

CRITERION

A Publication of the University of Chicago Divinity School



Dear Alumni and Friends —

Opening this Spring 2008 issue of *Criterion* is “For There Is Hope: A Conference to Honor the Memory of Tikva Frymer-Kensky,” a report by Karina Martin Hogan, one of the organizers of the October 2007 conference held at the Jewish Theological Seminary to celebrate the contributions of Tikva Frymer-Kensky (1943–2006), Professor of Hebrew Bible and the History of Judaism in the Divinity School.

Next is “It Is Your Duty to be Human: Anthropological Questions in a Post-Liberation South Africa,” by Piet Naude. Originally delivered as a lecture on Wednesday, May 9, 2007, in Swift Lecture Hall, this essay addresses four anthropological questions related to racism, globalization, identity and HIV/AIDS.

Following is the Alumnus of the Year 2007 address, delivered on Thursday, November 1, in Swift Lecture Hall. In his address, John C. Holt, the recipient of the award, reflects on how the Divinity School introduced him to serious critically and creatively engaged analytical thought and, thus, to “The Spirits of the Place: Buddhism and the Religious Culture of Laos.”

Concluding this issue is a homily by Father Leo O’Donovan, S.J., delivered at the Divinity School’s memorial service for Anne Carr (1934–2008), on February 15 at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Hyde Park. Professor Carr, a pioneering feminist theologian and advocate, and the first woman with a permanent faculty appointment to the Divinity School, died at her home on Monday, February 11. She was seventy-three.

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

I hope you enjoy this issue,

Terren Ilana Wein, *Editor*

CRITERION

VOLUME 46 | NUMBER 2



Karina Martin Hogan is Assistant Professor of Theology (Hebrew Bible) at Fordham University. She received her Ph.D. from the Divinity School in 2002.



John C. Holt is the William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of the Humanities in Religion and Asian Studies at Bowdoin College and the Divinity School's Alumnus of the Year for 2007.

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Piet Naude is Professor at the Ethics Institute, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, South Africa.



Leo O'Donovan, S.J., is President Emeritus, Georgetown University.



KARINA MARTIN HOGAN

For There Is Hope

A Conference to Honor the Memory of
Tikva Frymer-Kensky

On October 21, 2007, which would have been Tikva Frymer-Kensky's sixty-fourth birthday, a conference to honor her memory took place at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. The title of the conference, alluding to Jeremiah 31:17 in which her first name, which means hope, is mentioned, was "For There Is Hope: Gender and the Hebrew Bible." The goal of the conference was to celebrate Tikva's contributions to the broad range of fields in which she was involved, both academic and nonacademic.

The conference was organized by Dr. Amy Kalmanofsky (Conference Chair; Jewish Theological Seminary), Dr. Esther Hamori (Union Theological Seminary), Dr. Andrea Weiss (Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion) and Dr. Karina Martin Hogan (Fordham University). These four women, assistant professors of Hebrew Bible in New York City, had all been influenced deeply by Tikva's scholarship, and three of them had also been her students, but they did not know one another well. Shortly after Tikva's untimely death, the four met as a group for the first time and began to brainstorm about a conference that would be a fitting tribute to Tikva's life and work.

This was a daunting task, because Tikva had made major contributions in so many areas of scholarship and religion. In the introduction to *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism*,

a collection of her essays published in 2006 in the Jewish Publication Society Scholar of Distinction series, Tikva identifies herself as a "biblical theologian." At the same time, as the title implies, she was a critical scholar of the Bible and a feminist scholar, at that. Yet she would not have identified herself as either a feminist scholar or a theologian when she was completing her doctorate in Assyriology and Sumerology at Yale University, nor for several years thereafter.

Tikva's background as an Assyriologist and Sumerologist informed her scholarship throughout her life and made possible her groundbreaking book, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*:

"For There is Hope" was held at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York on October 21, 2007.

... Tikva was a model of “engaged scholarship,” always striving to integrate her faith commitments and nonacademic interests with her academic work.

Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth (New York: Macmillan, 1992) and her studies of biblical law and myth. Her first loves, however, were the Bible and Judaism, which she had studied intensively for eight years at the Jewish Theological Seminary before going on to graduate school at Yale.

As Amy Kalmanofsky said in her introduction to the conference, Tikva was a model of “engaged scholarship,” always striving to integrate her faith commitments and non-academic interests with her academic work. Before coming to the University of Chicago in 1995, she was director of biblical studies at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia. During that time, she developed strong interests in constructive theology and in interfaith dialogue. The fruits of her engaged scholarship can perhaps best be seen in her two remarkable books for general readers published while at the Divinity School, *Motherprayer: The Pregnant Woman’s Spiritual Companion* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995) and *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002).

The opening lecture of the conference, “Of Tools and Terracottas,” was by Dr. Carol Myers of Duke University, who spoke about “recovering the lives of women in ancient Israel” by starting from archaeological evidence, rather than the biblical text. Although the Bible can be helpful in interpreting archaeological data (for example, in identifying which tools and utensils would likely have been used by women), it can also be misleading, as, for example, in the case of the female terracotta figurines discovered in many

Judean homes, which were long assumed to be images of Asherah or some other goddess. They are now believed to be human representations used in household rituals associated with reproduction. Myers ended by praising Tikva’s effort in *Motherprayer* to fill a gap in contemporary Jewish and Christian practice by creating prayers and rituals for pregnancy and childbirth.

Tikva’s commitment to Jewish-Christian dialogue, exemplified by her coauthorship of “*Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*” (<http://www.icjs.org/what/njsp/dabruemet.html>), was reflected in the second session of the conference, “Wrestling with Troubling Texts in a Faith Context.” This session was a dialogue between Dr. Lori Lefkowitz, Professor of Gender and Judaism at Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and Dr. Katharine R. Henderson, Executive Vice President of Auburn Theological Seminary, about the different ways Jews and Christians have read the narratives about Sarah and Hagar in Genesis 16 and 21. Both women acknowledged that much traditional interpretation of these texts has been damaging to women (and to Jewish-Christian relations), but each was able to draw constructive reflections on these stories from the resources of her own faith tradition. The dialogue was preceded by a reading of Tikva’s translation of these texts in *Reading the Women of the Bible* by her daughter, Meira Kensky, a doctoral candidate at the Divinity School.

Five concurrent sessions in the afternoon, under the heading “A Tribute to Tikva Frymer-Kensky’s Legacy,” reflected the breadth of Tikva’s scholarship. Dr. Susan Ack-



... the efforts of Tikva and other feminist biblical scholars to
reclaim the Bible as empowering to women.

erman (Dartmouth College) brought together two texts that Tikva had explored separately: the Babylonian Creation Epic (*Enuma Elish*) and the story of the rape of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19. Dr. Jeffrey Tigay (University of Pennsylvania) discussed Tikva's contribution to the study of the Deuteronomic law code, which she saw as moving authority out of the patriarchal family and into the community. Dr. Stephen Geller (Jewish Theological Seminary) paid tribute to Tikva's work as a Jewish biblical theologian and shared some of his own reflections on biblical theology. Dr. Mary Boys (Union Theological Seminary) acknowledged Tikva's work toward Jewish-Christian dialogue and then brought Tikva's theological scholarship into conversation with the hermeneutical theory of a prominent Christian biblical theologian Sandra Schneiders. Rabbi Jill Hammer, Ph.D., honored Tikva's efforts to bring the women of the Bible alive for contemporary non-scholarly audiences by sharing some of her own poetry and works of modern midrash.

The simultaneous sessions were followed by a touching musical tribute by the award-winning singer-songwriter Debbie Friedman. According to Meira Kensky, Tikva was a "huge fan" as well as a friend of Debbie Friedman, who played some of Tikva's favorite songs, including "All Around us is Shekhinah" and "Miriam's Song." Just before the performance, Rabbi Allan Kensky, Tikva's husband, shared some of his personal memories of Tikva and spoke of the formative influence of the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary on Tikva when she was in high school and college. Between his moving reminiscences and Debbie

Friedman's emotional renditions of songs dear to Tikva's heart, there were few dry eyes in the auditorium by the end of the musical tribute.

