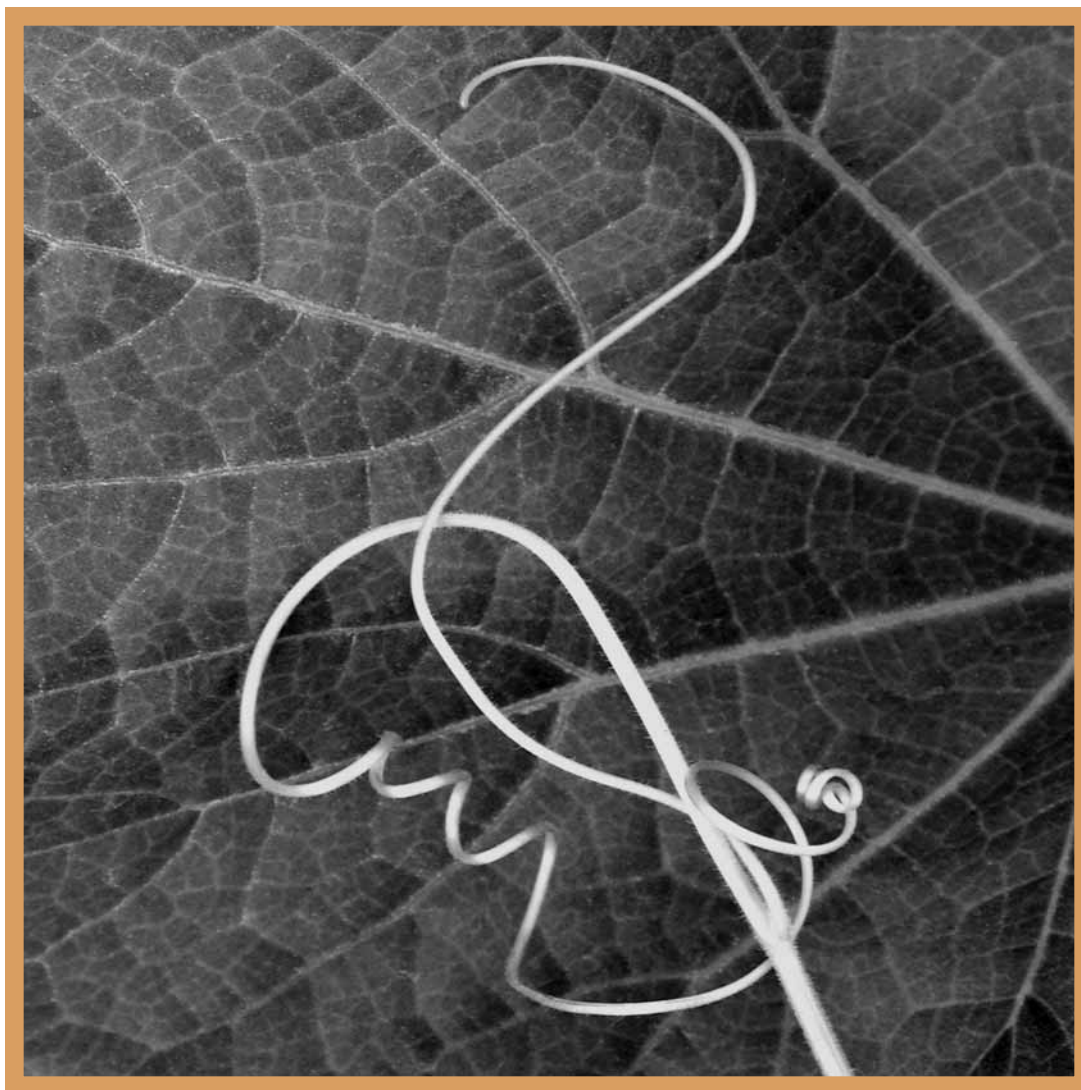


# CRITERION

A Publication of the University of Chicago Divinity School



## Dear Alumni and Friends —



Larry Bouchard is Associate Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia.



J. Ronald Engel is Professor Emeritus at Meadville Lombard Theological School and Senior Research Consultant, Center for Humans and Nature (Chicago and New York).

Opening this issue are tributes to David Tracy, the Andrew Thomas Greeley and Grace McNichols Greeley Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Catholic Studies and Professor of Theology and the Philosophy of Religion in the Divinity School, who retired from teaching at the Divinity School in December of 2006. These tributes were delivered at a retirement reception given in his honor in Swift Lecture Hall on Thursday, March 1, 2007.

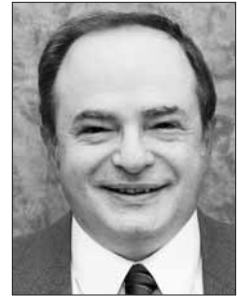
In the middle of this issue is the text of a Wednesday Community Luncheon talk by J. Ronald Engel, delivered in Swift Commons on April 11, 2007. In his talk, titled “Making the Earth Covenant at Chicago,” Engel, Professor Emeritus at Meadville Lombard Theological School and the Martin Marty Center’s Senior Fellow in 2006–2007, reflects on University of Chicago (and the Federated Faculty) contributions to the Earth Covenant movement.

Concluding this issue are tributes to Nathan A. Scott, Jr., the William P. Kenan Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies and Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Virginia as well as the former Shailer Mathews Professor of Theology and Literature in the Divinity School. Professor Scott died on December 20, 2006, in Charlottesville, Virginia; here he is remembered by some of his former students and colleagues.

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

I hope you enjoy this issue,

**Terren Ilana Wein**, *Editor*



Frank Burch Brown is the Frederick Doyle Kershner Professor of Religion and the Arts at Christian Theological Seminary and the Alexander Campbell Visiting Professor of Religion and the Arts at the Divinity School.



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# CRITERION

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Donald Burgo is Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Fontbonne University.



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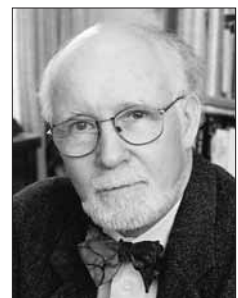
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Wendy Doniger is the Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Religions in the Divinity School.



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# Tributes to David Tracy

**D**avid Tracy, the Andrew Thomas Greeley and Grace McNichols Greeley Distinguished Service Professor of Catholic Studies and Professor of Theology and the Philosophy of Religion in the Divinity School; also in the Committee on Social Thought, retired at the end of Fall Quarter, 2006, after almost forty years of service on the University of Chicago's faculty. To celebrate his retirement, a reception was held on March 1, 2007, in Swift Hall; the tributes delivered then are printed here. On May 6–8, 2008, a conference in his honor entitled *Augustine: Theological and Philosophical Conversations*, organized by Professors W. Clark Gilpin and Susan Schreiner, will be held in Swift Hall.

