

CRITERION

A Publication of the University of Chicago Divinity School



Dear Alumni and Friends —

The Spring 2011 issue of *Criterion* opens with an essay by Margaret M. Mitchell, Dean of the Divinity School, and Professor of New Testament and Early Christian Literature. Her piece, “Playing with Fire,” was delivered as the inaugural Wednesday Community Luncheon talk of the 2010–2011 academic year, on September 29, 2010, in the Common Room.

Next are tributes to Don S. Browning, the Alexander Campbell Professor Emeritus of Ethics and the Social Sciences, who passed away on June 3, 2010, at his Hyde Park home. The Divinity School held a memorial service for him at Bond Chapel on October 23, 2010; these tributes were delivered there.

Concluding this issue is a lecture by Franklin I. Gamwell, now the Shailer Mathews Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Religious Ethics, the Philosophy of Religions, and Theology. The talk, entitled “Democracy and the Religious Question,” was delivered to the Divinity School Visiting Committee on October 19, 2010. In it, Gamwell discusses the implication of the United States Constitution’s First Amendment establishment clause, asking: “what did the founders think they were doing when they framed the nation with religious freedom?”

As always, my thanks to Susan Zakin, editorial assistant, and Robin Winge, designer.

I hope you enjoy this issue,

Terren Ilana Wein, *Editor*

CRITERION

VOLUME 48 | NUMBER 2



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1 Contents & List of Contributors

2 Playing with Fire:
The Task of the Divinity School
Margaret M. Mitchell

9 The Don S. Browning
Memorial Service
Margaret M. Mitchell
Kristine A. Culp
William Schweiker
Jean Bethke Elshtain
Elizabeth Marquardt

18 Democracy and the Religious
Question
Franklin I. Gamwell

25 Alumni News



Franklin I. Gamwell is the Shailer Mathews Distinguished Service Professor of Religious Ethics, the Philosophy of Religions, and Theology.

MARGARET M. MITCHELL

Playing with Fire

The Task of the Divinity School

A year and a half ago the Provost of the University, Tom Rosenbaum, asked me to participate in a panel on Free Speech on Campus. It was occasioned by several events at the University in that school year, surrounding controversies over guest speakers in the Center for Middle Eastern Studies (and whether both sides of the Palestinian/Israeli

conflict were adequately represented), on the one hand, and a pre-announced visit to campus by the Westboro Baptist Church (a church headed by Fred Phelps, known for its “God hates fags” signs and funeral protests “celebrating” the death of American military personnel as acts of vengeance against the nation for its immorality), on the other.

At this panel, the moderator, Dean Mark Hansen of Social Sciences, asked questions of us three panelists, hypothetical scenarios to which we were to respond, as a way to push and probe what are the limits of “free speech” on campus. Quite a few of the questions in one way or another had to do with religion. The first was, “What if a professor in a course lecture describes Christians as crusader baby-killers, or Muslims as bloodthirsty religious terrorists?” Another: “Can a staff member hang a poster behind her desk with a cruciform kitty and the legend, ‘hang in there, baby’?” And another: “What would you as a professor do if a student came into your class wearing a t-shirt with Matthew 27:25 on it: ‘His blood be on us and on our children,’” an apparent endorsement of the

polemical and deadly dangerous stereotype of Jews as ‘Christ-killers’?

When it was my turn to speak, (perhaps predictably) taking up the last example, I said that any student who wore such a shirt in my class would know that she or he was inviting a discussion on biblical interpretation, and that that discussion would in fact take place. In other words, I said, I would regard the wearing of that shirt as one of many public statements about religion — in this case of biblical interpretation — that we encounter everyday on campus and in American society that can and should be analyzed according to its multiple contexts: the shirt, the body and identity of the person wearing it, the late first-century Greek text we know as the Gospel of Matthew, and the placement of that sentence in the work, the meaning and narrative construction of the term *laos* (“the people”) who are said to utter it, the history of usage of that passage down through the years to excuse Christian anti-Judaism, the controversy around it in the Mel Gibson movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, (there in



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Aramaic, but not in the English subtitles), the printing shop and sponsor and marketing campaign of the 2009 t-shirt available for sale to this student, et cetera.

For all of these three examples, my answer was in the first place an emphatic yes. Any member of the University community has freedom of expression, and, no matter how offensive certain statements might be to some, *blasphemy is not a category that a University either recognizes or should be in the business of legislating or adjudicating*. Yes, you can say or do those three things here; absolutely yes.

But, I argued as well, freedom of speech on a University campus also involves accountability. Let me first say what I do not mean by this; by accountability I do not mean the need to shield possible or real listeners from something that will disturb or offend them. The hypothetical examples offered I think perhaps simplistically assume that some self-identified group would find themselves immediately targeted by presumed “outsiders” by such speech acts (i.e., all “Christians” would automatically be offended by a reference to Crusader baby-killers). But even this assumption can and should be questioned; for one thing, inner-religious, sectarian invective and accusation has nothing on the extra-mural in terms of its virulence or “scorched earth” politics. The statement also does not leave room for the possibility of self-critique, acknowledgement of harm done in one’s own name or in a name one now claims. But even more, the construction of religious identities and communities (either for valorization or accusation) needs itself to be an object of study. In any case, by accountability here I do not solely or even primarily have in mind the consideration that one should consider before speaking about a topic on religion who might be offended by it, though I do not think that is something we can or should avoid entirely. I am in favor of civility in conversation, and particularly in that form of conversation that we call formal education, but I do not think everyone must equally be, or must view civility in the same way.

But even more importantly, the accountability I emphasized then and would reiterate here is that all speech is accountable to the historical record, to standards for logical and evidentiary proof, to the community within which these speech acts occur, as representative of how it engages

in constructive conversation — because above all what the University stands for is that words and ideas seriously matter. While no statement should be censured, none likewise should go unchallenged. Free speech does not mean free to pontificate; it means free to converse — to speak with others — about things that matter. It also means being open to counter-statement, counter-argument, counter-evidence.

Now, another professor on the panel at which we faced these hypotheticals, from a different division of the University, who spoke next, began to cite statistics from a poll published in the noteworthy modern Almanac, *Newsweek*, about how many Americans believe in angels, in God or some higher spiritual power (81%), in miracles, an end-time event or future judgment. Given that, he intoned, you really should avoid talking about religion in the classroom, because, “*You’re playing with fire.*”

This was a good panel and set of exchanges, and I understood the point this professor was making; I want to acknowledge that his fear about religion creeping into the classroom (or, rather, his recognition that it was in fact already robustly in residence) was genuine and born of his own experience with class discussions going in directions he had not expected or wanted. He also relayed some personal experiences of his own religious history and recent encounters (such as the scholar of religion tends to hear unwittingly at 33,000 feet in an airplane when our seat-mate asks us what we do for a living: “I used to be religious...”). The effect was clear — religion is personal and strange, and talking about it made him uncomfortable and brought an implied threat — “playing with fire.” In that context, I kept my counsel, but what I thought inwardly then, and what I can now say openly here, is “*Come over to the Divinity School — this is where we play with fire for a living.*”

From the founding of the University of Chicago in 1891 the Divinity School has been a graduate professional school; in its former role it stands alongside Humanities, Social Sciences, Physical Sciences and Biological Sciences, Divisions of the University which award masters and doctoral degrees. In its latter designation it is in the company of the Law, Business, Medicine, Public Policy and Social

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Services Administration — schools that form students for distinct professions in society.

What is the “profession” of this Divinity School? The profession and graduate-level education that is the task of this Divinity School is learning how to think and talk (in that order!) about religion in a manner that is supremely well-informed, rigorously critical, and responsibly engaged. Playing with fire is not something to be avoided, but something to learn how to do with skill, competence, awareness of how things can go wrong, and boldness born of a conviction that it is worse to either avoid this fire or leave it to those who may not handle it in a responsible way. Those who are trained in the science and art of fire management know that fire avoided by the neglectful or fearful, or harnessed by the malevolent can do incalculable harm. They know one should not just play with fire, but work with fire, do so in an open field, put rocks around it, teach children how to do the same. They also know that fire, left unchecked or ignored, will carve its own, unregulated path; if it does go out (seemingly), it will likely go underground, to surface later in unexpected ways. As a practical matter, the fire will not die; as an evaluative one, many (though not all) would say that fire (appropriately harnessed) is essential to human flourishing — a source of warmth and light, and a locus of companionship. It is one of the four essential elements (*stoicheia*) of the cosmos for Plato and other ancient Greek philosophers (along with water, air and earth). The fire will be here and it will be a force to be reckoned with, a force located in that boundary territory between cosmos and civilization.

But let me be clear in what I mean and do not mean by this metaphor and the analogy it implies: the fire of which I speak when I say the Divinity School is a place where we play with fire *is not God* (despite fire theophanies — and anti-theophanies [1 Kings 19] — shared by the Torah, the Book of Revelation, the Hindu God Agni, et cetera). I am not saying that the Divinity School is the place where we play with God or gods, though we do interact on a daily basis with people (both living and dead), texts, rituals and communities (also living and dead) that engage in complex interactions with divine beings they believe exist and affect human life. *Nor is the fire we play with “religion”* — for a

fundamental presupposition of the academic study of religion is that there is a difference between studying religion and practicing religion (even as we struggle in various ways with the theoretical and practical issues this raises).