The conference ended with serious intellectual engagement with Tikva's work on the women of the Bible by Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi (Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles). She praised the efforts of Tikva and other feminist biblical scholars to reclaim the Bible as empowering to women. Her talk focused on several biblical books—Song of Songs, Ruth and Esther—in which women "expose, awaken and transform." She concluded by applying those same verbs to the task of contemporary feminist exegeses.

The conference organizers received many messages of gratitude from Tikva's family, friends, colleagues and former students who were present, as well as positive feedback from people who attended the conference because they were interested in the subject. The success of the conference, however, was due in great part to the presenters. All of them prepared original and engaging presentations that reflected Tikva's influence on their work. The conference achieved its objective, which was to give Tikva's friends and colleagues an opportunity to collectively honor her by reflecting on her diverse contributions and her remarkable personal history. ✕

From far left: Conference organizers Andrea Weiss and Amy Kalmanofsky; Dr. Mary Boys' session; Rabbi Allan Kensky, with children Eitan and Meira; Debbie Friedman



It is Your Duty to Be Human

Anthropological Questions in a Post-Liberation South Africa

The cradle of humanity has been subject to slavery, colonialism, political misrule and globalization. Any theology sensitive to this history and to contemporary Africa has to ask the anthropological questions: How should we understand the human person, and how could we live together in a human community?¹ These are, no doubt, questions of global concern that I will address from a (South) African perspective.

I wish to address concrete ethical concerns, moving “from phraseology to reality” (Bonhoeffer). I am, therefore, not primarily interested in the methodological link between a Christian view of person/community and the larger project to re-establish the ties between the Christian faith and the impulses behind modern humanism that grew from the European renaissance. Nor am I attempting to overtly develop a specific model of theological anthropology as, for example, ably outlined by Dwight Hopkins,² though my African context and Reformed theological orientation are declared in advance.

Insofar as the Christian anthropology developed below affirms, defends and promotes human dignity and associated values like justice, freedom, equality and reason, it may be part of a larger Christian humanist project. It is absolutely imperative that this project includes other religions as well as secular humanists, bound together by common concerns for promoting human dignity and opposing

religious and secular fundamentalisms.

Four anthropological issues³ are addressed below.

1. The anthropological dimension of the apartheid struggle and racism’s enduring importance beyond political liberation.
2. Economic justice and individualism in a global market-economy.
3. The construction of identity and community in a pluralistic context.
4. Loss of dignity and community due to HIV/AIDS.

Marginalization and loss of human dignity are common to all these themes. In each case, persons or groups or geographical areas are perceived as lacking desirable traits or deviating from the dominant norms, and are consequently overtly or covertly excluded or even ostracized as



The roots of racism . . . may be sought in a combination of thought-forms.

“undesirables,” not being or acting according to “the acceptable view.”

Each of these issues relate to two distinct theological themes, namely Christ and the church. There are obviously many other theological possibilities. In short: I will speak about human persons and human community in relation to Jesus Christ, the church,⁴ and concrete action for the restoration of human dignity.

The Question of Race as Anthropological Category under Apartheid and Beyond

The roots of racism, embodied in the apartheid state and theologically legitimized by some white Reformed churches, may be sought in a combination of thought-forms stemming from nineteenth century Europe that blended with the particular socio-economic and political situation of Afrikaners in the first four decades of the twentieth century.

The strength of Abraham Kuyper’s (1837–1920) neo-Calvinism was its affirmation of God’s rule over the whole of creation and the unity of humanity as created in the image of God. The weakness, however, was its emphasis on a God-willed pluriformity present in the very design of creation and confirmed by God in the events at Babel. Here God chooses to sustain pluriformity in separating the peoples of the earth via their different languages. Each people has its own unique law-stream according to which it realizes its potential in history. Where this potential meets God’s particular grace in Christ, the highest form of civilization (like in Europe and America) is reached, whereas groups sharing only in general grace, exhibit a lower form of civilization (like some African tribes).