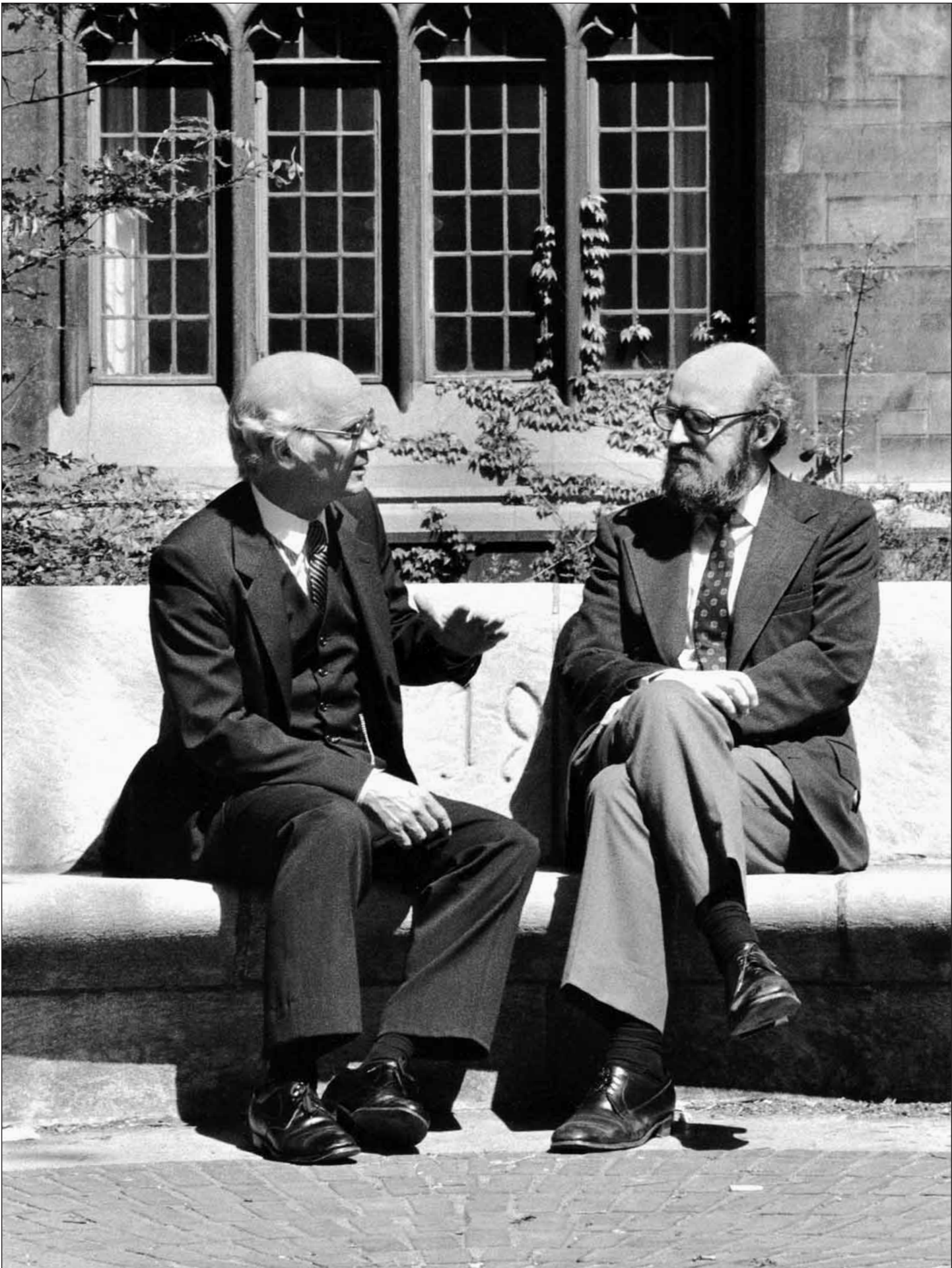
## Wendy Doniger

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**I** have been lucky enough to know David Tracy for over a quarter of a century now, known him as a friend, as a scholar, and as a colleague with whom I have often taught—Greek tragedies, Herodotus, Plato, Hesiod (all with David Grene as well), and then, just the two of us, courses on evil and on Shakespeare.

The friendship and the scholarship will not end until one of us dies—and I move to Paris, as Freud said. The one thing that has ended is our teaching together at the University of Chicago; and that—more precisely David Tracy's teaching here—is what I want to celebrate on this occasion of his retirement from it.

Years ago, David and Jim Gustafson taught a course on justice and mercy; the students were allowed to hand their papers in to either of the two instructors, and most of them gave them to David; when he asked one of them why this was so, the student replied, "Don't you know? Gustafson is justice, and you are mercy." This was not exactly true, as



## And so David Tracy praises.

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I will argue in a minute or two.

More recently, David and I taught a course together on Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies, and the superficial student word on the street probably was that he was tragedy and I was comedy. They were wrong again, for although tragedy is indeed the worldview that has, more than anything else, driven David's intellectual and spiritual life, he is also one of the only two people I know who have a sense of the tragic so pure and all-pervading that it survives intact even while it is inextricably intertwined with a wicked and wild sense of the comic. The other person is Hamlet.

Like Hamlet, David is fascinated by death (it seems to run in the family: his brother, Arthur, for years ran a cemetery), and much of his best writing and teaching (the two are closely linked in his life, to their mutual enrichment) is done in the face of the grim reaper. The great pleasure that he takes in traveling in Europe is fueled by his almost child-like love of people from other lands, but that love is not limited to the living; a powerful necrophilia shapes his itineraries, for he goes to visit, and to pay homage to, the great dead wherever he is; his favorite spot in Paris is not, as one might have thought, Notre Dame or even the Louvre, but the Pere Lachaise cemetery in Montmartre. On a trip to Denmark, before he had even unpacked, he made a beeline for the church where he knew Kierkegaard was buried, and asked where the grave was; the sexton pointed, and David wandered about for a while, unable to find it; he returned, asked the sexton again, and again followed the direction of the pointing finger, again in vain. Eventually he figured out that "kierkegaard" is the Danish word for churchyard, which is where the patient but puzzled sexton had kept sending him.

His professional and personal response to the tragedy of the world is, I think, best captured by a poem that he loves, W. H. Auden's poem in memory of W. B. Yeats, which ends: in the prison of his days, teach the free man how to praise. And so David Tracy praises. He praises the texts that he reads, rather than tearing them apart with the knives supplied by the many contemporary theories that he knows so well, indeed knows better than most of those who habitually wield them. He praises his colleagues, which is one reason why it is such a great pleasure to teach with him—he

is so appreciative of anyone whose expertise is different from his own. Indeed, he even praises the students, or the audience in a big lecture hall, by presuming that they have an erudition that matches his own matchless range; he will so casually remark, "Of course, you will recall what Pseudo-Dionysios said in one of his unpublished diary entries. . . ."

This praise is more complex than it appears on the surface, for just as David encompasses both comedy and tragedy, he encompasses both mercy and justice, *pace* the students in that class with Jim Gustafson.

David often finds himself trapped inside a triangular quandary made of three conflicting inalienable virtues that he has in abundance: first, compassion (or mercy); second, a sharply critical eye (that's where the justice comes in); and, third, the inability to tell a lie. On the one hand, he is the most empathetic man in the world, who would rather die than hurt anyone's feelings. On the other hand, he can always see through a lazy or manipulative student or a selfish or hypocritical colleague. And on the third hand, he is constitutionally unable to tell a lie. (Once when we were both trying to get out of something we never should have gotten into in the first place—Fred Allen's Law: It is easier to get into some things than to get out of them—and I, who am *not* constitutionally unable to tell a lie, suggested that we wiggle out of it that way, David confessed to me that he could not lie for he always feared that the nuns would hit him if he did.)

So there he is, with the heart of a dove and the eye of an eagle and the honest tongue of a dog (to the degree that dogs are loyal and honest, in comparison with, say, cats), like some marvelous medieval mythical beast. People who cannot, or will not, lie are often tactless, and hurt your feelings, but never David; the dove's heart always velvets the eagle's talons. How does he do it? What saves him is his mastery of the subtleties of the English language. His natural gift for finding *le mot juste*, more precisely the *evasion juste*, is greatly enhanced by his training in Jesuitical forms of discourse, such as *litotes*, or the art of giving a wrong impression without actually lying (like Stephen Potter's gamesmanship: the art of winning against a superior opponent without actually cheating). When one of his hundreds of adoring fans, sends him a long, terrible book that he has

## Tracy's retrieval system makes Google's look like a game of blind man's bluff.

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no intention of reading ("Oh, I love your books, please read mine," says the cover note), he replies, "Thank you for sending me your book, which fills a much needed gap."

But he also has another quality that enables him to praise, without lying, a book or a student's paper in which he sees all too clearly the many flaws, a quality that also makes him such a beloved teacher; and that is that the eagle eye also spies out, and values, virtues that someone else might have missed. David is generous with his time—suffering fools not gladly, perhaps, but patiently, when they come to him for advice on any of the enormous range of subjects that he knows—and equally generous with his praise.

For David's dove's heart is not only soft; it is vast and indiscriminately appreciative (though never indiscriminating). His mind, too, is generous in part because it is so enormous that there is no question of a limited good; he can give and give ideas and citations and quotations and anecdotes and never run out. Moreover, David can find anything that he has in his mind whenever he wants it, a talent that is increasingly rare in this age when (as Plato, in the *Phaedrus*, warned would happen) the use of writing has eroded our capacity for memory. Tracy's retrieval system makes Google's look like a game of blind man's bluff. I have formulated, on the basis of a very small sample (him and me) Doniger's Law of human behavior: There is an inverse relationship between the order of the mind and the order of the desk. The more chaotic the mind, the greater the need for a tidy desk; contrariwise, people with truly squared away minds can function blithely in workspaces of unspeakable disorder. And so, despite the fact that David's head is chock full of everything ever written in Greek, Latin, German, French, Italian, or English, all the philosophers from Plato to Derrida and beyond, as well as everything ever written in *The New Yorker*, the *New York Review of Books*, *The New York Times*, *The London Review of Books*, *The T.L.S.*, and about two dozen weird catholic publications, if you ask him what anyone said about anything, he can tell you. On the other hand, if you ask him for a book or an article that you lent him or a tie that you gave him for Christmas or his own glasses or gloves or hat, forget it. His desk or office or working space must have been what the mythmakers had in mind when they imagined primeval chaos, but his mind is

the most wonderful open stacks ever to be fit into a space smaller than a honeydew melon. Somehow I think that the sense that he must have of his mind as an inexhaustible but totally accessible natural resource is one of the springs of his generosity to all the rest of us who can't remember the names of the characters in a novel if we put it down for a day. And this generosity extends to his gift for friendship, and in particular to his deep affection for people in whom he sees and values things that other people do not see, eccentric, flawed but highly original characters, many of whom are in this room now. They join me in expressing their gratitude and appreciation for all the years of friendship and collegiality, and in wishing him a long, happy, healthy, and productive retirement. ✕

### Franklin I. Gamwell

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I first became aware of David's presence among us when he arrived at my oral examination as substitute for another faculty member on leave at the time. As I lacked any previous acquaintance with Professor Tracy, his appearance increased my agitation on that occasion—but without warrant, because his questions and comments could not have been more clear, incisive, and generous.

