Dear Alumni and Friends —

O


Next is “Inspiration in the Overlap: Silk Road Theatre Project and the First United Methodist Church at the Chicago Temple,” a piece by Divinity School alumnus Jamil Khoury. This piece, which includes an interview with Reverend Philip Blackwell, another Divinity School alumnus and the pastor of the church, discusses the secular partnership, shared by these two institutions, based on shared values and intersecting missions.

Following is the 2008 Nuveen Lecture, delivered on November 20, 2008, in Swift Lecture Hall. The 2008 Nuveen Lecturer was Leon Kass, the Addie Clark Harding Professor in the John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought, and his lecture titled “Defending Human Dignity: What it is and Why it Matters.”

Concluding this issue is a reflection by Richard A. Rosengarten, Dean of the Divinity School, entitled “Religion in the Academy.” This reflection was delivered on November 9, 2008, in Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, on the occasion of the installation of Elizabeth J.L. Davenport as the sixth Dean of “the Rock.” In his reflection Dean Rosengarten looks at the place of religion in the academy today, and the particular case of the University of Chicago.

As always, my thanks to Shatha Almutawa, editorial assistant, and Robin Winge, designer.

I hope you enjoy this issue,

Terren Ilana Wein, Editor
1 Contents & List of Contributors

2 Is there a Future for Gender and Theology?  
On Gender, Contemplation, and the Systematic Task  
Sarah Coakley

13 Inspiration in the Overlap  
Silk Road Theatre Project and the First United Methodist Church at the Chicago Temple  
Jamil Khoury

18 Defending Human Dignity  
What it is and Why it Matters  
Leon Kass

28 Religion in the Academy  
On the Installation of Elizabeth J.L. Davenport as the Sixth Dean of Rockefeller Memorial Chapel  
Richard A. Rosengarten

31 Alumni News

Sarah Coakley is the Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity and a Fellow of New Hall at the University of Cambridge.

Jamil Khoury is the Artistic Director of the Silk Road Theatre Project. He received his A.M. from the Divinity School in 1992.

Leon Kass is the Addie Clark Harding Professor in the John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought and the College.

Richard A. Rosengarten is Dean and Associate Professor of Religion and Literature in the Divinity School.
Is there a Future for Gender and Theology?

On Gender, Contemplation, and the Systematic Task

What I present to you this evening is offered in Alex Hivoltze-Jimenez’s memory and bespeaks, I hope, something of what I learnt from him in a class on Christianity and gender which was—as it turned out—one of the last I taught at Harvard. It was also, for me, one of the most exciting and fulfilling. Towards the end of that term, when I had simultaneously been struggling behind the scenes with a difficult chapter in my systematics which somehow refused to find completion, I ran some of this material by the class and was greatly aided and encouraged by their responses and criticisms, amongst them those offered by Alex. At all events, I am very glad and grateful to be here, and deeply honored and touched to be giving the first in this series of lectures in Alex’s memory.

Is there a future for gender and (systematic) theology? One might well wonder, since feminist theology of the 1970s and ’80s is widely seen, now, as having effectively exhausted its potential (a matter we could discuss); and gender studies, manifestly alive and kicking in contrast, is predominantly secular and often actively anti-theological in tone. My answer to my own question will—of course—be “yes:” there is a future; but to get to how and why, I shall first have to rehearse a number of (very good) reasons why it is often held these days that systematic theology is itself a doomed undertaking; and why its classic blindness to questions of power, gender and sexuality makes it seemingly oxymoronic positively to promote a systematic theology engaged with such issues. So what I shall be arguing tonight is something perhaps a little surprising. My claim will be that only systematic theology (of a particular sort) can adequately and effectively respond to the rightful critiques that gender studies and political and liberation theology have laid at its door. And only gender studies, inversely, and its accompanying political insights, can thus properly re-animate systematic theology for the future.

Now the combination of these particular two sides of my argument is admittedly unusual. It is customary, as just noted, for post-modern gender theorists (insofar as they have dealings with matters of religion at all) to be extremely skeptical about the project of systematic theology. It is perhaps even more common, conversely, for systematic theolo-
...this false disjunction...needs not so much to be overcome, but rather to be approached from a different, and mind-changing, direction.

So much by way of brief introduction. I want to move now to the first major undertaking of this paper—a brief examination of the three most significant contemporary critiques, as I see it, of the very idea of systematic theology. Note that for these purposes I propose to define systematic theology thus: it is an integrated presentation of Christian truth, however perceived (that's what system here connotes); wherever one chooses to start has implications for the whole, and the parts must fit together. However briefly, or lengthily, it is explicated (and the shorter versions have, in Christian tradition, often been at least as elegant, effective and enduring as the longer ones), systematic theology attempts to provide a coherent and alluring unfolding of the connected parts of its vision.

Why is Systematic Theology Distrusted?

Why, then, is systematic theology deemed contentious in our own post-modern age, even as it paradoxically enjoys a notable period of revival? Why is order so often perceived as a front for abuse, and system as an assumed repression?

Three often interlocked, contemporary forms of resistance to systematic theology can readily be identified, and cumulatively they might seem to be powerful. No one here will be unfamiliar with these critiques, and so I shall outline them only briefly. After I have done so, I shall return to the issue of desire that animates my systematic project, and show how these problems connect to it.

The first resistance to systematic theology resides in the philosophical critique of so-called onto-theology: it claims that systematic theology falsely, and idolatrously, turns God into an object of human knowledge. The second resistance arises from the moral or political critique of so-called hegemony: it sees systematic theology (amongst other discourses that provide any purportedly complete vision of an intellectual landscape), as inappropriately totalizing, and thereby necessarily suppressive of the voices and perspectives of marginalized people. The third resistance is the French feminist critique, arising from a particular brand of Lacanian psychoanalytic thought. It accuses systematic thinking (of any sort)
of being phallocentric, that is, ordered according to the symbolic,1 male mode of thinking which seeks to clarify, control and master. It is thereby repressive of creative materials culturally associated with femininity and the female body, which are characteristically pushed into the unconscious.

I shall need to look briefly at each of these stringent criticisms in turn, but with a particular eye to assessing how they might be answered with the aid of the insights of my contemplative théologie totale. The very act of contemplation—repeated, lived, embodied, suffered—is an act that, by grace, and over time, precisely inculcates mental patterns of un-mastery;2 welcomes the dark realm of the unconscious, opens up a radical attention to the other, and instigates an acute awareness of the messy entanglement of sexual desires and desire for God. The vertiginous free-fall of contemplation, then, is not only the means by which a disciplined form of unknowing makes way for a new and deeper knowledge-beyond-knowledge; it is also the necessary accompanying practice of a theology committed to ascetic transformation. When one looks at the three resistances to systematic theology I have just outlined, one can already note how revealingly themes of knowledge, power and gender are entangled and woven into these three objections. One begins to glimpse why it is that issues of sexuality, desire and gender cannot by mere fiat, or simple denial, be dissociated from the claim to be able to continue the task of systematic theology. It is no good denying the force of our three critiques. One cannot simply look away.

Answering the Charges against Systematic Theology: A Response from the Perspective of Théologie Totale

That systematic theology should be perceived as necessarily engaged in a false reification of God, first, is the accusation made when systematics is seen as implicated in a form of onto-theology. But what exactly does this accusation mean? The charge of course goes back to Heidegger’s claim that Greek philosophical metaphysics was already engaged in an inappropriate attempt to explain or capture the divine, the ultimate Cause, and so to reify, and banalify, being; and, further, that classical and scholastic Christian theology, in its dependence on Greek metaphysics, unthinkingly extended such a trait into its projects of philosophical and systematic theology.3 Even Thomas Aquinas has been (falsely) accused of such an onto-theological error.4

But the mistake in the charge itself, of course, is that it has failed to understand the proper place of the apophatic dimensions of classic Christian thought itself. Once there is a full and ready acknowledgement that to make claims about God involves a fundamental submission to mystery and unknowing, a form of unknowing more fundamental even than the positive accession of contentful revelation, the onto-theological charge loses its edge. Indeed, one might say it becomes a mere shadowboxing. For God, by definition, cannot be an extra item in the universe (a very big one) to be known, and so controlled, by human intellect, will or imagination. God is, rather, that-without-which-there-would-be-nothing-at-all; God is the source and sustainer of all being, and, as such, the dizzying mystery encountered in the act of contemplation as precisely the blanking of the human ambition to knowledge, control and mastery. To know God is unlike any other knowledge; indeed, it is more truly to be known, and so transformed.

So, if the onto-theological charge misses its mark, is its accusation simply much ado about nothing? Not at all; for its concerns rightly chide those forms of theology that show an inadequate awareness of the sui generis nature of the divine, and of the ever-present dangers of idolatry. In short, systematic theology without appropriately apophatic sensibilities is still potentially subject to its criticism. The question then presses: what constitutes such an appropriately apophatic sensibility? Can this be gained simply by taking thought (or, rather, by taking thought and then negating it)? Or is it that this first accusation against systematic theology has rightly isolated a deeper problem than that of mere intellectual or semantic hygiene—that is, the modern problem of the dissociation of theology from practices of un-mastery?

It is here that one of the key dimensions of my proposed théologie totale becomes crucial. As I have already suggested, and this is clearly a bold claim, systematic theology without contemplative and ascetic practice is void; for theology in its
...contemplation is the unique, and wholly *sui generis*, task of seeking to know...

proper sense is always implicitly *in via*. It comes, with the urge, the fundamental desire, to seek God’s face and yet to have that seeking constantly checked, corrected and purged. The mere intellectual acknowledgement of human finitude is not enough (and in any case is all too easily forgotten); the false humility of a theological liberalism which re-makes God as it wishes under the guise of Kantian or neo-Kantian nescience is equally unsatisfactory; it is the actual practice of contemplation that is the condition of a new knowing-in-unknowing. It must involve the stuff of learned bodily enactment, sweated out painfully over months and years, in duress, in discomfort, as well as in joy and dawning recognition. Apophatic theology, in its proper sense, then, can never be mere verbal play, deferral of meaning, or the simple addition of negatives to positive (cataphatic) claims. Nor, on the other hand, can it be satisfied with the dogmatic liberal denial that God in Godself can be known *at all*: it is not mysterious in *this* (Kaufmanian) sense. For contemplation is the unique, and wholly *sui generis*, task of seeking to know, and speak of God, unknowingly; as Christian contemplation, it is also the necessarily bodily practice of dispossession, humility and effacement which, in the Spirit, causes us to learn incarnationally, and only so, the royal way of the Son to the Father.

The first, onto-theological, objection to systematics therefore does still have continuing point, even as one answers it. It serves as a reminder that the problem of idolatry is an enduring one, and that it can never be dealt with by mere mental *fiat* or a false sense of intellectual control. It draws attention, too, to the fact that not all theology adequately reflects on its apophatic duties: if it fails in them, it is indeed implicated in onto-theological temptation. Finally, it hints therefore also at the need to make important distinctions between different levels, or types, of approach to doctrinal truth. That is, there are different ways in which doctrines can be purveyed, whether by symbolic power, indirect allusion, or analytic clarity; but not all of these remind one effectively of the apophatic necessity in any attempt to speak truly of God. One of the rightful requirements of systematic theology, then, is for it to indicate what sorts of forms it is using, and for what purpose, and how such forms relate to intentional practices of un-mastery. Only thus can one consciously guard against the onto-theological danger.

