

A PUBLICATION OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
DIVINITY SCHOOL

SPRING 2023

Criterion



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
DIVINITY SCHOOL



FROM THE DEAN

I send greetings from Swift Hall as we transition to a new academic year at the Divinity School, my first full year as Dean, and our 100th in this iconic building at the center of campus. There is so very much to share with you with fall approaching: events and programming—old and new, familiar and unexpected, as we build on our traditional strengths—interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research, challenging and innovative teaching, and a love of learning, exploration, and experimentation—to develop new partnerships and create exciting opportunities on and around campus.



This year, we are excited to welcome a new professor to our ranks, Stephan Licha, who specializes in the intellectual history of Japanese Buddhism. Prof. Licha's extraordinary range of research expertise and linguistic skills will help expand our existing strengths in Buddhist studies—classical Indian, Tibetan and Chinese—to the full range of developments in Japan, from the tenth century to modernism in the nineteenth and twentieth, even contemporary Manga. This appointment is part of our ongoing emphasis on extending our teaching and research capacities into new disciplines, traditions, time periods and geographical locales, and is made possible through the generous support of the Numata Foundation.

The cutting-edge faculty research and teaching of Dr. Licha and all our professors is supported by a new funding source created last year: The Dean's Fund for the Academic Study of Religion. Faculty can apply for support to host conferences, travel for research, develop programming and large-scale collaborative projects, just to single out a few general examples. The goal is to enable our faculty to apply the tools and ideas of historiography and philology, archival and manuscript research, ethnography, philosophy and theology, the study of art, architecture and archeological remains, to all aspects of religion, wherever they are found and in the most productive ways.

The Martin Marty Center for the Public Understanding of Religion is also working to strengthen the ways our research, learning, and education can find full flowering in and extending out from the School. In the coming year, the Center will engage scholars and the public around critical questions ranging from religion and reproductive politics, to mass migration and climate change, to the rich and fascinating history of religion in Chicago. The Public Religion Residency program will continue, as will the event series held in partnership with the Seminary Co-op, the online publication *Sightings*, and so very much more. Under the leadership of Interim Executive Director Emily D. Crews, PhD '21, the Marty Center will expand and refine its place as a nexus for all discussion around religion, enabling our faculty and students and other communities to present new work and experiment with different approaches in conversations taking place within and especially outside the academy.

All of this will continue forward, along with unabated efforts to improve student funding and resources, create more and more internship opportunities which help students explore the opportunities an education in the study of religion and religious leadership can open to, pedagogical training through the Craft of Teaching and the Colman Program, student-run workshops, conferences and lecture series, and in general the solidification of the social framework of learning required post-pandemic, including the revival of the Dean's Forum and Bibfeldt events, the Nuveen Lecture, Colver Lecture, Alumnus of the Year event, lectures inaugurating named chairs and events around the work of recently retired faculty and emeriti, and of course the steadying presence of the best coffee shop on campus, Grounds of Being.

The Divinity School speaks to and establishes the foundations of religion and religious studies, with learning and erudition, innovation and change, and an ever-increasing awareness of the need to relate scholarship to the pressing questions of public and contemporary concern (and vice versa!). We will continue to teach the critical skills that are necessary for relating to the ever-present and always complicated role religion plays in the many worlds we inhabit, in meaningful, responsible, but also creative and adaptive ways.

Warmly,

JAMES THEODORE ROBINSON
DEAN OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
CAROLINE E. HASKELL PROFESSOR OF THE HISTORY OF JUDAISM,
ISLAMIC STUDIES, AND THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

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STAY IN TOUCH with our quarterly e-newsletter for alumni and friends, *Swift Matters*. Email Madison McClendon at mmcclendon@uchicago.edu to subscribe.



What Are We Talking About When We Talk About Religion?

THE SHORTEST ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS “NO ONE IS SURE.” The slightly longer answer, at least among scholars of religion, is probably, “Mainly we talk about how to figure out what we mean when we talk about religion.” The word is notoriously slippery, hard to find a match for in many languages, and unlikely to lend itself to any one definition that will satisfy every one of its users. So the best I can do is to try to pinpoint what I think I mean by the word when I use it to single out the kind of human goings-on that have fascinated me personally—fascinated me to such an extent that it has absorbed much of my attention for the past several decades. At gunpoint, and in an elevator, I would describe it as an interest in any and every attempt made by human beings to work out a way to grok the relation between finitude and infinity. Given a less urgent setting, I might say something about human grapplings with the limitations of their own identities, of the boundaries marking out who and what they are, but also the breaching of those limits—that is, whatever there might be internal or external to those limits, or in the limits themselves, that problematize those limits and identities, stretches and stresses them, oversteps and undermines them, encompasses and sustains and exalts and eludes and undoes them. Being both inside and outside oneself, being a self both seeing and seen by another, seeing a self both being and been by another, being the interface of these two that is their tension and the resolution of their tension at once, that is their embrace and their struggle at once—might it be something like that?

BROOK ZIPORYN
MIRCEA ELIADE PROFESSOR OF CHINESE RELIGION,
PHILOSOPHY, AND COMPARATIVE THOUGHT



OUR MASTERS PROGRAMS welcome students of all ages and backgrounds. With the goal of making the academic study of religion more accessible to those who wish to pursue it with rigor and sophistication, students can focus on topics including Buddhism and Religious Ethics. See our website for more information.

SPRING COURSES

Every year our faculty develop new courses across the range of our curriculum.

Transnational Religious Movements

Time and Eternity: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives

Philosophical Traditions in Indian Buddhist Thought

Zen and Translation

Gender and Salvation in Jainism and Buddhism

Bioethics

Buddhism and Science: A Critical Introduction

History of Sexuality and Sin

Epic Religion: From the Ramayana to Game of Thrones

Parties and Feasting in/as Religion

Jesus: From Scripture to the Silver Screen

The Global Revolt Against Liberalism

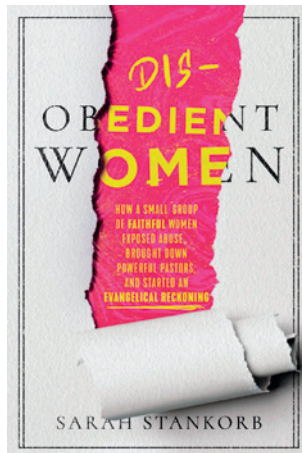
Religion, Science, Naturalism: Is There a Problem?

The Past, Present, and Future of Feminist Ethics

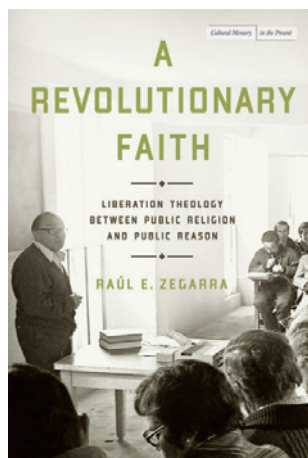
Disability Studies and Biblical Studies

Alumni Books

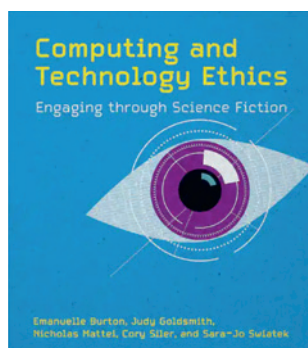
Have you recently published a book or do you have other alumni news? We'd love to hear from you. Please write to Madison McClendon at mmcclendon@uchicago.edu.



In *Disobedient Women: How a Small Group of Faithful Women Exposed Abuse, Brought Down Powerful Pastors, and Ignited an Evangelical Reckoning* (Hachette, 2023), **Sarah Stankorb (MA'05)** outlines how access to the internet—its networks, freedom of expression, and resources—allowed women to begin dismantling the false authority of evangelical communities that had long demanded their submission.