Indeed, I was so impressed by this young theologian as to resolve that my best hope for a future in this business was to imitate him, and I charted my course accordingly. As it turned out, however, this resolution had its problems. For one, I assumed that academic distinction required speaking with the cadences of Yonkers elocution. One does not ask: "Why are grades due on Tuesday directly after the quarter's end?"; rather, one asks: "What is this Tuesday?" So, I wasted many hours seeking to speak as only those from Yonkers can do. Then again, I assumed that scholarly success requires a work table so buried in

. . . the special treasure in David's singular achievement is how  
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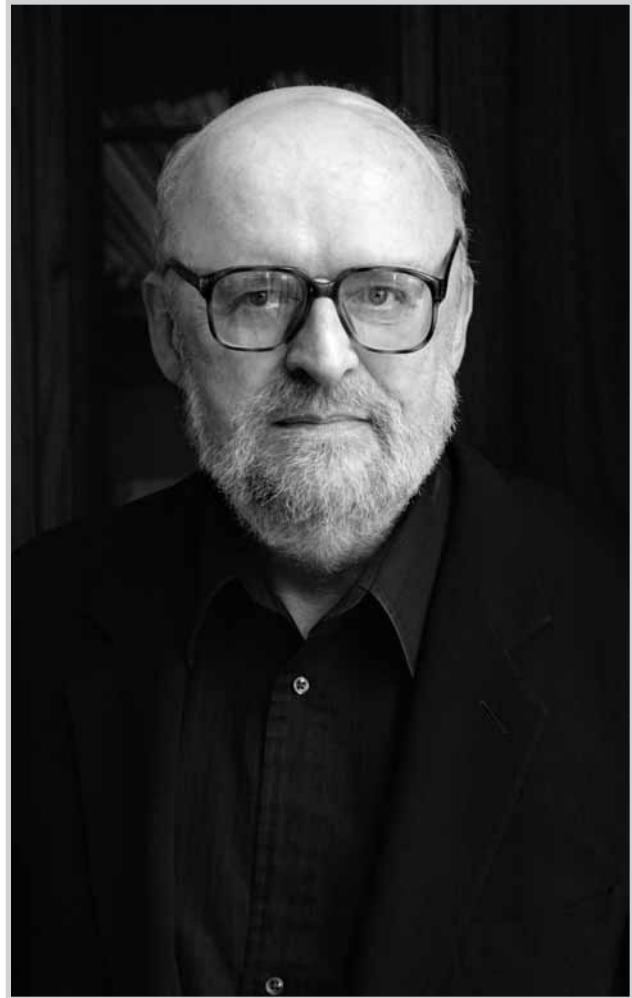
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books and cluttered with empty coffee cups as to make writing impossible, only to discover that I then did not write. And my first teaching position almost ended in disaster because I assumed that the academic day begins at noon.

But, above all, I foolishly assumed that David as an intellectual and a human being could be imitated. "The love of truth," wrote A. E. Housman, "is the faintest of the human passions." The love of wisdom—if not the love of truth by another name, then the same in a profound form—suffers the same status. So, when it is vividly present, we notice. David Tracy is that kind of presence. He is, as many know, fond of Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life*—and there is, although he would not see it, a reason for this beyond the inherent merit of that work, namely, that no contemporary more exemplifies what the book articulates. He is, then, someone to be admired but, for most of us, quite beyond our capacity to emulate.

David's exceptional achievement as a philosopher and theologian is transparent not only in this university but also within the larger academy across this country and across the seas, and his continuing contribution is the more extraordinary because, as Whitehead once said of Leibniz, David truly does inherit the Western tradition. Foreseeable generations to come will find themselves engaged with his legacy, and when his work on God is completed, he will be remembered for it. But no attempt to review his scholarly contribution is needed in this place, where its emergence has been witnessed during more than three decades.

As it happens, we might have missed most of it. Sometime in the middle 1970s, as David's distinction became quickly and widely known, he was offered a position at Union Theological Seminary in his beloved New York City, and he was tempted. Now, if we could erase the Divinity School's copious other debts to Joseph Kitagawa, then its dean and the source of this story, we would still owe him homage for his action at that moment, because he said to David: "Would you go to Union if it were in Cleveland?" David stayed at Chicago. That episode was an event in the life of this community



because the special treasure in David's singular achievement is how his love of wisdom leavens the rest of us.

Of ancient Athenian citizens it was said that wherever they go, there will be a polis. Likewise, wherever David is, there is a conversation—and, moreover, one that makes us better. Unlike some other preeminent minds, the individual power of his own thought is equaled by his power to evoke the individuality of his conversation partners. Beyond his own bibliography, for instance, there are untold publications whose appearance is due to his first conceiving them. I cannot count the times when, having watched David elicit the thought of a student or



What a classic is to a period-piece, David's reading  
is to your own intentions.

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colleague, I then heard him say: "You should write a book on . . . ."—and I have been around long enough to see several of those books published. But nothing so clearly exemplifies the singularity of his presence than his capacity to show others the larger potential of their own projects. I am completely confident that I speak for a host of others in recalling how, as I sought to carve out some circumscribed address to some narrow problem, David mapped its implications for other important issues and marked its relation to other relevant thinkers so as to give it a context of significance of which I had not dreamed and that I could only dimly appreciate. What a classic is to a period-piece, David's reading is to your own intentions.

During the past thirty-eight years, on my accounting, no other individual has so thoroughly shaped the character and conversation of the Divinity School or been more important to it within the larger academy and the larger public, and our loss of his full-time presence marks the end of an era. Some decades ago, one story has it, the great golfer Bobby Jones was asked to assess the stature of Jack Nicklaus, then in his prime, and Jones responded: "He plays a game with which I am not familiar." Like unto that, most of us must say of David: He moves in a discourse with which we are not familiar. Still, there is consolation in this: The capacity to recognize a great mind is, in its own way, a noble one. As students of David Tracy—and we all are—we have had the opportunity to develop and exercise this capacity, and in that sense as in so many others, he has ennobled us.

As for your future, David, I suppose that we should, in order to be theologically acceptable to you, acknowledge that the world will be consistently awry and its God as hidden as why a New York boy would forsake the New York Knicks is, to me, forever mysterious. But you will not, I hope, call us inconsistent if your many friends here promise you their abiding gratitude and affection, embrace your continuing presence whenever you will allow, and commend your many days ahead to the gracious care of the very same God. ✕

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## Bernard McGinn

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**W**hen I retired in the Spring of 2003, David told the story of our first meeting in the Fall of 1952. I remember it somewhat differently, for those who want to compare the two versions. He recalls a discussion about books. I remember what later came to be known as an exercise in the hermeneutics of suspicion.

In the early morning I was boarding the bus at the city line between New York and Yonkers (the City of Gracious Living, as it was then known) on my way to class at Cathedral College, the minor seminary of the Archdiocese of New York. A number of seminarians I already knew were on board, but there was this new guy, a thin, rather diffident fellow named Tracy. He was from another Yonkers parish (Holy Rosary), and in those days parishes were as distinct as countries, so I viewed him with suspicion. What had Holy Rosary to offer to the group? Could anything good come out of North Yonkers? Well, like so many others over the past fifty-five years, I quickly learned that it is difficult to be suspicious of David Tracy for long. No one expresses his good nature and concern for others more openly and more immediately. Then as now, it would be hard to find someone who strives to give more of himself to all he meets than David.

I will not try to say more about how our personal histories have been interwoven over fifty-five years, the last thirty-seven at the Divinity School, but I wanted to start my remarks with this meeting on a bus over a half century ago to ask each of you to reflect on the first time that you met David, whether it was in class, in conference, in some social situation, or whatever. Consider for a moment on what meeting and coming to know David has meant for you over the years. Knowing David, becoming his friend, even more than reading David, makes a change in one's life. His kindness and concern for others; his humor and sense of the absurdity of life; his many enthusiasms, some per-

Knowing David makes a difference: it has added a dimension  
to the lives of all of us gathered here . . .