The second charge against systematic theology is less to do with technical issues of speech about God, and more about falsely generalizing strategies of power. The social theorists who have decried hegemony (I am thinking of Gramsci, Foucault, and behind them Nietzsche) are rightly calling attention to ways in which powerful discourses, especially ones that aspire to a total picture, can occlude or marginalize the voices of those who are already oppressed, or are being pushed into a state of subjection. System here tends to connote systemic oppression, deep-seated political violence or abuse; hegemonic discourses consciously or unconsciously seek to justify such oppression. Does systematic theology do this too?

The short answer, again, is that it certainly can do, and most manifestly has done in many contexts in Christian tradition. Liberation theology, in all its guises, witnesses to the felt perception that classic, official church theology (systematic or otherwise) has often failed in any sustained theological response to problems of social and political oppression. That gender, race and class, amongst other categories related to such oppression, are still matters not generally discussed in systematic theology, is a telling comment on the state of the undertaking. So long as such topics are excluded *a priori* from systematic theology’s *loci* for discussion, or pushed aside as irrelevant to theological truth, the charge that they are being occluded from theological sight will continue to have point.

But the method of *théologie totale* is again of crucial significance here, and this for at least two reasons. First, the ascetic practices of contemplation are themselves indispensable means of a true attentiveness to the despised or marginalized other. It is easy, from a privileged position, to be morally righteous about justice for the oppressed, whilst actually drowning out their voices with the din of one’s own high-sounding plans for reform. Likewise, there is much talk of the problem of attending to the otherness of the other in contemporary post-Kantian ethics and postcolonial theory; but there is very little about the intentional and embodied practices that might enable such attention. The moral and epistemic stripping that is endemic to the act of contemplation is a vital key here: its practiced self-
emptying inculcates an attentiveness that is beyond merely good political intentions. Its practice is more discomforting, more destabilizing to settled presumptions, than a simple intentional design on empathy.

Secondly, the method of théologie totale (as I have already hinted) is not only founded in ascetic practices of attention, but rooted in an exploration of the many mediums and levels at which theological truth may be engaged. In this sense it deserves the appellation totale: not as a totalizing assault on worldly power, but as an attempt to do justice to every level, and type, of religious apprehension and its appropriate mode of expression. Thus it is devoted precisely to the excava- tion and evaluation of what has previously been neglected: to theological fieldwork in a variety of illuminating social and political contexts (not merely those of privilege, in fact especially not); to religious cultural productions of the arts and the imagination; to neglected or side-lined texts; and to the examination of the differences made to theology by such factors as gender, class, or race (all these relate to chapters in my forthcoming systematic project). In short, théologie totale makes the bold claim that the more systematic one’s intentions, the more necessary the exploration of such dark and neglected corners; and that, precisely as a theology in via, théologie totale continually risks destabilization and redirection. In an important sense, then, this form of systematic theology must always also remain, in principle, unsystematic if by that one means open to the possibility of risk and challenge. This playful oxymoron (unsystematic systematics) applies just to the extent that the undertaking renders itself persistently vulnerable to interruptions from the unexpected—through its radical practices of attention to the Spirit.

And that point forms a natural transition to the third, and last, charge made against systematic thinking: that it is intrinsically phallocentric (that is, that it operates intellectually in a mode symbolically linked to the male body); and that it is inherently repressive of feminine imagination, creativity, or of the destabilization of ordered thinking that may arise from the unconscious. This objection will make little sense unless one is familiar with the thought-forms and presumptions of French post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory; and thus one’s immediate response to this last critique must be that it precisely begs the question of one’s assumed theory of gender. However, there is something irreducibly important at stake in this charge: it concerns the embodied nature of all theological thinking.

For this last critique starts from the assumption that there is a distinctively feminine mode of reflection (the semiotic in Lacanian terminology), which is linked to the female body and female sexuality, and incapable of capture —without destructive phallocentric distortion—in clearly enunciated forms. To attempt systematics in such forms would thus be an intrinsic offense to feminine sensibility, and would crush the creative destabilizations that are unique to the realm of the semiotic. This particular understanding of the gender divide, we might note, can come in more-or-less hardened forms of dogmatism. The more subtle exponents of this school of thought by no means intend an essentialist view of gender (which would link female bodies inexorably and normatively to certain kinds of creative, but non-analytic, thought). Instead, feminist writers such as Luce Irigaray wish to draw attention to the undeniable cultural dominance of male thinking, and its repressive and distorting effects on both women and men: if the so-called feminine imaginary is accorded no worth, they argue, then psychic life remains distorted and stultifying for all.

The main problem with this line of thought, however, is that it risks reinstating the problem it seeks to resolve. If the gender division is so strongly bound to genital shape and symbolism, and so disjunctively construed, then a pessimistic ideology tends to dominate: the so-called feminine imaginary can never, it is averred, be brought into effective play in the realm of existing systematic discussion. Instead it has to found its own, distinct, form of discourse. It is as if such pessimism, and such dogmatized gender dualism, re-consigns the feminine to an eternal marginalization, ironically recreating the conditions of powerlessness from which it arose. Semiotic explosions may become the only means of redress: at best they are the deliciously subversive ripostes of the marginalized (noises off, as it were), but never harbingers of actual psychic or social change. Systematic theology, on this view, remains an irredeemably male undertaking.

But it is to address such a false disjunction as this that the contemplative method of théologie totale is, once again,
attuned. As the latter part of my lecture will now seek to
display, it is possible to acknowledge the full theological
significance of bodily and gendered difference (in a sense to
be discussed), but to avoid the stuckness of a theory in
which the so-called semiotic realm fails in any substantial or
transformative impact on the systematic. For the contemplative
method of théologie totale of course already welcomes
what is here called the semiotic at more than one level:
it welcomes it in the very act of contemplation, in which
practices of unknowing precisely court the realm of the
unconscious; and it welcomes it in the arts, as a way into
those levels of doctrinal truth, via the imagination and
aesthetic artifacts, that more dryly intellectual theology
often misses. What this third critique of systematics has so
rightly seen, then, that gender and bodily difference cannot
be irrelevant to systematics, is capable of a different response
than the dismissive one that it itself envisages.

The Tangled Root of Desire

I have now surveyed the three major contemporary ob-
jections to systematic theology, fully acknowledging
their force. But I have also suggested that a contemplative
approach to systematics, by virtue of its very practices of un-
mastery, is alone capable of addressing the deeper issues
raised. Indeed, if I am right, it can change the terms of the
debate in such a way that seemingly irresolvable dilemmas in
secular approaches to these problems may be fruitfully addressed.

For we now see that these three objections to the task of
systematic theology turn out to have a shared, or at least
tangled, root. Each presumes that the systematician idol-
atrously desires mastery: a complete understanding of God, a
regnant position in society, or a domination of the gendered
other; and each presumes that the same systematician will
thereby abuse his knowledge, his power, or his male mode
of thinking, for purposes of intellectual, social or sexual
dominance. The deeper issues, then, involve the insidious
entanglement of knowledge, power and gender. But their
shared root is the yet deeper problem of desire. It is the idol-
atorious desire to know all that fuels onto-theology; it is the
imperious desire to dominate that inspires hegemony; it is
the phallocentric desire to conquer that represses the femi-
nine. To speak theologically: unredeemed desire is at the root
of each of these challenges to the systematic task. It is to
this deeper problem that we must now attend.

I said at the beginning of this paper that systematic the-
ology cannot credibly go on without urgent attention to
matters of desire, sex, sexuality and gender. I am now in a
better position to say why this might be so, and how these
particular issues might themselves be ordered and rooted in
the category of desire itself. On the one hand (the theological
side of the matter), the contemplative task, which
rightly sustains systematics, is itself a progressive modulator
and refiner of human desire: in its naked longing for God,
it lays out all its other desires—conscious and uncon-
scious—and places them, over time, into the crucible of
divine desire. (Sexual desire, from this contemplative per-
spective, is thus drawn into an inexorable tether with all
other desires, judged by its approximation, or lack thereof,
to the purity of divine charity: the ontology of divine desire,
we might say, is more fundamental, because uncreated, than
the realm of created, human longings, which nonetheless
ultimately owe their existence to God.) On the other hand
(the cultural side of the matter), the tumultuous obsessions
of a secularized and sex-saturated culture, and the current
political intensities of debates over gender and same-sex
desire, make it imperative for the systematician to give the-
ological thematization to these divisive and contested topics.

So, as a hinge to the last part of the paper, I now want
to place before you my specifically theological hypothesis
about gender; and it is this. Not only is divine desire more
fundamental than human sexual desire, because it is its ultimate
incubus, source, and refiner; but also, and by the same token,
that same divine desire is more fundamental than gender. The key
to the secular riddle of gender can lie only in its connection
precisely to the doctrine of a desiring, trinitarian God.

Why Does Gender Matter?

But wait a minute, before we go any further: what
is gender, in any case, and why does it matter? To
contemporary secular theorists of gender, first, it matters
Gender matters to systematic theology... intensively, of course, since for them it is the powerful symbolic means by which culture slices humanity normatively into two (and only two), and thereby imposes, by continually repeated rituals of reinforcement (both conscious and unconscious), an oppressive and restricted form of life on those who do not fit the binary alternatives. Gender is, on this view, implicitly linked to oppression. Only performative acts of public dissent from the so-called gender binary may hope to shift its cultural hold.9

To biblical fundamentalists and conservatives, by contrast, and especially to the anti-gay lobby, gender matters no less intensely; not only is heterosexuality read as normatively prescribed by the Bible, but a particular, subordinationist, understanding of the relation of female to male is seen to follow as well.

There is another possible theological approach to gender, however, which by no means decries biblical authority, indeed still takes it as primary; but it sets the exegesis of complex scriptural texts in full relation to tradition, philosophical analysis, and ascetic practice. Here gender matters primarily because it is about differentiated, embodied relationship—first and foremost to God, but also, and from there, to others; and its meaning is therefore fundamentally given in relation to the human’s role as made in the image of God (Gen: 1:26-7). Gender matters to systematic theology, too then, insofar as it is a crucial dimension of its theological analysis of the human: to fail to chart the differences and performances of gender would be to ignore one of the most profound aspects of human experience, whether it is felt as joy or as curse. Where this approach differs from secular gender theory, let me now suggest, is in three crucial areas which transform its capacity to deal with seemingly insoluble dilemmas for the secular realm of discussion.