In *A Revolutionary Faith: Liberation Theology Between Public Religion and Public Reason* (Stanford University Press, 2023), **Raúl E. Zegarra (PhD'20)** examines the process of articulation of religious beliefs and political concerns that takes place in religious organizing and activism, focusing on the example of Latin American liberation theology and the work of Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez.



Computing and Technology Ethics: Engaging through Science Fiction (The MIT Press, 2023), by **Sara-Jo Swiatek (PhD'22)** and **Emmanuelle Burton (PhD'15)** (et al.) is an introduction to ethics and also includes an anthology of short fiction stories, pedagogy guides, and commentary on the main professional codes of conduct that technicians, programmers, and designers are expected to know.

Read Drs. Swiatek and Burton's interview about the creation and importance of their book on our website.

REV. TERRI HORD OWENS, 2023 ALUMNA OF THE YEAR



Upon recommendation from the Divinity School's Alumni Council, the Board of Trustees of the Baptist Theological Union has named **Teresa Hord Owens**, MDiv 2003, the Divinity School Alumna of the Year for 2023.

REV. TERESA "TERRI" HORD OWENS IS THE GENERAL MINISTER AND PRESIDENT OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA, a position she was elected to in July 2017. She is the first person of color and second woman to lead the denomination—and the first African American woman to lead a mainline Christian denomination.

A descendant of one of the oldest African American free settlements in Indiana and a Disciple since young adulthood, Rev. Owens was Dean of Students at the University of Chicago Divinity School for twelve years prior to her election shepherding a varied student body in both background and theology, and leading campus-wide diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Rev. Owens is widely sought after as a preacher, speaker and workshop facilitator. Her ministry and intellectual interests include a theology of reconciliation, cultural intelligence, developing inclusive and multicultural congregations, and the mentoring of young adults. Before studying at The University of Chicago she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Government and Afro-American Studies at Harvard University.

"Rev. Owens continues to make important, impactful contributions to the American church, the higher education landscape, and the Divinity School," said James Theodore Robinson, Dean of the Divinity School, of the award. "Her service to community, writ large, and to those who seek to understand our religiously pluralistic world, greatly embodies the values of The Divinity School."

Rev. Owens' Alumna of the Year address, entitled "A New Church for a New World" was delivered on Thursday, May 4, 2023. The video is available on our YouTube channel (bit.ly/DivinityVideo).

How Did The Ancients Interpret Their Myths?

Theological Genealogies of Modernity

Radical Theologies and Heretical Praxis in Reformation Europe: From Luther to Quaker Prophetesses

Art and Religion from the Roman to the Christian Worlds

Will, Life, Value

Rumi: Poetry, Wisdom, and Metaphysics

Capitalism and Doing Good?

Nietzsche, European Culture, and the Death of God

Heaven, Hell, and Life After Death

Broken Mirrors: Writing the Other from Herodotus to the Jewish/Christian Schism

Paul's First and Last Letters—The Macedonian Correspondence

Womanist Theology: 1st Generation

Christianity and Slavery in America, 1619-1865





Enrollment in Prof. Laurie Zoloth’s “Bioethics” class is a snapshot of the School: it includes MA, MDiv, and PhD students as well as students from the Social Sciences and Humanities divisions. This quarter’s version also included College students. Irrespective of program, Prof. Zoloth finds that her students are interested in the idea that profound religious ideas are available in literary texts.

CLASS:
Bioethics

INSTRUCTOR:
Laurie Zoloth, Margaret E. Burton Professor of Religion and Ethics; also in the College; The Program in Jewish Studies; and the MacLean Center for Biomedical Ethics at the Pritzker School of Medicine

What is the role of bioethics in the study of religion? How does thinking about religion through the lens of bioethics impact how we understand the phenomenon of religion in the world?

Bioethics, which is a discipline at the crossing points of science, theology, philosophy, humanities, and law, allows a complex discourse about the nature, goal and meaning of medical care and scientific research.

Religious traditions have long had the care of the body of the other, and the inquiry about the nature of the world at their core. The dilemmas of infertility and birth, befallenness, healing and death are the subject of much of our scriptural texts of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Quran. Buddhism has a narrative about the question of human suffering at its center, and Hindu temples are often the site of healing practices. This means

that religious traditions have rich and historical resources for thinking about health care. Thus, bioethics is a discourse that allows students who are perhaps encountering the study of religion for the first time, to see how powerfully these texts make legible the ethical questions that undergird the research and practice of medicine. Religious texts carry strong arguments for justice and human dignity that are critical in understanding the

reasoning behind bioethical norms. This is particularly important when medical care and science can be so dominated by arguments about cost-benefit, QALYS, or market outcomes—often religious texts that insist on the need to care for the vulnerable stranger are the only place where the poor and the ill have a deep value and where we as a society have an inescapable duty towards them.

Finally, because the language of medicine and the technologies of science are so powerful, and so redemptive, they create a very compelling argument in modernity. This means that it is rare for this argument to face a serious challenge. When such a challenge emerges in the clinic or in public policy, it is often made in terms of religious faith, or a commitment to a value central to that faith. For example: Is my body my “own” or is it a divine gift for which I care? Does human life have the same moral status prior to birth as after birth? Can I refuse care that doctors believe will save my life if I trust in a miraculous healing?

Bioethics must be a fast-moving field. How do you choose areas of focus?

This is a course in the fundamentals of the field, so we first read about the core arguments in the history of ethics, and the core legal cases that shaped

the field, and we focus on the dilemmas that occur at the beginning of life: genetic choices, surrogacy, foster care, abortion and at the end of life: withdrawal of care, organ transplants, advance directives. We end by thinking about public health and infectious diseases. Then, every year, the class works on a group project on an emerging issue in bioethics: For the last three years, we have thought about the complexities of COVID and the religious responses, last year, they considered the problem of religion, war and bioethical dilemmas, and this year, they are working on the bioethics dilemma of homeless populations. The goal in each of the final projects is to apply the theories and arguments of the texts we study to a practical problem that might yield to policy solutions. Then, of course, bioethical dilemmas often dominate the news, for the issues of embodiment, liberty, and moral status are always at stake in American public life. This year, three days after the Supreme court responded to the mifepristone question was the scheduled lecture on abortion, so we watched as history—and my lecture—was written in real time!

At the beginning of class, we have a discussion about the real need for debates about things that matter

READING LIST

- Thomas Beauchamp and James Childress: *Principles of Bioethics.*
- Helga Kuhse: *Bioethics: An Anthology.*
- Therese Lysaught and Joseph Koyta, Jr: *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives in Medical Ethics.*
- Gregory Pence: *Classic Cases in Medical Ethics: Accounts of Cases That Have Shaped Medical Ethics.*
- For Graduate Students:**
- John Arras: *Methods in Bioethics: The Way We Reason Now.*
- Michel Foucault: *The Birth of the Clinic.*