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manent and others fortunately temporary; the unmitigated joy he takes in intellectual pursuits; the patience he displays in times of personal adversity—all these personal qualities are not worn on his sleeve as some kind of display, but are shared with his friends by his very presence. That presence can't be easily captured in words, but is therefore even more real than our faltering attempts to express it. Knowing David makes a difference: it has added a dimension to the lives of all of us gathered here this afternoon who have been privileged to enjoy his friendship and love over the years.

This is a personal event, but also an academic one. While we are here to salute our friend and pay tribute to the ties that bind us to him as he moves on from one stage of life to the next, rejoicing in his new freedom to engage more fully in the creative thinking and writing for which he is admired around the world, we also reflect on what his thirty-seven years at the Divinity School has meant for this community. David's practice of theology has been central to the life and reputation of the Divinity School for over three decades. As a major voice in the contemporary world of theology, nationally and internationally, his contributions to our common endeavor have been second to none. The great systematic theologies of the twentieth century were gestated and produced in the half-century between ca. 1930 and ca. 1980. These great monuments to Christian thought, however admirable, are no longer totally adequate in the midst of the challenges that have erupted in the past generation from so many directions. In this confusing maelstrom, theology has been called upon to re-imagine itself in many and

often conflicting ways—by jettisoning the past and boldly setting out in new directions; by declaring its independence as a unique form of discourse open only to believers; or by trying to rethink its roots in dialogue with these contemporary intellectual challenges. David's respect for all these possibilities has never tempted him to depart from his conviction that it is the third option, difficult as it may be, that offers the best way forward for contemporary theology. This commitment to the ongoing dialogue between Christian faith and contemporary thought in all its bewildering complexity has been the hallmark of David's theological enterprise. In this sense he has fulfilled the vocation of the contemporary theologian that Karl Rahner expressed in a brief address given at his eightieth birthday in March of 1984, a few months before his death. Rahner posed the question: "How can we do theology today except in as wide as possible a confrontation and dialogue with the enormous variety of contemporary anthropological sciences?" He then set forth his own stance, one which I think David fully shares: "If as a theologian I inquire not about an abstract concept of God, but wish to approach God directly, then absolutely nothing of what God has revealed as Creator of the world, as Lord of history, should be uninteresting to me."<sup>1</sup>

Nothing has been uninteresting to David. His capacious grasp of the map of humanistic studies, the originality of his insights into the connections among disciplines and forms of discourse, and above all the rigorous honesty he brings to what often must seem like an impossible task, has given him a special status in the world-wide theological community. In a short talk, of course, it is not possible to say more about these and the many other dimensions of David's theology, but I can mention two stories that illustrate the range of David's reading and his assimilation of multiple forms of knowledge in constructing his theology.

For years David team-taught classes with many of his colleagues, not only in the Divinity School, but in many other areas of the University. I remember Langdon Gilkey reflecting on this some years ago. Langdon said, "Well, David would ask you to teach something with him, and you agreed. Then you would do the course together and at the end of it you suddenly realized that David knew everything that you knew about the subject—and more besides." If



I'm sure that David's *vacatio* will be as full of *inquisitio aut inventio veritatis* as the rest of his life has been.



we could tap into David's brain, much of what was taught in the Divinity School over almost forty years would be clearly laid out before us. The second story concerns the copious notes with which David adorns his works—a rich resource for students in search of further material on so many subjects. I once asked David's friend and classmate Joe Komonchok whether he ascribed this catholic generosity of citation to David's encyclopedic knowledge or to his desire not to offend anyone, no matter how offensive they might be. Joe said he wasn't sure, but he did know that the hermeneutical principle to adopt in reading David's notes was that, "If your name isn't there, you're nobody." I mention this remark not to induce an anxiety that will have you all run out to start reading David's notes to be sure of the reality of your existence, but only to assure you that if you have ever written anything, it is likely that it is already cited—or soon will be—in the Tracy *opera omnia*.

David has brought so much to the life of the Divinity School over almost four decades that to try to do more than make a few gestures at some of his contributions is impossible. Before closing, however, I want to note one other great blessing of David's time here—not something, but someone. When David came to Chicago in the Fall of 1969 he came in the company of his mother, Eileen Couch. Eileen became a treasured part of the lives of all here today: family, colleagues, students, and friends. Eileen, who left us rich in years but still too soon, enlivened and enriched this community with her love, her care, her wit, and her down-to-earth good sense that did more to puncture the balloons

of academic self-importance than a thousand negative reviews ever could. As we salute David for all he has meant to the life of the Divinity School, let us not forget how much Eileen was also a part of our lives during these years.

For some the word "retirement" may call up images of withdrawal and relaxation, a terminal "vacation" in the modern sense of the word. I want to close by wishing David a real *vacatio*, or *otium contemplativum*, in the sense presented by one of his favorite authors, Augustine of Hippo, especially in the *De civitate dei* and in some of his sermons. Augustine's theology of *vacatio* is based upon the picture in the first chapter of Genesis of the *vacatio dei* on the seventh day, as well as on such texts as Psalm 45:11 ("*Vacate et videte quoniam ego sum Deus,*" in the Septuagint). It is not a lack of activity, or an exhausted repose after strenuous labors, but is rather conceived of as an opportunity to be free of care and disturbance in order to pursue the truth with greater attention and concentration. Augustine puts it this way: "*In otio non iners vacatio delectare debet, sed aut inquisitio aut inventio veritatis, ut in ea quisque proficiat et quod invenerit ne alteri invideat,*" that is to say: "The delight of such leisure should not be indolent repose, but the pursuit and discovery of truth, so that each person makes real progress and begrudges no one else what he may find."<sup>2</sup> I'm sure that David's *vacatio* will be as full of *inquisitio aut inventio veritatis* as the rest of his life has been. ✕

## Endnotes

1. Karl Rahner, "Experiences of a Catholic Theologian," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, edited by Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 306.
2. Augustine, *De civitate dei* XIX, 19.



J . R O N A L D E N G E L

# Making the Earth Covenant at Chicago

When I returned through these doors in the Fall of 2006 as a Martin Marty Center Senior Fellow I did not at first realize just how formative were the persons and ideas that I encountered here—as a Bachelor of Divinity student in the 1960s, and then as a doctoral student in the 1970s—not only for my personal concern for the environment as an ethical and spiritual issue, but for the whole movement of theological and religious concern for nature as it has developed over the past fifty years. I did not realize how

prominent this concern was in the Divinity School during the three decades following the Second World War, or what an extensive company of faculty and graduates shared it. Nor did I realize the degree to which the constructive responses of this scholarly community to the environmental issue could be characterized as a prophetic shaping of what I am calling the “Earth Covenant.”

All of this has been my discovery this year. And because it is my impression that little of this is generally recognized, either here or beyond these walls, I want to share it with you today.

## II.

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We are in the midst of a massive renegotiation of moral relationships and boundaries. Everywhere we turn we hear

reports of agreements made and agreements broken; trust and betrayal; new promises that give us hope countered by conspiracies that send us into despair. We are struggling to set more ethically justified and enduring terms for human relationships, from the most intimate to the most public—from marriage vows to international law. Complementing these struggles, and in many cases precipitating them, are our attempts to renegotiate the relationships between humans and nature—humans and animals, humans and agriculture and sustainable use of natural resources, humans and soil, water, forests and the atmosphere, humans and ourselves, right down to our genes.

It is within this broad understanding of our present situation that I would ask us to consider the revolutionary

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This essay is the text of a Wednesday Lunch talk, delivered on April 11, 2007, in Swift Common Room.

## Covenant-making is one of a handful of metaphors large enough to comprehend the history now in the making and the ethical responsibilities required of us.

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transformation signaled by recent calls for an Earth Covenant. Such calls have come from across the spectrum of opinion, and from virtually all quarters of the globe—sometimes couched in terms of a “global compact,” as Kofi Annan has framed it; at other times as a “natural contract,” from the title of an influential book by the French philosopher, Michel Serres; but most perceptively, I believe, as a “new covenant with Earth,” as proposed, for example, by Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff and British political theorist David Held.

Covenant-making is one of a handful of metaphors large enough to comprehend the history now in the making and the ethical responsibilities required of us. In the course of the 1990s, as I became engaged in international consultations on the Earth Charter, “covenanting” was the idea that seemed to make most sense of what was happening. People were debating what principles should set the terms for our life together on the planet—to guide the renegotiation of human relationships toward greater justice, respect for human rights, and peace, yes; but also to preserve and restore ecological integrity. Consensus was reached on “Respect and care for the community of life” as our overarching moral aim, and since 2000, when the Charter was launched in The Hague, thousands of individuals and organizations have pledged to live out its principles in their communities and personal lives.

