was unable to engage these questions during my visit, but I have not stopped pondering the stares.

During our encounters with representatives of the Vietnamese government, two words were repeated constantly: peace and reconciliation. In response to questions regarding sentiments about the American and Vietnam War and the current United States and Vietnam relations, we were reminded that Vietnam does not seek revenge and retaliation; Vietnam only seeks peace and reconciliation. Such rhetoric is quite appealing; however, the stares I drew in Hanoi and the gaze I received from one of our hosts do not coincide with this rhetoric.

These stares felt neither "peaceful" nor "reconciliatory." The stares from those who looked but did not see hurt like knives piercing the skin.

How can anyone make peace and reconcile with someone who is not seen? With the exception of my time in the ethnic villages, the rhetoric of peace and reconciliation seemed to be a contradiction to my experience. I have yet to resolve this contradiction; I have yet to reconcile the hopeful rhetoric with the reality of my lived experience.

The essayist was graduated from Swarthmore College where she received the baccalaureate in religion with honors and served as president of the African American Student Society.

A Bountiful Tableau

The Laity's Primer on the Art Work of Benton Chapel

ESSAY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY
LEE MORRIS JEFFERSON

And let our seals be either a dove, or a fish, or a ship scudding before the wind, or a musical lyre, which Polycrates used, or a ship's anchor, which Seleucus got engraved as a device; and if there be one fishing, he will remember the apostle, and the children drawn out of water.

—Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*, 3:11

Striated Cross with Alpha and Omega

In the late second century, Clement of Alexandria provided a manual of appropriate symbols for early Christians to utilize as a sign or seal of their faith in Christ. Upon examining Clement's stylistic directives, visitors to Vanderbilt University Divinity School's Benton Chapel may be surprised when gazing at the ironwork adorning the chapel's exterior and discovering the same symbols Clement endorses.

It is remarkable to witness how Benton Chapel's works of art complement each other while maintaining the individual power to deliver a larger theme.

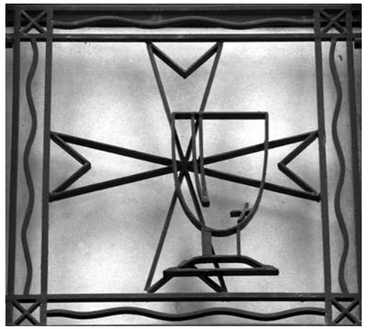
Benton Chapel contains small and large groups of artworks, such as the exterior ironwork, that go unnoticed beyond the dominant stained glass window above the entryway. The ironwork features of Benton Chapel are a little-recognized element of the overall artistic program of the structure; however, they are compelling in their simple material beauty and by their ability to convey larger themes through the use of well-known symbols. Before entering the chapel, one only has to glance skyward to understand how the small elements of the chapel convey a theological message through recognizable symbols and how the works of art in the chapel, on every scale, will complement one another and employ a visual language to enhance the acts of worship that occur within the walls.

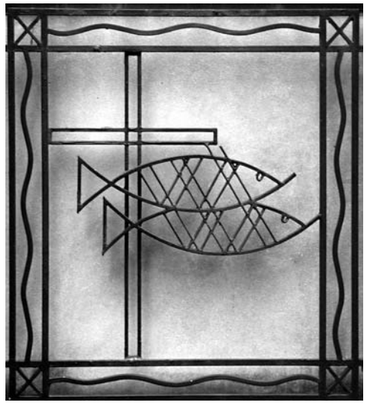
Benton Chapel was constructed as part of the Divinity Quadrangle with funding from a John D. Rockefeller grant awarded in 1959. The architectural firm overseeing the project was Brush, Hutchison, and Gwinn, currently named Hutchison and Associates based in Atlanta. Gwinn was the chief architect of the chapel, an endeavor in which he took great pride. Langdon Gilkey, a professor at the Divinity School from 1954 to 1963, had a central role in the development of Benton Chapel. Gilkey was involved especially in the planning of the main stained glass window for the chapel along with Robert Harmon, an associate of Emil Fries, Incorporated, of Saint Louis, Missouri, the artist of the Word of God window. Gilkey outlined in a pamphlet an interesting depiction of the Crucifixion based on Luke's Gospel. As the central figure Christ hangs on the Cross, the penitent thief on the left remains undistorted and linked together with Christ by the mantle of color. The figure of the thief on the right side of Christ is less stable, symbolizing the lack of faith of the thief and suggesting chaos perpetuated by unbelief. The window encapsulates the all-inclusiveness and omnipotence of God by depicting the letter "Alpha" at the bottom of the window complemented by the letter "Omega" at the top. All the elements that reside between these two Greek letters represent the power of the Word of God as interpreted in vivid stained glass imagery.

Scant documentation exists of Gilkey's overall contributions to the artistic program of Benton Chapel, but his fierce devotion and passion for the chapel project are remembered by his former colleagues. Although Gilkey invested his energy into the development of the chapel during his tenure at the University, perhaps the greatest documentation of his love for the chapel is captured in an ink lithograph drawn in 1963 by his own hand. Gilkey's lithograph remains displayed in the office of the associate dean of the Divinity School, and the practice of presenting a print of the drawing to professors upon their retirement is a testament to the beauty of the drawing and the passion inspired by the artist.

Before one enters the chapel through the wooden double doors, one may notice the latticed ironwork above the doorway. Depicted alternately with a decorative fleur-de-lis are doves pointed downwards. The doves appear to be indicative of the bestowing of the Holy Spirit at baptism and emphasize the rite of initiation for each person that enters the chapel.

Statuary also is included in the artistic program of the chapel. On either side of the chapel's entryway is a statue sculpted in 1964 by Puryear Mims in memory of his father Edwin Mims, a professor of English literature at Vanderbilt from 1912 to 1942. Although the statue on the left may appear at first glance to be a depiction of Christ on the Cross, the subject is not Christ, but





From top to bottom:
Greeek Cross with Chalice
Celtic Cross with Trumpet
Cross in the design of an Anchor
Ichthus and Cross

Dismas. The "faithful" thief from Luke's Gospel was legendarily known as Dismas and became the patron saint of condemned criminals, thieves, and prisoners. This statue recalls the image of the two thieves depicted in the Word of God stained glass window. Opposite from Dismas and sculpted in a similar material is the shrouded figure of Lazarus. As figures from the Life and the Passion of Christ, Dismas may emphasize repentance and forgiveness while Lazarus emphasizes piety and resurrection. Both figures visually prepare congregants for worship by stressing the themes of sin and forgiveness through the Resurrection of Christ. What may appear as rather curious figures for the narthex of a chapel are actually quite appropriate for the mood and tone of Christian worship.

The pulpit in Benton Chapel features an original woodcut of the four symbols of the evangelists: a man for Matthew, an ox for Luke, an eagle for John, and a lion for Mark. These symbols were popularized in the early church by the patristic author Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* (ANF 3.11.8) based upon his reading of Revelation 4:7; however, the symbols were never depicted or identified specifically with their correlating Gospel author until 546 C.E. with the creation of the mosaics at the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna. As typical inclusions on adorned Gospel book covers or in material art within a sanctuary, the four symbols have a strong tradition dating from antiquity and are a popular iconographic theme to incorporate on a pulpit from where the Gospel is proclaimed during worship.

The altar table in Benton Chapel includes a carved frontal image of the *ichthus* with a paten. The symbol of the fish emphasizes community, the *koinonia* of the church and may suggest the miracle of loaves and fishes recounted in the Gospels. The suggestion of a meal is appropriate, especially in conjunction with the paten, because each image can be understood as emphasizing the rite of the Eucharist that would be consecrated upon the altar table. The fish and paten both convey the importance of the Eucharistic meal that each church member would feast upon following the moment of consecration.

The ironwork panels on the chapel's exterior employ the traditional Christian signs and symbols outlined eighteen centuries ago by Clement of Alexandria. In each panel, there is the recurring element of a cross to help convey the central theme of Christianity. One encounters panels depicting a Petrine cross with a descending dove as a representation of the Holy Spirit and the rite of baptism; a striated cross as the background for the Greek letters *Alpha* and *Omega* as representations of the Last Judgment and Resurrection; a Greek cross with a chalice suggesting salvation, a Celtic cross with a heraldic trumpet announcing the presence of Christ as King; or a cross in the shape of a ship's anchor—one of the images prescribed by Clement—and perhaps a representation of evangelism. The anchor also may remind the viewer of one's ancestors arriving in the New World and Christ as the anchor of their faith. The design of the ship in the shape of a goblet also may stress the importance of the Eucharist and sacramental piety in the practice of evangelism. A rooster perched on a cross serves as an allusion to Peter's thrice denial of Christ and the apostle's subsequent repentance. The inclusion of this particular iconographic element may encourage the viewer to share in the culpability of Peter's denial.

The artwork of Benton Chapel contains works of obvious beauty as well as features that are much more subtle, as the exterior ironwork panels. Even the more seemingly obvious examples, such as the statue of Dismas in the narthex and the Word of God window, are examples of *trompe l'oeil:* a statue that appears to be Christ proves to be someone quite different; a register within a stained glass window illustrating the Crucifixion conveys a distinct theological message by an alternative depiction of the two thieves.

It is remarkable to witness how Benton Chapel's works of art complement each other while maintaining the individual power to deliver a larger theme. The diverse elements comprise a bountiful tableau—rich in theological import and splendid in colors and textures—while serving as a grand testament to the work and passion of the chapel's creators.

The essayist received his baccalaureate in history from the University of the South before he matriculated at Southern Methodist University where he earned the master of divinity degree. As a doctoral student in historical studies in the graduate department of religion at Vanderbilt University, Jefferson completed his course work in early church history at the conclusion of the 2006 spring semester. Jefferson's photographs of Benton Chapel are included in the "Art in the Christian Tradition" digital image database maintained by the Divinity Library and may be viewed at http://lib11.library.vanderbilt.edu/diglib/ACT-search.pl.

The Word of God Window

Intentions of the Artist and Architects

The theme of the central window in Benton Chapel of Vanderbilt University Divinity School is the Word of God, a reference from both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. At the base of the window are the waters of chaos, an element depicting the moment prior to Creation when the Spirit of God moved upon the waters and the Creation became manifest through the Word of God.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth; the earth was a formless void; there was darkness over the deep, and God's Spirit hovered over the water.
Genesis 1:1-2

By the Word of God the heavens were made; their whole array by the breath of His mouth; He collects the ocean waters as though in a wineskin; He stores the deeps in cellars.
Psalm 33:6-7

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
John 1:1-2

Above the waters of chaos, one sees the Word of God represented as a seed with the vertical inscription, *Logos,* which transliterated from the Greek means *Word.* The seed is cast into the newly created world represented by the mantle containing figures of God's creatures.

One who receives the seed in rich soil is the one who hears and understands the Word and yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.
Matthew 23:23

(Details from this register of the window are reproduced on the inside cover of this issue of *The Spire.*)

Entering the Creation is the Word of God Incarnate, Jesus Christ, represented by His Cross. On either side of His Cross are the crosses of the malefactors who were crucified with Him. The cross of the penitent thief on the left retains form and integrity because of the faith of the thief; consequently, the thief is linked with Christ by the mantle of color which also contains the Chalice, the article of Communion with Christ's Body and Blood. Because of the other thief's failure to accept Christ, the cross on the right disintegrates into the chaos. The dramatic forms surrounding the Cross suggest the dramatic kinetics of this episode.

Surmounting the Cross and the Star of David is a red mantle which represents the Communion of Saints and their relation to the created order which Christ has come to redeem. The movement from the Greek letter *Alpha* in the lower register of the window to the letter *Omega* in an upper register suggests the inclusiveness in time and space of the omnipotent God.

The Word of God Window was executed by artist Robert Harmon in association with Emil Frei, Incorporated, of Saint Louis, Missouri. Harmon also prescribed the color patterns of the three hundred window panes in the cruciform chapel.

Funding for the purchase of The Word of God Window was provided by *alumni/ae* of Vanderbilt University Divinity School in appreciation of the late Dean John Keith Benton and for the School. Benton became dean of the School of Religion in 1939 when he also accepted an appointment as a professor of the psychology and philosophy of religion; he served as the first chairperson of the Graduate Department of Religion from 1942 to 1944. Benton's University tenure as professor and dean concluded upon his death in 1956, the year when the School of Religion was renamed Vanderbilt University Divinity School.

Upon the occasion of Benton's death on August 21, 1956, *The Nashville Banner* reported that Dean Benton stood "on the threshold of a new era" in service to the region. In celebration of Benton's leadership, the faculty of the Divinity school resolved that "Benton was the Moses who led this School through memorable days of struggle and grace." ("Charting a New Vision: The School of Religion," by James P. Byrd Jr., PhD'99, in *Vanderbilt Divinity School: Education, Contest, and Change,* edited by Dale A. Johnson, Vanderbilt University Press, 2001, page 85.)

(Documentation of the intentions of the artist and architects is from the Divinity School's archives. Scriptural citations are from The Jerusalem Bible, reader's edition.)