No, the fire with which we play in the Divinity School is *talking about religion*. This is not something our American culture or our world does very well. There is a lot of fire in the world — lots of people making claims about their religion, your religion, those crazy people over there’s religion, all religious lunatics who defy rationality, et cetera. But not much safe playing with fire, not many places where there are stones around the fire or a clearing with some established guidelines, a dialogue over the evidence and claims in which the conclusions that are not predetermined, places that do not accept violence, bigotry, virulence or dogmatism as means of argumentation. Not often enough is there conversation about religion that produces light and heat, but not compulsion, condescension or condemnation.

Playing with fire requires a few things:

1. a proper and prepared place.
2. people who both know where fire comes from, how it tends to react to local conditions (wind, oxygen, hills, dirt, et cetera), and who are aware of its immense and dangerous power. These people have also inherited both histories and lore, and must learn to differentiate the two (the great Chicago fire of course comes to mind), and, in addition to facts, have a set of tools for handling the fire.
3. Some publicly articulated and clear sense of purpose about why we play with fire. *This does not have to be the same for all* — some want to cultivate the fire in a quest for inter-religious understanding through dialogue; some want to cultivate the fire of talking about religion for the simple reason that they find it fascinating (and that is enough); some want to cultivate the fire of talking about religion because they feel that there are powers and principalities that must be unmasked (these can be of various types), and scholarship is a way to do it.

... this Divinity School... has some distinct ways of
playing with fire...

That Swift Hall is host to scholars and students *who do not play with fire for the same reason* is one of its great historic strengths — we are not identified with a single school of thought, confessional stance or political/ideological agenda, but we host multiple allegiances, each of which accepts the challenge to argue for its point of view on a daily basis. Our three committees of study in their uneven alignment enshrine an ideal that we know is not real, of both heuristically separating historical, social-scientific and constructive studies of religion, and of tacitly acknowledging at every turn that this separation does not fully work, for the historian needs the tools of the social sciences, the constructive thinker the historical fine grain and the social scientist the analysis of the realia of the communities and discourses produced by the other two.

That said, I think that this Divinity School — the School for the academic study of religion at the University of Chicago — has some distinct ways of playing with fire, some consensual ground rules that both contribute substantively to how we think and talk about religion, and that mark the quality of conversation here and beyond it. So, what are these tools and techniques that govern the way we play with fire in the Divinity School? Before closing I shall name three (there are more, but this is a start up toward a fire-workers toolkit).

I. Philological Rigor

The man whose portrait stands in the middle of the west wall of Swift Commons is Edgar Johnson Goodspeed; he received the first Ph.D. from the University of Chicago Divinity School in 1898, in New Testament studies. His earliest work was translating the papyri that were emerging from the garbage dumps of Oxyrynchus and other sites from Egypt. He went on to have the audacity to challenge the King James by producing “The New Testament: an American Translation.” This fresh translation into the American vernacular was, you may be surprised to hear, deeply controversial in his time — on both ends of the task, its critique of the Greek textual manuscript base on which the KJV was produced, and its (unthinkable!) assumption that American English was enough of an idiolect

to have its own vernacular translation. In Swift Hall now are eminent scholars who translate Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Arabic, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Persian, Norse, German, French, Spanish and other texts. Such work is an act of both philology and historical contextualization: we cannot understand the past or the present of the phenomenon religion without engaging, as closely as possible, the linguistic systems and literary forms in which communication about religion was fashioned. Learning a language is learning to think in a language; it also requires the reference point of one’s own language as a way to comprehend differences of cognition and signification (“English does it this way”). We who play with the fire of talking about religion need to be masters of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, texts. We also need to be able to read and “translate” non-verbal artifacts and entities (images, rituals, human communities).

2. Hermeneutical Sophistication

When I arrived as an M.A. student in 1981 everyone in Swift was talking about hermeneutics; I did not know what they meant, but knew I needed to quickly if I wanted to join the discussion. A few years later, someone managed to get into the University Directory a putative faculty member named “Eutics, Herman.” University of Chicago Professor Eutics appropriately had his office in the Swift Basement (Swift is clear to me; why the basement less so!). Why is hermeneutics a critical tool in the study of religion? Religion as a human phenomenon is a cultural force that produces texts, artifacts, rituals and other creations that are richly and redolently symbolic. Symbolic language, even all language, is susceptible to multiple significations. *It is impossible “to lock-box meaning,”* as the history of scriptural reception empirically demonstrates, and the world’s religious traditions aggregate and recombine in creative ways their symbolic resources. However, it is indeed *possible to locate meanings* if one is clear enough about the delimited context, the evidence for this contextualization, and the superiority of one’s own proposal as a way to read the evidence over others that are on the table. Every act of interpretation is itself dependent upon assumptions about where meaning is to be found (in authors, in readers, in

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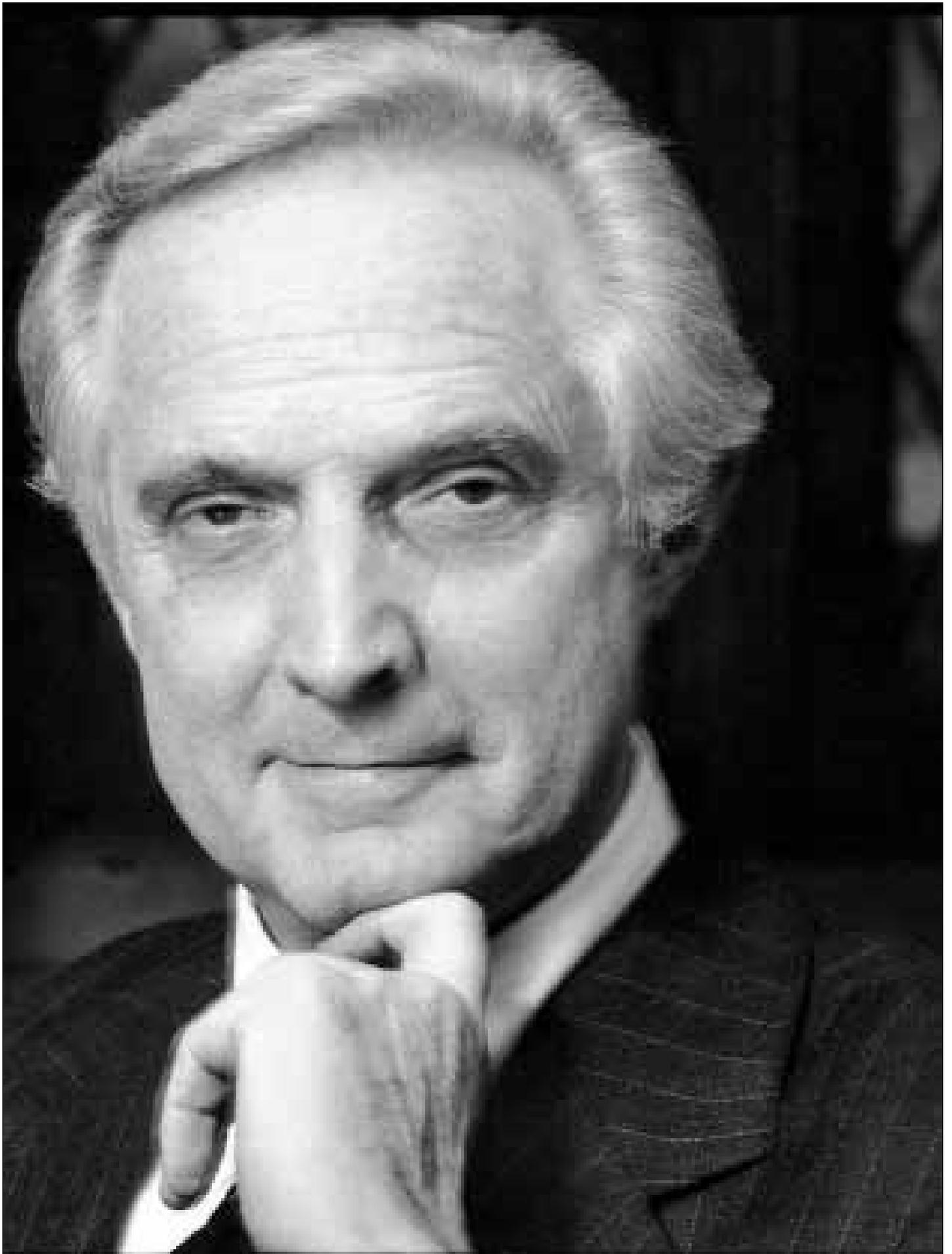
words, in actions), what the relationship is between the self who interprets (who is often already in some sense formed by the object of interpretation) and that upon which its gaze falls. Everyone in Swift Hall is engaged with the *praktike* and the *theoria* of interpretation (hermeneutics), and we are explicit about it, though we draw upon different cultural resources, past and present, in the quest (I just used the argot of the Greek Christian intellectuals of the third and fourth centuries, who in turn were naturally employing the Platonizing terminology in which they had been educated).

3. Appreciation for History and Tradition

The work of the Divinity School is based on the constantly reinforced assumption that religious traditions are complex, organic, developing and changing entities. Even those whose historical emergence we can plot (with any confidence) rely on historical, cultural and religious strains and pre-date them, and no religious tradition (Shintoism, Janism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, neopaganism, Hinduism) is either a static or a uniform thing in itself, or in itself as an object of study. That is the problem, of course, with the hypothetical professorial declaration that Christians are crusader baby-killers. The first question a Divinity School student or professor would ask is: which Christians, in what place, when, and how did their actions relate to their religious affiliation (claimed by or about them)? The same is true of the Muslim religious terrorists, the Sikh extremists, et cetera. Context matters — there can be no historical analysis without it — but the particular is also part of a continuum of some sort, of some construction. Everyone in Swift Hall is in time-capture mode — seeking the full reel through the freeze-frame of concrete expressions of religious traditions, while at the same time trying to move from traditional and venerable narratives to fresh options (or none at all). In my own field of study, ancient Christianity, the *historia ecclesiastica* of Eusebius of Caesarea is both a major source of primary source documents and itself a narrative construction of tremendous force that all subsequent interpreters must — in a quest that unites the philological, the hermeneuti-

cal and the historical — interrogate, question and interact with in its own attempts at historiographic work.

