

# CIRCA

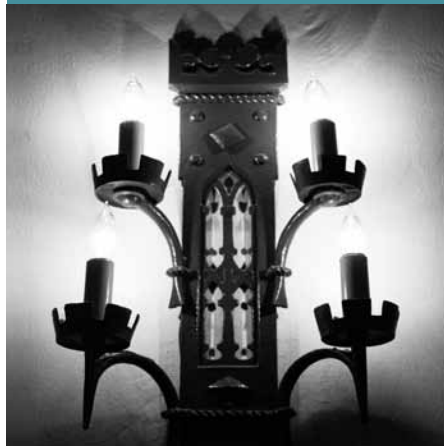
News from the University of Chicago Divinity School

I HAD INTENDED TO FOLLOW MY LAST *CIRCA* COLUMN WITH A VIEW INTO SOME OF the tasks (both expected and unexpected) that make their way with regularity into the inbox on my desk, now that July 1 is a distant memory and I am well underway in the deanship. But I expect that there will be more than ample time for that, and so instead would prefer today to give a better sense of what it means to be the ambassador for the Divinity School by recounting a not atypical set of three days in mid-November.

On a Thursday evening in November, I had the pleasure of a mid-week visit to the Art Institute of Chicago, to hear Professor Wendy Doniger, Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Religions, speak to a packed crowd under the auspices of the Chicago Humanities Festival. Her lecture, with accompanying slides, “The Lingam Made Flesh: Split-Level Symbolism in Hindu Art,” was a marvelous display of erudition, insight, humor, and hermeneutical savvy. She traced both the history of production of these “cylindrical votary objects” (as she put it, with dry neutrality) representing the god Shiva — from ancient Indian temples to the present — and the history of interpretation of these phallic images, down to the present, demonstrating how the ambiguity inherent in much religious symbolism may be incorporated into various systems of commitments and ongoing controversies.

The next night, I joined a crowd of students, faculty, South Siders and music adepts in Mandel Hall to participate in an extraordinary music improvisation event. This evening performance was part of a fall quarter course, “Improvisation as a Way of Life,” co-taught by Professors George Lewis (of Columbia University in New York) and Arnold Davidson, Robert O. Anderson Distinguished Service Professor in Philosophy and in Divinity (in the areas of Philosophy of Religions and History of Judaism). Davidson and Lewis, the great trombonist, composer and scholar (and Chicago native), organized this electrifying evening around improv that included performances by Lewis and his computer, the AACM Great Black Music Ensemble,

## Letter from the Dean



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and the European free-jazz pianist Alexander von Schlippenbach, and an interlude conversation about what improv is, how it happens and what it might mean philo-

sophically. Arnold urged the audience “to go beyond already established models of intelligibility and habitual practices of the self ... [in search of] new forms of self and of social intelligibility, new modes of freedom” on the promise that “attentive improvisatory listening can transfigure our lives.”

On Saturday morning I drove twenty miles in a light rain out of the city to Homewood, Illinois, to Faith Lutheran Church (ELCA), to attend the ordination of one of our M.Div. graduates, Erin Bouman. I had taught Erin in several classes during her time at Chicago, including a memorable seminar on the Gospel of Mark with students who tended to stay on after class (one and even two hours) with Greek New Testaments in hand, debating such issues as whether the disciples in Mark ever “get it,” or whether the statement of the centurion in 15:39 is a straightforward, or ironic, declaration. Rev. Cynthia Lindner, the Director of our Ministry Program, gave the sermon on the occasion of Rev. Bouman’s ordination, including a children’s message in which she asked some dozen three- to ten-year-olds who came forward, “just what does it take to make a pastor?,” drawing on analogies about what it takes to train a dentist, a plumber or a teacher.

After Erin was duly ordained, she announced that in this same church, thirty-eight years ago, Karen Knutson became the first woman in the LCA (Lutheran Church in America) ordained to a regular parish position. Pastor Knutson, who was on hand for this occasion, is herself a graduate of the Divinity School. A native

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## Mitchell — *Continued from page 1*

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of Denmark, Rev. Knutson was a path-breaker not only in the church, but also at the Divinity School, where she received the Th.M. in 1971 and D.Min. in 1972, one of very few women in ministry studies in Swift Hall in those days. She also told a few memorable stories about how a culture of male-only clergy only very slowly becomes transformed (one paradigm-shaking incident involved her preaching a sermon while seven months pregnant, with leg in a cast, from a bar stool). The living link between Revs. Bouman and Knutson, and between them and the Divinity School, was a palpable index of the transformative potential of education in the process of social change.