Infant with Ashes

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast;
Call a solemn assembly; gather the people.
Sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders;
Gather the children, even nursing infants.
JOEL 2:15-16

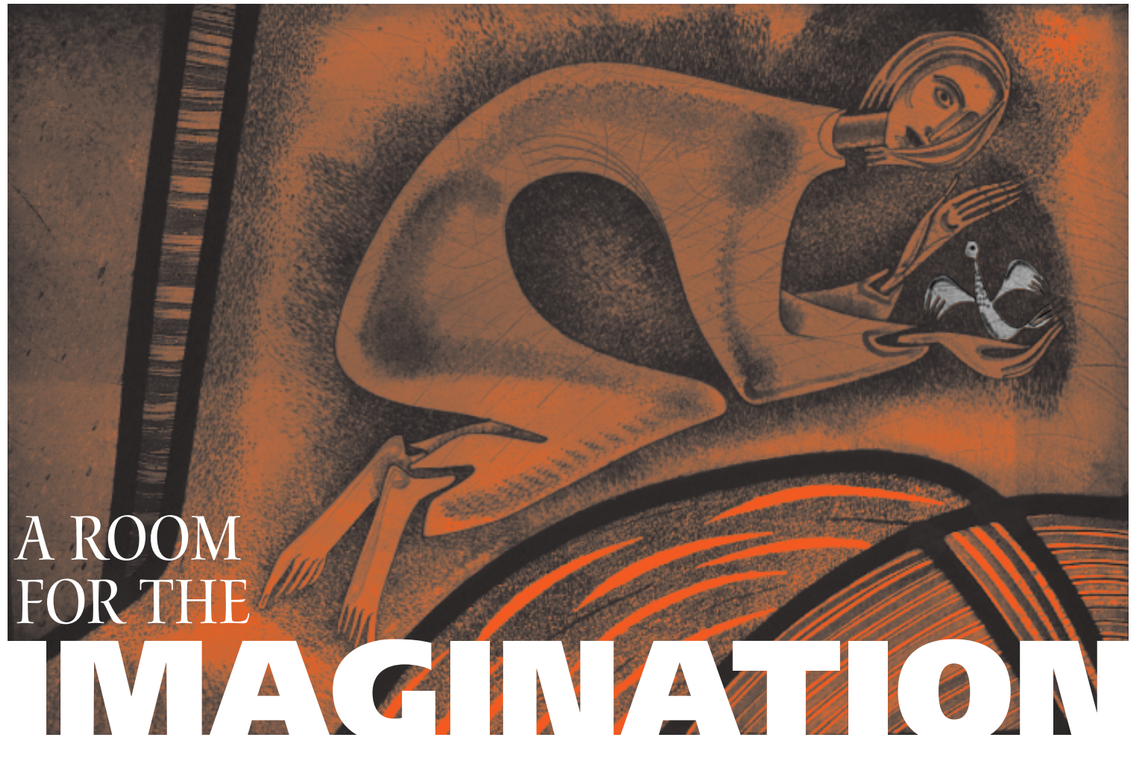
Midday, midweek in March, the eschatological moment:
Reminded that we are dust, and unto dust we shall return,
I receive my ashes, glad of one more chance for metanoia.
Sooty forehead bowed and soul-subdued, I find my pew,
Following a mother and her child returned to theirs.

From their inward gaze my eyes open on this pair: young
Woman kneeling, infant asleep on the seat between us,
That same smudge blazoned on his brow as ours—the same!
But how? Is he a sinner too, so lately christened, callow,
Sweet? Whose zeal was this: the mother's or the priest's?

I come to this sight fresh from teaching Job, who saw
His virtue burned away and heard the Voice from the
Whirlwind call his purity illusion. Who is good? Do we
Call innocent those who are but ignorant of their guilt?
In Nineveh even the animals wore sackcloth, didn't they?

Grace to the mother who gathers her infant at the breast.
Lady of silences, calm in your distress that death sucks
Even the blooms of spring, I pray: Ora pro nobis
Peccatoribus, now, in this noon of our new creation,
And at the hour when our hearts refuse to turn again.

Charlotte Barr, BA'69



A ROOM FOR THE IMAGINATION

BY RAY WADDLE, MA'81

One's a songwriter-playwright, another's a music critic, and the third is a performance artist-poet—three different career trajectories. But Jill Webb-Hill, MEd'91, D'96; Bill Friskics-Warren, MDiv'84; and Marcus Hummon, D'88, have this in common: They're following their own peculiar creative muses, and they all were shaped by Vanderbilt Divinity School.

They each arrived at the School on a hunch. They dimly discerned a need for vigorous ideas, clarity about matters of faith, and a sense of community—all ballast for their budding creative impulses. They weren't seeking a clergy track or a traditional vocation. What exactly they were looking for eluded definition. What they got was news of liberation, an encounter with seriousness and purpose, and a framework for the play of ideas.

Webb-Hill, Friskics-Warren, and Hummon, were all pulled along, too, by the undertow of Music City. Nashville altered their horizons with its music, its stages and studios, and its regional obsession with sin and salvation.

So their vocations took shape at the mysterious intersection of personal biography and graduate school rigor and serendipity. These writers and artists enrolled because the Divinity School invited them to take the time to catch the sound of their own voices and questions. The School gave them room for the imagination.

And they hung on to the three interests that mattered to them—words, music, compassionate ideas—showing the world, and themselves, what's possible.

A PECULIAR POETICAL

ALCHEMY

PHOTOGRAPH COPYRIGHT © MINTON SPARKS 2005

Raconteur Jill Webb-Hill has revived the art of storytelling set to music by creating the persona "Minton Sparks."

Wearing an old print dress and accompanied by a guitarist, Minton Sparks walks on stage and starts talking.

She tells stories, one after another, about broken-down, small-town characters, people eaten up with gossip, sex, moonshine, love, loss, self-defeat, perseverance, and God... the human condition with a Southern twang and a bluegrass soundtrack.

One story salutes a faithful member of Eastern Star, the women's auxiliary of the Masonic Lodge. Another tattles on the most flirtatious woman in town, "Vickie Pickle's Momma." In "Back of the Bus," Sparks recounts the sweaty make-out romps on the long bus ride home after a high school basketball road victory.

And "Sin Sick Soul" reveals the religion-soaked guilt of a mismatched adulterous couple, Wanda and Roy, and the fatal stigma hovering over them.

"It was a match made in heaven," Sparks begins, " 'cept he's married, and thirty years her senior ... He says he might as well blow a hole in his head; he's better off dead than sic the dog of divorce on his soul."

What is it Minton Sparks is doing up there? Theater? Poetry? Spoken word? Southern-fried performance art? Backroads theology?

Jill Webb-Hill, a mother of two, a former Divinity School student and family counselor—and the woman also known as Minton Sparks—isn't sure what to call it. But she's amazed at the intensity of response to it and the places it's taking her.

"I get up there and talk, and people look at me at first like dogs hearing a high whistle," says Webb-Hill, who grew up around Murfreesboro. "Then after a few minutes they seem to get it. Somehow a connection is made. I opened for legendary singer-songwriter John Prine in Kentucky not long ago, and when I was done, people were yelling, 'We don't know who you are, but we love you!'"

National Public Radio featured her last year, calling her art a revival of "storytelling set to music." The nation is starting to take notice. Sparks performs at folk festivals, college campuses, music clubs, and even larger auditoriums—telling funny, dark, or poignant yarns based on the outsized characters of her own Southern rural family history.

She has a DVD of her work called *Open Casket* coming out later in 2006. She has signed a contract to do four books for a new imprint of Thomas Nelson Publishers, a combination of poetry and short fiction. She's planning a tour of Southern juke joints this fall. In fact she's now getting invitations from all over the country to perform her peculiar poetical alchemy.

"People come up crying," she says, describing individuals who line up after her sets, eager to confess to her their own turbulent family memories.

"One woman wanted to tell me about her aunt who was a drunk but who inspired her to be a writer: 'Everybody else thought she was a devil but she was my hero.' People are walking around having conversations in their heads about the past but with no one to hear them. People burn to tell their stories, memories of their cousins and great aunts and grandpas.

Another woman told me she lived on a farm for 19 years, and then she just started sobbing. They're remembering people from the past. They're remembering the land. And religion. They e-mail me stories—so many now—it's unbelievable."

In a nervously wired and wireless world of long commutes and tiny workspace cubicles, Sparks is making contact with her audiences' half-buried memories of small-town life and religion, those childhood visits to the countryside before the old folks passed on and everybody else moved to the city. Hers is a complicated homage to a fast-fading rural culture and to the hearty people who worked the land and reared families despite the mean isolation and limited social choices.

She didn't set out to register such seismic motions at the intersection of urban and rural life, or for that matter, at the crossroad of sin and salvation. Even as a kid, Jill Webb, born in 1962, was always a writer, always composing poems. But she got her education as a psychologist by earning a baccalaureate in psychology from the University of the South and master's degree from Peabody before becoming a family counselor. She also has taught psychology at Tennessee State University where she remains on the adjunct faculty.

But professional counseling work proved arduous.

"People are really struggling, and I thought I might help," she says. "But many times, I found I could do nothing but pray for those people. That spiritual piece was sorely missing from the depth of the suffering that I was encountering."

Webb-Hill enrolled in the Divinity School's master of theological studies program in 1992 to try to discern her next vocational move. It was always part-time; she was a wife and young mother, and her identity as a writer was looming larger.

"Divinity school was a stop on my journey, a way to wrap my mind around concepts about which I was writing," she says.

She especially credits three influences there—Bonnie Miller-McLemore, the Carpenter Professor of Pastoral Theology and Counseling; her predecessor, the late Liston Mills, the Oberlin *Alumni* Professor of Pastoral Theology and Counseling; and Vanderbilt Chaplain Gay House Welch, PhD'80.

> *Religion is so deep in the culture, you can't write about the South without confronting it. I have no affection for the damage it could do but affection for the people who grew up in its midst.*
>
> —Jill Webb-Hill

"They mind-bendingly widened my idea of what theology is, the ways of thinking about God," remembers Webb-Hill.

After three semesters, she moved on, joining the staff at Magdalene House, run by her friend, the Reverend Becca Stevens, MDiv'90, and wife of musician Marcus Hummon. More and more, Webb-Hill also was writing poems about the people from her past.

"I started out writing just to preserve the stories for my family," she says. "Then Marcus took an interest. He produced my first record and helped me take myself seriously. He brought musicians in who played unbelievably. Amazing doors always opened when I was writing."

By 1999, she was testing the waters, performing at Nashville coffeehouses or clubs, sometimes opening for Hummon. The convivial, interconnected Nashville music scene gave her momentum. Eventually some of the giants of the business—Waylon Jennings, Maura O'Connell, Keb' Mo'—were eager to step in and collaborate.

She conjured up a stage name: "Minton Sparks" was created from the surnames of her maternal grandparents, who hailed from Arkansas.

On her first two records, *Middlin' Sisters and This Dress,* she channeled the personalities or memories of kinfolks dear to her. (*This Dress* won Spoken Word Record of the Year in 2004 at the Just Plain Folk Music Awards and was named one of the year's Top Five Off-the-Beaten-Path records by the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Read more at *www.mintonsparks.com.*)

Her third and latest CD, *Sin Sick,* is populated mostly by composite figures, including Aunt Shine, who shells out for a barely affordable face-lift ("too bad we can't reteach a girl her loveliness"), and those guilt-ridden church-going adulterers based on stories fans told her. The record is shot through with themes of risk and redemption in a close-knit world of ice cream socials, gravel driveways, Moose Lodge meetings and snacks of "curly fries and co' cola."

"'Sin sick' was thrown around a lot when I was growing up," she says. "It's a term for just being down and messing up. It's a coverall term for someone doing poorly."

But the old-time religion—rural Protestantism—haunts the term, too, just as it haunts the recording.

"Religion is so deep in the culture, you can't write about the South without confronting it," she says. "I have no affection for the damage it could do but affection for the people who grew up in its midst."

Jill Webb-Hill may not always want to be Minton Sparks. It's a vocational calling for now, but she's wary of letting it take over and keep her on the road away from her husband, John Hill, and their two children. Someday, she insists, she'd like to work for the Peace Corps. For now, she's finding creativity and connection by staying alert to her past, scribbling poems at all hours on any available piece of paper, and hanging on for the ride that her art is fueling day by day. She never quite planned it this way.

"Looking back over your shoulder, the way your life has gone can make sense to you, but when you're in the middle of it, it can feel as lost as can be," she says. "Well, the more lost the better. If you get all the way lost, you run smack dab into the middle of your real life instead of going down a path that's already been taken."

A BRIDGE OF

SENSIBILITIES

Inside the mind of Bill Friskics-Warren there's room for the Beatles, Woody Guthrie, the Beatitudes, and Edmund Husserl, too.

Friskics-Warren rides an irresistible dialectic—the call of theology, the passion of pop music, the harsh truth of human pain, yet the ultimate urge of human transcendence.

"I've always been uncomfortable with hard-and-fast distinctions between the sacred and the secular," he says. "I guess I've been trying to sort out what that means for as long as I can remember."

Based in Nashville, Friskics-Warren today is a nationally known music writer whose new book, *I'll Take You There: Pop Music & the Urge for Transcendence* (Continuum), embodies his roving impulses—the life of the mind, the heart, the streets.

"Little Richard screaming 'a-wop-bop-a-lu-bop' and pounding maniacally at his piano is as magnificent an expression of someone trying to break through to some higher plane as I can imagine," he declares.

Friskics-Warren discerns a spiritual dimension behind all sorts of human endeavor. Arriving at Vanderbilt Divinity School in the early 1980s, he discovered transcendent impulses behind the fearful syllabus of contemporary theology—Tillich, Husserl, Gutierrez. But he was identifying transcendent yearnings with other names, too—Van Morrison, Public Enemy, Johnny Cash—the turbulent constellation of this era's pop musicians.

"As a graduate student in theology at Vanderbilt, I spent countless hours poring over the writings of philosophers such as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty and those of theologians ranging from Gutierrez to Cone, Tillich to Teilhard de Chardin," he writes in his book.

"When I wasn't studying, I usually was combing the bins of record stores and flea markets for old LPs or camped out in the clubs."