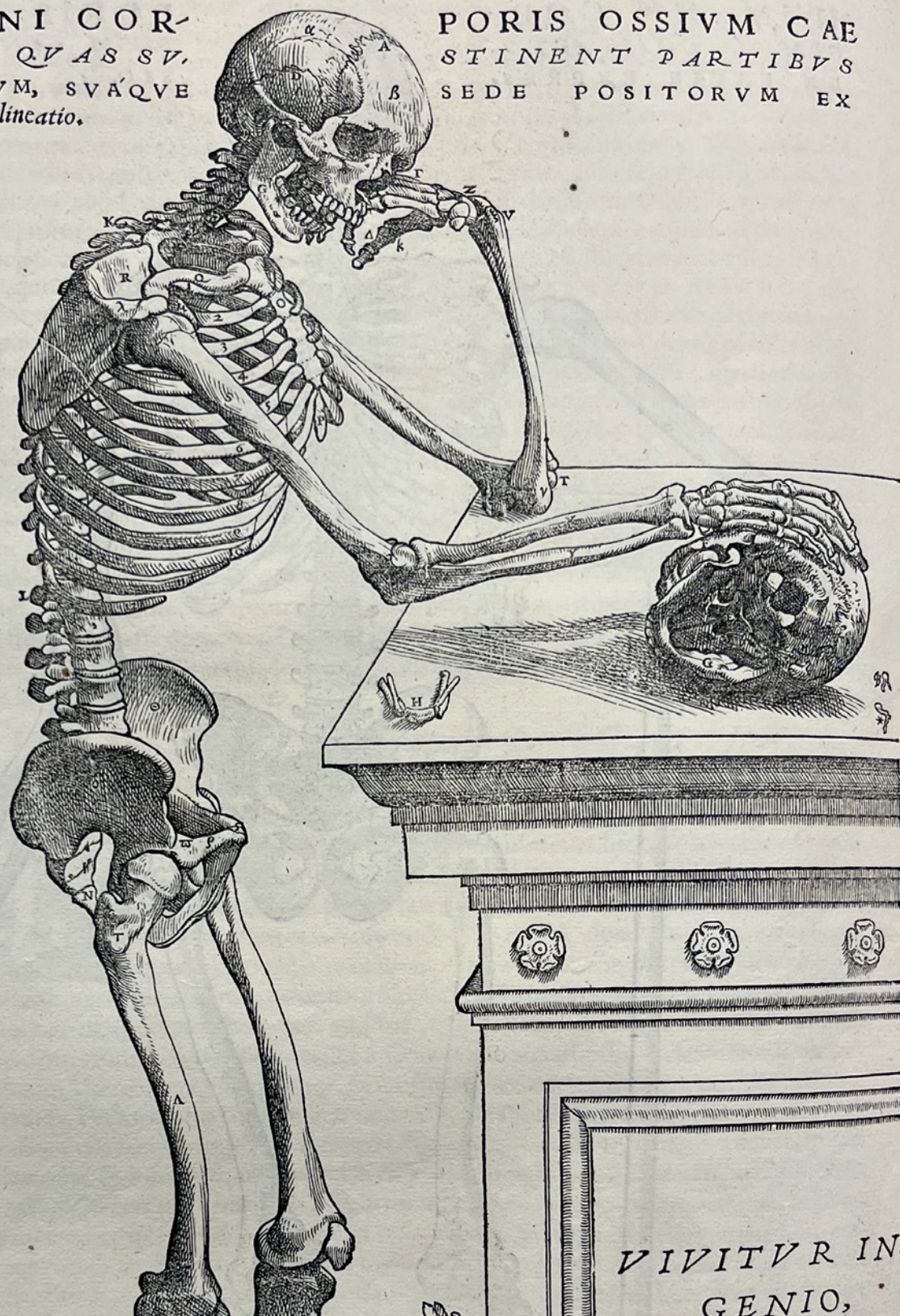


Many subjects in bioethics reflect deep, serious and incommensurate differences, and will not be easily resolved, for they touch on fundamental theological and ontological commitments. Learning to listen for and respect the sincerity in the arguments of others and learning to justify one’s one is part of the practice of bioethics and part of the learning experience of the class.

deeply, and I encourage the student to be unafraid to defend their positions. One way we do this is by reading a wide variety of texts, many of which disagree with one another.

“Often religious texts that insist on the need to care for the vulnerable stranger are the only place where the poor and the ill have a deep value and where we as a society have an inescapable duty towards them.” LAURIE ZOLOTH

164 ANDREAE VESALII BRUXELLENSIS
 HUMANI CORPORIS QUAS SV-
 LIBERORVM, SVAQVE
laterc delineatio.
 PORIS OSSIVM CAE-
 STINENT PARTIBVS
 SEDE POSITORVM EX



This illustration is from Andreas Vesalius's 1543 CE De Humani Corporis Fabrica, the first major text on human anatomy to be based on actual human dissection. Students had the opportunity to see and work with one of the two copies of first editions of this manuscript in the Library's Special Collections Research Center.

VIVITVR IN
 GENIO,
 CAETERA MOR-
 TIS ERVNT.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES COURSE TAKES FIELD TRIP



This story was written by Andy Brown for the College's Instagram account.

This past quarter, students enrolled in “**Medical Innovation and Religious Reform in Early Modernity**” had a unique opportunity to work with a number of rare manuscripts in the Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center.

According to Mark Lambert, (PhD'21) a Divinity School Teaching Fellow (with appointments in the College and the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality), the primary purpose of the visit to the archive was to examine a first edition (1543) manuscript of Dutch anatomist Andreas Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica* (*The Structure of the Human Body*). Considered the founder of modern human anatomy, Vesalius wrote what is arguably the most important text in the history of modern medicine, Lambert said. It was the first detailed text to treat the subject of human anatomy based

primarily upon empirical observation and postmortem dissection, and students were able to examine a nearly 500-year-old edition of it. “The fact that UChicago has not one but two first editions is itself a monumental feat that speaks to the high quality of our Special Collections resources,” he said. Students in Lambert's class are currently studying the symbiotic relationship between theology and medical inquiry during a period of considerable upheaval.

Photography: Mark Lambert

Winter Quarter Student-Led Programming



**EBONI MARSHALL
TURMAN**



**LARYCIA
HAWKINS**



NYLE FORT



**JEREMY
WILLIAMS**



BLACK HISTORY MONTH

This past February the Divinity School and the Dean of Students Office offered an innovative student-led programming series focusing on Black History Month. The program brought six visiting scholars for lunch-and-learn events.

We also had a book giveaway event; fiction and non-fiction titles on topics around Black religion, Black life, and Black culture were chosen by the student organizers. PhD students Matthew Vega and Iris Reddick Manburg (both in Theology) shepherded this robust month of programming, which began with a talk commemorating the life and legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Videos of the talks by RL Watson (PhD'18) and Braxton Shelley (MDiv'17, Music Department PhD'17) are available on our YouTube channel: bit.ly/DivinityVideo.



RL WATSON



BRAXTON SHELLEY



RAMADAN

During Ramadan—the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, observed as a time of fasting, prayer, reflection, and community—the Divinity School and the Dean of Students Office offered an innovative event and information initiative. This initiative included bringing guest writers and artists to campus and sponsoring a community Eid celebration and a community interfaith Iftar. MDiv student Safia Mahjebin and MA student Hajra Zaid spearheaded the initiative. Also included was an extensive art exhibit concentrated in the Swift Hall lobby and still on view on our Instagram account (@uchidivinity).



Jamil Jan Kochai led a reading and workshop in Swift Hall, entitled: “Writing for God: A Reading and Discussion.” He is the author of *99 Nights in Logar* (Viking, 2019), a finalist for the Pen/Hemingway Award for Debut Novel and the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature.



Jacinda Bullie led an art workshop entitled “DNA Joy.” The Chicago-based artist guided attendees to make their own narrative of themselves, their history, and their futures, through reflection and art exercises.



How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Have Fun

Anand Venkatkrishnan

2022-2023 WELCOME CEREMONY ADDRESS

A newer tradition of the Divinity School is the Welcome Ceremony, held at the beginning of the academic year not only to welcome our new students but to join in community together. For this year's ceremony our speaker was Prof. Anand Venkatkrishnan, Assistant Professor of the History of Religion in South Asia; also in the College.

Don't tell anyone, but I used to be a serious person. I thought that every decision, every action, had a moral and metaphysical significance. My failure was a symptom of everyone's failure. It was a level of severity familiar from many religious traditions. It endowed each act with an intensity of purpose, including the command to study. For example, when quarantined in a Wyoming concentration camp in 1943, the Japanese Buddhist priest Nyogen Senzaki wrote in his journal: "War or no war, the study of Buddhism must be continued." The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) taught his followers that to "study knowledge in God's name is to dread him; to seek it out is to worship him; to commit it to memory is to glorify him; to discuss it is to wage holy war; to instruct novices in it is to give alms; to dispense it freely to the qualified is to do righteous deeds." In the Sanskrit *Kathāsaritsāgara*, a humiliated king yells at his ministers, "Give me scholarship or give me death!" (This is now the motto on UChicago Sanskrit T-shirts).