So, in the case of the statements about Christians or Muslims as murderers — whether in a hypothetical lecture or the Park51 controversy now consuming America and the world — the Divinity School's purpose is to resource and move the conversation from caricature to argument, from blanket group statements to articulations of what the label "Christian" or "Muslim" has and does and might mean, who falls under that category, what acts are in view, what the context, import and impact are of the statement made, and what it is that makes "religious" violence a special class of violence (if it is). Sweeping generalizations and slo-ganeering are not what we do in the University or in the Divinity School as a part of it — we are responsible to argument and evidence, and hence such statements must be the start and not the end of any conversation. As a panelist then (to return to our departure point), I could not offer a wholesale evaluation of such statements from the putative professorial lectern, because so much depends on who said it, where, when and why, and — and this is key — what happened next. The presupposition of the question cannot be that statements about religion (or anything else) merely hang in the air; they are already part of a conversation, and must be analyzed as such. That is why *we must learn to play with fire*. And if we teach and learn and model a way to do it well here, just maybe the world might be different. ✖



1934 — 2010

The Don S. Browning Memorial Service

Don S. Browning, the Alexander Campbell Professor Emeritus of Ethics and the Social Sciences in the Divinity School, died June 3, 2010 at his home in Hyde Park. These tributes were delivered at the Divinity School's memorial service, held on Saturday, October 23, in Bond Chapel.

Margaret M. Mitchell

*Dean and Professor of New Testament and
Early Christian Literature*

Welcome

Welcome, everyone, to this service in honor of Professor Don S. Browning, here at the University of Chicago Divinity School, the institution where he made an indelible and permanent mark in over five decades of association — as a student, faculty member, researcher, and respected and loved senior statesman. We have assembled to celebrate that life of service, and to remember a human being whom we miss, and whom we knew as generous, intellectually engaged, unfailingly kind and energetically faithful to his commitments — Don Browning.

Welcome, faculty colleagues, students and former students, members of the Disciples Divinity House community, and in particular its Board of Trustees (here this weekend),

members of the Hyde Park Union Church (together with Don's pastor and former student, Rev. Susan Johnson), friends of Don from the University, the scholarly community, the neighborhood and beyond.

We especially embrace today Don's family.

Carol Browning, who has herself for five decades been and remains a vital member of the Swift Hall community, a woman of warm grace and deep integrity, and a beloved friend.

Don and Carol's children Beth and Chris, Beth's husband Michael and Chris' friend Jodi.

Myrna Beck, Carol's sister, together with her husband, Lowell, and Peter Browning, Don's nephew, and also an alumnus of the Divinity School.

I have known Don Browning, as Dean Browning, since I was a resident scholar in Disciples Divinity House back

Memorial contributions may be made to The Browning Family Fund at the Disciples Divinity House of the University of Chicago. Donations can be sent to 1156 East 57th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637. They can also be made online at <http://ddh.uchicago.edu>.

... I had encountered something exceptional in the way that his work rippled out and his students flourished.

in the 1980s. He set a tone and example in the House for serious scholarship and community spirit that were contagious. I always enjoyed the way Don would sidle up to you and, with his inimitable, slightly tinny and keen voice, start a conversation by asking what you thought about the present issues of the day, about the talk we just heard, or plans for what to do next. I miss it. As a New Testament scholar I participated in a few of Don's ventures for the Family project. I remember a conference at Brite Divinity School on the family in the ancient world, where I was thoroughly impressed with Don's acumen about ancient Christianity, his ability to listen patiently to excruciatingly detailed papers on the dimensions of domestic architecture on Delos, and the like, and his calm but insistent urging to the assembled scholars to move their arguments to a broader synthetic level, to larger questions.

I also have and continue to have fond memories of neighborhood association with Don and Carol (we live in the same townhouse complex), not least of which being the shockingly brave way they once chased a purse snatcher in their car, block by block, as he sought to escape! (Carol, you didn't think I'd bring that up today, did you?!).

Dear friends, this institution, our lives and this room are filled with warm and powerful memories of Don Browning, to which we shall give voice in word, in music and in song today.

Kristine A. Culp

Dean, Disciples Divinity House, and Associate Professor of Theology

Not quite thirty years ago when I first arrived at the University of Chicago as a Ph.D. student and a Disciples Divinity House Scholar, Don Browning was the Dean of the Disciples Divinity House, my dean. Don and Carol welcomed us to their home and presided over a crew of Disciples House scholars and residents who that year, 1982, also included Cynthia Lindner, Mark and Bonnie Miller-McLemore, Peter Browning, and Margaret Mitchell. My memories are mercifully hazy about many things from those years, but I remember that there were already

legends about Don's deanly acts on behalf of students whose careers had dangled near academic precipices. I also knew the enthusiasm of his students at the Divinity School. As I recall, he taught a seminar on William James that year: the class did not merely pour over James' works, they acquired t-shirts with James on them, and they became Jamesians. I also knew of Don as advisor. We Ph.D. students in other areas soon learned that students in RPS, Religion and Psychological Studies, had a decided advantage. The Browning program guided them through coursework, exams, and dissertation, and moreover, it seemed to ensure them jobs and publication, in one of the series that Don edited.

From that initial vantage point, I perceived only faint outlines of the scope of accomplishment and the breadth of humanity of Don Browning. But I already knew I had encountered something exceptional in the way that his work rippled out and his students flourished. When I later had the privilege of becoming one of his successors as dean of the Disciples Divinity House, I came to understand with greater specificity his deanly accomplishments. He had become dean in DDH's eighty-fifth year, taking up the mantle after the long deanships of E. S. Ames and W. B. Blakemore, and mindful that a tremendous generational change was also occurring. He honored the past and prepared for the future with canny, strategic programs of interpretation and development that, thirty years later, continue to bear fruit. Those were Browning hallmarks I would recognize elsewhere: to preserve and draw together the past, whether great ideas or personal connections, and to nudge those forward to new possibilities of collaboration, insight, and humanity.

About five years ago Don contributed to a collection of prayers that was published to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the chapel at the Disciples Divinity House. Don offered his somewhat impish contribution, "A Prayer for the Lost DDH Prayers." It began:

O God, how many prayers have been uttered in the Chapel of the Holy Grail, before dinners of the House community, or in the solitude of private rooms? How many of these have been lost, never to be found and read again for the good of any human being?

Moreover, did Don Browning *ever* lose *anything*?

Don continued, moving into a confessional moment:

I must confess, O God, that I have contributed to this great mountain of lost prayers. Due to my multiple moves, my many drawers, and my bounteous and disorganized files, this poor sinner cannot find a single one of the many prayers I have given at that place. I am comforted by the thought that others will do better.

Something about this confession has always rung hollow for me. Not the part about bounteous files — they seemed to contain everything from Aristotle to modern marriage to Scottish common sense philosophy. But that they were disorganized. Moreover, did Don Browning *ever* lose *anything*?

Did he ever lose an idea or fail to put a good idea to use? After all, he coedited an encyclopedia (and not just any encyclopedia, but the *RGG*). He was an enormously productive scholar whose work covered a remarkable range of subjects, and he was always causing those ideas to coalesce in new ways.

Did he ever lose an opportunity? He was very good at development work, and he liked being in the know. He was always collaborating, connecting, finding funding, advancing ideas, advancing institutions. Not only did he not lose opportunities, he saw opportunities that others did not even know could be lost. Even to the end of his life, he was talking with students, former students, colleagues, and friends, encouraging them onward.

And did Don ever lose a friend? Don had the art not only of making colleagues and friends, but especially of keeping them.

Maybe there was another reason for those “lost prayers.” Perhaps it was that Don didn’t really write down that many prayers. Not to disparage his piety, but praying was not the usual form of its public expression. “I am comforted by the thought that others will do better,” he wrote. Others, he knew, practiced the art of written prayer; his piety more often took public expression in teaching, lecturing, preaching perhaps, advising. He prized learning, conversation, and collaboration. Don Browning was a great citizen who relied on the contributions of others to corroborate,

amplify, and correct his own, and who helped build communities — this Divinity School, the Disciples Divinity House, and other intellectual, ecclesial, and civic places — that made collaborations and controversies possible.

The “lost prayers” that Don was really worried about were not the ones that came from ostensibly disorganized files. They were losses of a different order. He confessed and mourned “neglect [of] the important things of life, los[ing] our way in trivia, and fail[ing] to remember and carry forward all the goods that come from you and from our human sisters and brothers.” He was concerned about failures to acknowledge “human finitude and freedom.”

In the prayer and in his life’s work, Don’s confession was finally not about himself, but about the surpassing grace and forgiveness of God. He prayed:

We know as well of your grace and forgiveness — a grace and forgiveness that comes in many ways. Help us to appreciate the grace that comes from the reality that while we forget, you do not; while we waste and lose the goods of life, you cherish, preserve, and share all good with us; while we ignore and neglect, you ignore and neglect nothing, thereby saving us amidst all of our weakness, ignorance, and willful disregard.