Whereas secular gender theory argues, and agonizes, about how it can shift and transform cultural presumptions about gender that are often unconsciously and unthinkingly replicated, a contemplative theology in via has at its disposal, first, theological concepts of creation, fall and redemption which place the performances of gender in a spectrum of existential possibilities between despair and hope. What one might call the fallen, worldly view of gender relations is open to the future, and to change; it is set in an unfolding, diachronic narrative both of individual spiritual maturation and of societal transformation.10

Secondly, and correlatively, a theological view of gender thereby also has an eschatological hope, one that it sees not as pious fiction or wish fulfillment, but as firmly grounded in the events of Christ’s incarnation and resurrection. Gender, in the sense just given, is ineradicable (I am always, even after death—assuming I believe in that possibility—a particular sort of differentiatied, relational being); but gender is not unchangeable: it too is in via. What is fallen can be redeemed and sanctified—indeed rendered sacramental by participation in Christ. In this sense, gender may be seen not merely as a locus of oppression but just as much as the potential vehicle of embodied salvation.

Third and most importantly, gender is understood differently for a contemplative asceticism precisely because it claims through its practices of devotion to encounter and embrace a holy reality, a reality revealed as three (yet thereby transformative of any two).11 What contemporary gender theory jargonistically calls performativity and ritualization—which as reiteration of a repressive gender régime, or as a ‘destabilization’ of it—finds its theological counterpart in the sui generis performances of contemplation. These performances, however, are not, primarily intended as acts of resistance to worldly oppression (although I believe they give courage for such); and nor are they therefore merely human strategies of resistance. Rather they are acts of submission to a unique power-beyond-human-power and, as such, are already gendered in a particular and unique sense in relationship to God. What makes this gendering different from worldly gender, then, is its being rendered labile to the logic and flow of trinitarian, divine desire, its welcoming of the primary interruption of the Spirit in prayer, and its submission to contemplative unknowing so that the certainties of this world (including the supposed certainties of fallen gender) can be remade in the incarnate likeness of Christ. Gender (embodied difference) is here not to be eradicated, note, but to be transformed; it still matters, but only because God desires it to matter and can remake it in the image of his Son.
Twoness, one might say, is divinely ambushed by threeness.

Gender, the Trinity and Incarnation

Threeness and twoness. Let me reflect a little more at the close of this paper on the symbolic significance of these numbers for Christian doctrine, but also for gender. I can only spell out baldly here a thesis that may seem unfamiliar and strange, but which again takes its cue from the particular vantage point of the practice of unmastering prayer.

I have argued elsewhere, and do again in more detail in my forthcoming systematics, that prayer (and especially prayer of a non-discursive sort, whether contemplative or charismatic) is the only context in which the irreducible threeness of God becomes humanly apparent. It does so because, as one ceases to set the agenda and allows room for God to be God, the sense of the human impossibility of prayer becomes the more intense (see Ro8:26), and drives one to comprehend the necessity of God’s own prior activity in it. Strictly speaking it is not I who autonomously pray, but God (the Holy Spirit) who prays in me, and so answers the eternal call of the Father. There is, then, an inherent reflexivity in the divine, a ceaseless outgoing and return of the desiring God; and insofar as I welcome and receive this reflexivity, I find that it is the Holy Spirit who interrupts my human monologue to a (supposedly) monadic God; it is the Holy Spirit who finally thereby causes me to see God no longer as patriarchal threat but as infinite tenderness; and it is also the Holy Spirit who first painfully darkens my prior certainties, enflames and checks my own desires, and so invites me ever more deeply into the life of redeemed Sonship. In short, it is this reflexivity-in-God, this Holy Spirit, which makes incarnate life possible.

So when, from this perspective in prayer, I count three in God, the Holy Spirit cannot be a mere third. The Spirit is intrinsic to the very make-up of the Father/Son relationship from all eternity; the Spirit, moreover, is that-without-which-there-would-be-no-incarnated-Son at all, by extension no life of Sonship into which we, too, might enter by participation.

The Spirit, then, is what interrupts the fallen worldly order and infuses it with the divine question, the divine lure, the divine life.

So this irreducible threeness in God cannot be insignificant for the matter of gendered twoness, since the human is precisely made in God’s (trinitarian) image, and destined to be restored to that image. It must be, then, that in this fallen world, one lives, in some sense, between twoness and its transfiguring interruption; so one is not, as in secular gender theory, endlessly and ever subject to the debilitating falseness of fallen gender, fallen twoness. In contrast, in Christ, I meet the human One who, precisely in the Spirit, has effected that interruptive transfiguration of twoness. He has done so by crossing the boundary between another twoness more fundamental even than the twoness of gender: the ontological twoness of God and the world. In crossing that boundary in the incarnation, Christ does not re-establish the boundary as before, but nor does he destroy it; rather, we might say that he transgresses it in the Spirit, infusing the created world anew with divinity. Just as, in the Spirit, he crosses that ontological twoness transformatively, but without obliteration of otherness, so the interruptive work of the trinitarian God does not obliterate the twoness of human gender, either, but precisely renders it subject to the labile transformations of divine desire. Whatever this redeemed twoness is (and there are remaining mysterious dimensions to this question), it cannot be the stuck, fixed, twoness of the fallen gender binary.

So one might say that there are two different sorts of ‘difference’ that the fundamental doctrines of Christianity (Trinity and Incarnation) hold before one, as symbolically and theologically relevant for the differences of gender. One is the difference of the three in God—different but equal, a difference only of relation and not of distinct activities or powers. The other is the quite different difference between God and the world, a fundamental line of ontological difference that has been crossed and overcome in the Incarnation, yet also not obliterated. The Christian tradition has been constantly tempted to figure the difference of gender straightforwardly on the latter difference: to align masculinity with God and femininity with the world (and so to subordinate women to men, whilst tacitly undermining their status.
... our thoughts about gender must be recast... and remolded...

as fully redeemed). More recently, some feminist theology (one thinks especially of the work of Elizabeth Johnson here) has attempted in reaction to model gender on the former difference—straightforwardly to emulate a trinitarian equality-in-difference. The position proposed here is that neither of these more familiar alternatives is possible, nor even obviously mandated by the complex authorities of Scripture and tradition. Rather, in the case of human gender there is a subtle transformation of both models caused by their intersection: the ‘fixed’ fallen differences of worldly gender are transfigured precisely by the interruptive activity of the Holy Spirit, drawing gender into trinitarian purgation and transformation. Twoness, one might say, is divinely ambushed by threeness.

This is not a theory of a third gender, or a theory of the insignificance, or of the obliteration, of gender. On the contrary, it is a theory about gender’s mysterious and plastic openness to divine transfiguration.

Conclusions: Is there a Future for Systematic Theology and Gender?

We now know why my answer to this question is ‘Yes.’ Not only is there a future, but there must be; without it systematic theology evades, or represses, some of the most troubling personal and political issues of our day and renders theological anthropology arid and disembodied. But our thoughts about gender must be recast in the light of the logic of the trinitarian and incarnate God, and remolded in the crucible of contemplation. In the impossibility of the prayer of dispossession, in which the Spirit cracks open the human heart to a new future, divine desire purgatively reformulates human desire and the problems of gender are mysteriously recast. It follows that all the other problems of power, sex and gender with which contemporary theory struggles so notably cannot be solved, I dare to say—whether by human political power, violent fiat, or even subversive deviousness or ritualized revolt—without such prior surrender to the divine. ✹

Endnotes

1. Meaning, in Lacan’s use of this term, something like clear, analytical, and demonstrable.
2. I coin this term deliberately, to distinguish it from Milbank’s and others’ “non-mastery.” The desire not to master cannot be summoned by mere good intention or fiat. It is a matter, I submit, of waiting on divine aid and transformation, a transcendent undoing of manipulative human control or aggression.
3. The charge is of course Heidegger’s.
4. So Marion, who was then forced to retract.
5. Key figures here are Gramsci, Foucault, and behind them, Nietzsche.
6. Yet there is very little religious interest in post-colonial theory, which is ironic given its claim to speak for deeply religious populations.
7. For succinct and clear introductory accounts to Lacan’s complex thought in English, see especially the work of Malcolm Lowry and Juliet Rose.
8. I present this critique in more detail in “Feminism and Analytic Philosophy of Religion,” in ed. W. Wainwright, The Oxford Handbook to Philosophy of Religion (Oxford, OUP, 2005), 494-525. But here I am more forcefully driving home the point that any attempt to fix our three problems by purely human or secular powers tends either to resummon the temptation to false mastery, or to relegate the abused and unrecognized back to the alternative realm of the semiotic.
9. Such is the view of heteronormativity found in the work of Judith Butler.
10. I have argued in “Deepening ‘Practices’: Perspectives from Ascetical and Mystical Theology,” in Eds. D. Bass and M. Volk, Practising Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2001), 78-93, that gender is characteristically viewed differently at different periods of personal maturation, and even more at different phases of spiritual maturation if transformative ascetic practices are undertaken. Secular gender theory attends all too little to this diachronic complication.
11. I shall explain the relation of three and two in the next section. The metaphysical realism in my approach is important: it is not we who fix this problem of fallen gender. It is God.
12. It is important to underscore that this interruption does not bludgeon or suppress the human, but “comes to our aid.”
There is nothing unusual about a theatre company operating out of a church basement. The genealogy of western theatre is storied with church basements, and on a performative, perhaps even metadramatic level, the union of church and theatre routinely appears in such phenomena as storytelling, ritual, liturgy, and pageantry. Yet despite the seemingly obvious, the relationship between my theatre company, Silk Road Theatre Project (SRTP), and our hosts at the First United Methodist Church at the Chicago Temple (FUMC)
It became obvious that we had stumbled upon the very road map to our vision.

Italional independence, making it possible for us to operate there. And the congregation and staff have been gracious in a manner far surpassing anything we ever anticipated or imagined. But of course, the precursor to any successful collaboration is the existence of prospective partners: in this case, a venerable Loop congregation that predates the incorporation of the City of Chicago, and a young poly-cultural theatre project created in response to a terrorist attack.

Allow me to begin with the latter. Silk Road Theatre Project was founded in 2002 by Malik Gillani, my life partner and SRTP's Executive Director, and me, the company's Artistic Director. Our mission statement reads as follows: Silk Road Theatre Project showcases playwrights of Asian, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean backgrounds, whose works address themes relevant to the peoples of the Silk Road and their Diaspora communities. Through the creation and presentation of outstanding theatre, we aim to promote discourse and dialogue among multi-cultural audiences in Chicago.

Malik and I created SRTP as a proactive response to the attacks of September 11, 2001. It was our checkmate to a lot of rather dangerous individuals claiming to act in the name of Islam. Realizing that the consequences of that catastrophic day were bound to reverberate for years to come, posing unique and urgent challenges to artists of all backgrounds, Malik and I, with our respective Pakistani American and Arab American backgrounds, felt compelled to create a company that could educate, promote dialogue, and heal rifts through the transformative power of theatre. That theatre would be the medium in which we'd advance cultural change seemed a given; a decision dictated by our mutual love of the art and my vocation as a playwright. Tragically, in December 2003, a year and a half after setting course, the imperative of our decision was horrifically reinforced when Malik's brother Nader was murdered in Atlanta in what police declared an anti-Muslim hate crime.

It was our activist natures that propelled us to respond to the anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments sweeping the U.S. in the aftermath of 9/11. Our world had changed dramatically and our identities had become suspect and loathed far beyond any “recognizable” or “garden variety” brand of bigotry. Furthermore, our names, and Malik's appearance, seemed to call into question our American citizenship. And we felt increasingly alarmed by arguments surmising a “clash of civilizations,” a deeply troubling thesis that quickly gained traction amongst key policy makers and opinion shapers.