Current debates on climate change illustrate the power of covenant-making even if it is not named as such in contemporary public discourse. The recent finding by the Supreme Court that the EPA distorted scientific evidence is being rightfully interpreted as a restoration of our covenantal commitment to the search for truth, a *sine qua non* for the exercise of public reason in a democratic society. The fact that we will not reach effective international agreement on climate change without addressing the responsibility the United States bears for its consequences in other parts of the world raises issues of equity and fairness across national borders, and makes apparent the global covenantal principles that need to be honored. Finally, can we have any realistic expectation that the most daunting challenge of climate change, our need to restore biodiversity and ecosystemic integrity to the biosphere, can be met without an ultimate

commitment to, as well as for, nature? And that such a commitment must be made, not only by our political and business leaders, but by all of us?

The term “Earth Covenant” thus involves three levels of meaning: a holistic vision of planetary fulfillment; a universal ethic of justice, human rights, and peace; and a widening of the circle of the moral community to include nature. As the Earth Charter affirms, “all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.” Given the anthropocentric prison in which our society is held captive, this third level of meaning, our universal responsibility to and for nature, is the most radical, and the one that I want to concentrate upon today.

### III.

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I was first introduced to the idea of covenant by James Luther Adams, who was my predecessor in the field of religious social ethics at Meadville Lombard 1936–1956, and who founded the field of Ethics and Society in the Federated Theological Faculty (including the Divinity School, Meadville Theological School, Disciples House, and Chicago Theological Seminary) in the early 1940s. Adams discovered the importance of covenant as a determining factor in history as a result of his visits to pre-war Germany. Germany lost its Constitution, in his judgment, because of the failure of the churches and cultural elites to exercise covenantally grounded prophetic criticism of public life.

For Adams, history is nothing so much as a making, breaking and renewal of covenants, a struggle between inclusive democratic covenants and oppressive, exclusionary—even demonic—covenants, and between enduring covenantal modes of relationship and more limited, utility-driven contractual ones. As a normative Christian ideal, covenants are defined by the open-ended, unconditional responsibilities each member assumes to and for the well-being of each of the other members and the common good of the life they share. Liberating covenants arise out of gratitude for the life-giving relationships that are the creative matrix of our being; they move between remembrance and

I will never forget looking down at the stage from the upper balcony and seeing this tall, solitary figure standing alone in the spotlight.

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promise, with the present always under judgment, as well as pregnant with creative possibilities for the future. They flourish with the practice of the covenantal virtues—justice, steadfast love, forgiveness, truthfulness, peace.

For Adams, God is the covenant-making, covenant-keeping reality upon which we ultimately depend, but Adams also believed that the power of covenant transcended any particular theological formulation and may be interpreted nontheistically, even humanistically. It was therefore possible for persons of diverse religious backgrounds and persuasions to give their ultimate commitment to life-fulfilling covenantal relationships.

#### IV.

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Although Adams kept referring me to a little essay by an obscure philosopher, Fritz Kaufman, entitled “The covenant of being,” my first and most memorable glimpse of what covenant might mean for our relationships to nature came several years before I encountered Adams and his work, indeed, the day after my arrival in Chicago in September of 1960.

My wife and I, with our two-year-old son, drove from a summer job on Isle Royale National Park in northern Michigan straight into Chicago. The next night we found ourselves participating in a rally at Orchestra Hall sponsored by a Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy. One of the speakers was introduced as a professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School, Joseph Sittler. I will never forget looking down at the stage from the upper balcony and seeing this tall, solitary figure standing alone in the spotlight. Sittler’s speech consisted almost entirely of a poem, *Advice to a Prophet*, by Richard Wilbur:

#### V.

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Sittler read Wilbur’s poem again the next year at the World Council of Churches assembly in New Delhi when he placed the “care of the Earth” on the agenda of the ecumenical movement. The point of the poem, he later wrote,

is “single, simple, and absolute: human selfhood hangs upon the persistence of the earth, her dear known and remembered factualness is the matrix of the self.”

It is only now, with the aid of historical perspective, that I can appreciate how extraordinary was this sensibility at the time.

And how deeply covenantal! I owe this insight to Bernard Meland, whose richly empirical and naturalistic theism I also encountered at the outset of my education at the Divinity School. In early works such as *Modern Man’s Worship* (1934) Meland avowed a position of “mystical naturalism” that became more muted in his later works, but never left him. Meland maintained that “once man has discerned that he *is* a real child of Earth, he will find himself falling naturally into a feeling of at-homeness in the universe” and that this transformation in worldview can lead to an understanding of God as the sustaining matrix of the cosmic process and occasion the “rebirth” that will recover the “lost transcendence in modern religion.” In his 1962 *Realities of Faith* Meland argued that the doctrine of creativity, which characterized the theologies of many of the Chicago faculty, presupposed the covenant relationship in which the redemptive concern is primordially intended. We are constituted by our “internal” relationships, covenantal partners with a creative universe, responsible, so far as we are capable, for the flourishing of the entire community of life.

Adams was unique among his colleagues in speaking as forthrightly as he did about the contemporary relevance of biblical covenant, but as Meland saw, the covenantal mythos was never totally lost and was coming increasingly to the fore in an array of new scientific and philosophical movements.

Although Sittler seldom treated “covenant” in his writings, he does suggest in his book, *Essays in Nature and Grace*, that the Hebrew term “chesed,” which he defines as God’s faithfulness in covenants and relationships, is one of the closest equivalents in the Hebrew scriptures to the English term “grace.” This is why categories such as “life-as-nature” and “life-as-history” are useless for grasping the structure of biblical faith. Sittler often said that reality is known only in relations, what he called an “ontology of community, communion, ecology.” Moreover, “Being itself,” understood

. . . grace is a goodness built into the constitution of nature . . .

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as a relation, not an entity, required humans to spiritually honor—“behold” was his word—the “immaculate integrity of things which are not (ourselves).” Sittler’s special gift was his poetic capacity to evoke the way grace is a goodness built into the constitution of nature and how it comes leaping forth when humans respond with joy and fidelity to the variety of life. But what he and Meland were expressing in their reflections on nature and grace and their shared insistence on humanity’s fundamental embeddedness in the natural world was not very distant from what others among their colleagues were also saying through their distinctive disciplinary and religious vocabularies.

## VI.

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It is time for a roll call of these colleagues. Acknowledging that this is a very incomplete list, I would name the following faculty of the Divinity School and the Federated Theological Faculty in the several decades following the Second World War as prophetic of a new covenantal relationship with nature.

Charles Hartshorne, whose Whiteheadian pantheism and panpsychism provided the metaphysical grounds for a new natural theology, rigorously argued in a series of works beginning with *Beyond Humanism* in 1937, and whose book *Born to Sing* is a classic in ornithology;

Daniel Day Williams, whose 1949 essay “The Good Earth and the Good Society” was the opening salvo in the reformation we are discussing, and who joined Sittler and Meland in the first organized effort to respond theologically to the environmental crisis in the 1960s, the Faith/Man/Nature Group;

Sidney Mead, who in his last essays in American religious history argued that we moderns “can find a stable identity only . . . as (we) sense a mystical unity with all of life on its ‘immense journey,’” and that “the ultimate and absolute evil [is] the refusal to take the oath of loyalty to life”;

Bernard Loomer, who toward the end of his life moved in radically pantheistic directions, his controversial essay, “The size of God,” identifying God with nature in the widest range of its creative power;

John Hayward, student of Hartshorne and passionate field naturalist, who tried to establish the field of religion and art at the Divinity School in the 1950s, and who like Sittler drew upon poetry, and biblical and modern myth, to make visible the grace of God in nature;

Mircea Eliade, whose phenomenology of the sacred erupting in nature through the camouflage of the secular inspired numerous studies of sacred place and time, as well as a renewed appreciation for the ontological dimensions of human being;

Charles Long, who in dialogue with Eliade and Mead, exposed the horrors in American attitudes toward nature, while also taking issue with historicist admonitions to move beyond nature, arguing that “such a movement fails to take account of the evil inflicted *on nature* . . . the basic problems that confront us as a nation today, the exploitation of our natural resources and of blacks and other racial minorities, stems from the fact . . . that we have not taken the integrity of nature seriously”;

Langdon Gilkey, who argued for nature as an “image of God,” which we must respect as we do in the case of another person, and who cast his thought on nature in forthrightly covenantal terms, writing at one point that “the theme of creative being, betrayal, judgment, and the promise of rescue runs throughout our common Scriptures and illumines . . . our present situation vis-a-vis nature”;