Nothing of value was finally lost in the grace of God, Don confessed.

Don Browning was not perfect, but, it seems, very little was lost in his life. His powers of remembrance, anticipation, and friendship give us lasting glimpses of what truly capacious faithfulness, hope, and love might be.

I will close with one last remembrance of Don. Several years ago, he and his granddaughter — I honestly cannot remember whether it was Kristin or Livia — were running errands and stopped by DDH. They left, and I went back to work at my desk. The window near my desk looks out onto 57th Street. In my peripheral vision, I soon perceived a bobbing motion. I looked out to see Don and his granddaughter skipping down the sidewalk, hand in hand.

Faith, hope, and love abide.

“we would linger over ideas, texts, the state of
the Divinity School...”

William Schweiker

*Director of the Martin Marty Center and Edward L.
Ryerson Distinguished Service Professor of Theological Ethics*

The last time I spoke with Don was on a sunny, wind-swept Sunday this past May. It was just days before he would go for some final tests; he was more than mindful of the events that would follow. In fact, he seems to have foreseen what would unfold, and yet with the usual glint in his eyes, concern for others, and ironic self-understanding, he wanted to communicate this fact to me. We sat in the basement. He turned off the TV. Carol did some gardening and waited for a piano lesson. Don’s legs hurt. So, prop them on the coffee table. Chris would arrive soon at the airport in an hour or so, Don said. My friend was eager to talk.

I

Usually when Don and I would gather—as we so often did—for lunch and coffee, we would linger over ideas, texts, the state of the Divinity School, and the work of colleagues and students before hunkering down to some intellectual labor—a point of moral theory, an issue in which we agreed or disagreed, or a text that was decidedly important. To be honest, the constant worry was about how to interact with other disciplines with intellectual honesty. At stake was the question of personal and social flourishing and the goods these entail—pre-moral and moral goods as we put it in a course we once taught together—as well as the many dimensions that must be considered in pondering such matters. If so many goods are needed for life to flourish, how could theology and ethics immune themselves from the insights and also criticisms of other disciplines? This led to a certain frustration with overly dogmatic or one-dimensional or totalizing perspectives too often seen in religious thought.

Over food and coffee there was an increase—not the zero sum of decrease—in the to-and-fro of intellectual exchange and friendship. Don, of course, was a master of conversation: learned, massively well-read, in possession of amazing methodological self-sophistication. His scholarly

accomplishments and contributions are well-known; I do not need to repeat them. But more important, I judge, is that his considerable intellectual achievements were packed into an outlook at once humane and deeply religious and also—let’s be honest—laced with wit. He had a knack for the soft-spoken idea. I was enriched—and I am hopeful that he was too—in the labor of our noon-time meetings. I count those meals as one of the real blessings of my life.

But those were lunch conversations. The Sunday last May was a different matter—in a way. His legs kept hurting; prop them up. Things to convey: get at it. Things are happening, fast; time is folding in on itself as a life is passing way: time to talk. And talk we did. But not, surprisingly, about the past or even his present condition—other than complaints about pain and his remarkable calm in the face of what was surely coming. No, it was the future that Don wanted to explore: planning for his family, especially Carol; work that needed to be done; what he hoped I could do for the Science of Virtue project and, of course, the theology and ethics areas; further writing; on and on. As I have mulled over our last conversation in the solitude of thought, I realized that despite aching legs, despite the coming medical report, Don was opening a future beyond himself. There were, no doubt, moments of despair and even anger—although I do not know that to be the case. But I do know that Sunday he lamented deeply what he would miss: the growing-up of his grandchildren, the old age of his children, and, most of all, the love of Carol. But still—still—he poked and probed into the future.

II

Generativity is what the psychologists he studied called it. It is, as often put, love’s extension into the future. Generativity is concern for the next and future generations where a person receives and also achieves her or his integrity in commitment and action for future life. In his tireless labor for students, projects, institutions—especially the Divinity School and Disciples Divinity House—he led a generative life and even then, that May, in the basement, in the face of death. And, my goodness, he was including me, enlisting me in a similar adventure—just as he had enlisted others. I had come to see him. I had come to his home

Love generates the future.

to offer some support, comfort, and consolation. I hope I did so. But things were afoot; he had hopes and plans of which I too might be a part. The self's project is — if we be true and loving — bigger, more expansive, more creative than ourselves and our pet private projects.

Generativity is a psychological term, but, to be honest, it voices a deeper spiritual truth, a truth given expression in different religions and traditions, but not the sole property of any one of them. Don would know this, of course; he was always exposing the religious and moral underpinnings of modern modes of thought on the human project. The truth here is that some realities increase when they are shared. Spiritually we do not live in a zero-sum reality where the grit of tooth and claw grind down the weak and ravish the future and where loss is the ultimate benediction mumbled over human existence. It is a strange, mysterious, and gracious thing about friendships that when the moment demands, one can cut to the quick, because things are in the increase. There is no fear of loss. And, actually, this is a divine thing, because — like every kind of love — there is an increase in giving. The fountain of goodness, that some classic theologians called God. The forms of love pour forth goodness; they forge a future and mark human flourishing. Friendship expands, grows, and deepens in its giving and this strange and mysterious bounty means that it opens new horizons of time and relations.

Love generates the future. That truth, I now can see, was at the core of Don's thought and life — his commitments to Carol and his family, to human flourishing, his attention to the impact and vagaries of a person's experience, and to the health and endurance of institutions. More than that, it was the driving impulse of his relentlessly practical bent of soul. What good is spiritual truth that is not lived, not incarnate in the rough and tumble of our lives, that does not animate us to forge a future beyond ourselves? This is why, I believe, he spoke of "practical theology." It is why his presence in the Ethics area was a gift and goad to new work.

III

The spiritual truth that animates the psychological reality of generativity does not come packaged in concepts.

Spiritual truths rarely do because they reveal the embrace of thought and life with spiritual power and so need symbolic expression. And Don knew this as well. It is why he insisted on a hermeneutic dimension to religious and moral thought — that we must probe and ponder, decipher and decode, meanings expressed in symbols and narratives that have, come what may, shaped our lives and our consciousness. In good measure, a person is defined, as he put it in his last book, "by the stories or narratives that he tells about himself and the way they consciously and unconsciously organize needs, attachments, and a person's various social selves."¹ Narrative and symbolic forms cradle the goods — moral and pre-moral — which are crucial for the flourishing of life and they can also be, if profound and sustaining, the engines of generativity and thus spiritual truth.

Don sought to explore and to understand those enduring and humane truths articulated in Christian form. He was, after all, a Christian minister; he was an interpreter of the Gospel. He knew, of course, distorted and vicious religious forms. But he was certain, again in his words, that "to love the other, we must not only respect the other but actively work to realize the goods that the other needs to live a decent life."² Nestled in those words are the fact of generativity and, much more, the spiritual truth of love's labor pouring forth the bounty of goodness aimed at finite life.

So, I end with a religious story, the only one, outside of the resurrection, that appears in all four of the New Testament Gospels. The connection between this story and the resurrection is what I would like us to ponder in the quiet of our own hearts. The bond between them was, if I understand him rightly, the true impulse in Don's thought. He held that Christian faith is rooted in a conviction of Christ's victory over death and also a radical love that regards all equally and which tends to the future. Ponder that connection in the memory of our friend and colleague as we hear this text, Matthew 14:15–20.

When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go to the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them some-

... a life dedicated to what brings human transformation
and flourishing...

thing to eat.” They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” And he said, “Bring them here to me. “Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled...

When I left Don’s house that windy May afternoon and headed south along the tree-lined streets of Hyde Park back to my home, I knew in my gut that I would never again see my dear friend alive. A deep sadness and grief rolled over me. Yet each of us in our own way has been touched by Don’s life and his friendship and care. And so we can dare to rejoice in a life lived in front of itself, a life dedicated to what brings human transformation and flourishing, a life that testified to the faith that someday all might be filled. And in this rejoicing we give fitting thanks for the life of our friend and colleague, Don Browning.

Endnotes

1. Don S. Browning, *Reviving Christian Humanism* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Books, 2010), 123.
2. *Ibid.*, 51.

Jean Bethke Elshtain

*Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social
and Political Ethics*

One way to take the measure of a man is to assess just how gaping is the hole where he once stood. In what would be my last conversation with our dear friend and colleague, Don Browning, I told him that the space left empty with his passing would be enormous, so much so that it would take ten people to add up to his singular being — and even that would not suffice.

Don’s area of expertise was ‘practical theology’. I took this to mean that in his work he was not, like Icarus aspiring to the heights, flying too close to the sun, but, rather, that he would remain of the earth, solidly on terra firma. Our task, as he understood it, was to stay grounded even as we reached upward and outward, as we aspired to not yet realized goods and cherished ideals.

The delicate tendrils of our relationality should not be broken and cannot be ignored. At the same time, we are not reducible to our relationships, nor to the social determinants of our place in the world. We are conscious, reflective embodied selves.

Don had a nose for the big issues and questions in so many areas, nowhere more so than in the family, ethical life, and social policy. He was uncanny in predicting where the debate would go next and what scholarly discourses and modalities would be drawn upon to push that debate. Can we any longer use the language of nature and the natural when we take up the family or any institution and question. Is the family merely a system of private ordering that can be molded this way or that according to our preferences with no consideration for the wider social ecology?

In light of the volatility of debates in this area, Don, for two decades, was that rare bird: a voice of liberal moderation. He did not please ideologues, whatever their political orientation. For me that meant he was doing something right.