In our earliest, pre-SRTP brainstorming sessions, our goal was to create a forum that would counter negative representation of Middle Eastern and Muslim peoples with representation that was authentic, multifaceted, and grounded in human experience. Likewise, we wanted to create a forum for introspection and debate amongst Chicago's Middle Eastern and Muslim communities, and bring to the forefront issues and content too often dismissed in our communities as “controversial” or “uncomfortable,” or just flat-out denied.

It wasn't long before our idea expanded beyond the Middle Eastern and Islamic realms. Not a surprise, as our instincts are cross-cultural. We love seeking the interconnectedness of peoples and experiences, and relish the conversations that arise in the process. All of the plays that we've produced to date have either addressed conflicts within or between communities, including conflicts between Silk Road peoples and non-Silk Road peoples. If SRTP were to articulate a worldview, it would be one that rejects neat and orderly categorizations and eschews identity politics that are narrow and self-serving. So while conjuring a world larger than our own, we kept bumping into random and repeat references to the historic Silk Road until it became obvious that we had stumbled upon the very road map to our vision.

Inadvertently, we constructed an identity politic that allowed an Asian story and a Middle Eastern story and a Mediterranean story to inhabit the same plane, to coexist inclusive of one another and in dialogue with one another. SRTP thus officially came into existence in the summer of 2002 as a DBA (doing business as) of the Gilloury Institute, the registered 501©3 not-for-profit that Malik and I had submitted for approval just months prior. Quickly, our vocabularies expanded to include such terms as Silk Road playwrights, Silk Road stories, Silk Road actors, Silk Road content, and SRTP became the nation's first ever theatre company dedicated to representing such a diverse grouping of peoples and cultures.
The term “Silk Road” of course refers to the great trade routes that originated in China and extended across Central and South Asia, the Middle East, and into Europe, from the second century B.C. until about the sixteenth century A.D. The dominant land routes connected China to Syria, and adjoined to sea routes, creating an East-West corridor linking Japan to Italy. These transcontinental caravans resulted not only in trade, of which silk was an important commodity, but also in tremendous cross-cultural interaction among the peoples of the regions; interaction that fostered the exchange of ideas and the fusion of art and aesthetics.

The legacy of the Silk Road is one associated with rich traditions of oral narrative, epic poetry, and storytelling, and henceforth it serves SRTP both as a geographic guide as well as a metaphor for intercultural dialogue. If we consider the many trade routes the Silk Road spawned and linked up with, then today, the modern nation states of the ancient Silk Road comprise some two-thirds of humanity. Furthermore, it was not a legacy “invented” in Orientalist accounts and depictions, but one proudly embraced by the peoples and governments of Silk Road countries.

The storyteller tradition, combined with our love for the written word and my shameless bias towards playwrights, led us to structure SRTP as a playwright focused theatre (as opposed to the other dominant models, an actor focused theatre or a director focused theatre). We believe that representation begins at home, and that a playwright’s subjectivity is greatly informed by his or her cultural background. The term “playwright/protagonist imperative” is one I coined to describe a rule I follow when selecting the plays we produce. The playwright must be of a Silk Road background, and the protagonist, or a central character, must also be of said background.

Familial milieus inspire creativity, authorial voice spawns representation, and Silk Road artists are best suited to represent themselves. In producing playwrights who hail from the communities about which they write, we are aligning the company’s subjective voice with aesthetics and perspectives rooted in Asian, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean experiences; rendering characters that are neither angels nor demons, stories that are neither celebrations nor indictments, but instead, complex, three-dimensional, sometimes painful portrayals of the human condition. And in giving voice to playwrights seldom heard on the American stage, we aim to integrate their plays within the canon of American theatre.

SRTP’s tag line is Global Theatre for a Global City. We take notions of global citizenry and thinking globally quite seriously, and share a keen appreciation for the role art plays in fostering understanding between peoples. America’s relationships with countries of the Silk Road have become increasingly characterized by conflict and complexity, and we feel it is imperative to diffuse some of that “angst” with the empathy that emerges when we find ourselves in someone else’s story. As a Chicago-based company, SRTP contributes to the global education of Chicagoans, and generates dialogue across the city’s diverse communities. SRTP’s audience has been singled out and celebrated as one of the most diverse audiences in the city, diverse in terms of ethnicity, race, age, and economic status, and a rare mix of first time and veteran theatre-goers.

It is estimated that there are some one-and-a-half million people of Asian, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean backgrounds in the Chicago metropolitan area, and yet we seldom see ourselves on Chicago’s stages. The absence of such visibility reinforces our marginalization within American culture, and inhibits us from building bridges with the broader American public. This lack of Silk Road representation also discourages young people in our communities from pursuing careers in the performing arts. It erodes appreciation for theatre within our communities, and stifles the development of a potentially large theatre-going audience.

Therefore, we engage our mission with an overtly activist bent. We provide mentoring and professional opportunities to artists of Silk Road backgrounds. We partner with grass roots, community based organizations. We aim to expand the theatre community’s discourse on race and ethnicity. And we demonstrate that theatre with Asian, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean content can generate mainstream interest and success. The resonance of our mission and the quality of our product is, I humbly suggest, validated in the critical acclaim of our shows and in the many awards we’ve received, including: the 2008 Broadway in Chicago...
Emerging Theater Award, the 2008 City of Chicago Human Relations Award, and the 2007 Asian American Institute Milestone Makers Award.

It has been said that every partnership has its better half, and in this case, that would be our host, the First United Methodist Church (FUMC) at the Chicago Temple. An institution with a rich and distinguished past, the First United Methodist Church of Chicago is in fact the oldest church in Chicago. Tracing its origins to 1831, six years before Chicago officially became a city, and back when Fort Dearborn was an outpost on the United States' western frontier, the church was founded by a group of Methodist circuit riders. Over its 177-year history, five buildings have provided the congregation a home in which to worship, the first being a log cabin on the north bank of the Chicago River. In 1838, in a move that foreshadowed the adventurousness and ingenuity of the young congregation, the log cabin was floated across the river and rolled on logs to the very site the church occupies today, the northeast corner of Washington and Clark streets in the Chicago Loop. Of the church buildings that followed, one was destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, and the others were outgrown and replaced; each new building a bold improvement over the previous one.

FUMC’s current home, the magnificent Historic Chicago Temple Building, was designed by the renowned architectural firm of Holabird & Roche. Construction began in 1922 and was completed two years later. It is a building long heralded for its architectural beauty and magnificent spire. Built of gray and white Bedford stone and mixing the grace of a French Gothic cathedral with the practicality of an American skyscraper, the Chicago Temple became, when first dedicated, the tallest building in Chicago. In addition to housing the church, the parsonage, the Chapel in the Sky, commercial space, and of course, Silk Road Theatre Project, the Chicago Temple building also houses seventeen floors of private offices, primarily occupied by attorneys.

With more than one thousand members today, the congregation has contributed enormously to Chicago’s spiritual, civic, and cultural development, and has been described as “a microcosm of the history of Chicago and of the nation itself.” Celebrated as one of Chicago’s most diverse congregations, members hail from every zip code in the city as well as eighty suburbs. The congregation’s rich ethnic, racial and economic diversity, and its welcoming and affirming embrace of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, renders FUMC an ideal partner for SRTP.

Of special note is the relationship Malik and I enjoy with FUMC’s Senior Pastor Philip Blackwell. It is a relationship characterized by absolute trust and respect, not to mention a great deal of admiration. It’s telling that Malik is Muslim and I was raised in the Antiochian (Syrian) Orthodox Church, yet we both refer to Phil as “our pastor”? And since Phil and I both received degrees from The University of Chicago Divinity School, he a Doctor of Ministry (1986) and I an A.M.R.S. (1991), I truly believe that the philosophical “aesthetics” of the Divinity School are alive and well both in the mission of SRTP and in our relationship with FUMC. It never ceases to amaze me how much my experience at the Divinity School informs my role as Artistic Director.

If anyone were to tell me back when SRTP was “gestating in the wombs of our minds” that the most significant patron of our vision would be a Methodist church (or any church for that matter), I would have dismissed the thought as impossible. But a funny thing happens when you start your own theatre company. Many who you expect will support you do not and your greatest supporters turn out to be those you never thought would care. My own religiosity is a sliding scale and a slippery slope, but I can say for certain that the bond between FUMC and SRTP is a blessed one indeed. Amen to that.

TO LEARN MORE about Silk Road Theatre Project and the First United Methodist Church at the Chicago Temple, visit http://www.srtp.org and http://www.chicagotemple.org.
We can best accept one another once we have heard each other’s story.

Behind the Scenes

The following is an interview with Reverend Philip Blackwell, Senior Pastor at the First United Methodist Church at the Chicago Temple.

How would you describe the relationship between FUMC and SRTP?
The relationship is based entirely on trust. We have a rigorous written agreement, but we hope that we will never have to refer to it to answer a question or address a concern. It also is a relationship that is growing; it is not stagnant. We continue to surprise ourselves with what might be possible.

How did you first meet Jamil and Malik?
Jamil and Malik arranged to see me about buying a block of tickets for one of the early plays of SRTP. When we met it took me a while to glimpse the vision of what they were trying to do—start a theatre that would focus on stories written by people from the historic Silk Road about people from the historic Silk Road. All of this, as they explained, was in response to the attacks of 9/11. My imagination began to run free as they spoke, and I could see how what they understood as mission and I as ministry might overlap.

What compelled you to invite SRTP to become the theatre-in-residence at the Chicago Temple?
The compelling notion was that both the church and the theatre are about storytelling, and that our core Christian story is a Silk Road story. I have always known that we cannot fully understand the story of Jesus unless we see him in his historical and social context. So, it made sense to me to have on location a theatre project invested in telling stories that in direct or indirect ways comment upon the church's story.

Are the respective missions of FUMC and SRTP complimentary?
It is a key part of our mission as a Christian church at the heart of the city to encourage dialogue among people of different faiths and of no particular faith. There must be a safe place to talk to one another. We can best accept one another once we have heard each other's story. SRTP has an enormous influence on this happening in Chicago.

How does SRTP fit into your vision of the Chicago Temple as a cultural destination?
There is an historic role for the church, often as a “cathedral,” to promote the arts and shape the culture. For centuries the churches of Europe were the patrons of music, drama, and dance. Today the Chicago Temple can be a kind of oasis for cultural expression in the midst of the governmental/financial/commercial district of the city. The more we can bring people together in our sanctuary and other public spaces for cultural events, the more we are fulfilling our mission to serve the whole community. It cannot be only at eleven a.m. on Sundays on our terms that we are the church; we must be more than that to as many people as possible as often as we can.

How do you address the issue of artistic freedom?
It is crucial that SRTP has artistic freedom. Without that they would receive no grant money or community support.