As I drove back to Hyde Park I thought of how Wendy's lingam-lecture, Arnold's exhilarating improv event and Karen and Erin's keen gifts for ministry united this uncommon place which is the Divinity



School. All are concentrating on vital issues around how living religious and cultural traditions are critically engaged with the best of one's mind and imagination, eager for conversation with the most diverse possible publics, and (as in the spirit of improv) unafraid of unexpected consequences. □

— Margaret M. Mitchell, *Dean and Professor of New Testament and Early Christian Literature*

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### Jean-Luc Marion

*Le croire pour le voir: réflexions diverses sur la rationalité de la révélation et l'irrationalité de quelques croyants*

Paris: Parole et Silence

Reflections on the rationality of revelation and the irrationality of some believers.

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### Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds.

*The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History, 3rd Edition*

New York: Oxford University Press

Tracing the dramatic changes in Jewish religion, culture, and identity from the seventeenth century to 1948, *The Jew in the Modern World* remains the most complete source-book on modern Jewish history available. Now thoroughly expanded and updated, this critically acclaimed volume of primary materials features previously unpublished and inaccessible sources concerning the Jewish experience in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa; women in Jewish history; American Jewish life; the Holocaust; and Zionism and the nascent Jewish community in Palestine on the eve of the establishment of the State of Israel.

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### Margaret M. Mitchell

*Paul, the Corinthians, and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Proposing a fresh approach to early Christian exegesis, Mitchell shows how in the Corinthian letters Paul was fashioning the very principles

that later authors would use to interpret all scripture. Originally delivered as The Speaker's Lectures in Biblical Studies at Oxford University, this volume recreates the dynamism of the Pauline letters in their immediate historical context and beyond it in their later use by patristic exegetes.

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### Martha Nussbaum

*Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*

Princeton: Princeton University Press

Nussbaum makes a passionate case for the importance of the liberal arts at all levels of education, arguing that we must resist efforts to reduce education to a tool of the gross national product. Rather, we must work to reconnect education to the humanities in order to give students the capacity to be true democratic citizens of their countries and the world.

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### Levmore, Saul and Martha Nussbaum, eds.

*The Offensive Internet: Speech, Privacy, and Reputation*

Cambridge: Harvard University Press

The distinguished scholars assembled in this volume, drawn from law and philosophy, connect the absence of legal oversight with harassment and discrimination. Questioning the simplistic notion that abusive speech and mobocracy are the inevitable outcomes of new technology, they argue that current misuse is the outgrowth of social, technological, and legal choices.

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### Martin Riesebrodt

*The Promise of Salvation: A Theory of Religion — Translated by Steven Rendall*

Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Riesebrodt undertakes a task that is at once simple and monumental: to define, understand, and explain religion as a universal concept.

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### Susan Schreiner

*Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era*

New York: Oxford University Press

Schreiner argues that Europe in the sixteenth century was preoccupied with concerns similar to ours; both the desire for certainty and warnings against certainty permeated the earlier era. Digging beneath overt theological and philosophical problems, she tackles the underlying fears of the period as she addresses questions of salvation, authority, the rise of skepticism, the outbreak of religious violence, the discernment of spirits, and the ambiguous relationship between appearance and reality.

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### William Schweiker

*Dust that Breathes: Christian Faith and the New Humanisms*

Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell

In this insightful look at the practical challenges and possibilities for Christian life in the global age, Schweiker investigates Christianity's current relevance and discusses how the life of faith can be oriented.

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### Jeffrey Stackert, Barbara Nevling Porter, and David P. Wright, eds.

*Gazing on the Deep: Ancient Near Eastern and Other Studies in Honor of Tzvi Abusch*

Bethesda, MD: CDL Press

Essays on the history, religion, language, and culture of the Ancient Near East as well as articles on ancient Israel and the Bible, including essays on later Jewish History and Indic studies.

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### Sugarman, Jeremy and Daniel P. Sulmas, eds.

*Methods in Medical Ethics, 2nd Edition*

Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press

In this first book to systematically examine, critique, and challenge some of these disciplines and their methods in light of their influence on medical ethics, leading scholars present particular methods that have played significant roles in the field.

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### Christian K. Wedemeyer and Wendy Doniger, eds.

*Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade*

New York: Oxford University Press

This volume comprises papers presented at the Divinity School's 2006 conference marking the 50th anniversary of Joachim Wach's death and the centennial of Mircea Eliade's birth. Its purpose is to reconsider both the problematic, separate legacies of these two major twentieth-century historians of religions, and the bearing of these two legacies upon each other.