Gibson Winter, chair of the Ethics and Society field while I was a student, author of works such as *Liberating Creation*, who elaborated the implications of the artistic process for what he called an “ethic of dwelling” that could recover the original fabric of belonging between humans and nature;

James Gustafson, with long-standing concerns for bioethics, who drew upon his theocentric ethical perspective and the “relational” value theory of H. Richard Niebuhr to develop a moral theory of our participation in the interdependent processes of nature;

Alvin Pitcher, a leader in the Chicago freedom movement, who after a sabbatical at Holden Village in the Cascade Mountains, wrote *Listening to and Caring for the Creation*, a guide to the transformation of the churches into creation communities—eschatological anticipations of what the



. . . make visible the grace of God in nature . . .



future could be, a book that concludes with his personal draft of what a covenant with creation might entail;

To this list we must add the graduates of the Divinity School who studied under these generative figures, and who carried forward their trajectories of work, most especially:

John Cobb. No theologian has had a greater impact on the religion and environment movement than John B. Cobb, Jr. His “conversion” in 1969 to the view that the ecological crisis is the most overwhelming problem facing humankind led him to make a fresh appraisal of the naturalistic outlook of his teachers, Hartshorne and Meland. Cobb has devoted his formidable powers as a process theologian to challenging the reigning “economism” and preparing for a transition to a “just, participatory, and sustainable” society. The works he coauthored with evolu-

tionary biologist Charles Birch and steady-state economist Herman Daly are classics in the field.

Philip Hefner, student of Sittler, editor of the journal *Zygon*, and convenor of the long-running symposium at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago on “The Epic of Creation,” who has led the dialogue between religion and science in the Hyde Park community and addressed issues of ecology in his own constructive theology;

Douglas Sturm, student of Meland, who has made ecological responsibility central to his work on religion, ethics and law. In his keynote address, “A New Axial Age,” delivered at the Divinity School 2000 symposium on World Theology, Sturm argued that because of its underlying ontology of internal relations the Earth Charter marked the beginning of a new historical epoch. (We should note in passing that the symposium honored the work of Steven Rockefeller, chair of the Earth Charter drafting committee, who has written extensively on the religious philosophy of John Dewey, and whose advisor at Union Seminary was Daniel Day Williams.)

We should also highlight the work of Jerome Stone, who has proposed a non-theistic interpretation of American religious naturalism and process thought; Catherine Albanese, the preeminent authority on the history of “nature religion” in America; and John Opie, a founder of the field of environmental history; as well as Peter Bakken, Steven Bouma-Prediger, William French, Dana Horrell, Michael Hogue, Robert Keller, and Stephen Rowe.

A full account of the legacy we are celebrating would need to take note of the contributions of many others—including recent faculty and graduates of the Divinity School and the larger Hyde Park theological community. William Schweiker, new head of the Marty Center, has a strong theoretical and practical interest in environmental ethics. New Testament scholar David Rhoads at LSTC is leading a “green reformation” in Christian ministry and church-life, and bearing powerful witness to the legacy of Joseph Sittler. Meadville-Lombard graduate Clare Butterfield, inspired by process theology, directs “Faith in Place” in Chicago.

No wonder Peter Raven, eminent alumnus of the University of Chicago and Director of the Missouri Botanical

I doubt if any particular systematic rendition of this general form of thought  
can account for such a profound religious response.

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Gardens, called last fall at our conference “Without Nature?” for the Divinity School to mount a major response to the crisis of species extinction and collapse of ecosystems now engulfing the world.

VII.

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Why should this understanding of a new covenantal relationship with nature have happened here?

The adoption of an evolutionary perspective by the early “Chicago School” no doubt prepared the ground for these mid-century developments. But most members of the early faculty assumed a human-centered model of evolutionary “progress.” Meland’s mentor, G. B. Smith, was unique in his “cosmic” orientation. Without question, process thought, from James and Bergson through Whitehead (“organismic thinking” as Meland preferred) was an important influence. But I doubt if any particular systematic rendition of this general form of thought can account for such a profound religious response. There have been scholars at Chicago influenced by Whiteheadian metaphysics, such as Henry Nelson Wieman, who did not stress the value of non-human life; and there are others on our list who were outright critical of what is variously characterized as “process theology.”

Other factors were at work as well—the shock of World War II with its mass destruction of human and other life, rising consciousness of threats to the survival of the planet from the nuclear arms race, the environmental effects of the post-war industrial economy, and the vigorous reaction of citizens, United Nations agencies, academic leaders, and some churches, especially the World Council of Churches, determined to set a new course for world civilization. We so easily forget that appreciation of our dependence upon, and disregard for, the natural world and our common humanity has come again and again in the course of our history only to be set aside, and virtually forgotten, because its moral implications are so challenging to our most operative covenants—to make the world over in our own image.

In *Seeds of Redemption* (1947) Meland was uncompromising in his condemnation of the “crushing effects” of the

post-war American lust for power and affluence. Convinced that “the creative event of our time, the event that is now in process of emergence, and which takes precedence over every other event because of its importance to every other event of our time, is the shaping of a world community,” and his call for a repentance “so great that the elemental reverence for life, to use Schweitzer’s phrase, will well up in our being to repudiate all acts, decisions, and organizations that seek to prostitute life for what is less than life.” As he told the Divinity School Student Faculty Conference in 1954, “What this means to me theologically is that we are a generation that has been thrust back on the most elemental level of spiritual need.”

The nuclear threat in particular galvanized the Divinity School faculty in these years. In the spirit of the University’s missionizing founder, Jim Adams worked with Chicago nuclear physicist Leo Szilard and Charles Hartshorne in 1945 to build bridges between religion and science, and prepare a statement of conscience on nuclear power that was signed by sixty-nine faculty and published in the *New York Times*. Two years later, dean Loomer proposed (unsuccessfully) to the Federated Theological Faculty that they urge the University to stipulate political and moral conditions for the continuance of its atomic energy research—conditions such as the requirement that the U.S. government commit to a constitutional convention for a world government! Thirteen years later, shortly after I heard him speak at a SANE rally, Sittler wrote, “When atoms are disposed to the ultimate hurt then the very atoms must be reclaimed for God and his will.”

We also must give due respect to personal experience, for many of these persons were intensely devoted to a particular place, of birth or adoption, that meant the “world” to them—Hartshorne, Loomer, Meland, Pitcher and Opie in their cabins on the Lake Michigan Dunes, Cobb up in the mountains near Claremont, Gilkey sailing off the coast of Maine, Gustafson returning to his hometown of Niagara and the great white pines on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

If Sittler were here to answer our question, he would likely reply that it was an unsolvable “mystery of the mind’s attention.” But I think we can go further. What happened in Chicago in the mid-20th century was a prophetic

. . . our relations to nature, as well as to one another, are a matter of ultimate significance, involving both our creation and our redemption.

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response to the demands of the time by a community of sensitive and deeply concerned scholars of religion. Adams, Sittler, Meland and their colleagues and students showed the enduring power of the covenantal mythos to unfold in new and creative directions. They rediscovered and reframed the lost connections between covenant, cosmology, and politics. And they made clear, if it was not sufficiently clear before, that our relations to nature, as well as to one another, are a matter of ultimate significance, involving both our creation and our redemption. ✕

HISTORICAL NOTE: Peter Bakken writes that there is a certain “coming full circle” element to this talk. Apparently, Sittler’s seminal 1954 essay, “A Theology for Earth,” was first delivered as a Divinity School noon luncheon address.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: The text of the Earth Charter, and updates on the Earth Charter Initiative, may be found at [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org). Professor Engel’s essay, “The Earth Charter as a New Covenant for Democracy” may be found in the February archive for the Martin Marty Center Religion and Culture Web Forum at <http://marty-center.uchicago.edu>.

1925 – 2006

# Tributes to Nathan Scott

**N**athan A. Scott Jr. (b. 1925) died in 2006, from lung cancer, in Charlottesville, Virginia. He was 81 years old. Scott joined the faculty of the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1955, and remained here for more than two decades, rising to the endowed position of Shailer Mathews Professor of Theology and Literature. In 1976 Scott accepted a position at the University of Virginia, and remained on the faculty there until his retirement in 1990.

## Nathan Scott, Wagering on Meaning

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Larry D. Bouchard

When I first heard his voice during Prospective Students Day in 1974, he was teaching Eliot's *Four Quartets*, declaiming these lines in unforgettable cadences:

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.  
If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable.

Whenever I contemplate this poem, it is always Nathan Scott's voice with T.S. Eliot's words that "echo thus" in my mind.