You'd think that loosening those ties would mean that everything was permitted. The problem is that the scholarly life to which I had defected was no less serious. Rigor, discipline, mastery, judgment, criticism—these were the virtues that conferred prestige, the only currency available to us in the absence of, well, actual currency. Education as a profession has always been about status—longed for, withheld, and envied. Yet to treat it as a vocation, a noble sacrifice unsullied by personal gain, was only possible for those who never had to worry about money in the first place. So the battle to outdo one another for moral and material supremacy went on, the seriousness of the endeavor never under question.

How did I come, then, to a Jerry Garcia-like insistence that if it isn't fun, then what are we even doing, man? How, at the University of Chicago of all places, can one preach the gospel of fun? In the sacred words of John McEnroe, "You cannot be serious!" I learned it where I learned everything, from my teachers. I'd like to tell you about some of them. Mostly they were on the margins of academic life. They didn't have the stature of colleagues or the security of tenure. They loved the life of learning, but

the university never loved them back. That probably gave them a clearer sense of what they ought to be up to. The poet Bhartrhari says, *śrōtram śrutēnaiva na kuṇḍalēna*, Earrings don't adorn the ears—learning does; *dānēna pāñir na tu kañkañēna*, Bracelets don't decorate the hands—giving does; *vibhāti kāyah karuṇāparāṇām paropakārair na tu candanēna*, It isn't lotion that makes your body glow—it's compassion and helping others.

PART I: SPECTERS OF SARASVATĪ

I began studying Sanskrit at the age of 5. There was a private tutor in the Bay Area named Dr. Sarasvati Mohan. She was a four-foot-eleven, sprightly woman with a persistent wheeze, a penchant for oddball Ayurvedic remedies, and an infinite patience for young people. She developed her own pedagogical material: self-printed manuals of grammar lessons, homework exercises, and declension tables that I decorated with cartoon stickers. With Sarasvati Aunty, I never felt that I couldn't do this difficult thing. She allowed me to laugh at silly-sounding nouns, to play vocabulary games, to never take an exam in my life. The point of studying Sanskrit, in her view, was not to master it, to own it, to deploy it, or to defend it; the point was to enjoy it. Learning was important, but so was having fun.

She left for India when I started high school. I can't say that I understood everything she taught me, but I must have picked it up by osmosis. She was just a kindly old woman to me. I had a vague notion that she had studied for a Ph.D. in India, and had been at Wesleyan at some point, but I assumed she was an adjunct for a short time. As I discovered in the Wesleyan archives only a few months ago, the truth is much deeper. She had studied with the leading lights of Sanskrit poetics in the 1960s and worked as a bibliographer for Indian manuscript catalogues. From 1966-1973, she taught Sanskrit in Wesleyan's Ethnomusicology department, where she published her doctoral thesis and contributed to major Indology journals. She developed a second project on Sanskrit musicological traditions and conducted manuscript research in American, European, and Indian libraries. After landing in the crossfires of budgetary restrictions and departmental priorities, she was not advanced for tenure despite a stellar



research and teaching record. It's a complicated story that I have yet to unravel. One letter in her file rated her ahead of any contemporary graduate of American universities, and posited that "It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find her equal in both training and accomplishment." The irony, of course, is that if she had received tenure, maybe she would not have taught private lessons, and I wouldn't know Sanskrit. At least, I wouldn't have learned it the way I did.

I used to consider my Sanskrit education haphazard, undisciplined. Now I know that it was loving. Dr. Mohan transformed the bitterness of underemployment into the gift of education. This quarter I'm reading the last text she ever read with me with my Advanced Sanskrit class. It's an excerpt from



Bāṇa's *Kādambarī*, a prose romance from the seventh century. A minister warns a crown-prince about the dangers of youth, power, and wealth. "Lakṣmī (goddess of wealth) doesn't stick around in one place," he says, "as if there were thorns stuck to her feet as she skips across her lotus pond." Were these lines for me or for herself? As the old proverb goes, "Sarasvatī (goddess of learning) doesn't stay where Lakṣmī holds sway; mother-in-law and daughter-in-law seldom get along."

Dr. Mohan died a few years ago. The last time I spoke to her on the phone, or tried to, she had had complications from a surgery and fluid had leaked into her brain. She was unintelligible. It was very, very difficult. Something similar happened to another

teacher of mine, John Felstiner. I took his class on literary translation at Stanford. I remember him once unable to get through reading aloud a poem by Paul Celan. John died after complications from aphasia. The phenomenon of people who spent their lives with language unable to use it near the end is unspeakably sad to me. I don't mean to bring down the mood. I'm just saying that what we do with language when we still have it matters a lot. You never know whom your words will affect on any given day. Choose good ones. Sarasvatī will help you.

PART II: EVERYBODY HAVING FUN?

I fell in love on my first day of college, on the sofa in the graduate lounge of the Classics department. Bert Lain taught Latin as an adjunct faculty member. He was in his fifties, thin gray hair speckled across a balding head, holding court before a gaggle of prospective freshmen. He wore what I learned to be his uniform, a flannel shirt tucked into blue jeans, round wire-rim glasses on his face. He spoke with a Savannah drawl, sprinkled with Catholic school cadence. A mischievous smile constantly danced around his lips. The only thing I ever saw him eat for lunch was two Reese's peanut butter cups and a bottle of Coke. You could never quite believe anything he said. For example, he was convinced that *Jeopardy!* discriminated on the basis of class because they asked him on the questionnaire if he liked bowling. He was a prophet, a madman, an imp. He shivered with fury when radio shock jock Don Imus used a racist slur against the Rutgers women's basketball team. He was the only person I saw who spoke with sanitation staff like they were his neighbors, because they were. He told my parents at graduation that my work would save lives.

I didn't learn much Latin from Bert. He did things very slowly and interrupted himself with long asides about whatever was on his mind. He concluded these digressions with the rhetorical question: "Everybody having fun?" (I still ask people this at the end of my classes). But I didn't take Latin because I wanted to learn Latin. I wanted to know what it was like to be a person who learned Latin. Would I be virtuous or vain? Cosmopolitan or conservative? Awkward or... more awkward? How could I reconcile my love of old things with my hatred of old ways? Bert taught me that none of this really mattered. What mattered

"In thinking about the everyday life of scholarship, for the feelings that inspire reasoning, what I really care about is a vision of scholarly life that moves from mastery, control, and rectitude, to vulnerability, sensitivity, and compassion."

ANAND VENKATKRISHNAN

was whether or not you were having fun while you still could. I transcribed his speech at the Classics graduation, and I want to share some of it here:

"One of the things that the graduates today have most appreciated in those who have taught them, whether here or elsewhere, are the qualities of energy and enthusiasm. If the people teaching you don't have energy and enthusiasm, then why should you want to learn from them or to share any interest in what they do? It just won't be convincing if they can't get excited about it themselves. Nobody would ever say that I'm not excited about this stuff.

"Also energy and enthusiasm inspire people to do what they didn't think they were capable of. With energy and enthusiasm, you can honor people, because they will think, quite rightly—in my case, for example—that I'm enthusiastic about *them* and what *they* can do. That unflinching gets the best possible response. There's nothing that will energize somebody like the notion that somebody they admire believes in them. Nothing is more powerful than that. Not in my case, not in any case. Support of people not like yourself is the very essence of magnanimity. One of the best thoughts I've ever had, if I do say so myself.

"I've had a number of odd experiences. I met Betty Friedan and Liberace on the same day. And I chatted with both of them, even though I could tell Liberace had only a few days to live, which he did. He was determined to be himself, however; he was out on a day as hot as this, in his fur coat. Because he knew people would see him, and like me recognize him, and he wanted us to remember him *that way*. He had the courage to be himself, at a time when many people did not, if you know what I mean."