Kuyper — in his fierce opposition to British colonialism in South Africa — was of the opinion that the Afrikaner



people, due to their Calvinist origin, shared in the best that this tradition could offer, and had the God-given obligation to rule over less civilized people until the latter reached the same level of development.

Kuyper’s idea of a differentiation in creation, and a hierarchical construction of civilization, struck a powerful chord in the minds of Afrikaners suffering in the time after the British war (1899–1901), and the depression of the early 1930s, compounded by severe droughts in an agriculture-based economy. It enabled leading Afrikaner intellectuals to turn Kuyper’s specific brand of structured pluriformity into a theologically guided political ideology where separateness and *voogdyskap* (rule over others) could be presented as an ordinance of God.⁵

The strength of missiological reflection done by Gustav Warneck (1834–1919) was his insight into and emphasis on the fact that mission needs to take the nature of its object — specifically its cultural forms — seriously if the gospel is to be mediated not as something foreign, but as linking to the structure of “the own.” His weakness was, however, to interpret *ta ethne* (the nations) in the great commission (Matt

The struggle against apartheid was a search for the restoration of human dignity and the establishment of a common humanity.

28:19) in ethnological rather than salvation-historical terms. He ultimately chose for *Volkschristianisierung* (christianizing of peoples) as both object and method of mission.⁶ In this way the establishment of ethnically-based independent churches was seen not only as the method and contingent historical result of mission, but as its ultimate aim.

Warneck's work provided the theological rationale for defending the establishment of separate church denominations for different race groups in the Dutch Reformed family since 1881. The move from the ecclesial practice of racial separation to a political design that enforces racial separation (presented as the only viable Christian solution to the race problem) was an easy one to make and to defend.

There is no doubt that both Kuyper and Warneck were influenced by romantic ideas about the *Volk*: In Kuyper it resonates in his successful political ambitions, his romanticizing of the glorious Dutch past, and his overt nationalism.⁷ In Warneck it underlies the idea of both the German people and their relation to other nationalities: "The Germans have a special gift to respect foreign nationalities. This enables them to enter the specific features of other peoples in a selfless, and open manner."⁸

The rise of Afrikaner nationalism in the early part of the twentieth century was a fertile ground for the seeds of romantic ideas about the own and the *Volk*. In the mission policy of the Cape Dutch Reformed Church in 1932, it is stated that Christianity "does not want to rob the Bantu of his language and culture, but wants to permeate and cleanse his whole nationalism so that evangelization can never imply de-nationalization." Each *Volk* has to develop according to its own specific nature (Kuyper) and in its own geographical and socially defined context insofar as it is practically possible.⁹

The strength of Pietism was its emphasis on a holy lifestyle and full commitment in following Christ, a warmth of worship in new music, prayers and other liturgical forms, as well as a "passion for souls" leading to a strong missionary focus.¹⁰ Its weakness was strands of anti-theological attitudes which resulted in literal and, in some cases, fundamentalist readings of Scripture.

If one now takes into account that Kuyper, in his criticism of Gunning, set himself up against the modern critical

scholarship of his time (notably in his *De hedendaagsche Schrifcritiek*, 1881), and that, due to Scottish influences, a pietistic respect for Scripture was already deep-seated in the spirituality of the DRC in the period of 1860 to 1900, the chances for a self- or historical- critical reading were indeed slim.

A hermeneutical (and ethical) vacuum was created in the early 1930s into which the ideologically interpreted pluralism of Kuyper as encompassing Christian world view could step, unchallenged by a largely pious audience who accepted the Word "as it stands," thereby allowing a natural theological construct to destroy a sense for the historical and salvation-historical mode of Scripture.¹¹

It took the white Reformed churches more than fifty years to escape from this hermeneutical trap. It provided the moral authority to not only legitimize different churches for different racial groups, but, under the guise and in the name of Christianity, gave Afrikaner political leaders from 1948 onward the go-ahead to intensify and complete the racialist construction of the whole South African society.