He helped me see how Eliot was ironically inverting Augustine on eternal presence. While Augustine could understand *eternity* as present to time, the poem's speaker worries that if *time* were eternally present, it would be as discouraging as Milan Kundera imagines in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*: Robespierre's terror would reign infinitely, unredeemably. However, Eliot's poem and Nathan's career aimed to undo the inversion, to discern *eternity* engaging time meaningfully.

Nathan wagered on meaning in an epoch that implicitly regards both time and eternity as meaningless. In "Mimesis and Time in Modern Literature" (in *The Broken Center*), he applauded a second generation of New Critics for recognizing "that the true function of literature is . . . to awaken in us a greater lucidity about our common *humanitas*

Right: Nathan Scott preaching in Rockefeller Chapel



## His juxtaposing of ideas and metaphors in polyphony and montage provided time and space for meeting and meaning.

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and its commitments to the manifold burdens of time and history.” The idea that literature opens us to shareable meaning might strike some as old news. But Nathan deemed it a wager riskier than ever. If we had long been perplexed by existential questions of *meaning*, we were now becoming vexed by *communal identity*. “Why am I here?” was shifting to “Who are we?”—as in the later phrase, “culture wars.” And if we were to agree that local, tribal identity is the only horizon of meaning, then the literary wager on common human questions and meanings would seem merely quixotic.

However, I’ve observed that students at Virginia, who must infer his voice from the page, are quite responsive to Nathan’s wager. Sometimes his Anglican tones may touch their tribal affinities, but his existential themes speak spacioously and cogently. They also notice a feature of his rhetoric I didn’t catch in 1974: a generous rhetoric of juxtaposition that is implicitly postmodern.

In “Mimesis and Time,” for instance, Nathan took up Eliot’s essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” and proposed that the great “monuments” of literature be imagined not as a museum but a “forum.” The “assertive debate of a forum” is more appropriate to literature than “the quiet decorum of a museum,” for a forum is temporal as well as spatial. Things happen there. We gather *at* a forum, *in* a forum, or *as* a forum in which to participate. If a literary work is a forum, then as we enter it, it allows our time to unfold in its time. Our identities are overlapped, put at risk, and may receive new patterns. It is in the *juxtaposition* of moments and matters that literature offers us space and time to perform, discover, and enjoy.

Juxtaposition was also how Nathan structured his essay. Augustine, Lessing, Eliade, and Eliot help us explore our obsession with time. Vico and Bergson suggest ways of rebelling against time. Virginia Woolf, Faulkner, and Proust exemplify the spatialization of time. Oscar Cullmann offers a view of temporality in scripture that is illuminated both by the *Four Quartets* and the theater of Bertolt Brecht. It would be a mistake to regard these as but soliloquies staged on behalf of a singular meaning. Rather, juxtaposition allows readers to contemplate these figures critically without forcing a synthesis. Eliot and Brecht retain their own voices.

The hospitality of Nathan’s essay invites us to cross different horizons, and it is in such participation that meaning is realized and the wager, at least momentarily, is won.

Near the end of the essay, he returned to Eliot. The redemption of time must be an occupation of self-surrendering love. *Four Quartets* proposes “a kind of death . . . an act of *kenosis*, a true emptying—but not for the sake of annihilating time.” “In order to arrive at what you are not / You must go through the way in which you are not.” This *via negativa*, Nathan observed, is not an “*askesis* that will enable us to slough off our time-ridden finitude” but “a discipline designed for right action ‘in the meantime,’ in the concrete Now in which we work and worship and hope.”

The lives of ministers, artists, and teachers are inevitably kenotic lives—if *kenosis* is the emptying of selves into others, and the flow of other lives and contingent futures into our lives. With Nathan, we felt this in his love of hospitality (with many it was martinis, but he plied me with gin-and-tonics of consubstantial proportions!) and in his habit of mind. His juxtaposing of ideas and metaphors in polyphony and montage provided time and space for meeting and meaning. Juxtaposition and *kenosis* are terms of critical praxis Nathan Scott offered against the temptation to leave our voices inaccessibly enclosed in local horizons. ✕

### Nathan Scott Memorial Essay

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#### Frank Burch Brown

**I**t is difficult, even in adulthood, to view one’s parents in the round. And there is no use pretending to be disinterested in one’s impressions and recollections of them. I gather something similar must be true in the relationship of many a doctoral graduate to a former thesis advisor.

In composing my thoughts now, twenty-eight years after my formal studies with Nathan A. Scott, Jr., ended—and some months after his death—the grief and gratitude I feel

. . . how appreciative he was, himself, when his former students continued to read and comment on his own scholarship . . .

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are still conditioned by a very real sense of having been bereft of a kind of father.

Although Nathan had earlier given me some grief (by no means unprecedented) as I came to the stage of writing my doctoral thesis, he subsequently became an exceptionally generous and encouraging mentor at crucial points along the way. Over time, this allowed for an element of reciprocity. I eventually realized how appreciative he was, himself, when his former students continued to read and comment on his own scholarship.

It also became clear to me, after a while, that Nathan was taking risks on my behalf. I recall, in particular, when Nathan exercised his influence to arrange for me a commission from the AAR to compose a twenty-minute piece of chamber music for the seventy-fifth anniversary celebration banquet of that organization. The music, like

the evening itself, was dedicated to Mircea Eliade, who attended the event—and whose humble manner Nathan was fond of saying he could afford to emulate if (and only if) he ever reached such a level of accomplishment. In retrospect, I could see how Nathan's daring to propose that commission for a relatively inexperienced composer had given me the courage to undertake, for the first time, a kind of composition I might never have attempted, otherwise. No wonder the parental image stuck, even as it evolved (and not always without friction).

The last, typewritten note I received from Nathan arrived just a few weeks before his death, characteristically pointing out some professional prospect he hoped I would explore. No one, including Nathan, seemed to realize just then that his mortal days were almost at an end. But there was something poignant about the condition of this communication.

. . . the vibrancy of his speech and truly inimitable laughter and  
the unmistakable resonance of his prose.

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The typewriter, while easily identifiable after so many years, was much in need of adjustment. Nathan had gone to the trouble of making numerous corrections by hand where the keys had failed to do their work properly. His impressive capacity as a writer—together with the former elegance of his penmanship—was visibly compromised.

Yet the images of Nathan remain, for the most part, vivid and indelible. There was the vibrancy of his speech and truly inimitable laughter and the unmistakable resonance of his prose. There was the enormous and daunting range of his learning and prolific writing, not unlike that of George Steiner, whose work he admired and promoted. There was his dedication to literature as something integral to the study of theology and religion. Attentive to a wide array of movements and figures in modern literature and criticism, as well as in theology and religious studies, Nathan was nonetheless distinctive in his interpretive approach and resolute in creating his own synthesis. That was true even when it came to Tillich, whose overall influence on Nathan has sometimes been overestimated. In terms of his published legacy, a list of the most significant contributions would include, surely, Scott's three books with Yale University Press—*The Broken Center* (1966), *Negative Capability* (1969), and *The Wild Prayer of Longing* (1971)—as well as

his later studies *The Poetics of Belief* (1985) and *Visions of Presence in Modern American Poetry* (1993).

I have the impression that, increasingly over the years, Nathan stood up for aspects of African American culture that he thought had been unappreciated or misrepresented. He gently chided me, for instance, when he found out that, in my supplemental work as a director of predominantly European American choirs, I had sometimes been hesitant to use spirituals, thereby missing the opportunity of exploring ways for the choirs to sing in a spirit of true appreciation as opposed to the false appropriation that I feared. I cannot forget, finally, that Nathan was marvelously attuned to what as a theologian he perceived to be the sacramental potential in poetry, art, and life. I am grateful to have been “raised” at the University of Chicago Divinity School by this remarkable scholar (among others), and glad for the chance to say so in the virtual presence of many who likewise knew Nathan and who feel his undeniable and unforgettable influence. ✕

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## A Tribute to Nathan Scott

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Donald Burgo

When I heard of Nathan Scott's death, I thought of a quote from Nietzsche, once cited by David Tracy in a lecture given at Rockhurst University, later published in *Theology Digest* (Winter, 1977):

But how can we find ourselves again? How can man know himself? . . . The youthful soul should look back on life with the question: What have you truly loved up to now, what has drawn your soul aloft, what has mastered and at the same time blessed it? Set up these things. . . before you and perhaps they will give you. . . the fundamental law of your own true self. . . for your real nature lies not buried deep within you but immeasurably high above you. . . There are other



From left: Profs. Anthony C. Yu, Langdon Gilkey, and Nathan Scott



To read Mr. Scott was to enter into conversation with  
a most learned and civilized mind.

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means of finding oneself . . . but I know of none better than to think of one's educators.