The dual research paid off eventually. *I'll Take You There* is a spirited chronicle of spiritual themes he finds in the work of thirty artists—from the mysticism of Al Green and Sinead O'Connor to the righteous rage of the Sex Pistols and Eminem and the raptures of U2 and Curtis Mayfield—to make the point that an unstoppable impulse to transcendence infuses the pop expressions of our time.

He considers his book the belated "*de facto* dissertation" he never wrote at Vanderbilt.

"I wouldn't have known what the book was going to be when I was twenty-five. It took me this long to find my way into it and out of it."

Theologian Sallie McFague taught metaphorical theology and demanded that we write well. She always impressed upon us the value and power of language. Her models of God encouraged us to be creative with image and metaphor, and the cliché quotient routinely went down when she was the teacher.

—Bill Friskics-Warren

Bill Friskics, a Chicago native, arrived in Nashville in 1981 after an undergraduate career at Luther College in Iowa where he studied literature and criticism. He considered pursuing graduate work in literary theory at the University of Chicago, but Vanderbilt Divinity School invited him to enroll for an exploratory year. He was intrigued.

"It was a chance to immerse myself in serious study, but it was open-ended, too," he says. "That was a major, major gift."

He received the master of divinity degree as the Founder's Medalist and entered the Graduate School for doctoral studies in theology. He was ordained in the Disciples of Christ. Soon he left his academic pursuits altogether to work with homeless people and became a high-profile, local advocate. By 1997, he had quit that work to go full-time as a music writer.

This might sound like the journey of a soul divided, a man of competing interests, but to Friskics-Warren it's simply different pieces of the same sensibility, a drive to take the world seriously and find sources of hope and creativity in it. The pieces coalesced when he arrived at the Divinity School.

"Vanderbilt Divinity School gave me some invaluable grids," he says. "The gift I received was a preoccupation with the big questions, the larger contexts in which life and art can be understood."

He dedicates *I'll Take You There* to two people from his Divinity days. One is an old friend, Paul Shupe. The other is a theologian, his mentor, Edward Farley, the Drucilla Moore Buffington Professor of Theology, *emeritus*.

"Ed Farley was most formative in my understanding of the whole human striving for transcendence," Friskics-Warren says.

"One idea he impressed upon us students was the way human beings are wired, the way we seek something more than the mundane and everyday whether we know it or not. Ed was a revelation who quickly became an addiction."

By his reckoning, Friskics-Warren's voracious interest in music goes back to age four and the early, giddy epiphanies of the Beatles—specifically February 9, 1964, when the Fab Four first aired on *The Ed Sullivan Show.*

"With those harmonies and pressing rhythms, the Beatles were reaching for something well beyond my suburban childhood," he recalls.

A few years later, deeper into the 1960s, he discovered Sly and the Family Stone—the jarring politics of their record "There's a Riot Goin' On." The adult world of social tumult was crashing in his sensibility.

At Vanderbilt he bridged the worlds of music, writing, and social action. Besides Farley, two other people were decisive.

"Theologian Sallie McFague (the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of Theology, *emerita*) taught metaphorical theology and demanded that we write well," he recalls.

"She always impressed upon us the value and power of language. Her models of God encouraged us to be creative with image and metaphor, and the cliché quotient routinely went down when she was the teacher."

And he met a woman early on at Vanderbilt who would become his wife, Mary Katherine (Kaki) Warren, MDiv'92. They married in 1985 and are the parents of a son.

Kaki Friskics-Warren, who would become a leading local voice for prison ministries and advocacy for the families of prisoners, blazed for her husband a new way of seeing the world—an empathy for the dispossessed.

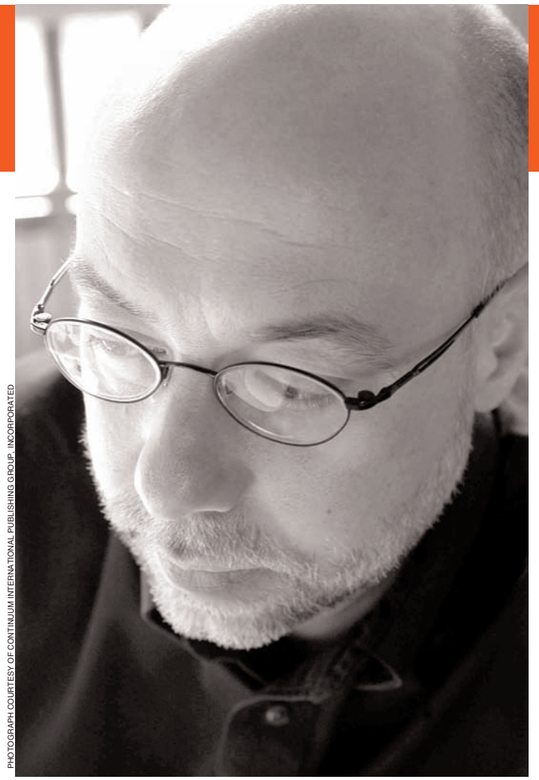
"She embodied a justice-seeking theology, a commitment to being where hurting people were and lifting them up and resisting whatever kept them down," he says. "She taught me the importance of hospitality to folks who are struggling. That's where God is at work in the world. In order to align with God, you've got to get busy."

Her example drove him more fully into the world of daily need. Starting in 1987, he worked two years for Storefront Ministry in downtown Nashville and then for six years as director of the Nashville Coalition for the Homeless. He resigned from that position in 1994.

"I felt the leadership should be coming from the homeless and the former homeless themselves—the people who had experienced the humiliations and indignities of living on the streets."

He turned to his first muse, music, and wrote about the Music City landscape for *The New York Times, No Depression,* and *Village Voice.* He recently ended a four-year stint as music editor of the *Nashville Scene.*

Last year for the *Washington Post,* he wrote about country musician Toby Keith, saluting a song that the usually swaggering flag-waving Keith called "If I Was Jesus" written by Phil Madeira. Friskics-Warren calls it a "wry John Prine-like homily that testifies to what grace is all about."



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF CONTINUUM INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHING GROUP, INCORPORATED

Author and music critic Bill Friskics-Warren examines the spiritual themes that infuse the music of thirty contemporary artists in his book, I'll Take You There: Pop Music and the Urge for Transcendence.

The lyrics include the lines: "If I was Jesus I'd have some friends that were poor, I'd run around with the wrong crowd, … get myself crucified by politicians and preachers, who got something to hide."

"It's enough that Keith, a guy critics routinely call a 'blowhard,' delivers these lines self-deprecatingly," Friskics-Warren writes. "It's downright disarming to have him remind us, like some liberation theologian, that God sides with sinners and outcasts."

Friskics-Warren admits he's always looking for an excuse to write about music that somehow witnesses to theology and artistry.

"I'm always looking for an opening to insert these themes that matter. Vanderbilt gave me an extra dimension to bring to pop culture. I'm trying to bridge sensibilities."

He ends his book with these bridge-building thoughts for dangerous times:

"No matter how insidious religious fundamentalism might be in our world, ours nevertheless is, at least for now, an increasingly secular and global society. Ours is a world in which great numbers of people look to pop music—and to TV, movies, and pop culture in general—for guidance that conventional religious observance does not provide. This is not to impute religious value or power to the recordings of, say, Radiohead or OutKast; it is, however, to lay claim to pop music's ability to serve as a portal for the transcendence we seek. Ultimately, it is to argue, as Van Morrison does in his wondrous 1982 single "Cleaning Windows," not just for a way of hearing or responding to music, but for a way of being in the world. A way of attending to the taken-for-granted or everyday in hopes of spying openings for the inbreaking of that which transcends it, that which, however fleetingly, might satisfy the hunger in our restless hearts."

THE ART OF

CIVIC DUTY

Marcus Hummon is a gold-standard Music City songwriter who has created hits for such big-name performers as Sara Evans, the Dixie Chicks, Wynonna, Tim McGraw, and Rascal Flatts and who won his first Grammy this year.

It's his living and his glory.

And yet other ambitions haunt him.

Hummon is preoccupied with tumultuous ideas, world-changing themes—monotheism, racism, Shakespeare, the Civil War, the afterlife, the dynamics of peace and hope. Call it an artistic quest that was marked early by a globetrotting childhood as the son of a U.S. State Department official and later by a pivotal year at the Divinity School.

Without leaving country songwriting behind, Hummon has been pouring himself into aesthetic expressions that can accommodate his big-canvas concepts. Where others fear to tread, Hummon marched straight into a new creative challenge—musical theater and folk-rock opera.

"It's a civic duty," contends Hummon. "Artists have a civic duty to be fearless," he says. "If I'm not going to challenge myself and people around me, then I'm not going to be vital or worthy of the people spending time and money to go see what I create. I don't want to be just an entertainer."

Genre-defying operas and musical dramas have been tumbling out of him at an intimidating pace since the late 1990s, using pop, bluegrass, soul, Celtic, African and classical inflections. They've been performed to acclaim in Nashville, New York, Hartford, and other venues.

One, called *Warrior: An American Tragedy,* tells the story of Jim Thorpe, the Native American super-athlete and Olympian, against the friction of his era's racism and his own alcoholism.

Another, *Surrender Road,* focuses on the up-and-down life and loves of a New York boxer, told through Shakespearean soliloquies.

The opera *Francis of Guernica* descends into the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s, grappling with Picasso's famous anti-war painting and issues of sainthood, fascism, and transcendence.

He's at work now on a new creation, *Tut,* perhaps his most ambitious so far—a dual narrative that ponders the emotional world of 1350 B.C.E. Egypt with its elaborate royal burial practices and the twentieth-century obsession of the archaeologist, Howard Carter, who discovered Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922. The work-in-progress is shaping up to be an expansive meditation on theism, finitude, and immortality.

"We're driven by lust, power and greed, but ultimately, immortality is the endgame, the big question," Hummon says. "What fascinates me is how the Egyptians dealt with death. Nobody did death like the Egyptians."

Hummon is used to embracing the big picture. Born in 1960, he was a precocious kid who got to see the world, spending part of his childhood in Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Italy. His parents exposed him to art and literature along the way. He learned a deep affection for Islamic culture and got acquainted with Africa, its beauty, its searing political conflicts. He took up guitar and piano as a teenager, as well as sports. Returning stateside for college, he played football at Williams in the early 1980s.

The music prevailed. He went to Los Angeles to get his start as a performer. But he was intrigued by reports about the Nashville scene, a synergistic colony of new music writing. In 1986 he moved to town and quickly got signed as a songwriter with a music publisher.

"I found a unique songwriting culture in Nashville—a fellowship, the seriousness of a community," he says. "By 1989, this place was on fire."

He had grown up Christian in his far-flung boyhood, but the evangelical Protestant accent of Southern culture was alien to him. He wanted to understand it, the better to succeed in Christian songwriting if need be, so in 1987 he spent an open-ended year at the Divinity School, a pivotal turn for him. He encountered ideas, he found diversity, and he met his wife.

"What I loved about Vanderbilt Divinity School is you could say anything," he recalls.

"Social justice was a priority. People weren't kidding around about that. And the School embraced diversity. That's what I was struck by—the courage to have real dialogue. In my time, that included shouting matches. That was great!"

He remembers Walter Harrelson, the Distinguished Professor of Hebrew Bible, *emeritus,* with special fondness. "I don't know of anyone who could speak of the Hebrew Bible as beautifully as he did. What a lovely person. We need leaders like that—we need presidents like that—people who can inspire that kind of generous spirit."

Within days of arriving at Vanderbilt, he also met a student colleague, a dynamo named Becca Stevens.

"My first date with this beautiful woman was literally cleaning out a homeless shelter, then maybe a beer afterward," he recalls. "You fall in love with a person, but also with that person's vision of the world. Becca is a woman of dogged hope who sees a sense of possibility in everyone."

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF BMG MUSIC PUBLISHING

Songwriter and playwright Marcus Hummon believes an artist has a civic duty to explore the unyielding contradictions within the human condition.

Soon they married, and they are now the parents of three children. Stevens is an Episcopal priest at Saint Augustine's Chapel on Vanderbilt's campus and founder of Magdalene, a residential housing and recovery program for local women with a criminal history of prostitution and drug abuse.

After his Vanderbilt year, Hummon got a record deal as a country artist. He toured exhaustively, but performing kept him away from his family. It didn't fit him. It wasn't much fun.

If I'm not going to challenge myself and people around me, then I'm not going to be vital or worthy of the people spending time and money to go see what I create. I don't want to be just an entertainer.

—Marcus Hummon

Meanwhile, though, the megastars of the industry were noticing his songwriting talents; he offered songs to them. He scored his first big hit, "Only Love," for Wynonna in 1991. Others followed, and he made the transition from full-fledged performer to hit maker, collaborator, and composer. His records include "All in Good Time," "The Sound of One Fan Clapping," "Looking for the Child," "Revolution," and "Nowhere to Go but Up." He has his own label, Velvet Armadillo. (Read more details at velvetarmadillo.com.)

Vocation and avocation mingled—country songwriting and theater, Grammys by day, the history of the world by night.

He got a taste for the grandeur, the reach of theater when *American Duet,* his cowritten musical play about two young men (one black, one white) searching for their artistic identities, premiered with the Actors Bridge Ensemble in Nashville in 1999.

"That first night, it was an incredible feeling to see the audience enjoy it," he says. "And I remember thinking, 'I've found it.' It might be a fluke, but I wanted to keep doing this. This felt like home. As a theater writer you write to create those big moments of life and art. Each story has come from my own life and theological underpinnings. But I look back to classical ideals of theater. The ancient Greeks challenged their leaders, and Arthur Miller once remarked, 'Other than saving someone's life on a medical gurney, writing a great play is the best thing you can do for a culture.' I want to follow in that tradition."

He's in contact now with the New York theater world, probing new opportunities for staging his works. His music is rousing, optimistic, inviting audiences to feel something deeper. It carries ambivalent themes of religious nonviolence and violence, too, the unyielding contradictions of the twenty-first century.