PART III: DHARMA ACTIVIST

In the dark days of seriousness, I nearly became a public intellectual. The social responsibility of the overeducated was to contribute enlightened opinions, as if telling different stories would result in different social arrangements. This was before we learned that social media was not a social good. I signed up for a class on Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel, two religious intellectuals who attempted to build the beloved community. It was co-taught by Akiba Lerner, Richard Rorty's last student, and Mark Gonnerman, a shaggy-haired Buddhist Christian trained in old-school comparative religion. (Rorty, by the way, recognized when someone was having fun, which is why he criticized those who took Derrida too seriously.) When he finally finished his dissertation after fifteen years, Mark produced a monumental thesis on Gary Snyder and the making of American Zen. He had spent many years doing peace work in Japan. Mark and I bonded over being preacher's kids, his background Midwest Lutheran and mine Brahmin Hindu. We had both rejected one priestly caste for another. Walking and listening was important to Mark. Whenever I went out with Mark, I made new acquaintances in the neighborhood, people who were housed and unhoused alike. It wasn't just that he could talk with anyone, it's that he wanted to. He taught me to understand the space I was in through its history, through the lives of those who had lived there. Sho Konishi, author of a book of anarchist thought in modern Japan, says that "[S]pace can be designated, fixed, and even controlled and managed by power, but what you think and do in these spaces at an undesignated time essentially determines the meaning of the space." The university



was a corporate engine, yes, but it provided the conditions for other kinds of relationships. Mark's work was ultimately about relationships. He was an organizer at heart. A

symposium he convened on Gary Snyder's *Mountains and Rivers Without End* took participants from the seminar room to a ritual circumambulation of Mount Tam; a speaker series he ran, the Aurora Forum, hosted public conversations with everyone from Cornel West to the Dalai Lama. Mark never settled down in normative academia. He directed a program at the ill-fated Institute for Transpersonal Psychology, founded a short-lived publishing company for Chinese writers entering the English-language marketplace, and cobbled together teaching at community colleges. Through all the uncertainty and disappointment, there's always a glimmer of a smile on Mark's face and a knowing glint in his eyes when he unclips his John Lennon sunglasses. Whenever I visit the Bay, I try to see Mark and his wife Meri Mitsuyoshi, a third-generation Japanese American, fellow Warriors fan, and one-time Sanskrit student of Dr. Mohan. We met in Berkeley a few months ago. They'd come up from San Jose for the hatching of the peregrine falcons that nest on top of the university bell tower and for the Japanese American evacuation exhibit at Bancroft Library. We sat on the steps of Sproul Hall and talked about the dispiriting future of humanistic study. Conversation turned to my interest in scholarly biographies, and how my view of intellectual virtues compared to that of my institution or my field. Life returned to Mark's voice. "Yes, very good!" he murmured. For a moment, it didn't matter that none of his students wanted to read, or think, or hope. It was enough that someone did. I noticed a lightness in his step as we departed. "One does not stand still looking for a path," as he loved to quote Rev. Mas Kodani. "One walks; and as one walks, a path comes into being."

PART IV: KABIR SAYS, LISTEN UP, WISE GUYS!

What can I say about my buaji, my favorite aunt, Linda Hess? She has the youngest heart of anyone I know. It's got to be the result of all the years she's spent with the poet Kabir and at the Zen Center. I adore her combination of irreverence and loving care. Denied tenure at Berkeley for being a "mere translator" of Kabir's poems, she commuted across the Bay to be a lecturer in Religious Studies at Stanford. For decades she was the only specialist in Hinduism; ironic, because her favorite poet would have hated that label, yet apropos, because both he and she lived on the margins. Linda bristled at anything that was too classical. We bickered about the Sanskrit epics; she felt that they were retrograde and I said that they contained the seeds of their own questioning. She refused to condone top-down theories of anything. A democratic, but above all a sympathetic spirit. "Kabir says, I go on shouting / and the pandits go on thinking."

Linda introduced me to many poets, singers, and scholars. She also introduced me to cranberry walnut bread at Berkeley Bowl, and beet chips baked in the oven, and rose hedges at the UC Botanical Garden. I'll never forget the time she made me externalize a small family conflict I was struggling with. Playing the role of Anxiety, she danced around me like a ghoulish apparition, while I tried to push her away with my arms. Her dog Joshy got really excited. We giggled with relief and took him for a walk to the park. "Dogs help you meet people," Linda explained. "There's a whole community I've discovered!"

That line about discovering community is a microcosm of her career. Linda went from the serious business of comparative literature, to wild adventures on the ghats of Banaras, to singing bhajans with folk musicians in rural India — all without the stability that the profession promises. Kabir says, *yah sansār kāgaz ki puḍiyā / būnd paḍe ghul jānā hai*, "This life is a sheaf of papers: a drop of water and it dissolves." Someone asked Linda if she didn't find Kabir's emphasis on transience and death to be depressing. "His approach to death is joyous," she said. "The joy of it is you're expressing your complete freedom from fear. Your freedom! I haven't achieved that, no way. But I hear it!"

PART V: HERE AT THE END OF ALL THINGS

The things I've learned from my teachers have less to do with the content of their expertise and more with the example of their being. In fancy terms we call this *habitus*, the attitudes, dispositions, and comportments that structure scholarly practice. My own scholarly *habitus*, for instance, is jokey and un-serious and filled with puns. The MA students here will take my class in the winter titled "Theory and Method Man," a joke that's probably too old for most of you and too niche for the rest, just the way I like it. I don't think my way of being is necessarily the right one, it's just more fun. You gotta have fun before it's too late.

For many people in my field, the form of scholarly prose should be utterly serious, unequivocal, scriptural. But I find it difficult to "take seriously," even and especially as a virtue. What if the practice of reading a text were to take it as a joke? After all, one possible definition of a joke—a form of transmitting knowledge that requires the reader to accept the premise—could apply just as easily to scripture. Perhaps our relationship to any canon, religious or academic, would be healthier if we did not take it seriously. Seriousness is good if you want to explain why things are the way they are (or were). That is scientism. A humanist, like an artist, offers possibilities, to talk about things as they might have been, but are not unreal for not being, and may still yet be. Humor is amoral, and as such unreliable. But it could be gentle, soft, silly, and forgiving. In thinking about the everyday life of scholarship, for the feelings that inspire reasoning, what I really care about is a vision of scholarly life that moves from mastery, control, and recitude, to vulnerability, sensitivity, and compassion.

When it comes to studying religion, sometimes good humor is better than good faith. For instance, religious studies as a social science has developed all kinds of ways of thinking about ritual theory. But when students ask me about this or that practice, I refer them to my dad's theory of "the cat in the basket." He used to fulfill priestly functions for the local Hindu community on a small-scale but public level. Usually he provided symbolic interpretations of

ritual steps that could satisfy a modernist audience. But on occasion, with mischief in his heart, he would refer to the cat in the basket. Before a household ceremony, the story goes, family members were running around to find a cat to place under a basket. "We can't start without the cat!" urged the patriarch, while the priest waited, bemused. What did the cat have to do with anything, he ventured. "You see," said the patriarch knowingly, "this is an ancestral practice. For generations we have not embarked on any initiative without the cat under the basket." The priest realized that one of his own ancestors was probably responsible: once upon a time a cat had snuck into the ceremonial space and the priest back then had thrown a basket over it to prevent interference. Eventually it was incorporated into the ritual. And that's how traditions are formed, my dad would conclude, satisfied and full of mirth. The point of the story was not that all traditions are absurd, or that ritual efficacy is purely performative. The point was that meaning is social and historical, and we do not need to appeal to antiquity or to eternal insights to justify our acts. The fact of us being here together in worship is enough. It may not be enough forever, and another generation will shuffle things up. But we have found our cat, and they will find theirs.