Continued on page 32
Defending Human Dignity
What it is and Why it Matters

In American discussions of bioethical matters, human dignity, where it is not neglected altogether, is a problematic notion. There are disagreements about its importance relative to other human goods, such as freedom or justice. There are differences of opinion about what it means and what it rests on, a difficulty painfully evident when appeals to “human dignity” are invoked on opposite sides of an ethical debate, for example, whether permitting assisted suicide for patients suffering from degrading illnesses would serve or violate their human dignity. There are also disagreements about the extent to which considerations of human dignity should count in determining public policy.

We friends of human dignity must acknowledge these difficulties, both for practice and for thought. In contrast to continental Europe, human dignity has never been a powerful idea in American public discourse. We tend instead to be devoted to the language of rights and the pursuit of equality. For the egalitarians among us, the very idea of dignity smacks too much of aristocracy, and for secularists and libertarians too much of religion. Moreover, it seems to be too vague and private a matter to be the basis for public policy.

Yet we Americans actually care a great deal about human dignity, even if the term does not come easily to our lips. In times past, our successful battles against slavery, sweatshops, and segregation, although fought in the name of civil rights, were at bottom campaigns for treating human beings as they deserve to be treated solely because of their humanity. Likewise, our taboos against incest, bestiality, and cannibalism, as well as our condemnations of prostitution, drug-addiction, and self-mutilation—all these, having little to do with defending liberty or equality, seek to uphold human dignity against (voluntary) acts of self-degradation.

This lecture seeks to illuminate and defend the idea of human dignity. Specifically, it aims to do three things: to defend a robust role in bioethics for the idea of human dignity; to make clearer what human dignity is and what it rests on; and to make clearer what human dignity is and what it means.

we increasingly sense that we neglect human dignity at our peril...

rests on; and to try to show the relationship between two equally important but sometimes competing ideas of human dignity: the basic dignity of human being and the full dignity of being (actively) human, of human flourishing.

The Importance of Human Dignity for Bioethics: Old and New Concerns

Today, human dignity is of paramount importance in nearly every arena of bioethical concern: clinical medicine; research using human subjects; uses of novel biotechnologies “beyond therapy,” particularly for so-called enhancement purposes; and activities aimed at altering and transcending human nature. Indeed, as we become more and more immersed in a world of biotechnology, we increasingly sense that we neglect human dignity at our peril, not least in light of our gathering powers to alter human bodies and minds in ways that affect our very humanity.

Because ethical concerns differ in the various domains of bioethics, each domain tends to emphasize a particular aspect of human dignity. Thus, in clinical medicine, a primary focus is on the need to respect the equal worth of each patient at every stage of life—regardless of race, class, or gender, condition of body and mind, severity of illness, nearness to death, or ability to pay. Every patient deserves equal respect in speech and deed and equal consideration in selecting an appropriate treatment. No life is to be deemed worthier than another, and under no circumstances should we look upon a fellow human being as if he had a “life unworthy of life” and deserved to be made dead.

The ground of these opinions, and of the respect for human dignity they betoken, lies not in the patient’s autonomy or any other personal qualities but rather in his very being and vitality.

Regarding research with human subjects, the major ethical issues concern not only safeguarding the subject’s life and health but also respecting his humanity, even as this will generally be overlooked in the research protocol. Through the soliciting of their voluntary informed consent, the human subjects are treated also as knowing and willing copartners in the research enterprise.

In clinical medicine and research on human subjects, then, appeals to human dignity function explicitly as bulwarks against abuse: patients should not be reduced to thing-hood or treated as mere bodies; research subjects should not be utilized as mere means or treated only as experimental animals. This negative function of the concept of human dignity helps to restrain the strong in their dealings with the weak.

But a more robust notion of human dignity is needed when we turn to the moral challenges raised by new biotechnological powers and the novel purposes to which they are being put, and to concerns prompted not by what others may do to us but by what we may choose to do to ourselves.

After all, the powers of biotechnology to alter body and mind are attractive not only to the sick and suffering but to everyone who desires to look younger, perform better, feel happier, or become more perfect.

We have already entered the age of biotechnical enhancement: growth hormone to make children taller; pre-implantation genetic screening to facilitate eugenic choice; Ritalin to control behavior or boost performance on exams; Prozac and other drugs to brighten moods and alter temperaments—not to mention Botox, Viagra, and anabolic steroids. Looking ahead, we can see other invitations already on the horizon: drugs to erase painful or shameful memories or to simulate falling in love. Genes to increase the size and strength of muscles. Nanomechanical implants to enhance sensation or motor skills. Techniques to slow biological aging and increase the maximum human lifespan.

Thanks to these and other innovations, venerable human desires—for better children, superior performance, ageless bodies, and happy souls—may increasingly be satisfied with the aid of biotechnology. A new field of trans-humanist science is rallying thought and research for the wholesale redesign of human nature, employing genetic and neurological engineering and man-machine hybrids, en route to what has been blithely called a post-human future.

Neither the familiar principles of contemporary bioethics—respect for persons, beneficence, and justice—nor our habitual concerns for safety, efficacy, autonomy, and equal access will enable us to gauge the true promise and peril of
At stake are the kind of human being and the sort of society we will be creating in the coming age.

the biotechnology revolution. Our hopes for self-improvement and our disquiet about a post-human future are much more profound. At stake are the kind of human being and the sort of society we will be creating in the coming age.

Broadly speaking, and despite the differing emphases among the diverse fields of medical practice, discussions of human dignity in bioethical matters have two main foci: concern for the dignity of life around the edges (the life-and-death issues) and concern for the dignity of life in its fullness and flourishing (the good life or the dehumanization issues). If one believes that the greatest threat comes in the form of death and destruction — say, in the practices of euthanasia and assisted suicide, embryo research, or even just denial of treatment to the less than fully fit — then one will be primarily concerned to uphold the equal dignity of every still-living human being, regardless of condition. If, by contrast, one thinks that the greatest danger comes not from killing the creature made in God’s image but from self-deifying efforts to redesign him after our own fantasies, or even only from self-abasing practices reflecting shrunken views of human well-being, then one will be primarily concerned to uphold the full dignity of human excellence and rich human flourishing.

These two aspects of human dignity — the basic dignity of human being or the full dignity of being flourishingly human — do not always have the same defenders, especially when the two seem to be at odds. Indeed, defenders of one sometimes ignore the claims made on behalf of the other. Thus, certain pro-lifers appear to care little whether babies are cloned or “born” in bottles, so long as no embryo dies in the process; others insist that life must be sustained come what may, even if it means being complicit in prolonging the degradation or misery of loved ones. Conversely, certain advocates of “death with dignity” appear to care little whether the weak and unwanted are deemed unworthy of life and swept off the stage, so long as they get to control how their own life ends; and patrons of excellence through biotechnological enhancement often have little patience with the need to care for those whose days of excellence are long gone. Meanwhile, the trans-humanist researchers who dream of post-human supermen care not a fig either for the dignity of human being or for the dignity of being human; they esteem not at all the dignity of us ordinary mortals, let alone those of us who are even less than merely ordinary.

Yet there is no reason why friends of human dignity cannot be defenders of all aspects at once, both the dignity of “the low” and the dignity of “the high.” In fact, when properly understood, the two notions are much more intertwined than they are opposed. In order to see why, we need first to examine each more closely, beginning with the dignity of human flourishing and living well — of being human.

Full Human Dignity: The Dignity of Being Human

Among the many moving songs from the American Civil War, one in particular always gives me goose-flesh: the “First Arkansas Marching Song,” written for and sung (to the tune of “John Brown’s Body”) by a regiment made up entirely of ex-slaves fighting on the side of the Union:

Oh we’re the bully soldiers of the First of Arkansas,
We are fighting for the Union, we are fighting for the law;
We can hit a Rebel further than a white man ever saw,
As we go marching on.

(Chorus: Glory, glory, hallelujah, etc.)

We are done with hoeing cotton,
we are done with hoeing corn,
We are colored Yankee soldiers, now, as sure as you are born;
When the masters hear us yelling,
they will think its Gabriel’s horn,
As we go marching on.

Then fall in, colored brethren, you’d better do it soon,
Can’t you hear the drums a-beating the Yankee Doodle tune;
We are with you now this morning, we’ll be far away at noon,
As we go marching on.
Debased ex-slaves, only recently hoeing cotton and corn for their masters, have transformed themselves into brave soldiers “fighting for the Union . . . fighting for the law.” Although formally emancipated by Lincoln’s proclamation months earlier, they have been truly lifted up not by another’s largesse but by their own power and choice. They celebrate here their new estate, singing out their dignity and beckoning others to join the cause.

The heart is stirred by this simple display of noble humanity, not least because it fully refutes the dehumanizing conclusions some may have drawn from the marchers’ prior servitude and submissiveness, namely, that anyone who accepts a life in slavery must have a slavish soul. I am particularly moved by their dedication to a cause higher than their own advantage. And my imagination thrills to the picture of their marching through Southern towns and past slave-holding plantations, summoning their brethren to affirm their own dignity by putting their lives similarly in the service of freedom and union.

Opposite to this example of dignity triumphing over degradation is the self-inflicted dehumanization of Herr Professor Immanuel Rath in the classic German movie, *The Blue Angel* (1930). A strict, upright Gymnasium teacher, Professor Rath goes to the local nightclub to reprimand his wayward students who have been attracted there by the siren singer, Lola Lola, and to scold her for corrupting the young. But on entering into her presence, Rath is smitten by Lola’s charms, and he returns the next night filled with desires of his own. When he gallantly “defends her honor” against a brutish sea captain seeking sexual favors, Lola, touched by his chivalry, invites him to spend the night. Exposed in school the next morning by his students, the honorable professor declares his intention to marry Lola Lola, for which decision he is promptly dismissed from his position. Lola, after laughing uproariously at his proposal, unaccountably accepts him; yet at the wedding feast, in front of all the guests, Rath is made to cock-a-doodle-do like a rooster in love. The married professor now joins the traveling show, first as Lola’s servant, later as a performing clown.

Eventually, when the traveling entertainers return to his hometown, Professor Rath is made costar of the vaudeville show. Lola, with a recently acquired new lover at her side, again forces Rath to play a (now-cuckolded) crowing rooster while eggs are cracked upon his skull before a full house of roaring spectators, including his former students and neighbors. It is a scene of human abasement that is unbearable to watch.

What human goods and evils are at issue in these two vignettes? Not liberty or equality or health or safety or justice, but primarily the gain or loss of worthy humanity—in short, the display or the liquidation of human dignity. In the first case, degraded human beings knowingly assert their humanity and their manhood; anyone not humanly stunted will admire and applaud their nobility, courage, and devotion to a righteous purpose higher than themselves. In the second case, an upright and proper man of learning loses, first, his wits and his profession to his infatuation and, finally, every shred of dignified humanity as he shrinks to impersonate an inarticulate barnyard animal; notwithstanding that he has brought this on himself, anyone not humanly stunted will shudder at his utter degradation.