The struggle against apartheid was a search for the restoration of human dignity and the establishment of a common humanity. From a theological perspective this struggle was not fought on the basis of either anthropology or recourse to human rights. A careful analysis of ecumenical church witnesses after 1948 reveals that the anthropological theme is not independently developed, but subsumed under the theological views of church and Christ, because the struggle was not against atheistic humanism or communism, but against fellow Christians. It was a protest against "unbelief, superstition and heresy," speaking the full truth against "the mass of human error which consists supremely in half, quarter and eighth truths."¹²

The church is the one body of Christ where only faith is required for membership and not accidental factors like culture or race, witnesses the Belhar confession¹³ in its second article. Because of a communal faith in Christ, there is in the church no more Jew nor Greek, rich nor poor, master nor slave, man nor woman (Gal 3:26-28). In a de facto situation of a *corpus Christianum*, those who so fiercely defended and fought for visible church unity "as a priceless gift" (Belhar), knew all along that the anthropological and political

... the effect of globalism is deeply ambiguous.

consequences of such unity would eventually imply the collapse of the political system of racial separation, and restore the humanity of those excluded and humiliated.

Christ is the Reconciler between enemies; in his body and through his death he brought peace between Jew and Gentile (Eph 2:11-19). "Where different groups of people are hostile to each other, this is due to human sin, not the plan of the Creator," witnessed the *Message to the People of South Africa* (1968).¹⁴ Where He rules over a society that claims to be Christian, this reconciliation must be made visible in the structures of that society. A doctrine "which sanctions in the name of the gospel... the forced separation of people on grounds of race and color (PjN: anthropology) and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ" (PjN: Christology), must be rejected as heresy (Belhar, article 3).

A humanizing Christian anthropology can play a role to ensure that exclusions and marginalizations of whatever kind are fought with the vision of Christ's inclusive grace, the openness of the church as hospitable community, and representative action to strengthen the voice to the voiceless.

Economic Justice and Individualism in a Global Market-Economy

One could argue that apartheid was in the end demolished by economic, and not so much political or ecclesial, forces. That is why sanctions in which the ecumenical church played a crucial role were so fiercely resisted by the apartheid government.

Conversely, one of the prospects of political liberation was a renewed integration into the world's economy with massive reinvestments to undo the economic harm of disinvestment during the preceding decade. The idea of a "Marshall Plan" for SA after apartheid did, however, not materialize, *inter alia* due to the inherent "logic" of a global market economy into which we belatedly stepped in 1994.

Knowing the danger of not understanding the complexities of modern economics, as well as resisting the temptation to blame the international economic order for all woes, a few remarks are nevertheless required:

Depending on your hierarchical place in the system, the effect of globalism¹⁵ is deeply ambiguous. If you are classified as an "emerging economy" or "Third World country," you might find the following:

- Your currency is left to the mercy of trader-perceptions of international rating agencies, formed by factors over which you have absolutely no control, e.g., a banking crisis in Singapore, unconstitutional land-policies in Zimbabwe, or an election result in Argentina. The currency is not a mere interesting economic indicator. It has a material effect on the very livelihood of people. An example is the dramatic drop in the value of the Rand over a few days in December 2001 which led to double figure food-inflation and a steep increase in the price of maize, the most basic food of poor South Africans.
- Your borrowing of money from international agencies is linked to enforced economic policies (normally dramatic privatization) not always suited to the social conditions of your country, resulting in a deepening social malais, and eroding the very idea of autonomy in a nation state.
- If you do attract international (re-)investment, it is mostly in liquid forms to enable a quick flight of capital at the press of a button somewhere in London or New York. This is hailed as the magic of digital capitalism.
- The industrialized nations speak with a forked tongue on the liberalization of trade and act in their own interest whenever it suits their local election campaigns or sectional economic lobby-groups.
- Poorer countries in the East and the South do not have the resources to combat the impact of global warming, caused mainly by the industrialized nations like the United States and China who look at unusual droughts and floods in these areas as a matter of benevolent aid and not as a case of coresponsibility.