Scholarly habits form in similar ways. Spend enough time being broken down by your teachers and you will think that criticism is a form of love. But bring your whole being into the life of learning and your values change. We often talk about the life of the mind as if it were the mind that mattered, when it's really the life. It's a comically short life; sometimes the mind disintegrates before the body. It reminds me of a Sanskrit proverb about getting lost in the weeds of learning: *anantapāraṃ kila śabdāsāstram*, The science of language stretches on without end; *svalpaṃ tathāyur bahavaś ca vighnāḥ*, Life is short, and obstacles many; *sāraṃ tatō grāhyam apāsya phalgu*, So take what matters and chuck the rest; *haṃsair yathā kṣīram ivāmbumadhyāt*, Like a swan separates milk from water. May your lives be long and obstacles few. Thanks for being here.



CURTIS J. EVANS, Associate Professor of Religions in America and the History of Christianity, has been appointed Marty Center Faculty Co-Director.

Faculty Co-Directors advance the Marty Center's engagement with the university community and broader public. During a three-year appointment, they collaborate with staff on the weekly publication of *Sightings*, oversee the sponsorship of conferences and events, and lead the annual Marty Seminar Junior Fellowship program.



Simran Jeet Singh concentrated his visit on Divinity School graduate students.

"We are very excited about the leadership and experience Professor Evans will bring to the Marty Center's developing programming," said Dean James T. Robinson. "His unparalleled knowledge of American history, African American history, and especially the history of African American religion, in its many and diverse congregational and institutional forms, will add greater depth to research projects focused on local and contemporary subjects."

Evans is an historian who focuses on modern American religion, particularly since the Civil War; race and religion in US history; and slavery and Christianity. He will succeed Willemien Otten, Dorothy Grant Maclear Professor of Theology and the History of Christianity, who has led the Marty Center as Faculty Director and later Co-Director since 2017.

For the full announcement, please visit divinity.uchicago.edu/news/curtis-j-evans-appointment

Photos by Lauren Pond



Local kids flocked out to hear Samira Ahmed talk about superheroes and religion and racial identity.

It has been a fruitful and memorable year at the Marty Center! Over the past nine months, we have substantially grown our public programming, research initiatives, partnerships, and other opportunities to advance the public understanding of religion. We have:

- Trained more than 22 graduate students in writing about religion for the public through the Divinity School's first Sacred Writes workshop
- Sponsored public talks with scholars on topics including Christian Nationalism (Samuel L. Perry), the hidden history of Black Catholic nuns in the U.S. (Shannen D. Williams), urban indigenous healthcare (Jocelyn Formsma), and the AIDS pandemic (Sarah Schulman and Michael O'Loughlin)
- In partnership with the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice, facilitated the 2023 Nathaniel Colver Lecture with Senator Reverend Raphael Warnock and the 2023 Social Justice Address with Reverend Doctor William Barber II
- Honored the scholarship and legacy of French theologian Jean-Luc Marion through a public conference, which brought together speakers and scholars from around the globe
- Convened more than 50 scholars, religious leaders, creatives, activists, and journalists for a multi-day, collaborative discussion about religion and reproductive politics



Prof. Jean-Luc Marion (center) engages with panelists at the November conference in his honor.

- Hosted a conference exploring the intersections of science and religion, with speakers including Peter Harrison and acclaimed novelist Marilynne Robinson
- Facilitated a monthly fellowship and peer-mentoring meeting of Black Church Leaders, which offered opportunities for training, reflection, and network-building
- Launched our first Public Religion Residency Program and invited inaugural fellows—Congressman Bobby Rush, bestselling author Samira Ahmed, and interfaith activist Simran Jeet Singh—to campus to share their expertise and perspectives
- Developed a new partnership with the Seminary Co-Op Bookstore and facilitated public conversations with nine authors whose books consider the topic of religion
- Provided academic consultation for Court Theatre's production of *The Gospel at Colonus*, which embeds Sophocles' text, *Oedipus at Colonus*, in the traditions of Black worship and sanctification
- Partnered with the Newberry Library to offer adult education courses on topics such as religion and abortion and the writings of Flannery O'Connor

Read more about these and other activities on our website at martycenter.org, and subscribe to our newsletter to stay abreast of our programs in the 2023-2024 academic year!



Scholars Ashlyn Strozer (L), Leila Blackbird (center) and Ekaterina Lomperis (R) at April's Religion and Reproductive Politics conference.

When Women's Fears are Twisted into Myth

Women should not be the subject or target of myth as they should not of any anti-abortion legislation. Rather, they should have the central and deciding voice in all matters regarding pregnancy care and childbirth.

BY WILLEMEN OTTEN | APRIL 13, 2023

Recent abortion bans around the country have heightened women's fears that they are no longer medically safe in case they have to endure difficult pregnancies and, especially, critical deliveries. Many women have taken to TikTok to voice their fears over births that could be life-threatening for them. Their reason for going on social media is not just to spread the word about their health risks but to literally plead for their own lives, seeing such openness apparently as the best way to protect themselves. Propelled by the fear that the life of their baby may mean the sacrifice of their own, they are creating "living wills" to prioritize the need to save their own lives.

W

hen I read about this in an article on CNN, its apparent aim was to dispel this fear as a "childbirth myth." Doctors denied that women had to worry because rarely is there need to make a choice between mother and child. The burgeoning trend on TikTok of "living wills" could hence be dismissed as noise from hysterical women.

But is the article right? Is it indeed a myth that there is no potential harm to pregnant women?

Or is the true myth being perpetuated here that these women's fears have no basis, as if we can all rest assured that the recent abortion bans will not have any long-term adverse effects on medical care for women in labor and new mothers? When, in other words, is a childbirth myth really a myth? As a scholar of religion, I am constantly on guard against casual employment of the term "myth", knowing how much it is caught up in structures of authority made murky by being overlaid with sacrality. In an interesting case of life amplifying work, I happen to have relevant experience as a mother, too.

Over two decades ago, our oldest daughter was born without much incident, but I was in grave danger right after delivery. My placenta did not leave my womb, which led to massive bleeding and an emergency hysterectomy. While still in the ICU, doctors were glancing at us with a worrisome look, since we would not be able to have more biological children. When I was fighting to stay alive during my hours-long surgery, my husband was counseled to go see our newborn daughter. This was no doubt well-meaning advice intended to calm and console him, but it also was a subtle nudge that the arrival of new life might have to compensate for the possible loss of my own. He told me later he could not bring himself to do so, waiting nervously outside the operating room instead.

Stumbling across the CNN article recently made me rethink the advice to my husband to go see our daughter in a more sinister way. What do we really know about the long-term effect of abortion bans on medical care for women? We already know that segments of our society value born life much less than "unborn life," which has become surrounded by a mystique of transcendent proportions. Once children are born, however, their education is not guaranteed nor is their healthcare, while we do precious little to protect them against gun violence.



"Myths in the study of religion are holistic scenarios that have a popular appeal, give creative meaning, hold a community together, but do not contain (f)actual truth."

WILLEMEN OTTEN

If there is such a drop-off in protection from unborn to born life for children, is it not a logical step to think that mothers have good reason to be concerned about their own well-being precisely at childbirth, the crucial moment of transition when the newborn is still tinged with the mystique of "unborn life"? It does not seem a stretch to think that the fact that in many states pregnant women no longer have legal protection for abortion can easily lead to a weakening of their overall medical care and the long-term devaluing of their lives. If childbirth seems to be valued above all other medical health issues for women to the point of disempowering them, will it not also be valued *at the expense* of other medical health issues for women?

What worried me most of all in the CNN-article is that the express will of women—as manifested in their "living wills" posted on TikTok—was seamlessly turned into an anonymous medical predicament, one about which pregnant women themselves can no longer pronounce with any kind of authority. Apparently only doctors can, doctors who in many states are explicitly forbidden to respect women's wills. An article about women feeling disempowered could thus end up further marginalizing their personal voices by invalidating what they considered a last resort.