With these examples before us, let me try to specify what I mean by the dignity of human flourishing—of being actively *human*. Both historically and linguistically, “dignity” has always implied something elevated, something deserving of respect. The central notion, etymologically, in English as in the Latin root *dignitas*, is worthiness, elevation, honor, nobility—in brief, excellence or virtue. In all its meanings it has been a term of distinction; dignity is not something that, like a nose or a navel, is to be expected or found in every human being. Even in democratic times, as the soldiers of the First of Arkansas make clear, dignity still conveys the active display of what is humanly best.

But *which* intrinsic excellences or elevations are at the heart of human dignity and give their bearers special standing? In the view of the ancient Greek poets, the true or full human being is the hero, who draws honor and prizes by displaying his worthiness in noble and glorious deeds. Supreme is the virtue of courage: the willingness to face death in battle, armed only with your own prowess, going forth against an equally worthy opponent—think Achilles against Hector—who, like you, seeks victory not only over his adversary but, as it were, over death itself.
Socratic turn in the history of Greek thought, such heroic excellence was supplanted by the virtue of wisdom; the new hero is not the glorious warrior but the man singularly devoted to wisdom, living close to death not on the field of battle but in a single-minded quest for knowledge eternal.

Attractive though these candidates are, however—we can still read about Achilles and Socrates with admiration—the Greek exemplars are of little practical use in democratic times, and especially when it comes to bioethical matters. The dehumanization evident in Aldous Huxley’s dystopian novel *Brave New World* (1932) is not primarily the lack of glorious warriors or outstanding philosophers (or artists or scientists or statesmen)—though the fact that they are not appreciated in such a world is telling. The basic problem is the absence of kinds of human dignity more abundantly found and universally shared.

In Western philosophy, the most high-minded attempt to supply a teaching of universal human dignity belongs to Kant, with his doctrine of respect for persons. For Kant, all persons or rational beings deserve respect, not because of some realized excellence of achievement but by dint of their participation in morality and their ability to live under the moral law. Through this concept of personhood, Kant sought to find a place for human freedom and dignity in the face of a Newtonian worldview that reduced even the human being to a matter of physics.

But Kant’s respect for persons is largely formal, abstracted from how they actually exercise their freedom of will. If universal human dignity were grounded in having a moral life, greater dignity would seem to attach to having a *good* moral life—that is, on choosing well and on choosing rightly. Is there not more dignity in the courageous than in the cowardly, in the moderate than in the self-indulgent, in the righteous than in the wicked, in the honest man than in the liar?

And there is a deeper difficulty with the Kantian dignity of personhood. It is finally inadequate not because it is undemocratic or too demanding but because it is, in an important respect, inhuman. In setting up a concept of personhood in opposition to nature and to the body, it fails to do justice to the concrete reality and particularity of our embodied lives: lives of begetting and belonging no less than of willing and thinking, lives lived always locally, corporeally, and in a unique trajectory from zygote in the womb to body in the coffin. Not all of human dignity consists in reason or freedom.

The Kantian dignity of rational choice pays no respect at all to the dignity we have through our natural desires and passions, natural origins and attachments, sentiments and repugnances, loves and longings. It pays no respect, in short, to what Tolstoy called “real life,” life as ordinarily and concretely lived.

The dignity of being human is perfectly at home in ordinary life, as it is at home in democratic times. Courage, moderation, generosity, righteousness, and the other human virtues are not solely confined to the few. Many of us strive for them, with partial success, and still more of us do ourselves honor in admiring persons nobler and finer than ourselves. We frequently give even wayward neighbors the benefit of the doubt, and we strongly believe in the possibility of a second chance. No one ever knows for sure when a person hitherto seemingly weak of character will rise to the occasion, realizing an ever-present potential for worthy conduct. No one knows when, as with the ex-slaves of the First of Arkansas, human dignity will summon itself and shine forth brightly. With suitable models, proper rearing, and adequate encouragement—or even just the fitting opportunity—many of us can be and can act in accord with our higher natures.

In truth, if we know how to look, we can find evidence of human dignity all around us, in the valiant efforts ordinary people make to meet necessity, to combat adversity and disappointment, to provide for their children, to care for their parents, to help their neighbors, to serve their country. Life provides numerous hard occasions that call for endurance and equanimity, generosity and kindness, courage and self-command. Adversity sometimes brings out the best in us, and often shows best what we are made of. Even confronting our own death provides a chance for the exercise of admirable humanity, for the small and the great alike.

Beyond the dignity of virtue and endurance, there is also the simple but deep dignity of human activity—sewing a dress, throwing a pot, building a fire, cooking a meal, dressing a wound, singing a song, or offering a blessing in gratitude.
There is the simple but deep dignity of intimate human relations—bathing a child, receiving a guest, embracing a friend, kissing one's bride, consoling the bereaved, dancing a dance, or raising a glass in gladness. And there is the simple but deep dignity of certain ennobling human passions—hope, wonder, trust, love, sympathy, thankfulness, awe, reverence. No account of the dignity of being human is worth its salt without them.

**Basic Human Dignity:**
The Dignity of Human Being

The excellence or worthiness that shines forth in human beings is always something that arouses our admiration and respect. Still, there are partisans of human dignity who reject such judgments of excellence or worth, insisting that no one person lives a life more worthy than another’s. Human dignity, they assert, is something every human being—base or noble, wicked or righteous—enjoys equally, simply by virtue of his human being.

What is the basis of this claim, and what is its purpose? To begin with, those who advance it seek to prevent the display of contempt, and especially contempt with lethal consequences, toward those who do not measure up. They wish to insure a solid level of human worth that no one can deny to any fellow human being, to lean against the widespread tendency to treat the foreigner and the enemy, the misfit and the deviant, or the demented and the disabled as less human or less worthy than oneself—and especially as unworthy of basic respect and continued existence. And, following the unspeakable horrors perpetrated in the twentieth century, they wish at the very least to provide a moral barrier against the liquidation of human beings often practiced by people acting in the name of their own life and liberty.

Mention of life and liberty reminds us that, for Americans, the doctrine of human equality and equal humanity has its most famous and resounding expression in the Declaration of Independence. It is, in fact, to the principles of the Declaration that some people repair in seeking to ground the dignity of human being, and it makes a certain sense to do so. Americans, in declaring themselves a separate people, began by asserting their belief in the truth that “all men are created equal.” However human beings may differ in talent, accomplishment, social station, race, or religion, they are, according to the Declaration, self-evidently equal.

These passages have always seemed to me to be, exactly as claimed, self-evidently true. But they do not go far enough in providing a ground for the equal dignity of...
human being as such. True, some interpreters of these passages suggest that all human beings have dignity because God gave it to them. But the text does not say that the Creator gave all men dignity; it speaks not of equal dignity but of equal rights, and the relation between the two is not as clear as we might wish.

In its eighteenth-century meaning, the natural right to life is not a right to be or to stay alive, or even a right not to be killed or harmed. It is, rather, a right to practice active self-preservation, a right to defend, protect, and preserve my life not only against those who threaten it but also in the face of those who would deny the rightfulness of my liberty to do so (for example, by insisting that I must “turn the other cheek”). The right to life is a (negative) right against interference with acts of self-preservation, and it rests not on anything lofty, such as dignity, but on the precariousness of human life and especially on the self-conscious passion that each of us legitimately has for our own continued existence. It follows that human dignity is not the foundation of these inalienable rights; nor is dignity ours by virtue of the mere fact that we possess them. Instead, the true manifestation of dignity in the American founding appears at the end of the Declaration, where the signers proclaim: “And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”

Having equal natural rights is neutral with respect to dignity; exercising them in the face of their denial carries the dignity of self-assertion; defending with one’s life and honor the rights of a whole people is high dignity indeed.

Others, granting that our equal dignity resides not in our rights, locate it in the more fundamental truth that makes those rights necessary: our common mortal fate and our equal capacity to suffer. But there is nothing dignified in vulnerability as such or in the fact of suffering per se. A sufferer merely undergoes, merely receives, as passive patient, what is inflicted by the active agent, whether natural, human, or divine. For Christians, Christ on the cross may be regarded as the supreme exemplar of human dignity; but even here it is not suffering as such but suffering understood and accepted as sacrificial and redemptive that alone makes the crucified Jesus, for Christians, the epitome of dignity. If there is dignity to be found in the vicinity of suffering, it consists either in the purpose for which suffering is borne or in the manner in which it is endured. Not everyone has the requisite virtue or strength of soul, and it therefore cannot be the basis of the equal dignity of human being.

A deeper ground for our equal human dignity—natural and ontological, not practical or political—may perhaps be found in our equal membership in the human species. All of us are members of the class Homo sapiens, sharing thereby in whatever dignity adheres to the class as a whole, and especially in contrast with the dignity of other animals. There is surely something to this suggestion. Even when we condemn or show contempt for another person—and even when such condemnation is richly deserved, as, for example, in the case of a Stalin or a Hitler or a Saddam Hussein—we cannot help noticing that he is, alas, one of us. Indeed, the condemnation comes precisely from the great gap between despicable deeds and what we have good reason to expect from another member of our species; we do not find fault with lions and tigers for their predatory and lethal conduct.

As it happens, the human “species-form” or Gestalt—upright posture, eyes to the horizon, hands fit for grasping, fingers for pointing, arms for embracing or cradling, and mouths for speaking and kissing no less than for eating—functions silently to elicit a primordial recognition from our fellow species members. Such mutual identification is the basis of hospitality to strangers, the acts of good Samaritans, or even just a nod of human kinship when we pass one another on the street. This salutary reminder of our common humanity, even in the face of severe deformity or degradation, puts a limit on possible tendencies to banish another person, in thought or in deed, from the realm of human concern and connectedness or even from the world of the living. Preventing many an outrage and many a violation, it also encourages many a sympathetic word and many a charitable deed.

So far, so good. Yet, once again, problems arise if we are compelled to answer just what it is about membership in Homo sapiens that justifies allowing our “species pride” to guarantee the inviolability of our life and being. After all, the (higher) animals, too, are not without their special
The ground of our dignity lies in the humanly specific potentialities of the human species.

dignity and special standing. Our being alive, and our being members of a closed interbreeding population, are properties that belong also to chimpanzees and cheetahs and kangaroos.

Thus the elevated moral status of the human species must again turn on something else: the special capacities and powers that are ours and ours alone among the creatures. Such distinctively human features include the capacities for thought, image making, freedom, and moral choice, a sense of beauty, love and friendship, song and dance, family and civic life, the moral life, and the impulse to worship.

Yet once we introduce these material properties, we will be hard-pressed not to assess the dignity of particular human beings in terms of the degree to which they actually manifest them. For the universal attribution of dignity to human beings on the basis of specific human attributes pays tribute only to our potentiality, to the possibilities for human excellence. Full dignity will depend on realizing these possibilities.

For partisans of the equal dignity of human being, the search for its content has therefore reached a troubling point. The ground of our dignity lies in the humanly specific potentialities of the human species. But this basic dignity is not yet dignity in full, not the realized dignity of fine human activity. What, then, of the dignity of those members of our species who have lost or who have never attained these capacities, as well as those who use them badly or wickedly?