Today is not the occasion to rehearse the particulars of those debates. I mention them in order to remind us not only of Don’s calm, orderly, clear, sane voice and way of arguing but to honor his courage as he found himself, on

That knock on the door. How I miss it.

a number of occasions, at odds with compatriots in his own fold. In so doing, Don reminded us of why a rigid ideology—whatever political orientation it represents—must be repudiated if we are to nourish serious intellectual and political contestation about matters essential to achieving a good we can come to know in common that we cannot know alone.

I was honored to be by his side throughout the years as we worked together on many vital projects. Whenever someone inquired—‘who would be a solid person on new developments in family law’ or ‘who can make intelligible some of the current debates about the family in religion’, I referred them to Don. I sent so many people his way over the years that he would have been well within his rights to knock on my office door—as he did so frequently—and to ask me politely to cease and desist.

That knock on the door. How I miss it. Usually things would go like this: Don would enter wearing his jacket or coat, with that great hat of his on his head, and ask if I had a few moments. After those few moments passed, he would sit down, now with coat off and hat doffed, as we reviewed the state of the nation, the university, and ourselves over the years.

This became a more exigent project as each of us found ourselves diagnosed with various ailments. Mine are scarcely worth mentioning alongside his. But he was unfailingly solicitous and insistent that I tell him ‘the latest’ on my health front when he was the one undergoing surgery and chemotherapy. Throughout, I detected not a shred of self pity—not the merest hint.

I will never forget that the final paper he delivered, but a few weeks before his death, was a brilliant analysis of one area of my work in which he succeeded in making me look much cleverer than is warranted. I was honored and delighted to listen to him, but mostly I was deeply moved. I had told him that he could let himself off the hook; that everyone understood his situation. But, typically, there he was on the day he was due to present his paper, having quite literally risen from a hospital bed in order to do so.

Don honored this Divinity School and this University with his remarkable energy, his scholarship, his international stature and, above all, his courage and integrity. He

was an extraordinary colleague—responding, often overnight, with several pages of close critical analysis if you had given him something to read the day before.

The image of Don and his beloved Carol, she knitting by his side at so many conferences over so many years, is vivid to me and to all who knew him and know Carol.

Carol, Don’s family, thank you for sharing him with us. His presence lingers in Swift Hall. His books stand as a monument to his erudition. His grateful colleagues and students, a tribute to his collegiality, his thoughtfulness, and his dedication to learning the bringing into being of reflective selves.

Don taught us how to live well and how to bring a life well lived to its earthly conclusion. We are blessed to have shared in his living and his dying. All who knew Don and loved him can attest to his imprint on our lives.

Thank you, dear friend, thank you. May you rest in peace.

Elizabeth Marquardt

*M.Div. 1999, Vice President for Family Studies,
Institute for American Values*

“Why did you come to divinity school,” he asked me.

“Because I wanted to meet and learn from people who I could respect,” I said.

I saw him slightly shudder, as if subtly disowning the possibility that he was so clearly one of those people.

And yet he was. More than I could ever have hoped or imagined before I showed up here.

Late in May, a few days before a local conference at which I had invited him to speak, Don left me a voice message. Elizabeth, I have some bad news, he said. Bad news for you. Certainly bad news for me, his voice cracking on the word “me.” I had never heard him sound that way; I had never heard him seeming bewildered, a little awed, as he seemed now. Call me back when you get this message, whenever you get it, he said. I did, around 11:00 that night. Don was in the hospital. He told me he was being released into hospice the next day. I started to cry. In silences I could hear noises from the hospital staff outside

His well seemed inexhaustible, and yet he seemed to get
the balance right.

his room. After a while he said, “Well, they need to do something to me now.” It only occurred to me later that may or may not have been true. It only occurred to me later that he knew that I was incapable of hanging up the phone.

In June, after his funeral, one of Don’s colleagues, Clark Gilpin, said to me and several others gathered in an aisle, “Don Browning and Martin Marty I think have had the best relationships with their students. And I think they also had the most students.” He observed with a smile, “There could be a correlation there.” Don had generations of students. So often when I meet another scholar at a different institution, I discover that yes, he or she was one, too.

Don Browning was my teacher and mentor and fellow board member, but mainly and overwhelmingly he was my older and wiser friend. I can’t say we had long, profound conversations. But when we did meet and converse, he regarded me. He was present. His eyes danced. He got excited about ideas. He asked about my children and clearly cared about my answers.

I know that I was one of many, many people Don engaged with in this way. His well seemed inexhaustible, and yet he seemed to get the balance right. Today’s clergy talk about “self care.” I never heard Don use those words, but I deeply admired that even as a prolific scholar and engaged teacher he knew how to have fun. His intellectual work did not seem like work for him—he was like a kid in a candy store with ideas; you could feel his dancing energy. But beyond that he enjoyed a glass of wine and a good meal and a trip somewhere interesting. I’m told he loved watching movies with his family.

On a brisk October night we were walking in Charlottesville between a conference and dinner. Don was receiving chemotherapy treatments and responding very well, but he’d lost weight and was easily chilled. He wore a thick fleece pullover beneath his coat. We ambled along, talking movies. I mentioned the new Woody Allen film: Have you seen *Barcelona*? I asked. No, he said. It’s not much of a story I said, but it’s nice to watch—it’s basically a love song to Barcelona and to Scarlett Johansson’s bottom. That might be nice, he demurred, and I smiled.

Don was a scholar of generativity who lived, it seemed to so many of us, a wholly generative life. His student

Christy Green, now at Notre Dame and with us today, shared with me this week a passage from his work:

“Something very fundamental happens to man when his needs for generativity are not met, something quite central to the direction of his energies and to his relationship to himself. Individuals who fail to achieve this delicate synthesis which generativity demands often become ‘stagnated’ and ‘begin to indulge themselves as if they were their own—or one another’s—one and only child...”

He wrote, “an inadequate capacity for generativity not only brings subtle diminishment to those who suffer from it, but passes itself on to succeeding generations.”

One cannot help but think of Don himself when reading these words. Because his life was the inverse of these words—that which he said a man without generativity did not do, he did.

Don’s student John Wall, now at Rutgers, told me this week of “how much Don supported his graduate students and gave them opportunities to speak, publish, and otherwise become active as scholars.” John wrote, “As I told him shortly before he passed away, I didn’t just learn a field of study from him; I learned what it means to be a scholar. And I could have added: a human being.”

My friend Amy Zietlow was a fellow M.Div. student for whom Don Browning was advisor on her senior ministry project. Before coming to divinity school Amy danced and toured with the Oklahoma Festival Ballet Company. All her life she has been a practitioner of, as she calls it, “the dance,” and her culminating project reflected her dual interests. She recalls:

“I remember meeting with him for my senior ministry project and he’d always laugh about how he never thought he’d be mentoring a paper on dancing...I still remember [presenting] my senior ministry project in the basement of Ida Noyes in the dance room... he in his full suit, stocking feet, standing at a barre. Ah, the joys of practical theology!”

Amy, now chief operating officer of Hospice of Baton Rouge, likes to say that “we die as we live.” A couple days after Don was released home into hospice my colleague Brad Wilcox and I visited Don and his family. I greeted his son Chris, came up the steps, and saw Don in his chair, his skin darkened by his condition, his cheeks hollowing. It

... he believed that words and ideas make a difference.

was clear his body was failing, yet he was ... all Don. He wanted to know what we were doing at the meeting from which we had come, what else we were working on. He wanted to tell us about the manuscript he was finishing with John Witte. Carol came in and we hugged and she sat close to Don, solemn and present, her knitter's fingers flying over a fiber creation. Brad gave Don his deep regards and left for the airport. I stayed until Don's eyes blinked once, slowly, and I realized with a start that he needed rest. I gathered myself, said goodbye, kissed his forehead, hugged Carol, and walked out tugging my suitcase, my chest hurting and tears streaming, knowing I would not see him again.

It only occurred to me later that he might have blinked that way on purpose. It only occurred to me later that he knew I was incapable of leaving my dying friend.

Some years ago when Don retired from the Divinity School I was asked to join others in saying a few words. That task was so much easier, mainly I think because he was so clearly not retiring from anything. He was working and writing and traveling and speaking. Nothing was in the past, the words I chose did not feel so loaded with the potential to name wrongly or insufficiently another's life.

In moments like this I take comfort that we are parts of one body, contributing something partial, stumbling towards a whole. God knows who Don was.

I am grateful to have known him, too.

Margaret M. Mitchell

*Dean and Professor of New Testament and
Early Christian Literature*

Concluding Remarks

Professor Don Browning was a scholar, and as a scholar he believed that words and ideas make a difference. Don had a comprehensive and optimistic vision for religious humanism. In a book which appeared just this year, *Reviving Christian Humanism: The New Conversation on Spirituality, Theology, and Psychology* (Fortress, 2010) he set forth this vision, and also gave a corrective and refinement to some

of the ideas on which he worked over his entire scholarly career. In this ceremony of remembrance and gratitude for his life, I think it only fitting to give Professor Browning the last word:

It might seem farfetched to both hope for and predict the revival of institutional life—the institutions of civil society, religious organizations, service clubs, voluntary associations, and higher degrees of orchestration between professional organizations and other sectors of society. This may seem implausible during a time when individualism seems so rampant. But I write these words at a time when the economies of the world are wracked by poor judgment, inadequate virtue, and neglected institutional regulation and supervision. There are calls for a new era of individual and institutional responsibility. New attention to the institutions of marriage and family has been developing in the United States for the past twenty years and now seems to be spreading to Europe and other parts of the world. New intellectual interest in the institutional philosophy of Confucianism has emerged and was even evident among members of my audience when I first presented the contents of this book at Boston University.