Globalization. . . raises crucial questions about personhood.

The negative impact of global capitalism (there are, obviously, also advantages) leads to the deep paradox of “being accepted in the world,” but simultaneously experiencing a loss of our sense of agency which was exactly denied in political terms over many decades. We are deeply concerned by a lack of urgency by powerful agencies to create a more humane society where the very system of international trade and investment are reviewed to overcome forms of “invisible” marginalization and dehumanization.

Globalization not only poses the question of economic justice. It raises crucial questions about personhood. Our “joining the world” implied a radical and extremely swift immersion into the typical traits of personhood emanating from Western modernity with its commendable values of freedom, individuality, rationality, questioning of authority, and secularity. Our new constitution expresses these values powerfully.

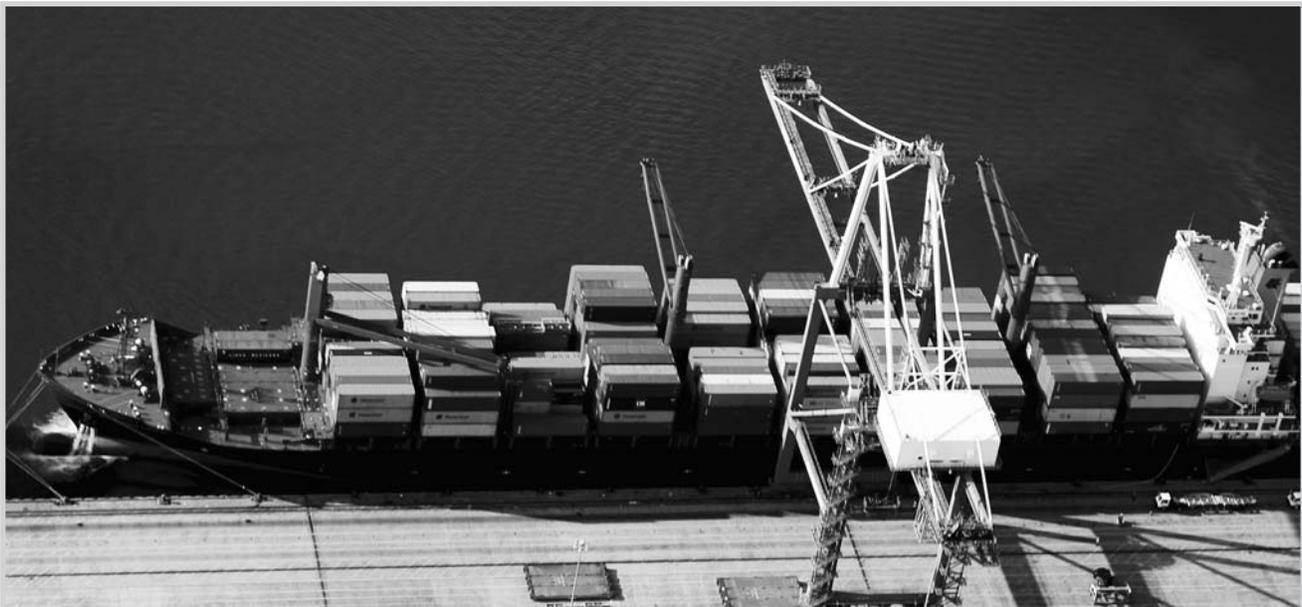
But we know that each of these values can and has been distorted in our present time: freedom turns into the unfettered power of arbitrary individual choice;¹⁶ individuality becomes individualism that inhibits community and weakens a striving for the common good; rationality and public argument turns into rationalism that falls prey to scientism

and hermeneutically naïve positivism; a healthy questioning of authority turns into loss of cultural memory and tradition; and secularity in turn becomes secularism with an impoverished ontology and anti-religious attitudes.¹⁷

In South Africa we unfortunately witness the inhuman consequences of a rising selfish individualism. This distorted value is embraced by a new generation of black business people and public servants who openly say: “We are entitled to this” and “I did not join the struggle to be poor.” It is also embraced by a new generation of young people (of all races) who religiously believe that money determines your human destiny and social acceptability. Crass materialism has become deeply embedded as guiding value; corruption based on greed, is rife; and consuming has become an important form of personal and social therapy.