"I bounce between grace-filled images of the world and the violence of the world," he says. "Beyond trying to make a living and loving your family, I believe some issues have to be embraced and discussed. As much as I love Christianity and spirituality, the fanaticism and exclusivity that you find in religions today are the greatest danger we face. It's a refusal to step across borders out of love of humanity."

In *Francis of Guernica,* a tender song called "Stained Glass Love" stands as the emotional center of the work. It serves also as Hummon's own personal theology of a broken world still capable of renewal:

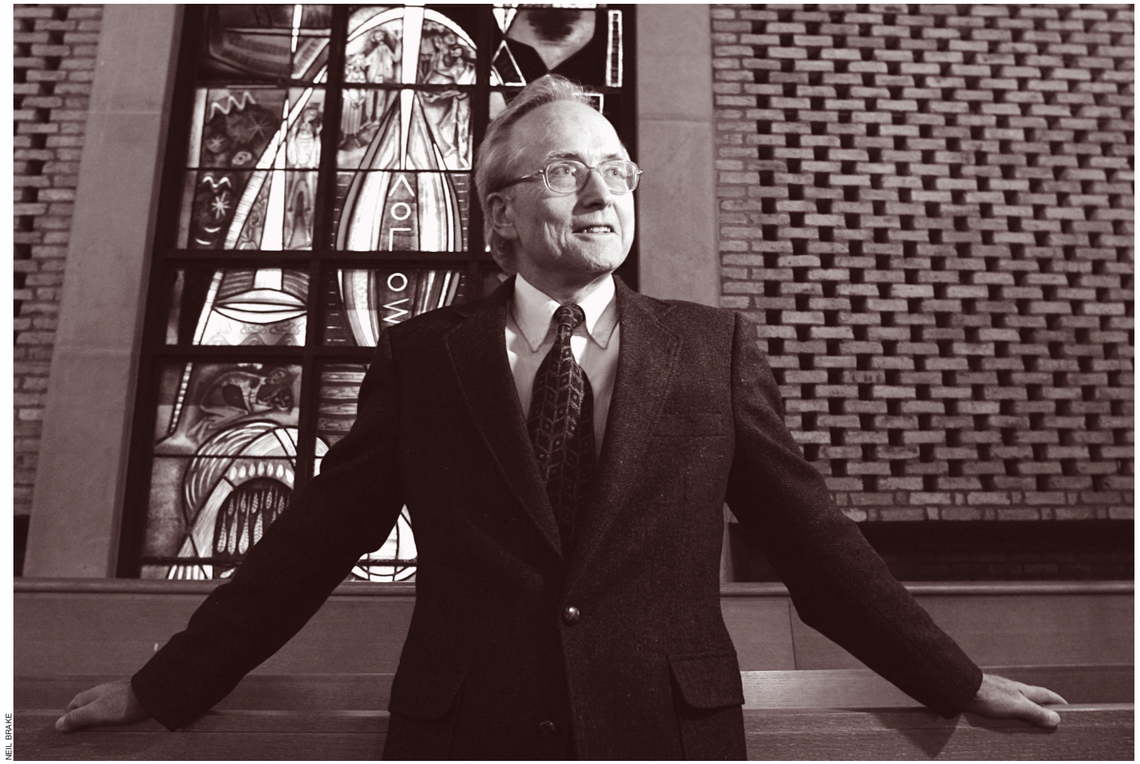
It's a picture made of broken things
of fallen feathers from an angel's wings;
the shattered pieces of our past
are held together like stained glass.

When all is said and done
what else have I but a stained glass love,
and were it not for you
how could this love come shining through?

Hold the pieces in your hand
and think of how glass is made from sand,
how sand together becomes clay
and clay is flesh when God breathes our way.

When all is said and done
what else have I but a stained glass love,
and were it not for you
how could this love,
this stained glass love
come shining, shining through?

Journalist Ray Waddle served as religion editor for seventeen years at The Tennessean. *He is the author of* Against the Grain: Unconventional Wisdom from Ecclesiastes *and* A Turbulent Peace: The Psalms for Our Time. *To learn more of the writer's career, visit www.raywaddle.com.*



NEIL BRAKE

A Wondrous Man of Letters

To commemorate Professor Dale Johnson's tenure of thirty-seven years at Vanderbilt University, *alumni/ae* were invited by Dean James Hudnut-Beumler to compose letters to Professor Johnson upon the occasion of his retirement. We are pleased to publish excerpts from the correspondence Professor Johnson received, and we dedicate this issue of *The Spire* to him in appreciation for his commitment to scholarship and his concern for the intellectual and spiritual formation of his students.

Knowing of Professor Johnson's interest in Sacred Harp singing, students from the Divinity School and the graduate department of religion also paid tribute to him during the final community coffee hour for the academic year by singing "What a Wondrous Man is This," their variation of the Sacred Harp hymn, "What Wondrous Love is This." In honor of the Drucilla Moore Buffington Professor of Church History, *emeritus,* they sang:

What-a wondrous man is this, O history, history!
What-a wondrous man is this, O history!
With women, Jews, and kings, he made it interesting,
To bear the dreadful course, history, history
To bear the dreadful course, history.

When from this School he leaves, we'll sing on; we'll sing on;
When from this School he leaves, we'll sing on.
We'll sing his memory in Vanderbilt history,
Through the halls of Divinity, we'll sing on; we'll sing on;
Through the halls of Divinity, we'll sing on.

Above: Dale A. Johnson, the Drucilla Moore Buffington Professor of Church History, emeritus

It has happened every semester since I began teaching five years ago: students shuffle into my courses in church history and expect to spend the term learning dates, names, and events. This is what "history" is to them. What they don't know is that I learned to teach church history from Dale Johnson, a fellow who never allowed history to be just the facts. Sure, there were always "chronological items of the day" to master. But church history always had to mean more than that: you insisted that we see broad patterns, discern connections, and most importantly determine why any of this matters to us today. At long last, I learned that this is what you meant when you asked the haunting question, "What *is* the problem here?" Because of your influence, I burden my own students with a similar question of relevance: "So what?"

I require my students to construct an accurate story based upon the facts of history, and they must learn to assess historical materials—especially primary source documents—in their historical contexts. But the task that always puzzles them at first is they must reflect on the relevance of historical issues for people of faith today. With what questions are the people of the past struggling that are relevant for us today? How is our situation different from theirs, and what difference does that make in the answers that we provide for those questions? The good students always get the importance of this task and express universal appreciation for this way of teaching history.

Scott D. Seay, PhD'04

From other students I had heard that you were a pastor to your students, that your teaching style was engaging and dynamic, that you were a person of integrity and a gifted teacher with a dry wit, and that I needed to hurry and take your course—Christianity in the Reformation Era. I'll never forget how nervous I was when I realized that in my last semester I was going to be in your class; I could barely keep up with the reading assignments, but I was so excited about what I was learning that I forgot to be anxious. From you I learned:

1. Answer the question—do not head off in another direction.
2. In answering any question, always qualify your answer by acknowledging that you are speaking from your own perspective.
3. We are where we are in the Church because of where others have been.
4. Come to class prepared, but when you are not, acknowledge that you are not ready to contribute to the discussion.

A day does not go by in my life and in my work that I do not use those guidelines as I talk with people or reflect upon a situation in my ministry. Thank you. And thank you, too, for teaching me to play horseshoes and for being a good sport about my total lack of pitching ability.

Janet Salyer, MDiv'02

One of the great gifts you gave to me—a trace of you that lives in me—was your encouragement to relax and let the text come to me on its own terms. I came to the Divinity School from a small town and was anxious about being in a strange land. Your reassurance inspired me to understand study as conversation, even a sacred conversation.

Steve Monhollen, MDiv'72, DMin'73

I clearly remember my first meeting with you when I entered the Divinity School. I was working in the Divinity Library with Steve Gordy and Nancy Braun. Steve, as usual, was somewhat irreverent and began teasing you. Nancy panicked, grabbed me, and said, "That is Dale Johnson; what could Steve be thinking?"

You had on a suit and tie, seemed reserved and formidable, and then zinged Steve with a scorching retort. He grabbed his heart, and you let loose with a wonderful laugh. All was well except for Nancy who had to fan herself to calm down.

The atmosphere at the School was charged with excitement that year. Sallie McFague was the new dean, the women's community was growing in new numbers, and the Black Seminarians were making their presence known. I remember believing that I was absolutely in the right place and could not believe my good fortune. The School was an oasis where honest dialogue prevailed on the Vanderbilt campus. I did not know then that you would become a central champion to the women's office and lend your aid to our struggle to find our collective voice and to learn about the history of our efforts. I recall thinking that you were, at first glance, an unlikely hero for the women's community, but slowly we began to gravitate to the sound of your voice in the halls, in meetings, and in your classroom. You became committed to our cause, and as a scholar, you began to research the women who had spoken for centuries before us and documented their words; you developed a class that would become the most moving learning experience I had at the Divinity School. The large, green, unwieldy computer print-outs you distributed felt sacred.

Peg Leonard-Martin, MDiv'83

You put us though our paces, expected thoughtful seminar presentations and papers, and you both inserted and removed commas with that seemed like gay abandon! Whereas many times we Vandy students received papers that said "Nice work B+" and little else in the way of comments, those of us in *your* classes got very specific responses to our work. We always knew *why* the grade was an "A" or "B."

Do you recall the lunch table complaints about too many "B-" grades? Someone once accused you of having a middle name of "B-". Instantaneously came your retort, "My middle initial happens to be "A" for Arthur." It was a great moment.

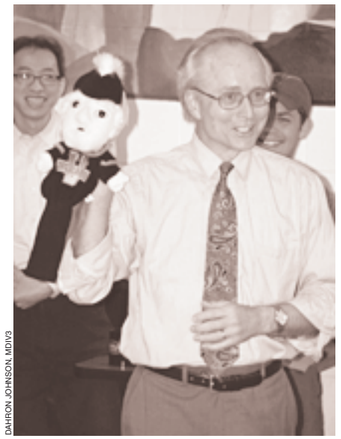
Nadia Lahutsky, PhD'84

I shall never forget the assignment that changed me as a scholar, or rather changed my view of myself as one who *could become* a scholar. The question we were asked to discuss was "What was at stake in the Lord's Supper controversies?" Your written comments inspired and enthused the ambivalent student I was at that time. I began to see myself in a different light, with possibilities for vocation that I had ignored, if indeed I could imagine them at all. It was amidst the themes of the Reformation, in the context of your classroom, where complexities and possibilities came alive intellectually and theologically for me. My vocational tapestry is reflective of these deep connections: a tapestry woven of threads from the church, the academy, and the lives of those who make them possible.

My son, born in 1985 at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, has been accepted to the Divinity School. In our earlier discus-

sions about where he might apply, I told him that as long as there were professors such as Dale Johnson teaching at VDS, I could not imagine a better place to study. This was true in 1985 and remains true today.

J. William Harkins, MDiv'86, PhD'01



DAHRON JOHNSON, M.DIV.3

The Commodore will accompany Professor Johnson to the golf course during his retirement years. Among the gifts the professor of church history received from students to commemorate his thirty-seven years of service to the University was a golf club cover in the design of the Vanderbilt mascot. Sharing in the celebration are Simon Wei, MDiv3, and Peter Gray, MTS'06.

As I journey toward what I hope will be my own teaching career in theological education, I find myself returning to the models of teaching I experienced during my time in the Divinity School. Your active commitment to the growth and development of your students, precisely within their callings, is notable among professors, and I thank you for the affirmations, encouragement, and support you consistently have offered me in particular. You have been a gift to my own vocational development, and I hope that one day I may offer such gifts to my students.

Krista Hughes, MDiv'01

You once said to me in response to my complaining about the relevance of church history for persons studying pastoral care that history teaches us much about the patterns of religious responses and the depth of historical truths that live on in people's lives. I have often remembered your words as I sit with patients and families as they struggle with pain, guilt, redemption, and suffering. Being able to see the parallels between what has gone before and current struggles often affirms for me the relevance of tradition and the comfort of the Word.

Jo Clare Wilson, MDiv'78

Of all the accolades that deservedly will come your way upon retirement, I would like to offer one that may be unique: You wrote the most memorable comment that I ever received on a class paper. In a fit of bombast, I paired two words, "veritable plethora." Beside that bit of hot air, you wrote, "This sounds like Howard Cosell." What a shame that many of your current students likely don't know that name.

Michael L. Welch, MDiv'82

There can be no doubt of what will always be my most favorite moment of any of your classes—your memorable rendition of the "Vicar of Bray." But what I have taken away with the most gratitude is your kindness. Many were the times when I gave clueless, incorrect, or even absurd answers to your questions in class, but you never once made me feel stupid. As an artist with an interest in theology, I had dreaded the required church history component of my degree program, but not after I had taken one of your courses. Your ability to bring church history back to life and show the relevance to current issues and reflections of faith is a talent—no doubt—but your genuine concern and affection for teaching, for your students, and for the ministry of Vanderbilt Divinity School to the world is what has made you outstanding.

Sandra Ward-Angell, MDiv'85

In my experiences in higher education, I have had one professor who was a teacher par excellence, one whose commitment to pedagogy and commitment to his students were unrivaled by any other professor. At Vanderbilt, you were that professor for me. In your courses, I did not just absorb the material, and I did not just learn to write and think as a church historian; your greatest gift was that you were a model for how to be a teacher and a scholar. You showed me how important it is to balance commitment to scholarship, commitment to teaching, and commitment to forming relationships with students—that is *teaching as ministry.*

Andrew Thompson, MDiv'01

From you I learned patience, stillness, and genuine listening. Your academic rigor was always impressive, but what really impressed me and has affected me as a professor of religion is nurturing an honest interest and enjoyment in relationships with others—especially with students. I believe you were the first professor I had at Vanderbilt who treated me as a colleague rather than as a student. I have tried to do the same throughout my career, both in parish ministry and in college teaching. Thank you for your wise modeling of the welcoming presence that sponsors persons toward the development of their own gifts.