Myths in the study of religion are holistic scenarios that have a popular appeal, give creative meaning, hold a community together, but do not contain (f)actual truth. Contrary to the article's message, too much is unknown at present to rule that the "living wills" posted on TikTok are myths in such a truth-defying sense. We simply cannot oversee the consequences of living in a culture that increasingly sees women's bodies as vehicles for procreation or incubators of new life. Dismissing their anxieties and desires out of hand thus amounts to a form of gaslighting.

The radical refusal to take concerned women's personal voices seriously—whether in the "living wills" on TikTok or the many pro-choice protests around the country—taps into another, much more ominous sense of myth, one that has been used over the centuries and across religions to assign certain groups of people their fixed place in a faceless overarching religio-political order. That faceless order, currently becoming unmasked in the Republican-Christian conservative legal race to the bottom (i.e., Supreme Court) to establish a national abortion ban, is eager to tell women that all will be well even as it is left open whether they themselves will be well or whether they will have a say in any medical decision about their well-being.

In both cases, I contend, women should not be the subject or target of myth as they should not of any anti-abortion legislation. Rather, they should have the central and deciding voice in all matters regarding pregnancy care and childbirth, as it is not just their bodies but their lives to which "unborn life" has been entrusted.

Willemien Otten is the Dorothy Grant Maclear Professor of Theology and the History of Christianity and Associate Faculty in the Department of History. She studies the history of Christianity and Christian thought with a focus on the medieval and the early Christian intellectual tradition—especially in the West—and an emphasis on the continuity of Platonic themes. Her latest book is Thinking Nature and the Nature of Thinking: From Eriugena to Emerson (Stanford, 2020).



Academic Research Meets Art

UCHICAGO GRAD'S "EXPAND YOUR PERSPECTIVE" SERIES (HELD IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UCHICAGO ARTSPASS PROGRAM AND THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO) provides graduate and postdoctoral students the opportunity to present their research on campus and at cultural institutions in Chicago. Last fall two Divinity School PhD students participated. Samuel Baudinette and Kelly Holob talk about why they chose to participate and how doing so enhanced their work.

KELLY HOLOB
Kelly is a PhD Student in Early Christian Biblical Interpretation.

Why did you focus on this piece of artwork for the Expand Your Perspectives series?

I originally picked this Roman-era Egyptian funerary mask because it connects to my research on ghosts and martyrs in Roman Egypt (and other places) and because it's just very neat. However, I began having second thoughts because it's tucked away in

the basement. I was chatting with my advisor, Sofia Torallas Tovar, about the Art Institute event, and she mentioned that one of her favorite images in the museum was the Vivarini because of the fantastic little demon. She even pulled it up on her computer and we oohed and ahed over its goofy look—but also the spooky contrast of its darkness against the brighter colors of the rest of the painting. I realized that even though I might not know too much about Renaissance art, I know quite a bit about demons and exorcism thanks to my work on the Transmission of Magical Knowledge in Antiquity research project supported by the Neubauer Collegium Institute.



Saint Peter Martyr Exorcizing a Woman Possessed by a Devil, Antonio Vivarini, 1440–1455

How did the experience and artwork illuminate your research and vice versa?

As for my research, I'm a contributor to one of the results of the Magical Knowledge project, the second volume of the Greek and Egyptian Magical Formularies (the first volume of which was just been published open access by UC Berkeley Classics) and am particularly interested in a recipe from about 350 CE that identifies itself as a "tested procedure" by somebody named Pibechis "for those possessed by *daimones*" (or demons, as we say now). The recipe, beginning near the end of PGM IV, or the Great Paris Magical Codex, has garnered a lot of attention over the last century for its mention of Jesus (which wasn't common in magic at this time) and for its potential in illuminating the exorcisms portrayed in the New Testament and other early Christian texts. I'm interested in it for its usefulness in unsettling the expected distinctions between Christianity, Judaism, and paganism: the same ritual text includes Jesus, a

long, sort of confused series of allusions to biblical and extra-biblical Jewish narratives, a warning not to eat pork, and appeals to the Egyptian god Phtha. Plus, the whole thing is attributed to a person who may be a legendary Egyptian sorcerer. I think the spell encourages us to think of Christianity, Judaism, and Egyptian paganism not as separate traditions with firm boundaries but as collections of figures and technologies that interested parties can make use of for particular purposes. In other words, if you had a demon problem, why *wouldn't* you ask Jesus, the famed exorcist, for help, whether or not you attended your local church?

The painting ended up speaking to my research in a way I didn't expect. While I talked a bit about how in the period I study and in this painting demons live in the air, cause physical distress, and so on, the holy water that Peter Martyr is flinging on the poor woman helped me rethink a puzzling part of the Pibechis recipe. What does it expect you to do with the mixture of random botanicals mentioned at the beginning of the recipe? I figured you either had to smear it on something or someone, or it was part of a fumigation ritual (in which steam is used to drive away bad things or purify something or someone). Fumigation is the most common method in these sorts of spells but I didn't connect it to exorcism practices as they still exist even today until I thought about the mechanism of how the water moves from the instrument Peter is holding to the possessed women—it moves through the air, where the demon lives, and it gets broken into tinier, more rarified drops. It's really very similar to steam! The boiling mixture suddenly made much more sense, and it shows how rarified liquid that travels through the air has been thought of as an effective way of combating demons for the better part of 2000 years. Now, I haven't actually confirmed this through further research yet, but I think it's a promising direction. Next time I get sprinkled by holy water at mass it will be fun to think of how I'm not too different from a person exposed to a smelly, steamy pot of liquid in late antiquity.

SAMUEL BAUDINETTE

Samuel is a PhD student in the History of Christianity.

Why did you decide to share your work in the Expand Your Perspectives series and what was the process like leading up to your presentation?

I wanted to bring my dissertation project about the theology of the 13th and 14th century German Dominican School into conversation with one of the many works at the Art Institute which feature Dominican saints. However, I was faced by two

immediate challenges. Most of the pieces in the Art Institute's collection that depict Dominicans were from places that I don't explicitly work on, like Italy, or were produced after the period that I work on. Secondly, the German Dominicans who I study—like Meister Eckhart, Heinrich Seuse or Johannes Tauler, to name the most well-known—were highly critical if not hostile toward the role that images and imagination play in Christian devotional life. So I had to find a way to speak about that dimension of their thought.

Eventually, I decided to present an early fourteenth-century devotional icon from Italy attributed to the Sieneese artist Ugolino di Nerio: *The Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints Peter, Paul, John the Baptist, and Dominic and a Dominican Supplicant*. The work's temporal and geographical proximity to the figures from Germany that I study as well as the fact that a Dominican supplicant is included in the work made it easy for me to talk about the role that images played in the Dominican culture of Italy—aptly described in Joanna Cannon's excellent book *Religious Poverty, Visual Riches: Art in the Dominican Churches of Central Italy in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*—as well as the critique of images which features so prominently in the German context that I study. I also introduced attendees to the ways that the discourse about images in the German Dominican School informed the later iconoclastic movement of the radical reformation in the 16th century which itself prepared the way for the practice of ideology critique in modernity as well as the late capitalist desacralization and commodification of art in the age of mechanical reproduction analyzed by Walter Benjamin—subjects which have long interested me since I took a seminar on idolatry with Prof. Susan E. Schreiner in my first year of coursework at the Divinity School.

What was the event itself like? And what are your takeaways from the experience?