Things change. Trends come and go. I believe a new rebirth of spirituality within religious institutions and a new recasting of these institutions within the spirit of religious and Christian humanism is a real possibility for our time. I believe we can avert the two dark alternatives I have discussed—either that science will vanquish religion *or* that an even more tenacious fundamentalism will dominate the world—and that a new Christian and religious humanism will eventually bring science and religion into a mutually reinforcing relation to each other. This development will strengthen cultural and institutional life in many other respects as well” (p. 154).

Thank you, Don Browning. ✕

Democracy and the Religious Question

The eighteenth century in Western history has sometimes been called “The Age of Revolution,” due in large part to events in America during the later 1700s. Perhaps nothing was more revolutionary than the turn summarized in the terse formulation: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”—the first clauses of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

An established religion means an official religion, endorsed and supported by the state or government, which citizens are somehow bound to accept. In the late 1700s, for instance, the Anglican Church was official in England, the Lutheran Church in Sweden, the Roman Catholic Church in France. In contrast, the First Amendment provided religious freedom.

The radical mark of those clauses is signaled by Winifred E. Garrison, a church historian who taught at the Divinity School early in the twentieth century. The declaration for religious freedom, he wrote, was one of “the two most profound...[institutional] revolutions which have occurred in the entire history of the church.”¹ In ranking this second, Garrison did not mean, as one might expect, second after the Protestant Reformation. Rather, the first profound revolution he had in mind was the so-called Constantinian settlement of the fourth century of the Common Era, when the Roman emperor, Constantine,

converted, at least ostensibly, to Christian faith, thus making it the official or, at least, favored religion of the Roman empire. Reaching from there all the way until full religious freedom broke forth in the American experiment, the Christian church took for granted its official sanction by the political order—so that Christianity was, in today’s idiom, the established religion. Disestablishment was, then, the second profound revolution, when the Christian churches accepted constitutional separation from the civil order of the American republic, turning their back on the major premise of fourteen centuries.

I

If memory serves me, it was Reinhold Niebuhr who said of religious freedom that it came to America “by the providence of God and the accidents of history.” I’ll return



I'll return shortly to God's providence...

shortly to God's providence, but first we can readily chronicle the historical accidents at play: Settlement along the eastern seaboard during the sixteen and seventeen hundreds occurred for many reasons, and by the later seven-teen hundreds, the colonies were religiously diverse. By and large, the differing faiths were all expressions of Christianity, but the differences mattered to most members of the differing communions. Many colonies had official churches—Puritan Congregationalists in New England, Anglicans in the South, although pietist move-ments had emerged within each of these churches, and pietists were typically at odds with the traditional ties to government. More pointedly, Rhode Island, peopled by Baptists, and Pennsylvania, by Quakers, refused religious establishment, and Jewish families had been attracted to both colonies. Also, Roman Catholics had settled in Maryland, and a minority of deists, not avowedly Christians, were found among the cultural elite. So, when independence came and the drive to union surged, no given religion was in a position to bid for supremacy. It was clear to each religion that it could have freedom for itself only if freedom were granted also to all the others. The accidents of history had decided for the First Amendment.

But if so, history thereby delivered a problem. During the long centuries between Constantine and the U.S. Constitution, it was not simply historical inertia that kept church and state together in European communities. There was also a logic to that course, and it went some-thing like this: A religion, whatever else it may be or do, defines the most overarching beliefs and orientation of its adherents; it expresses how they see human life related to the all-encompassing reality or mystery from which we all come and to which we all go and, thereby, presents the overall point or purpose of human life. Since differing religions at least may have differing convictions about these ultimate matters, adherents of two or more religions may conflict about some or other political issue and do so for the most basic of reasons. And if they do, how, in prin-ciple, can such conflict be resolved or governed? Since the grounds in conflict are ultimate or all-encompassing, what principle could override the opposition and, thereby,

civilize or unite the political community? It would be like two heavenly planets hurling, because their orbits intersect, toward a cosmic collision. What power in all heaven and earth could prevent the disaster?

In sum, religious differences internal to a nation seem a recipe for civil instability or schism; thus, civil order requires religious uniformity throughout the political community—so went the logic of centuries-old European practice. And the problem presented to the federal union in America was this: how could the new republic avoid this logic? Given the accidents of history, perhaps Union could not occur *with* an established religion. But the legacy of Western wisdom argued that national integrity was doomed *without* one. And the American Civil War might be called as a later witness to what one writer has called the “foreordained failure” of the First Amendment.² However fortunate this nation has been in living with its religious diversity, perhaps its “house divided” in the 1860s revealed the tragic logic of disestablishment. The Union could not civilize fundamentally differing beliefs about proper relations within the human community once the conflict became more important to the South than was the Union itself. So, is political union with many religions really viable—or merely hopeless verbiage demanded by history's accidents? Or, we might ask: what did the founders think they were doing when they framed the nation with religious freedom?

Over the course of our history, this question has pro- voked an extended discussion—becoming especially vital since the middle twentieth century, probably because the religious landscape in America has become increasingly pluralistic and, moreover, government has become increas- ingly involved in the lives of American people. In any event, the favored view among recent thinkers goes some- thing like this: religious freedom keeps religion outside of politics. As you may know, the phrase “wall of separation between church and state” is not used in the Constitution but, rather, comes from a letter President Thomas Jefferson wrote to a group of Connecticut Baptists in 1802. Still, the recently favored view not only interprets the Constitution in those terms but also reads Jefferson to say that religion should have nothing to do with the business of govern-

How is political union with religious freedom possible?

ment. The First Amendment, in other words, sets up a secularistic state. The political process is self-enclosed, based on principles of justice segregated from any and all religious beliefs, which are placed beyond the periphery—and thus citizens should agree to leave their differing faiths outside the door when they enter the public realm to discuss and debate what the laws and policies will be. And only because citizens agree to keep their religions private is it possible to have political stability or integrity in the midst of religious diversity.

Notwithstanding how widely persuasive this account may be, both among political theorists and within some part of public opinion, I find it untenable. Among other reasons, it seems *read into* rather than *out of* the past because the founders of our republic were not secularists. Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin were all alike theists—and, to all appearances, brought their theism to their momentous public task. They saw politics accountable to, as Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence, the laws of nature and of nature's God. And some form of theism was believed by virtually all citizens, even if, as seems to be the case, only a minority were active members of a church. So, finding in the architects an intent to secularize our nation's government is, at best, implausible and cannot be, so far as I can see, what Jefferson meant by his "wall of separation."

But whatever the case with our founders, a secularistic state is untenable because religion cannot be irrelevant to politics. How could a religious believer really keep her or his religious convictions outside politics in some private space? If one's faith defines for its adherents their most encompassing convictions about the ultimate nature of things, then its counsel about the overall point of human life has importance for political decisions as for anything else—and a believer who agreed to exempt public life would, in effect, no longer consider her or his faith truly a conviction about ultimate things. Having a religious commitment one sheds on entering the public realm would be like having a belief in military discipline one then casts aside when the battle begins. So far as I can see, religious freedom must allow citizens to bring their diversity of

religious orientations into the political process. But, of course, precisely that diversity seems to threaten civil instability. So, we're back to the question: what did the founders think they were doing? How is political union with religious freedom possible?

II

We can start an answer by noting how some architects of the new republic did not merely accept the need for religious plurality but embraced it. They were not reluctant draftees into the cause of religious freedom but, rather, enthusiastic volunteers. Had the accidents of history not occurred, and hence a single religion could have been sanctioned by the Constitution, these founders would nonetheless have pressed for the First Amendment. Here, I have Jefferson especially in mind, and I'll focus on him in order to make the point. His commitment became crystal clear when he introduced a Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom in Virginia a decade before the First Amendment was drafted and ratified. And he called for this freedom because it was, in his mind, *essential* to a fully democratic form of government. Democracy and religious freedom are, he thought, indivisible—and I will need a moment here to explain why this is so.

If the U. S. Constitution broke with the long Western tradition of religious establishment, the new republic also turned its back on a Western political practice of even greater vintage—namely, the view that political rule properly belongs to the one or the few, to a monarch or an aristocracy, who should have power because of uncommon wisdom or virtue or divine appointment. In contrast, political leaders in America insisted on rule by the many. Indeed, here in the new world, their zeal for democracy outstripped even the early modern forms of constitutionalism in England from which they learned. This, too, was a thoroughly a radical idea—that "we the people," whom the state is to rule, could be the final ruling power, the source of political authority, so that each person subject to the government would also be the government's superior—or, in the phrase Abraham Lincoln subsequently

...“we the people” cannot be sovereign unless each of us is allowed to find for herself or himself the source of light showing what is best for our common life.

engraved on our national memory, government would be “by the people.”

It follows from popular sovereignty that each citizen must be sovereign over her or his judgment or assessment of every political claim or proposal. In other words, the state may never fix how citizens should reach their political evaluations. Whether the issue concerns war or foreign aid or taxation or the economy or public education or health care or affirmative action or any other potential matter of legislation and policy, each citizen must be free to take her or his own decisions about the merits of differing ideas. And this is why full democracy is wed to religious freedom. Let me see if I can make this clear.