W. Alan Smith, MDiv'76, DMin'83

The day I ran out of your office remains one of my most formational and embarrassing moments of my time spent as a Vanderbilt student. I felt so utterly out of place and overwhelmed that very first semester. I had the heart of a student and the mind of a young woman overly fearful of failing and making a mistake—not the simplest of combinations. Your patient, intuitive, and honest approach helped me to gain the courage to walk boldly in my fear and to take the risks necessary to foster the academic curiosity so vital to learning. I thank you for giving me the time to mature as a student and for challenging me, not in arrogance but in compassion, so that I could find my own voice in my own time. I may not always recall every last detail of Kant or Hegel. I will, however, remain forever mindful and grateful for your care-filled influence on my life.

Shelli Yoder, MDiv'02

NEIL BRAKE

During the 2005-2006 academic year, Vanderbilt University Divinity School claimed three Rhodes Scholars among the faculty: Ted Smith, appointed in 2005 as an assistant professor of divinity and director of the program in theology and practice, was in residence at Jesus College; Dale Johnson, who began his tenure in 1969, read modern history at Worcester College; and Brad Braxton, appointed in 2004 as an associate professor of homiletics and New Testament, matriculated at Trinity College. As a Rhodes Scholar, Johnson earned his second baccalaureate at Oxford in 1959 and returned to the university to earn the master of arts degree in 1963.

I appreciate the example of piety, or as the Methodists term it, "holy living" that you provided for us. I learned from you that it is important to love the people we serve as God loves them. I know you shared this "pastor's heart" not only with those entering ordained ministry, but with those entering the teaching field. You reminded us that we could have knowledge, but if we did not have love, it was in vain.

Daryl Fansler, MDiv'76

My transition from Stephens College to Vanderbilt had everything to do with you!

You came to Stephens to visit at a very vulnerable time in my life when career decisions were unclear. I can still see you drawing all over the blackboard in Richard Gelwick's theology class. I had never seen anyone so excited and enthusiastic about his work. I was sold! I knew I had to come to Vanderbilt University although I was not sure at the time where it would lead me.

Ann VanDervoort, MDiv'83

I distinctly remember your criticism of my senior essay which was comprised of several sermons addressing issues of prison ministry. You stated the sermons sounded more like speeches. This criticism was quite difficult to hear—not only because your words as a professor meant much to me—but because I had tried to gain more experience preaching, but the minister in the setting for my field education would not allow me to preach.

Years later, I preached at Trinity Presbyterian Church where you attend; my sermon alluded to the brutality of the death of Jephthah's daughter and the brutality of Matthew Shepard's death—and how no one attempted to prevent these deaths. After the service, you sought me and said the words I had forgotten I had wanted to hear: "That was a very good sermon."

Emily R. Cheney, PhD'94

Two of the parties you and Norma hosted for students stand out in my memory—one on Martin Luther's birthday and another one when we played a board game titled "The Reformation." I cannot recall the details of the game except that I was Spain, and two other players representing the Turkish Empire and the Pope formed an unholy alliance against me, sank all my ships, and drowned my army.

You are a model of good teaching that still influences my own strategies and practices for lectures, seminars, and examinations. We all laughed easily in your seminars which were full of good humor; we looked forward to coffee and to lunch with you at a table in the refectory, and we felt we could come to you with our problems and concerns. For example, Robert Early came to your Reformation history class when he needed a wife, and we all watched him find Kim there. Match.com has nothing on you.

Betty DeBerg, PhD'88

You were my advisor when I attended the Divinity School; I guess you drew the short straw. Before the first two weeks of classes were over, I had switched from the MTS program to the MDiv program and back to the MTS. You would call it "a liminal period." One night during this time, I called you at home in a panic. Your wife informed me that you were in bed, but she would see if you could come to the phone. You did, and you spent the next twenty minutes calming the overactive mind of a forty-year-old graduate student who had no idea of what he wanted to do when he grew up.

When I entered the Divinity School in 1996, I was a musician and part-time writer with an interest in art and social justice. Ten years later, I am living a grown-up version of that life with critical skills and a sense of purpose that owe a debt to you. Whenever I sit down to learn a song or to write, I hear your voice; "What is the task?" he asks. "And how can I approach it?"

These are the words of an organized man—that I will never be—but to your credit, you never held my scattershot learning style against me. To the contrary, you valued it; you allowed it, and encouraged me to explore the Divinity School and the entire University. As I zigzagged toward graduation, I was no closer to a career choice, but I knew a whole lot more about what I liked and why I liked it.

My freelance life is purposeful and satisfying. Rather than being a prolonged adolescence, I recognize it as my calling, and I have Dale Johnson to thank.

Paul Griffith, MTS'00

Conscientious Objector

I shall die, but that is all I shall do for Death.

I hear him leading his horse out of the stall; I hear the clatter
on the barn-floor.
He is in haste; he has business in Cuba, business in the Balkans,
many calls to make this morning.
But I will not hold the bridle while he cinches the girth.
And he may mount by himself: I will not give him a leg up.

Though he flick my shoulders with his whip, I will not tell him
which way the fox ran.
With his hoof on my breast, I will not tell him where the black
boy hides in the swamp.
I shall die, but that is all that I shall do for Death;
I am not on his pay-roll.

I will not tell him the whereabouts of my friends
nor of my enemies either.
Though he promise me much, I will not map him
the route to any man's door.
Am I a spy in the land of the living, that I should
deliver men to Death?
Brother, the password and the plans of our city are safe with me;
never through me
Shall you be overcome.

—Edna St. Vincent Millay
(1892–1950)
composed in 1931 and published in *Wine from These Grapes,* 1934
Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York, pages 47–48

"Conscientious Objector" was among the poems Maya Angelou recited during her lecture at Vanderbilt University on February 27, 2006.

gleanings

Age Divine, or Confessions of a Dutiful Daughter

BY AMY LYLES WILSON, MTS2

Amy Lyles Wilson

Oprah tells those of us who are middle-aged that fifty is the new thirty. I am this close to forty-five, so I am not sure what that means for me. If it means I am really twentysomething, then my body owes me an explanation for the widening hips and weakening eyesight. Such physical changes are the more public, and alarming, part of midlife. So, on the outside, I may look a bit disheveled. I can live with that, for it's what is happening underneath the menopause creams and the bifocals that sustains me.

Although I have not had an extramarital affair or leased a Porsche, I am undergoing my own version of a midlife crisis. In January of 2004, I returned to school.

At Vanderbilt University Divinity School, such a rash act earns you the label of "second-career" student, which I guess sounds better than "clueless geezer" or "late-in-life learner." But some of us were drawn to the *Schola Prophetarum* in search of an identity broader than any new job. We're the ones who've come back to school because we've long wanted to study theology, or because we want to give something back to our world. We know by this stage that we can't solve all the problems of the human condition, but we're smart enough to know we can still affect our communities and maybe learn a little something about ourselves in the process. As for me, I came looking for knowledge, yes. I also came hungry for newfound purpose, a base from which to conduct what remains of my time on earth.

After college, I tried law school for one semester. My family was full of lawyers, from my father to a sister to two brothers-in-law. (Currently my other sister, at the age of fifty-five, is attending law school in Alabama. You get the picture.) I hated it from the start. After a dismal semester, I called home with the news that I wanted to quit. The problem is, you don't "drop out" in my family. You don't take a year off to find yourself; you don't call in sick if all you can complain about is a stomach bug. The Wilsons persevere. So I wasn't sure what my parents' reaction would be. Would they disown me? Even worse, would they make me stay in law school? In reality, the encounter went something like this:

"Stay put," said my father, on that cold, clear day in December. "Your mother and I are on our way."

Three hours later, I met my parents at a Wendy's hard by the highway outside Oxford, Mississippi, where I was in school. As Daddy stopped his big, black Lincoln, he rolled down the window and said, "Don't say a word. Get in the car."

Ever the dutiful daughter, I did as I was told.

My mother sat stoically in the back seat. Daddy swung the car out of the parking lot and headed toward the farmland that has been in our family for generations. It was quiet outside, a crisp day in the country. Inside the car, a deep voice thundered forth:

"We can't all be oranges," intoned self-help guru Leo Buscalia from the cassette in the tape deck. "Some of us are meant to be apples."

…I spent my first semester waiting for a dean to toss me out of the ivory tower once word got around that I was not bound for the pulpit or a doctorate…

So that's how my parents told me to go and do what I wanted to do, that I didn't have to become a lawyer just because everybody else seemed to think it made sense. To this day I don't know what kind of fruit my parents thought I might be, but I remain grateful for their understanding. The next day I dropped out of law school and enrolled in graduate school to study journalism, with my parents' support, and my own dreams intact.

I was still lugging some of those same dreams when I came to Vanderbilt's campus for orientation two years ago. Even though I had earned two degrees and gained fifteen years of professional experience, I spent my first semester waiting for a dean to toss me out of the ivory tower once word got around that I was not bound for the pulpit or a doctorate—not to mention that I grew up Methodist, became an Episcopalian, and am currently enamored with the Disciples.

So it was with my own kind of fear and trembling that I attended History of Religion in America for the first time. Quickly scanning my peers for anyone who looked as if he or she might have come of age before the first Clinton administration, I was delighted to find I wasn't the only person past forty sporting a new book bag and a look of panic. As it turns out, there are quite a few of us "second career" types roaming the library and the Common Room.

There's Liz, who's divorced with four kids. She does her homework before three in the afternoon so she can be with her children after they get out of school. She's Catholic, so ordination is not an option for her. For now, she says, just being at VDS is enough.

Mary's a mother and a nurse who wants to use her medical skills in a parish setting. She's Methodist and is considering the ordination track. The sheer, quiet force of these women amazes me. It's all I can do to get myself ready for class on time, so I can't imagine juggling carpool and soccer practice with exegesis and field education.

Marbut, a lawyer and realtor, isn't seeking a degree. He's already had several successful careers. At age sixty, he audits courses because

he wants to be a better Sunday school teacher.

I'm inspired by the younger generation, too, these people of enviable energy and earnest conviction. There's Jorge—"you can call me George"—from Mozambique. He tells me people in his homeland can be killed for their religious beliefs, and he wants to return there one day to make a stand for Christianity. I have never been in danger for my life, much less for my religion, so this revelation stuns me.

There's Farrell, a woman of such exquisite physical beauty that my inclination on first sight is to resent her, but I can't because her spirit is as luminous as her skin. She wants to work with parents of critically ill children, a horror she has lived herself.

John, who works for a rural church, teaches me more about pastoral care in our conversations on the fifth floor of the parking garage than any text ever will. And then there's Dahron, who drinks coffee with me when I need to vent about yet another theological dilemma; and sweet Cait, who rolls her eyes when I say I'm too old to be cramming for an examination or revising a paper.

During my years at VDS, I have been horrified by the Holocaust, encouraged by the Exodus, lifted up behind the lectern, and called on the carpet. I have been challenged and frustrated, delighted and distraught. I have wept in front of teaching fellows and cheered when a colleague offered an especially moving sermon. I've prayed for perseverance in All Faith Chapel and trusted in my own abilities. In essence, I'm having the time of my life.

As I prepare to leave this sacred space, I will take more than another diploma with me into my forty-fifth year. I will take a better understanding of God, and of myself. Such insight knows no age.

The fortysomething essayist was graduated from Millsaps College where she earned a baccalaureate in English before she received the master of arts degree in journalism at the University of Mississippi. While studying at the Earlham School of Religion, Wilson was awarded the 2003 Patrick Henry Christian Writing Fellowship for her accomplishments in creative writing. For the next academic year, she will serve as an editorial assistant for Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life, *published by the Upper Room in Nashville.*

A Beneficent Antiquarian

The greatest accomplishment in Christian Hauer's life as an academician is represented by a modest pin he wears on the lapel of his blue blazer. The rosette insignia indicates that he holds membership in the prestigious Society of Antiquaries of London.

An examination of Hauer's scholarship reveals why he was invited to become a member of the United Kingdom's learned society that conducted its inaugural meeting in 1707 and received a Royal Charter in 1751. A professor of religion, *emeritus,* at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, Hauer has been dedicated always to the disciplines embraced by the Society of Antiquaries: archeology, architecture, art history, conservation, anthropology, music, linguistic study, and church history. His books demonstrate the depth of his interests in these subjects and how easefully he navigates interdisciplinary relationships.

"I am a historian first," states Hauer, BD'55, PhD'59, whose celebrated book, *An Introduction to the Bible: A Journey into Three Worlds,* emphasizes a historical and descriptive approach to the Bible with the intention of encouraging a rational discussion among persons from different perspectives. Co-written with his colleague William Andrew Young, their text is being considered for a seventh edition by Pearson and Prentice Hall.

In their volume *A Comprehensive History of the London Church* and *Parish of Saint Mary, the Virgin, Aldermanbury: The Phoenix of Aldermanbury,* Hauer and Young recount the history of a London parish church from its origins in Saxon England to the rebuilding of the church by Sir Christopher Wren after the Great Fire and finally to the re-erection of the structure on the campus of Westminster College. The church serves as a memorial to Sir Winston Churchill who delivered the historic "Iron Curtain" address at the college in 1946. Hauer's knowledge of British antiquities also has resulted in his receiving an invitation to compose the entry on Sir Christopher Wren for the first biographical dictionary of astronomy.