"To think of one's educators": for so many of us Mr. Scott was the father of theology and literature. Others preceded him, of course (the Divinity School established the field in 1950), but it was he who best articulated in volume after volume the relation of theology and the literary imagination. His books and essays were written with, as he might have put it, an "urbanity of scholarship . . . a grace of style." In prose hypotactic he explored the theological horizons of much of modern literature: Joyce, Eliot, Stevens, Bellow, Camus, Beckett, and countless others.

To read Mr. Scott was to enter into conversation with a most learned and civilized mind. To know him personally was an even greater treat. Yes, to a very green student in his early twenties, entering the field without the prerequisite master's degree in either literature or theology, Mr. Scott could be quite intimidating on first encounter. Can any of

us who heard it forget the annual "honorifics" talk, usually given at the first evening get-together of the fall quarter? Or the *Mrs. Dalloway* lecture, when wave after wave of polemical prose would wash over us? Or the time a file card was passed around with the message 'New World Record: 265 words in one sentence'?

But as one got to know him, two things about Mr. Scott began to emerge: his kindness and his faith. The kindness came in all kinds of small ways. Let me give just one example. I have before me a postcard in his handwriting, dated Easter Sunday 1968. He sent one to each of us in his seminar because he had forgotten to mention that he would be lecturing at Vanderbilt University from Monday through Wednesday of the coming week and our next session would not be until April 18. In this day of e-mail, will we ever see the like again? I recall meeting with him in his office when something I said would elicit a deeply appreciated "Bless your soul!" And then there were the written comments on one's work: the joy of seeing "You write well;" the fear and trembling when one saw "Infelicitously phrased. Recast."

Of his deep Anglican (I would call it Catholic) faith I best not cite examples. The ones I could offer are quite personal and I believe them to have been shared in confidence. I know others can attest that Mr. Scott was a man of deep sacramental vision, "the like of which today is. . .(seldom) met. And I therefore express regret." ✕

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## Tribute to Nathan Scott

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Mary Gerhart

I came to the University of Chicago in 1968 because I had heard a lecture by Nathan A. Scott, Jr. One of his first questions to this student, elated at the opportunity of doing graduate work in one of the first Religion and Literature programs in the country, was, "And what would you like me to call you?" Nathan often taught without his having to say so.

## His work speaks eloquently for itself.

In this instance, it was clear that taking and giving a name was, for him, more than a routine formality. “Now you may call me Nathan”—he likewise gave his students the prerogative of calling him by his first name when he congratulated them at the conclusion of their oral examinations.

Such prerogatives and pronouncements, half serious and half ironical, were often punctuated by his laughter that made them ambiguous, even optional. He was also a master at asking a seemingly innocent question for information and then, having received an earnest reply, responding musingly with another question—one that did not lend itself to as easy an answer as the first.

Precision in speech was indisputably part of who he was and how he constructed his world. His precision was celebratory, not strained—it seemed to be for other than its own sake. In his introduction to *Negative Capability: Studies in the New Literature and the Religious Situation*, Nathan can be understood to affirm why both equanimity and precision matter. There Nathan quotes John Keats on the occasion of the poet’s sudden recognition of what “coming at a truth” by way of “remaining content with half-knowledge”:

. . . several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature. . . I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” (161)

At the same time Nathan was someone who, in Heinrich Böll’s careful phrase, “had the habit of writing.” I know this firsthand from visiting him once shortly after he and Charlotte had moved to Charlottesville. As he showed me his study, he explained that every morning he sharpened four wooden pencils and wrote until they needed sharpening again. Whereas Böll wrote as a political act to restore the integrity of the German language after World War II, Nathan wrote, I think, out of a love for literature and the multiform life it evoked.

In 1972, Nathan was appointed the Shailer Mathews Professor of Theology and Literature and at the same time received an appointment in the English Department

at the University—a well deserved and unusual honor especially for that time. Nathan had always made generous recommendations to his advisees to take courses outside the program. I took his practice for granted until I learned that such largesse was not a policy at all other universities.

If his annual Christmas letters faithfully indicate his preoccupations, then the health and achievements of his family—Charlotte, the children, their spouses, and grandchildren—were uppermost in his life. I don’t recall anything in the letters about his own work.

But then, there was no need for him to do so. His work speaks eloquently for itself. ✕



Merry  
Christmas  
& Happy New Year!

Nathan and Charlotte Scott

# Alumni News

CRAIG A. FORNEY, M.A. 1985, Ph.D. 2002, teaches in American Religious History, Comparative Religion, and Religious Ethics at Arizona State University. He recently published *The Holy Trinity of American Sports: Civil Religion in Football, Baseball, and Basketball* (Mercer).

ROBERT M. FRANKLIN JR., Ph.D. 1985, has been chosen as the 10th president of Morehouse College. He was previously a professor at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. Founded in 1867, Morehouse has an enrollment of about 2,800 students and is the nation's only historically black all-male college.

JOEL S. KAMINSKY, M.A. 1984, Ph.D. 1994, is Associate Professor and Director of Jewish Studies in the Department of Religion at Smith College. He recently published *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Abingdon, 2007).

WILLIAM MADGES, Ph.D. 1986, is Dean, College of Arts & Sciences, at Saint Joseph's University (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). He and JAMES BUCHANAN (Ph.D. 1986) are two of the principal creators of a multimedia exhibit currently on display at the Loyola University Museum of Art in Chicago: *A Blessing to One Another: Pope John Paul II and the Jewish People*. The exhibit describes how Wotyla's early interactions with Jewish neighbors and friends set the stage for some of the steps he took as pope to improve relations between Judaism and Catholicism.

MARK MATTES, Ph.D. 1995, is Professor of Religion and Philosophy and Chair of the Religion Department at Grand View College in Des Moines, Iowa. A book that he coedited, *The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, was recently released by Eerdmans Publishing Company.

DOUGLAS R. MCGAUGHEY, Ph.D. 1983, is Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Willamette University and the executive secretary of PNW Region of AAR, SBL, ASOR. He was the 2006 essay-contest prize winner in response to the question "Braucht Werterziehung Religion?" sponsored by the Forschungsinstitut für Philosophie in Hanover, Germany and recently published *Religion before Dogma: Groundwork in Practical Theology* (T & T Clark International, 2006).





DAN (BUCHANAN) MCKANAN, Ph.D. 1998, recently published his second book, *Touching the World: Christian Communities Transforming Society* (Liturgical Press, 2007), a comparative study of the Catholic Worker and Camphill movements. He is associate professor of theology and department chair at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University.

ROBERT LYMAN POTTER, M.D., Ph.D. 1991, is the Director of Ethics Education at Oregon Health Science University. He came out of retirement from the Midwest Bioethics Center (in Kansas City, Missouri) to teach healthcare ethics to first- and second-year students from 2006 to 2007.

DEEPAK SARMA, M.A. 1993, Ph.D. 1998, is Assistant Professor of Religion at Case Western Reserve University, where he received the 2007 Carl F. Wittke Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. He recently completed a reader on Hinduism and is working on one in Indian philosophy, as well as a novel.

REVEREND BARKLEY THOMPSON, A.M.R.S. 1998, has had a change in ministry. In July he received a call to serve as rector of St. John's Episcopal in downtown Roanoke, Virginia, the largest parish in the diocese of southwestern Virginia.

JAMES K. WELLMAN, JR., Ph.D. 1995, is program chair and assistant professor in the Comparative Religion program at the University of Washington. He recently edited *Belief and Bloodshed: Religion and Violence across Time and Tradition* (Rowman and Littlefield). The book contains contributions by Jon Pahl and Bruce Lincoln.

RAYMOND BRADY WILLIAMS, M.A. 1963, Ph.D. 1966, is LaFollette Distinguished Professor in the Humanities at Wabash College, where, on May 13, 2007, he received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree.

RALPH WOOD, M.A. 1968, Ph.D. 1975, is the University Professor of Theology and Literature at Baylor University. All four of his books remain in print, with *The Comedy of Redemption* now having reached its twentieth year; Eerdmans will be bringing out a volume of his lay sermons. He has received the Mary Ann Remick Senior Visiting Fellowship at the Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame, where he will spend the 2007–2008 academic year working on a book on G.K. Chesterton's aesthetics.

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For information on alumni giving and volunteering opportunities, please contact Mary Jean Kraybill, Director of Development, at 773-702-8248 or [mjkraybill@uchicago.edu](mailto:mjkraybill@uchicago.edu).

You may also update your contact information in the University's online directory, which can be accessed from the Divinity School's Web site, at <http://divinity.uchicago.edu/alumni/alumni.html>.



# Alumni News Information

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# Alumni News Information

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