The staff at UChicagoGRAD introduced all the presenters before the event to a number of useful strategies we could use to grab the attention of our non-specialist audience while presenting, and I felt these really complimented the pedagogical tricks I've learned through the Divinity School's Craft of Teaching program as well as the conversations about public outreach which were such a central part of my time as a Junior Fellow of the Martin Marty Center from 2021–2022. The strategy I settled on was to ask my audience to attend to the direction of the gaze of the figures in di Nerio's work (particularly the gaze of the Dominican supplicant who gazes upon the

Virgin Mary and the Christ child who gaze upon each other) in order to have them think about how it directs their own gaze toward the central figures of the work and even beyond toward the divinity that the figures represent. This helped me to discuss how devotional icons become the means or medium of divine revelation and helped me to ask them how such a practice of viewing differs phenomenologically from modern practices of viewing art. It also allowed me to explain why German Dominicans like Meister Eckhart or the iconoclasts of the Reformation may have worried that works like di Nerio's, as well as the creative products of the human imagination, precisely insofar as they are both representational media, could *come between* the viewer and God rather than facilitate that relationship.

I loved hearing about what other graduate students made of my academic work and how it resonated with them. I had some great conversations about all this with several participants at the event who came up to talk with me about di Nerio's artwork after my presentation, including with someone who found it very similar to the Buddhism that she practiced and wanted to learn more about how to understand the similarities and the differences between Buddhism and Christianity. Another participant was keen to talk about how they could relate the art and theology I presented to their own interest in ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Protestants. I found these to be rewarding discussions and definitely gave me the impression that the research that I do as a historian of Christianity at the Divinity School is relevant to the religious concerns of other graduate students at the University."



Virgin and Child Enthroned with Saints Peter, Paul, John the Baptist, and Dominic and a Dominican Supplicant, Ugolino di Nerio, 1325–1335

SENIOR MINISTRY PROJECT PRESENTATIONS



At the end of every academic year, our 3rd year Master of Divinity students present their Senior Thesis presentations. The Senior MDiv Thesis and Project is an in-depth exploration of a question or issue in religious leadership, an opportunity to wrestle with contemporary problems or possibilities in religious life, and make meaningful contributions to the practice of theological conversations.

Senior projects are far-ranging in topic and focus, and presentations vary in venue; this year presentations were in churches and parks as well as in lecture halls. We were able to capture a few, pictured here.

PRESENTERS (NOT PICTURED):

Farah Akhtar	Shradha Jain	Charlotte Long	Justin Perkins
John Jacob Burns	Laura Johnson	Tom McCarlie	Sean Willard
Sydney Callaway	Arshan Khalid	Shannon Page	



Danny Sanchez: "The Unbundling of Religion in America"



Alexa Dava: "Collaborative Survival: A Filipino American Reading of Ruth"

"The Thesis Presentation gave me the opportunity to convene people who wouldn't normally encounter each other, which was, for a lack of a better word, fun! I was lucky to be supported by my MDiv cohort, fellow classmates, friends from outside the Divinity School, and even my family who travelled from out-of-state. It's important for me that my work in the Divinity School is legible and translatable for multiple audiences, and I was grateful for the chance to work on something tailored for a public context."

ALEXA DAVA



Hayley Segall: "The Singh Twins and Postmodernism: Encountering Generational Trauma Through Sikh Contemporary Art"



Emily King: "A Saint's Notebook: Writing at the End with Simone Weil"

"Presenting my thesis felt like living out its intentions—a moment for pause, reflection, and sincere encounter of the Singh Twins' art. The community's active presence and sincere investment in my work brought my thesis to life—it was humbling and inspiring."

HAYLEY SEGALL

Faculty News



KEVIN HECTOR NAMED NAOMI SHENSTONE DONNELLEY PROFESSOR

Kevin Hector, Professor of Theology and of the Philosophy of Religions, has been named by the University of Chicago's Board of Trustees as the Naomi Shenstone Donnelley Professor in the Divinity School. Hector's teaching and research are devoted largely to interpretive questions, particularly how best to understand faith commitments, and how the outworking of such commitments can shed light on broader cultural issues. Prof. Hector received the 2013 Faculty Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching and Mentoring.



BROOK ZIPORYN DELIVERS INAUGURAL LECTURE AS MIRCEA ELIADE PROFESSOR

Brook Ziporyn, Professor of Chinese Religion, Philosophy, and Comparative Thought, has been named by the University of Chicago's Board of Trustees as the Mircea Eliade Professor in the Divinity School. A scholar of ancient and medieval Chinese religion and philosophy, Professor Ziporyn is a premier expositor and translator of some of the most complex philosophical texts and concepts in Chinese religious traditions with a particular expertise in the Tiantai school of Buddhist thought. His inaugural lecture as the Mircea Eliade professor, "Teleology and Consciousness in Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism," is available for viewing on our YouTube channel.



SARAH HAMMERSCHLAG NAMED JOHN NUVEEN PROFESSOR

Sarah Hammerschlag, Professor of Religion and Literature, Philosophy of Religions and History of Judaism, has been named by the University of Chicago's Board of Trustees as the John Nuveen Professor in the Divinity School. Hammerschlag's teaching and research have focused on the position of Judaism in the post-World War II French intellectual scene, a field that puts her at the crossroads of numerous disciplines and scholarly approaches including philosophy, literary studies, and intellectual history.



"Textual Amulets of the Mediterranean World: 1000 BCE-1000 CE" has been selected by the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society for the new collaborative research projects of 2023-2024. This project brings together Divinity School professor CAROLINA LÓPEZ-RUIZ and Classics professors Christopher A. Faraone and Sofia Torallas Tovar to produce a corpus of translations of the most important and best-preserved textual amulets of the Mediterranean, as well as drawings and recipes for them.



ANGIE HEO will be Associate Professor of the Anthropology and Sociology of Religion; also in the College, effective July 1.

STEPHAN LICHA TO JOIN FACULTY



The Divinity School is pleased to announce that Stephan Kigensan Licha will join the faculty as Assistant Professor, effective September 1, 2023. Licha joins us from the Department of Japanese Studies at the University of Heidelberg. He received his PhD from SOAS, the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London) in 2012 and specializes in the intellectual history of Japanese Buddhism, with an emphasis on the interactions between the pre-modern tantric, Tendai, and Zen traditions, and the global history of Buddhist modernism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He has published widely on these topics, and his monograph, *Esoteric Zen: Zen and the Tantric Teachings in Premodern Japan* is forthcoming from Brill.

"When it comes to studying religion, sometimes good humor is better than good faith."

ANAND VENKATKRISHNAN
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF THE HISTORY OF
RELIGION IN SOUTH ASIA; ALSO IN THE COLLEGE

SWIFT ONLINE



Religious studies courses can feature a broad range and variety of texts. The Marty Center partnered with the Undergraduate Religious Studies Program to design “Why This Text Matters” as a series of videos to help faculty prepare for courses, their students, and anyone generally curious about important texts in the study of religion. In the space of about 30 minutes, viewers can gain a deeper understanding of the context, themes, and significance of texts taught by experts at the University of Chicago Divinity School. *Visit our YouTube Channel (bit.ly/DivinityVideo); we have videos in this series on texts including the Daodejing, the Song of Songs, the City of God, and many more.*

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH ON INSTAGRAM PIONEERING PROFESSORS OF SWIFT HALL



Our Instagram account (@uchidivinity) provides another means of staying in touch with students and alumni. For Women's History Month, running profiles of some of the pioneering women of Swift Hall allowed us to revisit some of the Divinity School's story. (left to right: Anne Carr, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, Jean Bethke Elshtain).



#BondChapel @uchicago before I ponder #wonder #TeenAngst #punk #biblicalcriticism and the great #BruceSpringsteen song #GrowingUp with #uchidivinity students in #OpenSpace session

This photograph was taken by Simeon Chavel, Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible, as he prepared to address students gathered for Open Space. Providing a weekly time to reflect in community, this year's Open Space theme was “wonder.” Prof. Chavel spoke on the wonder of childhood, the punk spirit grappling with loss in the teen years, and his own punk brand of biblical scholarship—and played Bruce Springsteen's “Growing Up.”

Prof. Chavel posted this photo to his own Instagram account with this caption: #BondChapel @uchicago before I ponder #wonder #TeenAngst #punk #biblicalcriticism and the great #BruceSpringsteen song #GrowingUp with #uchidivinity students in #OpenSpace session



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