Having now come at human dignity from two directions—first from the dignity of flourishing humanity, beginning at its heroic peak, and then from the dignity of human life at its primordial level of mere existence—we may note a curious coincidence. Once we learn how to find virtue and worthiness in the doings of everyday life, the more aristocratic account cannot help being universalized and democratized; and once we are forced to specify what it is about human beings as a class that gives them special dignity, the more egalitarian account cannot help introducing standards of particular excellences. This convergence invites the suggestion that the two aspects of dignity actually have something to do with one another—indeed, that they may be mutually implicated and interdependent.

The Dignity of Being “In-Between”: Human Aspiration, Transcendent Possibilities

Let me suggest three ways in which this is so. First, the flourishing of human possibility, in all its admirable forms, depends absolutely on active human vitality, that is, on the mere existence and well working of the enlivened human body. And just as the higher human powers and activities depend upon the lower for their existence, so the lower depend on the higher for their standing. What I have been calling the basic dignity of human being—sometimes expressed as the “sanctity of human life,” or the “respect owed to human life” as such—depends on the higher dignity of being human.

This mutual dependence can be clearly illuminated if we ask why murder is wrong, and why all civilized people hold innocent life to be inviolable. Particularly helpful here is the biblical story of the Noahide law and covenant in Genesis 9, where, unlike in the more famous enunciation of a similar prohibition in the Ten Commandments (“Thou shalt not murder,” Exodus 20), a specific reason is given for why murder is wrong.

Before the flood, human beings lived in the absence of law or civil society. The result appears to be something like what Hobbes called the state of nature, characterized as a condition of war of each against all. Immediately after the flood, primordial law and justice are instituted, and nascent civil society is founded. At the forefront of this new order is a newly articulated respect for human life, expressed in the announcement of the punishment for homicide: “Whoever sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God was man made.”

In this cardinal law, the threat of capital punishment stands as a deterrent to murder and provides a motive for obedience. But the measure of the punishment is instructive. By equating a life for a life—no more than a life for a life, and the life only of the murderer and not, for example, also of his wife and children—the threatened punishment implicitly teaches the equal worth of each human life. Such equality can be grounded only in the equal humanity of each human being.
... eros comes fully into its own as the arrow pointing upward only in the human animal...

But murder is to be avoided not only to avoid the punishment. There is also a deep reason that makes murder wrong: namely, man’s divine-like (image-of-God) status. Any man’s very being requires that we respect his life, and human life is to be respected more than animal life because man is more than an animal; man is godlike. Note that the truth of the Bible’s assertion here does not rest on biblical authority. Man’s more-than-animal status is proved whenever human beings, possessing the godlike powers of reason, freedom, judgment, and moral concern, quit the state of nature and set up life under a law like this one, as only the godlike animal can do. The demand for law-abidingness and for punishing transgression both insists on and demonstrates the superiority of man.

We reach a crucial conclusion: the inviolability of human life rests absolutely on the higher dignity—the godlike-ness—of human beings. Yet man is, at most, only godly; he is not God or a god. To be an image is also to be different from that of which one is an image. Man is, at most, a mere likeness of God. With us, seemingly godly powers and concerns are conjoined with animality. God’s image is tied to blood, which is the life.

This point, too, stands apart from the text that teaches it. Everything high about human life—thinking, judging, loving, willing, acting—depends absolutely on everything low—metabolism, digestion, respiration, circulation, excretion. In the case of human beings, divinity needs blood, or mere life, to sustain itself. And because of what it holds up, human blood (that is, human life) deserves special respect, beyond what is owed to life as such. The biblical text elegantly mirrors this truth about its subject, merging both high and low: though the reason given for punishing murder concerns man’s godliness, the injunction concerns man’s blood. Respect the godlike; do not shed its blood. Respect for anything human requires respecting everything human, requires respecting human being as such.

Second, even as the dignity of being human depends for its very existence on the presence and worth of human vitality, everything humanly high also gets its energizing impetus from what is humanly low. Necessity is not only the mother of invention; it is also the mother of excellence, love, and the ties that bind and enrich human life. Like the downward pull of gravity without which the dancer cannot dance, the downward pull of bodily necessity and fate makes possible the dignified journey of a truly human life. Human aspiration depends absolutely on our being creatures of need and finitude, and hence of longings and attachments. Pure reason and pure mind have no aspiration; the rational animal aspires in large part because he is an animal and not an angel or a god. Once again it is our in-between status—at once godlike and animal—that is the deep truth about our nature, the ground of our special standing, and the wherewithal of our flourishing.

Perhaps the most profound account of human aspiration is contained in Socrates’ speech about eros in Plato’s Symposium. Eros, according to Socrates’ account, is the heart of the human soul, an animating power born of lack but pointed upward. Eros emerges as both self-seeking and over-flowingly generative—at bottom, the fruit of the peculiar conjunction of, and competition between, two conflicting aspirations joined in a single living body, both tied to our finitude: the impulse to self-preservation and the urge to reproduce. The former is a self-regarding concern for our own personal permanence and satisfaction; the latter is a self-forgetting aspiration for something that transcends our own finite existence, and for the sake of which we spend and even give our lives.

Other animals, of course, live with these twin and opposing drives. But eros in the other animals, who are unaware of the tension between the two drives, manifests itself exclusively in the activity of procreation and the care of offspring—an essential aspect of the dignity of all animal life. Socrates speaks of the self-sacrifice often displayed by animals on behalf of their young, and I would add that all animal life, by one path or another, imitates the noble model of the salmon, swimming upstream to spawn and die.

But eros comes fully into its own as the arrow pointing upward only in the human animal, who is conscious of the doubleness in his soul and is driven to devise a life based in part on the tension between the opposing forces. In the human case, the fruits of “erotic giving-birth” are not only human children but also the arts and crafts, song and story, noble deeds and customs, fine character, the search for

Continued on page 34
Reflection: Religion in the Academy

The Installation of Elizabeth J. L. Davenport as the Sixth Dean of Rockefeller Memorial Chapel

From its inception the University of Chicago has demonstrated abiding and robust interest in at least three of the most central aspects of human living and being: religion, money, and sex. I shall on this occasion leave money and sex to the Provost, and focus my remarks on religion. My charge is to reflect briefly on the place of religion in the academy today, and at the University of Chicago in particular.

It is my privilege to do so, and in doing so to signal both my personal delight and my institutional pride that it is the Deanship of Elizabeth Davenport that we are gathered to celebrate. Already we are the beneficiaries of her colleague-ship, and I look forward to many shared years of work in the life of our University.

The nature of my charge differs in 2008 from what it would have been in 1979, when Bernard Brown was installed, or even in 1996 at the installation of Alison Boden. I can best illustrate this difference via anecdote. Our peripatetic colleague Martin Marty made it part of his weekly routine throughout the last three decades of the twentieth century to travel and speak, usually at a college or university, on every Thursday of the academic year. A staple Marty practice on these trips was to snag a copy of the local newspaper upon arrival at his weekly stop, and to begin his lecture by displaying its front page and explaining to his audience why every story listed there had something to do with religion. Marty’s point was that his audience tended to underestimate religion’s influence on public life.

No such underestimation bedevils us today. The combined effect of the travel and information technologies—which have simultaneously shrunk our globe and expanded our knowledge of human behavior—makes us more immediately, if also more disparately, aware of the range of religions, and indeed of the range of practice within individual religions, than at any time in history. Religion, which has always been a force both for good and for ill in the world, is on richer display than ever.

This is good because it can counter, at least potentially, what Nick Davies in Flat Earth News bemoans as the “industry-wide failure” (the industry is journalism, but it could be any industry) “to be sufficiently interested in reality.” Religion now commands our interest in a way that it never has in modernity. This also presents a challenge because in some cases the religions remains bedeviled, by their
practitioners and by their observers whether sympathetic or not, with preconceptions that can distort their realities. The challenge is well illustrated by the fact that as sophisticated a public communicator as our president-elect felt he could not, in response to charges that he was a Muslim, do more than aver his Christian commitment. It was left to General Colin Powell to ask, “What precisely would be wrong with a Muslim President?” I have absolutely no doubt that General Powell’s question is one that President-elect Obama shares. My point is that, in running for the highest office in our land, the President-elect clearly worried about what such a statement might mean for his candidacy. Such are the preconceptions that can, willy-nilly, guide our public discourse.

In the throes of civic life, then, the challenge is that the truth about religion is inevitably partial and, for our broader understanding, in danger of distortion.

Enter the academy.

There is no more salutary antidote to this challenge than the canons of evidence and argument. What the religions actually mean, and what they have done, is crucial to our understanding and, ultimately, to our capacity to live together and to learn from one another as richly and fully as possible. I would submit, with affection and appreciation for its noble work, that this effort is distinct from that of dialogue among the religions. There the effort is usefully marked by the resolution of internecine misunderstanding, and the result references the understanding of practices and outlooks internal to specific traditions. What civil society needs, insistently and crucially, is informed recognition of the centrality of the religions to the human adventure and, indispensably, clarity about the baseline facts of the religios: that they teach truths that they take to be normative for our behavior; that they have histories of their own, glorious and inglorious; and that they influence and are influenced by the cultures of which they are part.

Enter, in turn, the University of Chicago.

This University takes rightful pride in its aim to privilege the engaged argument. Ideas never exist in a vacuum when we do our work best. Crescat scientia, vita excolatur: our questions, and the answers we afford them through research, must always provide at least a provisional answer to the “so what” query. The particular genius of Chicago has been, and must continue to be, the long view about what counts as an answer: engagement is a matter of fundamental value, which need not axiomatically translate into immediate application. Our particular Scylla and Charybdis is precisely the negotiation of engagement—to ensure both that research is properly disinterested, and that it is properly focused toward the real problems of the world.

Just this negotiation applies to religion in public life; and the University cannot negotiate a properly engaged stance in the world without engaging the religions. To do so, it is crucial for the life of the University to embody two practices, and to do them with special attention to the engaged argument. One is to recognize the place of religion in public life and the need to study and understand it. Two is to recognize that the University community will reflect in its membership the practices of the religions that characterize the wider world, and to foster that practice in its healthiest forms (including, not incidentally, ecumenical dialogue).

Now you might imagine that these tasks can be neatly divided at the University between the respective institutions of the Divinity School and Rockefeller Chapel. But such a division is not the case, precisely because of the University’s desire to foster the engaged argument. Just as individual humans do not, indeed can not, separate their religious beliefs and practices from the remainder of their lives, so the University—wisely—does not separate these dimensions of religion in its work. So the Divinity School is home to a powerful doctoral program and an equally powerful program in scholarly preparation for ministry. So Rockefeller Chapel is home to a powerful ecumenical liturgical program, and to penetrating engagement of religious understanding in the lives of our faculty, staff, and students. Our work is, to be sure, different in the ways that a School and a Chapel are different. But our common concern with religion means that the failure to ignore the fact of the lived reality of religion in Swift Hall, and the failure to ignore the necessity of reason in the public understanding of religion in Rockefeller Chapel, is each equally deleterious to the engaged life of this University.