Were the government allowed to declare some religion official, and teach it to everyone, the state could dictate how all citizens should understand the overall point of human life, so that everyone should begin from the same point of view when they think about laws and policies. I’m reminded of Henry Ford’s announcement, when the Model T Ford was mass produced and left all competition in its wake, early in the automobile age, that his customers could have any color car they wished, so long as it was black. An established religion would give government the right to tell us what our most basic perspective on the government should be. But every citizen must be the ruler over all of her or his own political judgments and so must be free to embrace whatever vision of human life as a whole she or he finds convincing. In other words, “we the people” cannot be sovereign unless each of us is allowed to find for herself or himself the source of light showing what is best for our common life. Full religious freedom insures popular sovereignty, and this bedrock support for democracy is, I venture, why Niebuhr assigned the First Amendment not only to “the accidents of history” but also to “the providence of God.”

I pause to mention how, on this account, the political meaning of “religion” has been stretched. For most of the time, I expect, the term “religion” points to some or other tradition in which human life overall is expressly related to some god or other reality beyond the world, and the religious community typically gathers to engage in symbolic expressions and practices whose pur-



pose is to worship that reality and thereby reinforce their overall commitment. Religious freedom certainly protects members of all these communities or traditions. Within the political constitution, however, the principle also has a wider meaning. Every citizen has a right to any conviction about the ultimate basis for political judgment her or his conscience commends. Every such conviction is protected, whether or not a god or other-worldly reality is affirmed and whether or not a community of worship is involved. All such beliefs are “religious” within the purview of the First Amendment, because every citizen must be sovereign over all political claims.

I doubt that most founders had this wider meaning of “religious” in mind when they ratified the First Amendment, mainly because theism was so pervasively taken for granted. But it’s noteworthy that Jefferson was clear: religious freedom, he said, protects the “infidel” as well as the Christian or Jew or Muslim. Be that as it may, in our day,

... together we will make our common life as good as our common reason will allow.

when atheistic or merely humanistic ideologies and beliefs, in some guise or other, have become far more prevalent, the necessity of full freedom of conscience if politics is to be fully democratic requires the wider account.

Still, the bond between popular sovereignty and the First Amendment hardly clears up the apparent dilemma. If religious freedom portends political conflict beyond any civilized resolution, a collision of the spheres, perhaps full democracy is simply at odds with itself, has no inherent solidarity, and government in which “we the people” is the final ruling power is finally a futile hope. But we should not rush to that judgment — and here, again, Jefferson is our best teacher. When he proposed his Bill for Religious Freedom in Virginia, others in the Virginia legislature, including Patrick Henry, raised in protest the specter of unyielding religious conflict, and Jefferson replied with the following: “Truth is great and will prevail if left to herself;...she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict [among religions] unless...disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate, errors ceasing to be dangerous when it is permitted freely to contradict them.”³

Now, to appreciate his meaning, we should recall that major figures among our founders were schooled by the Enlightenment, the European Age of Reason, and so they typically believed that human life fulfills its potential and the body politic is perfected insofar as each is guided by rational reflection. The Enlightenment was relentless in its critique of superstitious elements in religion, but it was not anti-religion. Indeed, many Enlightenment thinkers took theism to be itself open to rational confirmation, and this is why major founders such as Jefferson and Franklin could also be theists. In any event, their reliance on reason led to a body politic in which decisions would be taken through the fullest possible discussion and debate — including, therefore, debate about the ultimate basis of political evaluation. It is no accident that protection of religious freedom in the First Amendment is followed directly by rights to other freedoms required by open public communication — freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of petition. And religions could be admitted to this public realm precisely because the ultimate question, the question

about the overall point of human life, was itself thought to be a rational one.

So here is what the founders thought they were doing: Every citizen could be religiously free, or decide for himself (it was, alas, only “himself” for the founders), the ultimate basis of political assessment because “we the people” would be *united* as equals in full and free political discourse and through it rule themselves. “Reason and free inquiry,” Jefferson also wrote, “are the only effectual agents against error. Give a loose to them, they will support the true religion by bringing every false one to their tribunal.”⁴ “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” did establish something — it established the ultimate question, to which differing religions are differing answers. The new democracy was, we can say, *constituted as the religious question* and thus as a never-ending debate about the ultimate grounds of our life together. Thereby, our best collective wisdom can be embodied in our governing laws and policies, and together we will make our common life as good as our common reason will allow.

III

To the best of my accounting, something like this is what Jefferson and other founders had in mind. And if so, some of our fellow citizens will find them hopelessly romantic. Jefferson’s vision — public discourse committed to reason and persuasion, where errors cease to be dangerous as the truth prevails — will seem to some impractical, utopian. In fact, we will be told, politics in our republic is largely a clash of self-interests, where outcomes result from bargaining in which disproportions of money and forms of manipulation give state sanction to injustice, and what passes for discussion and debate is typically deceptive rhetoric or a mere smokescreen hiding pursuit of power or profit.

There is, alas, all too much truth in this description — but it cannot be the whole truth. We humans do have the capacity to rise above self-interest, and our public process, however compromised, does in some measure include

First, I, for one, am with Jefferson.

an effective exchange of reasons aimed at the common good—in and through political campaigns, civic organizations, the press, and political leaders who do their best to maintain a sense of principle. In another of his aphorisms, of which I am especially fond, Niebuhr wrote this: our “inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary” but our “capacity for justice makes democracy possible.”⁵ Our bias toward self-interest makes wide participation in decision making necessary, but government by the people could emerge in our world because there are also better angels in our nature.

Still, even if that point is conceded, Jefferson’s view exacts a price to which many of our fellow citizens will object—namely, democracy requires from all religious believers a pledge to trust in the public assessment of all religious beliefs. To be free in one’s beliefs about ultimate matters is to pledge allegiance to the way of reason. The constitution defines democracy as the practice of discourse about the ultimate question in its pertinence to government—and such discourse is possible only if differing basic beliefs can be brought before the tribunal of argument and debate. But for some adherents, their religious convictions transcend reason, are solely matters of faith or revelation in a sense that puts them beyond the reach of argumentative defense or dissent—and for these believers, democracy on Jefferson’s account demands a pledge they cannot and should not give.

I will here beg off from response to this objection and ask to be excused after merely asserting two opinions, for whatever they may be worth. First, I, for one, am with Jefferson. For my part, awareness of our relation to that encompassing reality from which we all come and to which we all go is ever present in the deepest experience of every human being. One could not be human at all without an understanding, however dim or inchoate, of the great truth about our lives. So, differing religions are so many differing ways seeking to symbolize with clarity and power what all of us, at some elemental level, already know—and the measure in which any given religion succeeds can be, in principle, assessed through reasoned reflection on our common human experience. The abiding human vocation, in other words, is to make this great truth

dominant in one’s life—to become, insofar as one can, truly human—and we are, in that sense, all after the same thing. A religion is our servant insofar as it helps us in that quest, and the public assessment of differing religions seeks to aid each of us in finding a faithful servant. A teacher I have long admired said it this way: “I was born a human, I became a Christian, and the one thing I know is that I will die a human.”

The second opinion I can express more quickly. Whether or not religions can, as Jefferson believed, be brought before the bar of reason, I’m persuaded that religious freedom finally makes sense only on his terms. A political community in which every citizen can adhere to whatever vision of ultimate good or ultimate purpose seems convincing has no principled basis for union except through reason and persuasion. If Jefferson was wrong about that, then so far as I can see, the First Amendment, in the end, constitutes a great confusion, and the democratic ideal can never be what Lincoln thought it was, “the last, best hope of earth.” ✕

Endnotes

1. Cited in Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 18.
2. Steven D. Smith, *Foreordained Failure: The Quest for a Constitutional Principle of Religious Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
3. Thomas Jefferson, *Jefferson: Political Writings*, edited by Joyce Appleby and Terence Ball (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 391.
4. Jefferson, *Political Writings*, 394.
5. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of Its Traditional Defense* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1944), xiii.

Alumni News

Armand H. Matheny Antommari, Ph.D. 2000, has been awarded tenure and promoted to Associate Professor, Division of Pediatric Inpatient Medicine and Adjunct Associate Professor, Division of Medical Ethics and Humanities at the University of Utah School of Medicine. His recent scholarship has focused on conscientious objection in health-care. He is the lead author of the American Academy of Pediatrics' policy statement on "Physician Refusal to Provide Information or Treatment on the Basis of Claims of Conscience" and has published articles on this topic in journals including *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* and the *Ave Maria Law Review*.

Dereck Daschke, M.A. 1992, Ph.D. 2000, Chair and Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Truman State University, has published *City of Ruins: Mourning Jerusalem through Jewish Apocalypse* (Brill Academic Publishers, 2010), based on his Ph.D. dissertation. The monograph examines the theme of mourning the Temple of Jerusalem through the lens of Freudian psychology. He also coedited *A Cry instead of Justice: The Bible and Cultures of Violence* (T & T Clark, 2010).

Donald L. Berry, B.D. 1950, Harry Emerson Fosdick Professor of Philosophy and Religion, Emeritus, at Colgate University, has recently published *How to Listen to a Sermon: With "Honoring the Gospel" and Other Homilies for the Sake of Heaven* (University Press of America, 2011).

Robert D. Denham, M.A. 1964, John P. Fishwick Professor of English, Emeritus, at Roanoke College, has published a new book entitled *Remembering Northrop Frye: Recollections by His Students and Others in the 1940s and 1950s* (Jefferson, NC & London: McFarland, 2011).