Christian Hauer Jr., BD'55, PhD'59

The *alumnus* remains ever mindful of the role Vanderbilt Divinity School has played in his educational formation. Royalties from his books support the Hauer Memorial Scholarship Fund which he and his brother, the Reverend Billy J.T. Hauer, BD'59, established as a joint tribute to their parents, Christian Ewing Hauer Sr. and Anna Lee Cotton Hauer.

"Establishing the fund in their names was appropriate because our parents had two Presbyterian minister sons to be graduated from the Divinity School. Dean Jack Forstman once remarked the Hauer Memorial Scholarship is a good example of how people can make a significant contribution by 'persistent giving' over time," remembers Hauer, who spends his retirement years in Huntsville, Alabama.

The Divinity School remains appreciative for the Hauer family's generous, persistent spirit.

The Habit of Moderation

BY SHELTON DOWSLEY CLARK, BA'85

Even those who know the Reverend Arnold Slater, D'32, well may have been surprised that he kept a December 2005 preaching engagement. He had broken his hip two weeks prior to the commitment; however, Slater, pastor *emeritus* of Pilgrim Congregational Church in Chattanooga, was determined to continue an annual tradition of preaching a sermon on the occasion of his birthday.

While he may have been confined to a wheelchair, there was nothing confined in the spirit of the one-hundred-year-old Arnold Slater. The centenarian preached an enthusiastic Christmas sermon before a congregation of two hundred friends and family members who gathered in Patten Chapel on the campus of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Slater still speaks with the lilt of his native England. He came to Vanderbilt after the Congregational seminary he was attending in Atlanta closed its doors.

"The denomination informed the ten seminarians that arrangements had been made with Vanderbilt for us to finish our studies there," remembers Slater, "so in 1929, we came to Nashville."

"At Vanderbilt we found the kind of institution that we thoroughly enjoyed," he continues. "Vanderbilt had good scholarship—academically it was fine—but we liked the spirit," he adds. "It was broad; it was not narrow-minded; it was not sectarian, and it gave us what we were looking for at that time—a broad, inclusive sense of fellowship in the ministry. And we found that the professors were very open, very honest, and very good."

Slater's years at Vanderbilt were not without a major setback.

"I was just about to complete my time there, and I had just married," he says. "We were living in Wesley Hall, which housed the divinity students, and it burned to the ground. And everything we had—books, clothes, notes, Bibles, everything—every single thing—burned to the ground. And when we were graduated about two months after that, we had nothing except our faith and the knowledge in our heads."

His Vanderbilt days proved important not only in his ministerial life but in his personal life as well.

"I served a little church, Highland Chapel, just north of Nashville in a town called Ridgetop," he says. "That is where I met my wife, and I served that church on the weekends for about three years while I was a student at Vanderbilt. For a number of years, they depended on the Vanderbilt students to serve their congregation on the weekends, and it was very, very satisfactory."

The Reverend Arnold Slater, centenarian, D'32

…we got phone calls saying that we better discontinue our efforts against segregation, or we would be sorry for what we were doing…

Another Vanderbilt experience planted the seeds for his ministry during the turbulent civil rights era.

"We had a professor who was very interested in civil rights, and some of us who were in his sociology class went over to Fisk University for a number of weeks," Slater says. "We studied over there, and we got to know the students at Fisk, and that experience influenced our commitment to the civil rights movement."

Slater, who was called to Pilgrim Congregational in 1944, was a well-respected member of the Chattanooga community by the 1960s when tensions surrounding civil rights reached a boiling point in many southern cities.

"It has always been a part of my belief to be inclusive," he contends. "Fortunately, my church here in Chattanooga was willing to let me take my positions, even though sometimes my positions were not acceptable to a number of other people in town. All I did was to get with other people who had similar hopes and aspirations, and we met for weeks and weeks wondering how we should approach this business of desegregation. We had no plans; we did not want to make any unusual gestures. We would work with some of the black leaders and discuss our ideas with them and have them to come in and meet with us. Whenever we had an opportunity, we would speak at a school and present our concerns and our interests. And when the very difficult days came and the stores were preventing the blacks from going in and eating, some of us decided that we would protest such discrimination. I was probably one of the first white men to eat with a black person in one of our downtown restaurants," says Slater.

"And I must say there were times when we had meetings, even at my church, when we got phone calls saying that we better discontinue our efforts against segregation, or we would be sorry for what we were doing. Of course, we didn't pay any attention—we kept on going. But we were not aggressively belligerent; we just quietly believed that desegregation ought to come around. Whenever we, as a group or as individuals, got an opportunity to give our point of view, we did it. And fortunately, we think—we like to think, anyhow—that the influence of this group that had met for months before desegregation became a real issue in Chattanooga was that we had created an atmosphere in which black leaders and white leaders could meet with mutual respect."

In 1971, Slater took a well-deserved retirement—or so he thought. Several Chattanooga residents who spent their weekends on Chickamauga Lake had been meeting for Sunday morning services.

"I had retired, and I thought I was through with the ministry as far as preaching was concerned, but I happened to be there

the Sunday the minister who had been serving them resigned," Slater says. "There were Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, even Catholics, and one Jewish family," he recalls. "We just met as a fellowship, and we had short, brief informal services. We did not organize; we had no leadership, no deacons, no stewards, no treasury; they just called me to serve as pastor from year to year. It turned out I served thirty-four years up to last year. And it turned out to be one of the most satisfying experiences of my whole ministry. I hope I'll be able to serve them this summer."

And how does he feel about having turned one hundred years old?

"All I can say is, God is good to me," Slater answers. "I've had good health all my life—oh, I've had some occasions where I needed to go to the hospital—but I've been very happy, very satisfied. And when somebody asks me how I account for my longevity, I say just by being moderate in my habits—moderate in my eating, moderate in my exercise, moderate in my fun. In other words, I try to be a reasonable person who believes that God has given me a body and that I should take care of it."

Slater's daughter, Betty Soward, adds, "Most of all, I think he's determined," pointing out that her father also recovered from stomach cancer seventeen years ago. "He has come back so far from this fall he had recently. He does what he's supposed to because he wants to get better."

"If I ever come back and have another hundred years to live," adds Slater, "I'll be as satisfied then as I have been in the past."

The essayist earned his baccalaureate in English from Vanderbilt University in 1985 and is a freelance writer in Nashville.

Vanderbilt University Divinity School Alumni/ae *Council Representatives*

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1958	Carol and David Adams
1959	David Hilliard
1960	Harold Montgomery
1964	Joe Pennel
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1969	Chappy Bradner Donna and Ray Dykes
1970	Horace Bass
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1972	Bill Sachs
1974	James Crutcher
1975	Jonathan Clark
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1980	Lauren and David Odell-Scott Kenneth Uselton
1981	Richard Babb
1984	Bill Friskics-Warren
1985	Bill Harkins
1986	Bill Harkins Nancy and Robert Victorin-Vangerud
1989	Jennifer Crane
1990	Larry Condra
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1995	Martha Lyle Ford Molly Hadley Jensen
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2005	Nancy Jenkins Jenny Redding
2006	Cynthia Curtis John Feldhacker Dana Irwin

Graduate Department of Religion

1995-2000 Anthea Butler

Alumni/ae Council members help reconnect classmates with the Divinity School, organize Reunion and Homecoming events, and promote the Annual Fund for Student Support. Not all classes have identified council representatives, so if you would like to volunteer, please contact Kitty Norton Jones at 615/322-4205, or *kitty.nortonjones@vanderbilt.edu.*

Alumni/ae Class Notes

Elbridge Wesley Bartley Jr., BD'40, returned to campus during Commencement 2006 when his granddaughter, Sayler Anne Ault, received the doctorate of jurisprudence from Vanderbilt University Law School.

Earl W. Downing, Oberlin, BD'54, of Brighton Township, Michigan, was featured in an article published in the August 18, 2005, issue of the *Livingston Community News.* The Methodist minister was recognized for his commitment to the Brighton Center for the Performing Arts and for his project, Mission to Poland, a volunteer educational program for teaching English in Kraków and Tarnów.

Harold T. Elmore, BD'55, is serving in his retirement years as coordinator of the *Emeritus* Club at West Virginia Wesleyan College in Buckhannon where he served as a trustee from 1979 to 1994. For his exemplary leadership at the college, he received Wesleyan's Rhododendron Award during the 2005 Founder's Day ceremony.

Richard Alan Bunch, MDiv'70, DD'71, who teaches humanities at Napa Valley College, has been included in *Who's Who in American Education.* He also teaches philosophy and history at Solano College where he received his fourth nomination for Teacher of the Year. He and his family reside in Davis, California.

Richard Hanna Schmidt, MDiv'70, has been appointed editor and executive director of Forward Movement Publications, an agency of the Episcopal Church, located in Cincinnati, Ohio. The author of *Praises, Prayers, and Curses: Conversations with the Psalms,* Schmidt has served Episcopal parishes in West Virginia, Missouri, and Alabama.

James McReynolds, MDiv'71, DD'72, is the author of *Passionate Joy: Building a Wealth of Joy in a World Starved for Love* published by iUniverse.com. Minister of the First Christian Church in Weeping Water, Nebraska, McReynolds wrote the book in an effort to connect the psychology and spirituality of joy to human fulfillment.

Bryon C. Bangert, MDiv'73, DMin'73, research associate at the Poynter Center for the Study of Ethics and American Institutions at Indiana University in Bloomington, is the author of *Consenting to God and Nature: Toward a Theocentric, Naturalistic, Theological Ethics* published in the Princeton Theological Monograph Series.

Lawrence H. Balleine, MDiv'75, is the author of *From a Soldier of Rome to a Soldier for Christ: An Easter Sunrise Drama* published by CSS Publishing Company. He recently completed a forty-day trip down U.S. Highway 41 from upper Michigan to Miami which will serve as the basis for his next book on Lenten themes. *The Spire* is grateful to John R. Killenger Jr., who taught homiletics at the Divinity School from 1964 to 1981, for submitting this class note. *Alumni/ae* also may be interested in Professor Killenger's most recent book, *Winter Soulstice: Celebrating the Spirituality of the Wisdom Years,* published by Crossroad Publishing Company, in which he recounts his experience at the Divinity School.

Mary Fern Richie, BSN'75, MSN'83, MTS'06, works in community outreach with the Nashville YWCA Domestic Violence Center. She writes, "My work with vulnerable women and their children affords me a wonderful opportunity to blend ministry and nursing."

William Edwin Jacobs, MDiv'76, DMin'78, is the author of *Answers to Unanswered Questions of Life and Religion* published by Victory Publishing Company in Decatur, Illinois. The book ventures answers to vital questions of philosophy and religion from a scientifically enlightened trans-denominational Christian perspective. Having served congregations in Kentucky, Indiana, Florida, and Illinois, Jacobs retired in 2000 from ministry in the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ.

W. Alan Smith, MDiv'76, DMin'83, professor of religion at Florida Southern College in Lakeland, participated in the 2005 Oxford Round Table at Lincoln College, Oxford University, where he presented a paper titled "Faith-Based Initiatives Meet the Public Schools: Florida's School Voucher Program and its Effects on Education, Faith, and Public Policy." Established in 1989, the Oxford Round Table convenes to discuss major issues in contemporary educational policy in the United States and England. The subject for the 2005 meeting was "Religion, Education, and the Role of Government."

James J. H. Price, PhD'77, professor of religious studies at Lynchburg College in Virginia, is the recipient of the 2006 T.A. Abbott Award for Faculty Excellence given by the Board of Directors of Higher Education and Leadership Ministries of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. In his letter of nomination, Dr. Vernon Miles, dean of Lynchburg College, remarked, "Professor Price demonstrates character and conviction in his ability to interact with all individuals by treating them as worthy of attention and equality. His actions infer that he truly believes that each individual contributes to the greater good of society and that each individual is a special gift. Through his teaching and personal example, Professor Price inspires not only students but also other faculty and administrators to teach, learn, and contribute to Lynchburg College."

Barbara G. McGarey, MDiv'78, of Duncan, Oklahoma, has received the doctorate of ministry from McCormick Theological Seminary after successfully defending her thesis titled "New Medium, New Community, Same Jesus: Using the Internet to Connect Isolated Rural Clergywomen."

Craig Mitchell Watts, MDiv'79, MS'80, is the author of *Disciple of Peace: Alexander Campbell on Pacifism, Violence, and the State* published by Duolos Christo Press.

Keith Wilson, MDiv'79, serves as a family advocacy program therapist at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where he works to prevent and intervene in domestic violence situations for active-duty soldiers, particularly those returning from Iraq. He recently con-

ducted a workshop at the Scarritt-Bennett Center in Nashville on "Containing Compassion Fatigue: Enhancing the Compassion Connection" for human service providers in need of developing practical skills for preventing burnout.

Bill Harkins, MDiv'86, PhD'01; Paul Shupe, MDiv'87; Bill Friskics-Warren, MDiv'84; and **Bob Victorin-Vangerud, MDiv'86,** reunited as classmates in May to canoe the ninety-two miles of the Allagash Wilderness waterway in Maine.

Richmond Brookshire Adams, MDiv'88, a doctoral student in English at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, presented "Sectarian Excess: Sir John Falstaff's Sociological God-Talk" at the 2006 Sigma Tau Delta Convention in Portland, Oregon. The ideas for his paper originated in Professor Jean Porter's ethics class during the 1988 spring semester through the reading of Ernst Troeltsch's *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches.*

Wendy Farley, PhD'88, associate professor of religion and ethics at Emory University, is the author of *The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth* published by Westminster John Knox Press. Drawing from Christian meditative and mystical traditions, from the symbolism of folk music, and from her own experiences, Farley demonstrates how desire is "the great seal on our souls" and reveals how this holy desire for connection, home, and beauty is wounded in our attempts to cope with the uncertainty and suffering in the human condition.