In closing let me return, once more contrastively, to the particular moment in which we gather. At its founding in 1890 this University’s leadership was both unflinchingly American Baptist and unequivocally committed to a model of the research university in the German mode. These commitments were complementary, and William Rainey Harper stointed neither. For Harper and his colleagues, the engaged argument was Christian in a way that is appropriately problematic for all members of the University community today, religious practitioners or not. Yet what Harper and his colleagues sowed and nurtured as they founded the University was a culture in which engaged argument might flourish and in which the possible roles of religion in that engagement were to be not only recognized but fostered and encouraged. A great university, then, requires a great Chapel. What we especially acknowledge today is that a great Chapel requires great leadership. So Elizabeth: thank you; welcome; and let’s get to work! ×

FRANK BURCH BROWN, M.A. 1972, Ph.D. 1979, has published *Inclusive Yet Discerning: Navigating Worship Artfully* (Eerdmans, 2009). He has just completed service as Interim Academic Dean at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis. As Alexander Campbell Visiting Professor of Religion and the Arts, he will again offer a course in the Divinity School in the spring of 2009: Music, Theology, and Spirituality. His choral song “Mary with Jesus,” a setting of a hadith from The Muslim Jesus, is included on a new CD, *Gloria* (2008), from the Sacramento Master Singers.

DENNIS CASTILLO, Ph.D. 1990, is Academic Dean and Professor of Church History at Christ the King Seminary in East Aurora, New York. He has completed a history of the seminary for its 150th anniversary, entitled *For the Spread of the Kingdom: A History of Christ the King Seminary*.

THOMAS J. DAVIS, Ph.D. 1992, is Professor of Religious Studies and Managing Editor of *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*. Dr. Davis was recently appointed the Thomas H. Lake Scholar in Religion and Philanthropy at the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy. He has completed a history of the seminary for its 150th anniversary, entitled *For the Spread of the Kingdom: A History of Christ the King Seminary*.

J. BRUCE LONG, M.A. 1963, Ph.D. 1970, served as a delegate to the first annual symposium of the International Association of Buddhist Universities, where he presented a scholarly paper on a panel on Buddhism and science entitled *There is no There There: The Insubstantiality of the World and Our Knowledge of It According to Nagarjuna and David Bohm*.

THE REV. MARK A. McINTOSH, Ph.D. 1993, has been appointed the new Van Mildert Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham (United Kingdom), and Canon Residiency of Durham Cathedral. Previous holders of the Van Mildert chair have included Michael Ramsey, later Archbishop of Canterbury, as well as Daniel Hardy, Bishop Stephen Sykes, and David Brown. McIntosh takes up the position in autumn 2009 after fifteen years as a member of the Theology Department of Loyola University Chicago; he also served as a chaplain to the House of Bishops of the

RITA M. GROSS, Ph.D. 1975, has published *A Garland of Feminist Reflections: Forty Years of Religious Exploration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). She is Professor Emerita at the University of Wisconsin.


J. BRUCE LONG, M.A. 1963, Ph.D. 1970, served as a delegate to the first annual symposium of the International Association of Buddhist Universities, where he presented a scholarly paper on a panel on Buddhism and science entitled *There is no There There: The Insubstantiality of the World and Our Knowledge of It According to Nagarjuna and David Bohm*.

THE REV. MARK A. McINTOSH, Ph.D. 1993, has been appointed the new Van Mildert Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham (United Kingdom), and Canon Residiency of Durham Cathedral. Previous holders of the Van Mildert chair have included Michael Ramsey, later Archbishop of Canterbury, as well as Daniel Hardy, Bishop Stephen Sykes, and David Brown. McIntosh takes up the position in autumn 2009 after fifteen years as a member of the Theology Department of Loyola University Chicago; he also served as a chaplain to the House of Bishops of the
Episcopal Church, and as canon theologian to the twenty-fifth Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church. He recently published his fifth monograph, *Divine Teaching: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Blackwell Publishing, 2008), and is at work with Damon McGraw on a new study of the theology of John Henry as well as a monograph on the history and theology of the divine ideas tradition in Christian thought.

DAN (BUCHANAN) MCKANAN, Ph.D. 1998, has been appointed Ralph Waldo Emerson Unitarian Universalist Association Senior Lecturer at Harvard Divinity School. Previously he was an associate professor and the Chair of the Theology Department at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University. In 2008 he published *The Catholic Worker after Dorothy: Practicing the Works of Mercy in a New Generation* (Liturgical Press).

MARK MORRISON-REED, M.A. 1977, an affiliated faculty member of Meadville-Lombard Theological School in Chicago, has published a new book entitled *In Between: Memoir of an Integration Baby* (Skinner House, 2008), a meditation on the meaning of race and the inevitability of integration.

A new St. Catherine of Siena parish hall has been named in honor of VICTORIA RIES, Ph.D. 1982. The $3.8 million multiuse building in northeast Seattle was announced by Archbishop Brunett at the groundbreaking on June 1, 2008. Ries is one of a few living women in the Seattle Archdiocese to have a building named in her honor. She served as the Pastoral Life Director at St. Catherine for nine years, and is adjunct faculty at the School of Theology and Ministry at Seattle University.

TAD WADDINGTON, M.A. 1990, won five awards for his book *Lasting Contribution: How to Think, Plan, and Act to Accomplish Meaningful Work: The Eric Hoffer Award, an Axiom Business Book Award, International Business Award, Independent Publisher (IPPY) Gold, and a National Best Books Award. He is currently the Director of Performance Measurement at Accenture.

WILLIAM JAMES WASSNER, D.Min. 1985, is the new Executive Director of the United Religious Community of St. Joseph County (a non-profit interfaith organization with over 125 member faith communities united for mission and service representing Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Baha’i, etc. in existence for forty years).

**LOSSES**

MICHIO ARAKI, M.A. 1970, Ph.D. 1982, died on December 19, 2008. A historian of popular religion, he had retired from the University of Tsukuba and was the President of Kansai Social Welfare University. He was instrumental in the introduction of the study of the history of religion in Japan, and was the author of several books, including *Konko daitin and Konko-kyo: A Case-study of Religious Meditation*.

FREDERICK S. CARNEY, Ph.D. 1960, passed away on January 15, 2009. He was Professor Emeritus at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, where his specialty was moral theology and Christian ethics. As a scholar, Dr. Carney was published widely, including a

**Silk Road** Continued from page 17

We at the church understand and honor that. All we ask is that the productions do not bring dishonor to the church or undermine our work in the community. This is where the trust is crucial.

Has SRTP proven to be a good partner for FUMC?

SRTP is a wonderful “foot forward” for us in the community. People in Chicago know about it who do not know about the church. It introduces us to a population whom we otherwise would not meet. It also gives us a distinctive claim that causes people to stop and think, “What kind of church is this that has a theatre in the basement and lets them do anything they want to do?” Also, within the life of the church, SRTP increasingly is providing programs and opportunities for members of the congregation to grow in their own understanding of other cultures.

How do the congregation and church staff perceive SRTP?

SRTP is well received by most members of the congregation, though there are some people who wish that we had more access to the Pierce Hall area. When SRTP is in rehearsals and production, the congregation’s use of the social hall is limited. Also, some members are unsettled by the content of the plays themselves. “Should people be saying those
things and acting that way in a church?” they ask.

How did SRTP fit into the decision to renovate Pierce Hall in the church’s lower level?

The congregation had to restore Pierce Hall and the entire lower level of the Chicago Temple because water damage had made areas unsafe and unsightly. Our decision to do that was made just as we were in our initial conversations with SRTP. So, we listened to some needs and hopes the theatre folks had for the space and tried to incorporate them into the master plan. It helped a great deal that SRTP was willing to make some noticeable financial commitments toward the aspects that we added. We ended up with a space more versatile than we first had planned, and SRTP ended up with a home that has served them very well.

How has SRTP’s sharing of the space worked for you?

Sharing space always is a matter of trade-offs, but it also is a time of buy-ins. Because SRTP is part of our extended family (as is the tutoring program, the Chicago Humanities Festival, and the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service) we learn a lot from just being around each other. At the same time, I think that the actors and theatre crew have found it interesting and even meaningful to be in a church. The shared space makes things complex, but without SRTP around it would be very boring!
wisdom, and a reaching for the eternal and divine—all conceived by resourcefulness to overcome our experienced lack and limitation and all guided by a divination of that which would be wholly good and lacking in nothing.

This transcendent possibility is the third aspect of the relationship between what is humanly low and what is humanly high; indeed, it points us to what is both high and highest. And here, too, an ancient story shows us the point. In the Garden of Eden, the serpent tempts the woman into disobedience by promising that if she and the man eat from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil, their eyes will be open and they “will be as gods, knowing good and bad.” But, as the text comments with irony, when the human pair disobeys, “their eyes were opened and they saw that they were naked.” Far from being as gods, they discover their own sexuality, with its shameful implications: their incompleteness, their abject neediness of each other, their subjection to a power within that moves them toward a goal they do not understand, and the ungodly bodily ways in which this power insists on being satisfied—not standing upright contemplating heaven, but lying down embracing necessity.

As in Socrates’ account, the discovery of human lowliness is the spur to rise. But here it comes in two stages, one purely human, the other something more. Refusing to accept their shame lying down, the human beings take matters into their own hands: “and they sewed fig leaves and made themselves girdles.” In this act of covering their nakedness out of a concern for each other’s approbation, human lust is turned into a longing for something more than sexual satisfaction. Shame and love are born twins, delivered with the help of the arts of modesty and beautification.

But there is more. Immediately after covering their nakedness, “they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the Garden”—the first reported instance of human recognition of and attention to the divine. For it is only in acknowledging our lowliness that we human beings can also discover what is truly high. The turn toward the divine is founded on our discovery of our own lack of divinity, of our own insufficiency.

It is a delicate moment: having followed their eyes to alluring temptations that promise wisdom, human beings come to see, again through their eyes, their own insufficiency. Still trusting appearances but seeking to beautify them, they set about adorning themselves in order to find favor in the sight of the beloved. Lustful eyes give way to admiring ones, by means of intervening modesty and art. Yet sight and love alone do not fully disclose the truth of our human situation. Human beings must open their ears as well as their eyes; they must hearken to a calling. Eyes opened by shame-faced love, the prototypical human pair is able to hear the transcendent voice.

Thus, awe, too, is born twin to shame, and is soon elaborated into a desire to close with and have a relationship with the divine. The dignity of being human, rooted in the dignity of life itself and flourishing in a manner seemingly issuing only in human pride, completes itself and stands tallest when we bow our heads and lift our hearts in recognition of powers greater than our own.

Endnote

1. A more expansive discussion of these biblical passages, and of those to be mentioned in the sequel, may be found in my book, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (Free Press, 2003; paperback edition, University of Chicago Press, 2006), especially Chapters 1-3 and 6.
Alumni News Information

CRITERION solicits your participation in keeping the Divinity School up to date on alumni professional accomplishments. We also invite letters to the editor. Please use the form below, or write to us separately, and mail to the address listed below.

Name / Preferred Form of Address (Ms., Dr., Rev., etc.)

Divinity School degree/s and year/s received

Address

Is this a new address?

E-mail address

School (and Department) or Organization

Professional Title

Recent professional news you would like noted in the next issue of Criterion, e.g., new position, promotion, book, grant. (Please include bibliographic information on publications.)