William I. Elliott, D.B. 1957, Professor Emeritus at Kanto Gakuin University in Yokohama, Japan, has published his eighth book of poems, *A Suite of Angels* (Kamakura, Japan: Minato No Hito, 2010). He has also translated, with Hiro-

yoski Tanaka, *Zen Poems of Toshio Tanaka* (Nagoya: Arm Press, 2011). Included in the latter are paintings by Michie Tanaka.

Rev. Mark J. Englund-Krieger, Ph.D. 1998, serves as the Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of Carlisle, a middle governing body of the Presbyterian Church (USA). He has recently published his first book, *The Presbyterian Pendulum: Seeing Providence in the Wild Diversity of the Church* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010).

Gabriel Fackre, B.D. 1948, Ph.D. 1962, Abbot Professor of Christian Theology Emeritus, at Andover Newton Theological School, will soon be publishing the third edition (updated) of his *The Promise of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Eerdmans, forthcoming April 2011). First published in 1970, the book provides an introduction to the life and thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971), arguably the most influential American theologian of the twentieth century. This standard text has now been reworked for a new generation.

Rev. G. E. Ryan Gilbert, M.Div., 2008, is Executive Chaplain at Good Shepherd Community Nursing Center, in Phelps, Kentucky. A Disciples minister, Gilbert's sermon "Son of a Zealous God" was recently published in *A Beautiful Thing: Sermons from the Inaugural Festival of Young Preachers*, ed. Lee Huckleberry (Chalice Press, 2010). He recently moderated the Transylvania Presbytery's Calvin Retreat and serves on a monthly preaching rotation for two area Presbyterian churches.

Kelly E. Hayes, A.M. 1996, Ph.D. 2004, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis, has published a new book. *Holy Harlots: Femininity, Sexuality and Black Magic in Brazil* was released by University of California Press in February 2011. *Slaves of the Saints*, a documentary film about Afro-Brazilian religions that she made with writer/editor Catherine Crouch, is being released as a companion DVD with the book.

Bryan Adams Hampton, A.M.R.S. 1998, is James D. and Dorothy Kennedy Distinguished Teaching Associate Professor of English, and Coordinator for Humanities, at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. His first book, *Fleshly Tabernacles: Milton and the Incarnational Poetics of Revolutionary England* is forthcoming from the University of Notre Dame Press.

David Hein, A.M. 1977, Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Hood College, is co-editor of a new book, *C. S. Lewis and Friends: Faith and the Power of Imagination* (London: SPCK, 2011). The book contains essays on C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, Dorothy L. Sayers, Rose Macaulay and Austin Farrer.

Maynard Kaufman, M.A. 1962, Ph.D. 1971, Associate Professor Emeritus of Religion and Environmental Studies at Western Michigan University, has also worked in community organizing for the past thirty years. This background led him to work with the Transition Initiative, an international movement designed to help people make the transition to reduced dependence on fossil fuels, after it moved from England to the United States in 2008. He explored related issues in his 2008 book, *Adapting to the End of Oil: Toward an Earth-Centered Spirituality* (Xlibris).

Richard Lawrence, M.Div. 1962, Co-chair of the San Diego Affordable Housing Coalition, has been selected as a Civic Ventures Purpose Prize Fellow. He has helped to organize a broad-based alliance of labor, faith-based, and community groups called ACCORD (A Community Coalition Organized for Responsible Development). Currently he is focused on developing “community action think tanks” to engage diverse groups of citizens in exploring pressing issues, including housing and health care.

Meggan Manlove, M. Div. 2002, was installed in January as Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Nampa, Idaho. She had previously been Pastor at Soldier Lutheran Church in Soldier, Iowa.

William J. Meyer, M.A. 1988, Ph.D. 1992, is Professor of Philosophy and the Ralph W. Beeson Professor of Religion at Maryville College in Tennessee. He has recently published *Metaphysics and the Future of Theology: The Voice of Theology in Public Life* (Wipf & Stock, 2010).

Jon Pahl, Ph.D. 1990, Professor of the History of Christianity in North America at The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (LTSP), has been named Director of M.A. Programs at LTSP. He has also developed a new Master of

Arts in Public Leadership, in partnership with Temple University Fox School of Business and School of Social Work, designed for faith-based social entrepreneurs and for leaders of social ministry organizations. Pahl has recently published *Empire of Sacrifice: The Religious Origins of American Violence* (New York University Press, 2010).

Robert L. Randall, A.M. 1969, Ph.D. 1973, has published a new book with colleague Terry Cooper entitled *Grace for the Injured Self: The Healing Approach of Heinz Kohut* (Pickwick, 2011). It contains previously unpublished interviews Dr. Randall held with Dr. Kohut, just a few months before Dr. Kohut’s death, on the subject of self psychology and religion.

Jonathan Wyn Schofer, Ph.D. 2000, Associate Professor of Comparative Ethics at the Harvard Divinity School, has recently published *Confronting Vulnerability: The Body and the Divine in Rabbinic Ethics* (The University of Chicago Press, 2010). The book carefully examines rabbinic texts that employ vivid images of death, aging, hunger, and so forth, to find out why their creators thought that human vulnerability was such a crucial tool for instructing students in the development of exemplary behavior.

Huston Smith, Ph.D. 1945, Thomas J. Watson Professor of Religion and Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Philosophy, Emeritus, at Syracuse University, currently resides in Berkeley, California. The University of California Press will publish *A Huston Smith Reader* this year, and his book *To Live Rejoicing* will appear next year.

Father Alexis Trader, A.M. 1989, is publishing a new book entitled *Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck’s Cognitive Therapy: A Meeting of Minds* (Peter Lang Press, 2011). The book details a journey into two seemingly disparate worlds united by a common insight into the way our thinking influences our emotions, behaviors, and ultimately our lives.



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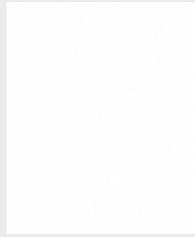
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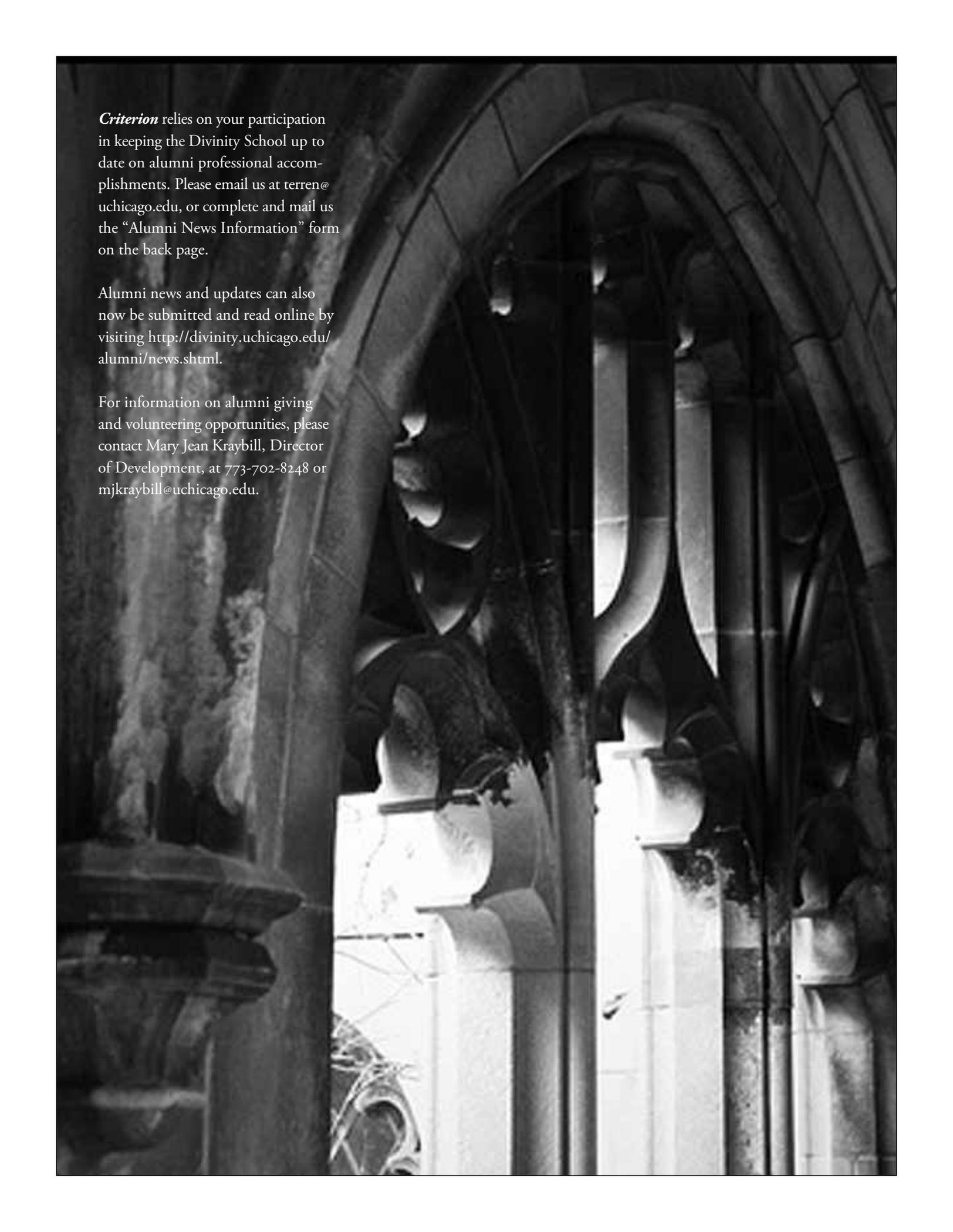
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