Becca Stevens, MDiv'90, Episcopal priest for Saint Augustine's Chapel at Vanderbilt University, is the author of *Sanctuary: Unexpected Places Where God Found Me* published by Dimensions for Living Press of Nashville. Stevens also is the founder of Magdalene, a residential community for women with a criminal history of prostitution and drug abuse.

Gregory Reece, MDiv'92, is the author of *Elvis Religion: Exploring the Cult of the King* published by I.B. Tauris Publishers. Reece explores the reasons why the cult of Elvis Presley has become more imaginative posthumously and how the King of Rock 'n' Roll has become transformed into a god-like figure.

Ellen T. Armour, PhD'93, who has begun her tenure as the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Associate Professor of Theology at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, and Susan M. St.Ville, a therapist at the Madison Center, are coeditors of *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler* published by Columbia University Press. Among the essayists are **Teresa Hornsby, PhD'00,** assistant professor of religion and director of the women and gender studies program at Drury University, and **Ken Stone, PhD'95,** professor of Bible, culture, and hermeneutics at the Chicago Theological Seminary.

Christopher Sanders, MDiv'95, the former director of development and *alumni/ae* relations at the Divinity School, has been named director of development at St. Luke's Community House in Nashville. He will maintain his connection to the Divinity School by serving as an *alumni/ae* council representative for the class of 1995.

Evon Flesberg, PhD'96, lecturer in pastoral theology and pastoral counseling at Vanderbilt University Divinity School and the graduate department of religion, has earned the certification of Diplomate from the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. She is the founder of A Talking Place Pastoral Counseling Service in Brentwood, Tennessee.

Jonathan Paul Strandjord, PhD'96, has been appointed to the board of trustees for the Fund for Theological Education. As a trustee elected by the Association of Theological Schools, Strandjord will serve a term of three years and help advance the Fund's mission to encourage a new generation of people to consider vocations in ministry and theological scholarship. He serves as director for theological education for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America Unit for Vocation and Education in Chicago and as chair of the steering committing of the ELCA fund for Leaders in Mission.

Cynthia Ann Curtis, MAT'97, MDiv'06, the 2006 recipient of the Elliott F. Shepard Prize for academic distinction in the discipline of church history, has accepted a one-year teaching appointment in the religion department of Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. Curtis also conducts a Bible study class for high-school women at Christ Church Cathedral.

Monica Anita Coleman, MDiv'98, has been named assistant professor of systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago where she served for two years as director of womanist religious studies and assistant professor of religion.

Daniel Grant Deffenbaugh, PhD'99, associate professor of religion at Hastings College, was named the 2005 Nebraska Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). A pulpit supply minister for the Central Nebraska Presbytery, Deffenbaugh also serves as vice president of The Open Table, an ecumenical organization that provides meals for the hungry.

Asha Dailey Hunter, MEd'99, MDiv'06, recipient of the 2006 Nella May Overby Memorial Award for honors in field education and the Florence Conwell Prize for accomplishments in preaching at the Divinity School, has been appointed to the faculty of the mathematics department at Maplewood High School in Nashville, Tennessee.

Jane Ellen Nickell, MDiv'00, was appointed chaplain of Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania, on February 1, 2006. An ordained minister for the United Methodist Church, Nickell is currently working on her dissertation for the department of religion at Drew University. In her role at Allegheny College, she is responsible for providing pastoral care and religious life leadership to the campus community, offering weekly ecumenical services, and teaching courses in the department of philosophy and religious studies.

Beverly Ross, MDiv'00, who serves as chaplain with VITAS Innovative Hospice Care in South Florida, has been accepted as a supervisory candidate with the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education.

Melinda Grace Brutas Aoanan, MDiv'01, serves as program secretary of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, an ecumenical fellowship of Churches of Christ committed to working for justice, peace, human dignity, and the integrity of creation. She also teaches part-time at the Philippine Women's University in Manila.

Kimberly Nicole Crawford Sheehan, BMus'01, MDiv'05, chaplain and spiritual care coordinator at Odyssey Hospice in Knoxville, Tennessee, has been endorsed as a chaplain by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Amy Marian Ard, MTS'02; and **Michael Waller, MTS'02,** celebrated the second anniversary of their wedding on August 14, 2006. Ard works in marketing, national policy, and program development for the Rural Coalition (Coalición Rural), an alliance of regionally and culturally diverse organizations dedicated to building a more just and sustainable food system that brings fair returns to minority and other small farmers and rural communities. The alliance works to ensure just and fair working conditions for farm workers, protect the environment, and deliver safe and healthy food to consumers. Waller was graduated in May 2005 from the Washington College of Law at American University and is an associate in the financial institutions department for the firm of WilmerHale. They reside in Washington, D.C.

Janet Todd Salyer, MDiv'02, was ordained to the ministry on November 20, 2005, at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee.

Eric Christopher Smith, MTS'02, associate minister for adults at Biltmore United Methodist Church in Asheville, North Carolina, has been accepted for admission to the joint degree program between Iliff School of Theology and the University of Denver. He will begin his studies for the doctorate of philosophy in the fall of 2007.

Shelli Yoder, MDiv'02, has been appointed executive director of the Eating Disorders Coalition of Tennessee, a nonprofit organization established in 2003 by health professionals and community leaders as a resource of hope, help, and support for anyone affected by disordered eating.

Bryan Bennington Bliss, MTS'04, director of youth and young adults for Williamson's Chapel United Methodist Church in Mooresville, North Carolina; his wife, Michelle, and their daughter, Eleanor Grace (Nora), announce the birth of Bryan Bennington (Ben) Bliss II. Ben was welcomed to the Bliss family on Father's Day, June 18, 2006.

Jason Crosby, MDiv'04, was ordained to the ministry on April 2, 2006, at the First Baptist Church of Battle Creek, Michigan.

Adam Fronczek, MDiv'04, was elected on March 13, 2006, to the position of associate pastor for adult education and worship by the congregation of Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago. He will be responsible for the administration, expansion, and development of educational opportunities. Fronczek was installed during the worship service on Sunday, July 23.

Conor Picken, MTS'04, has begun graduate studies in English at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

Patricia Brock, MDiv'05, recipient of the 2006 J.D. Owen Prize for accomplishments in the study of Hebrew Bible at the Divinity School, serves as minister of congregational care at the Temple Church in Nashville, Tennessee.

George Wyatt Cunningham, MDiv'05, was ordained to the order of Christian ministry in the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, on December 10, 2005, at Central Christian Church in Murfreesboro. The homily was delivered by Brad Braxton, associate professor of homiletics and New Testament at Vanderbilt University Divinity School. During Commencement 2006, Cunningham and **Meredith Siler, MDiv'06** were recipients of the Chalice Press Book Awards for their academic distinction as representatives of the Disciples of Christ faith tradition and the Disciples Divinity House at Vanderbilt University.

Lea Marcella McCracken, MDiv'05, her husband, Thomas, and their three-year-old son, Kerby, welcomed Marcella Wells (Marcy) McCracken to their family on January 28, 2006.

Courtney Evans, MDiv'05, has been appointed communications coordinator for the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development.

Vona Rose Wilson High, MDiv'05, serves as youth minister for the congregation at the First United Methodist Church in Franklin, Tennessee. During Commencement 2006, she received the Saint James Academy Award for composing the most outstanding sermon in her homiletics courses.

Thomas Carleton Krueger, MTS'05, is a volunteer with Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) and writes from a hospital in Mambo Point, Monrovia, "I am the sole surgeon at the hospital and perform ten to thirteen operations daily. Conditions for surgery are very difficult: no water, no sanitation, no electricity. And we see cases of trauma, child rapes, malaria and typhoid, as well as schistosomiasis, cholera, intermittent epidemic and episodic viral hemorrhagic fever. The theology one might construct and apply to life in Liberia is one that my experiences at the Divinity School cannot easily address. Please pray for the Liberians and my work among them."

Jenny Tyler Redding, MDiv'05, and **Jonathan Daniel Rhodes, MDiv'04,** were married on May 26, 2006, at the First United Methodist Church in Jackson, Tennessee. Redding currently is pursuing a master's degree in special education at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University.

Stephanie Barger, MDiv'06, serves as coordinator of the crisis center for Family and Children's Services in Nashville, Tennessee.

Lindsey Blackwelder, MTS'06, traveled during the summer of 2006 to Kampala, Uganda, where she served as a volunteer at an HIV/AIDS hospice.

John McFatridge Feldhacker, MDiv'06, the 2006 recipient of the Umphrey Lee Dean's Award for exemplifying the mission and vision of Vanderbilt University Divinity School, serves as associate pastor at West End United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee.

William Travis Leitze Garner, MTS'06, serves as associate youth minister at Brentwood United Methodist Church.

Peter Whittlesey Gray, MTS'06, a postulant in the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, attends Virginia Theological Seminary in preparation for ordination in the Episcopal Church. He attended Vanderbilt University Divinity School as a Carpenter Scholar and received the Academic Achievement Award and the Wilbur F. Tillett Prize in theology during Commencement 2006.

Sherry Narrimore Harris, MDiv'06, serves as an associate pastor at Vestavia Hills United Methodist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.

Amy Kathleen Jay, MTS'06, attends the Louis D. Brandeis School of Law at the University of Louisville.

James Andrew Metzger, PhD'06, received the 2006 Luke-Acts Prize at Vanderbilt University for his dissertation titled *Reading Consumption and Wealth in Luke's Travel Narrative.* He has accepted an appointment as visiting assistant professor in the department of religion and philosophy at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa.

Kristen Michelle Taylor, MTS'06, has accepted a position with Teach for America as an elementary school teacher in Saint Louis, Missouri.

Obituaries

H. Hugh Kelly, BD'44, of Brewerton, New York, on May 10, 2006, at the age of 89. He retired in 1971 as a minister for the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ.

Donald H. Fortune, Oberlin, B'48, of Lake Wales, Florida, on October 14, 2004, at the age of 77.

Thomas D. Peterson, BA'48, BD'52, MA'58, of Greenfield, New York, on November 9, 2005, at the age of 82. A trustee for the Wesley Health Care Center and a board member of the Foundation for Baroque Music in Saratoga Springs, he was ordained as a minister for the United Methodist Church in 1951 and served congregations in New Jersey, Massachusetts, and New York.

George A. Parsons Jr., Oberlin, BD'49, of Columbus, Ohio, on June 30, 2005, at the age of 84. A developer of work projects around the world, he traveled to Nicaragua to immunize youth during a severe outbreak of polio in 1969. Parsons served for twenty-five years as senior pastor of Garfield Memorial Methodist Church, and he will be remembered for his progressive theology and visionary thinking.

Don E. Marietta Jr., BD'50, PhD'59, of West Palm Beach, Florida, on March 30, 2006, at the age of 79. A former Methodist minister who later became an Episcopal priest and environmental activist, Marietta served as the first Adelaide Snyder Professor of Ethics at Florida Atlantic University. He wrote *Philosophy of Sexuality, Introduction to Ancient Philosophy, Beyond Certainty: A Phenomenological Approach to Moral Reflection,* and *For People and the Planet: Holism and Humanism in Environmental Ethics.* He also served as coeditor for *Environmental Philosophy and Environmental Activism.*

Donald Eugene Kribbs, MDiv'52, of Nashville, Tennessee, on May 9, 2006, at the age of 86. A retired Methodist minister who served congregations in Tennessee and Florida, he also worked in addictions counseling and management through his appointment as executive director of regional alcoholism councils in Nashville and Hartford, Connecticut, and as addictions program supervisor for the city of Cleveland, Ohio, and for the state of Florida.

Churchill Hunt Cox, BD'53, of Peru, Indiana, on March 5, 2006, at the age of 79. He was a minister for the United Methodist Church and was known for his musical talent and keen wit.

Robert F. Berkey, BD'55, of South Hadley, Massachusetts, on December 23, 2005. An ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, he taught for forty years in the religion department of Mount Holyoke College.

Richard E. Appel, MST'57, of Lebanon Ohio, on January 23, 2005.

J. William Turley, BD'58, of Morgantown, West Virginia, on December 5, 2005. He was pastor, *emeritus,* of the Spruce Street United Methodist Church in Morgantown.

Herman Dix Archer, BD'59, of Memphis Tennessee, on December 3, 2004, at the age of 73.

James R. Denney, MDiv'62, of Bluefield, West Virginia, on October 29, 2005, at the age of 72. A minister for the West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church, he served as a pastor for thirty-six years.

Howard A. Hayes, DMin'63, of Johnson City, Tennessee, on October 14, 2005, at the age of 98. Among the founders of Midwest Christian College in Oklahoma City where he served as academic dean and professor of church history, he later assumed these roles at Minnesota Bible College in Rochester. He also held faculty appointments at Milligan College in Tennessee and at Bluefield College of Evangelism in West Virginia.

John R. Long, DMin'66, of Dalton, Ohio, on January 30, 2006, at the age of 86. A retired Lutheran pastor for the Ohio Synod, he served as president for the Ohio Chaplain Association and was a member of the Board of Mental Health in Wooster.

George E. Sanford, BD'67, of Alachua, Florida, on February 14, 2004, at the age of 81.

Evan Harold Bergwall Jr., BD'68, of Cumming, Georgia, on February 16, 2006, at the age of 62. A member of the American Psychological Association and the Northern Indiana Methodist Conference, he served as director of the Roswell United Methodist Church Counseling Center in Georgia from 1979 to 1992.

Edwin Franklin Belue, MDiv'69, of Pelham, Alabama, on June 25, 2005, at the age of 65. A member of the clergy for the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church, he earned his doctorate in educational administration from the University of Alabama and held membership in the Alabama Counseling Society.

Ralph E. Hoffman, MDiv'69, of Inverness, Florida, on April 1, 2006, at the age of 81. He was pastor, *emeritus,* of the First Presbyterian Church of Inverness where he served the congregation from 1968 to 1989 and where he returned as volunteer minister of pastoral care in 2004. He will be remembered for his profound commitment to community service.

William Fulton Connor, PhD'73, of Great Falls, Montana, on March 7, 2006, at the age of 81. A professor of philosophy at Phillips University in Enid, Oklahoma, he later served the congregation of First Christian Church in Hamilton, Montana.

Stuart Moore Jr., DMin'76, of Springfield, Tennessee, on February 25, 2006, at the age of 75. He was a retired minister for the Presbyterian Church.

Roland Morris Travis, DMin'78, of Ellicott City, Maryland, on April 30, 2004, at the age of 62.

Jean Tallmon Bruhn, MDiv'81, of Milford, Nebraska, on April 18, 2006, at the age of 61. An accomplished pianist and music educator, she taught in the public school systems of Denver, Colorado, and Aberdeen, South Carolina, before moving to Charlotte, North Carolina, where she was named outstanding teacher of the year. While pursuing the master of divinity degree at Vanderbilt Divinity School, she served as musical director for Woodbine United Methodist Church in Nashville. She was graduated first in her class and received the Founder's Medal during the 1981 commencement exercises. Upon her ordination, Bruhn served congregations in the Methodist Conference of Nebraska.

Clyde Jackson Wood, DMin83, of Hazel Green, Alabama, on October 4, 2005.

Charles Henderson Lee, MDiv'87, of Arden, North Carolina, on June 19, 2006.

Deborah Hayes Runions, D'00, of Nashville, Tennessee, on October 17, 2005, at the age of 55, thirteen years after being diagnosed as HIV positive. Founder of the Tennessee State Department of Education's HIV Prevention Program, she served on President Bill Clinton's HIV/AIDS Advisory Council and spoke on behalf of American citizens living with AIDS at the 1996 Democratic National Convention. Runions received the Deihl Award from the Comprehensive Care Center in Nashville for being a "tireless advocate for people who do not have a voice."

Katherine Elise Moss Simmons, MDiv'01, of Huntsville, Alabama, on April 26, 2005, at the age of 53. An attorney who represented Native Americans in Oklahoma and who provided legal services for the indigent in Alabama, she also served as general counsel to Birmingham Southern College. Upon earning her degree from the Divinity School, she was appointed associate minister at Trinity United Methodist Church in Huntsville.

Faculty, Staff, and Friends

Jordan Stokes Brown III, of Springfield, Tennessee, on July 15, 2005, at the age of 90, following an illness of eight weeks. A partner with his father in the Pike & Brown Insurance Agency, he later became a securities and real estate investor and worked at his office daily until the onset of his illness. A former trustee of Scarritt College, he was active in civic affairs and served as treasurer of the First United Methodist Church of Springfield for thirty-five years.

William Sloane Coffin

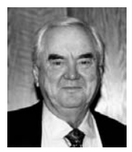
William Sloane Coffin, of Strafford, Vermont, on April 12, 2006, at the age of 81. A Presbyterian minister, civil rights activist, Freedom Rider, and antiwar campaigner, Coffin sought to inspire and encourage an idealistic and rebellious generation of college students in the 1960s from his position as chaplain of Yale University. As senior minister of Riverside Church in New York, he drew attention to the plight of the poor, questioned American political and military power, encouraged interfaith understanding, and campaigned for nuclear disarmament. He preached that courage was the first virtue because "courage makes all other virtues possible," and he argued that the true patriot is "one who maintains a lover's quarrel with one's country."

Alumni/ae of the Divinity School will remember Coffin from the two academic terms he was in residence as the Anne Potter Wilson Distinguished Visiting Professor. Inscribed on the memorial card which the School received from the family was Coffin's celebrated quotation: "God's love does not seek value; it creates value. It is not because we have value that we are loved; it is because we are loved that we have value. Our value is a gift, not an achievement."

DANIEL DUBOIS

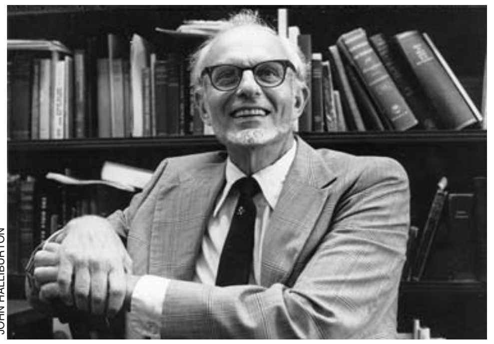
Karen Dolan

Karen Lynn Dolan, G'04, of Nashville, Tennessee, on May 1, 2006, at the age of 52, from the effects of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). As registrar for the Graduate School of Vanderbilt University, she will be remembered by the students in the graduate department of religion for her kindness, efficiency, candor, sense of humor, and courage.



Robert W. Funk

Robert W. Funk, PhD'53, of Santa Rosa, California, on September 3, 2005, at the age of 79. A professor of New Testament at Vanderbilt University Divinity School from 1966 to 1969 and chair of the graduate department of religion, Funk was a distinguished teacher, writer, translator, and publisher in the field of religion. He retired from the University of Montana to found the Westar Institute, a nonprofit research and educational institute dedicated to the advancement of religious literacy. Westar's first project, the Jesus Seminar, renewed the quest for the historical Jesus begun by David Friedrich Strauss in the nineteenth century and later taken up by Albert Schweitzer at the beginning of the twentieth century. A Guggenheim Fellow and Fulbright Senior Scholar, Funk served as Annual Professor of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem and as executive secretary of the Society of Biblical Literature.



JOHN HALLIBURTON

Lou H. Silberman, Hillel Professor of Jewish Literature and Thought, emeritus

Lou H. Silberman, the Hillel Professor of Jewish Literature and Thought, *emeritus,* of Tucson, Arizona, on June 6, 2006, at the age of 91. Before his appointment to Vanderbilt University in 1952, Silberman served as a rabbi in Omaha and in Dallas. During the twenty-eight years of his tenure at the University, he chaired the undergraduate department of religious studies, helped to establish the graduate department of religion, advanced the Judaica collection at the Divinity School Library, and encouraged Jewish and Christian communities to engage in critical dialogues about the implications of the Shoah in the years following World War II. For his distinguished service to Vanderbilt, he received the Thomas Jefferson Award in 1979. Silberman also was among a group of Vanderbilt professors who offered their resignations over the expulsion in 1960 of civil rights leader and Divinity School student James Lawson.

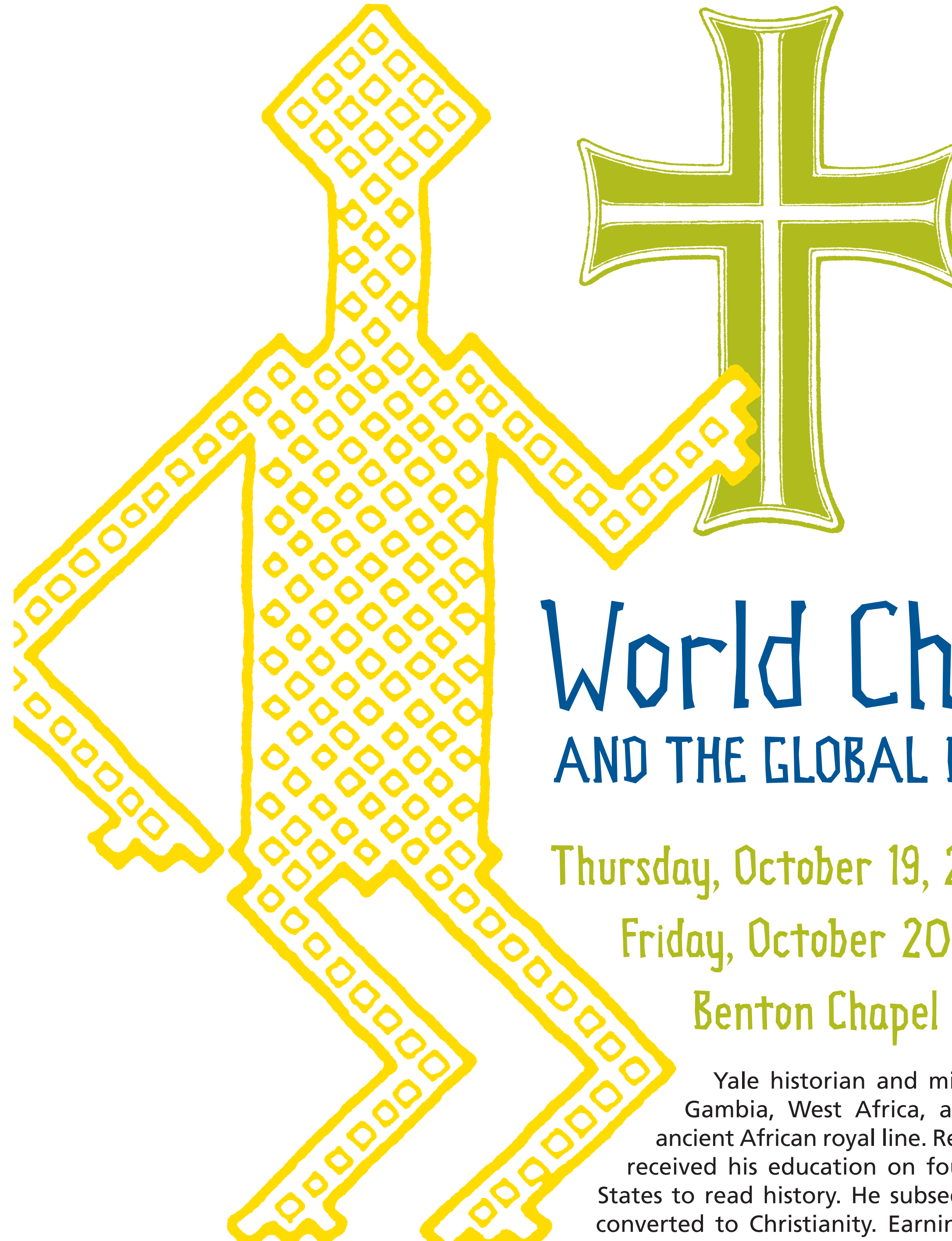
"If anyone built Jewish studies at Vanderbilt, it was Lou Silberman," contends Dale Johnson, the Drucilla Moore Buffington Professor of Church History, *emeritus.* "His quiet dedication made Jewish studies an important part of the religious studies field of vision."

"He was a patient but demanding mentor for graduate students and younger faculty members," says Daniel Patte, professor of New Testament, early Christianity, and religious studies. "Professor Silberman's scholarship found its most powerful expression in incisive pioneering articles that again and again transformed the field of early Jewish studies by envisioning a different way of approaching a text."

details from *The Word of God* Window
Benton Chapel
Vanderbilt University Divinity School
1960
conceived and executed by Robert Harmon,
of Emil Frei Associates, Incorporated,
Saint Louis, Missouri
funded by *alumni/ae* in honor of
Dean John Keith Benton

photographed by Neil Brake

For an explanation of the window's iconographic program, refer to the article titled "A Bountiful Tableau: the Laity's Primer On the Art Work of Benton Chapel" in this issue of *The Spire.*



Vanderbilt University Divinity School
announces the
107th Cole Lectures
to be delivered during
Reunion and Homecoming 2006
by **Lamin Sanneh,**
The D. Willis James Professor
of Missions & World Christianity
and Professor of History
Yale University

World Christianity
AND THE GLOBAL BALANCE OF POWER

Thursday, October 19, 2006, 7:00 p.m.
Friday, October 20, 2006, 10:00 a.m.
Benton Chapel

Yale historian and missiologist Lamin Sanneh was born in the Gambia, West Africa, and is descended from the *nyanchos,* an ancient African royal line. Reared in an orthodox Muslim family, Sanneh received his education on four continents and traveled to the United States to read history. He subsequently became a naturalized citizen and converted to Christianity. Earning the doctorate of philosophy in Islamic history from the University of London, Sanneh served as a professor at Harvard University for eight years before his appointment in 1989 to Yale.

"World Christianity is not a free-standing phenomenon but a movement in active interface with the cultures and religions of the world. In more than twenty years of study and writing on the subject, I have become convinced of a major shift in Christianity's North Atlantic Center of gravity. **Contrary to many predictions, religion has survived with greater strength into the twenty-first century,** and equally surprising, so has Christianity with ever-greater diversity."
—LAMIN SANNEH

An exceedingly prolific writer within the discipline of religious history, Sanneh is the author of *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World; Whose Religion is Christianity?: The Gospel beyond the West;* and *The Crown and the Turban: Muslims and West African Pluralism.* Among Sanneh's books that have made significant contributions to interreligious dialogue is *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* in which he argues that contrary to the folklore that passes for social science, and in sharp contrast to Islam, Christianity preserves indigenous life and culture because of the emphasis on mother-tongue translation.

In recognition of his contributions to scholarship, the Republic of Senegal bestowed the title Commandeur de l'Order National du Lion, the country's highest national honor. He also received appointments from Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI as consultor to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

Philanthropist Edmund W. Cole, president of Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad and treasurer of the Vanderbilt University Board of Trust, endowed the annual Cole Lecture Series in 1892 "for the defense and advocacy of the Christian religion." Cole's gift provided for the first sustained lectureship in the history of Vanderbilt University.

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She arrived at VANDERBILT DIVINITY SCHOOL *with more* QUESTIONS *than* ANSWERS.

MIKE STRASINGER

You supported her during
the lectures…the seminars…
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