This individualism, a form of self-centered hedonism, ravages a striving for the common good and relegates a caring for those who stand very little chance to become part of the economic system (approximately thirty percent of the South African population), very low on the agenda.

How shall we respond theologically to the two associated challenges of rampant, self-referential individualism and economic marginalization?



... church is a sharing communion of saints ...

If our cue to be truly human lies in Jesus Christ, we must retain the vision of the earthly Jesus' ministry in all its concreteness. We see how he transcends his own needs and, for the sake of others, does the will of the Father even unto the cross. We see his openness to respond to the physical and spiritual needs of those marginalized by culture, religion, gender or economics. We hear his teaching that it is better to give than to receive, and that the eschatological judgment will be based on our action toward the weakest and the smallest. In the context of a self-serving agenda, he teaches that those who cling to life will surely lose it, and that those who show mercy to others are blessed.

The theological agenda of the non-person, and the epistemological privilege of the poor, so forcefully argued for by Latin American (and later black) liberation theologians, and the revelation of God as "in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged," so eloquently confessed in the Belhar confession (article 4), are now ecumenically accepted views, and are still as urgent as ever before.¹⁸

The vision of Christ-for-others, sharing not only gifts, but ultimately himself, should guide the church in its self-understanding as holy church gathered by Word and Spirit into a *sanctorum communion*.

Holiness refers foremost to the church's state of justification whereby believers receive Christ's holiness (1 Cor 1:30), but it equally refers to sanctification as our becoming holy (Lev 11:44; 1 Pet 1:15) by following Christ. Both these dimensions need to be kept in focus: As holy people, the church is both a distinct community set aside by and for God, and witnessing to Christ through an alternative life-style in the realities of the world (1 Pet 2:11 ff, 3:15-16). "The church is sanctified" remarks Moltmann, "where it participates in the lowliness, helplessness, poverty and suffering of Christ."¹⁹

In a remarkable counter-statement to self-referential individualism, the Heidelberg Catechism explicates the *sanctorum communio* as "the obligation on each of us to use our God-given gifts freely and joyously for the benefit and welfare of others." This sharing obviously relates to spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12-14), but the biblical evidence includes material gifts as well.

The early church is depicted in Acts 2 as a sharing



community. They shared a common teaching, common prayers, common meals, common property and a common doxology. The sharing included Greek widows (Acts 6) that in turn served as basis for instituting the office of deacon, tasked to ensure that the needs of the needy are met. As the church spread beyond the borders of Jerusalem, and the mother church itself was later plagued by poverty, the mission churches sent material help according to their ability. Paul uses the holy communion as basis to exhort not only to unity, but also to the sharing of food. The early church hymnal interpreted the self-donation of Christ as basis for the holy people of God to "be of the same mind as Christ," and count the interest of others higher than their own (Phil 2:5-9).

There is no doubt that the church is a sharing communion of saints, a "community of concern" where members serve as "ministers of divine benefit."²⁰ What does that imply for being church in a complex, capitalist society, far removed from the social conditions prevailing at the time

The answer lies in action at both the global and the local levels.

of the earliest churches? The answer lies in action at both the global and the local levels.

At the global level, the institutional church's witness against the systemically uneven distribution of economic goods in the world, and the declaration of a *processus confessionis*, should not be underestimated so as to keep the issue of systemic injustices on the agenda of agencies like the G-8, the World Bank and the IMF. Nuanced analyses are probably required more than a mere dichotomy between "God" and "mammon,"²¹ but this witness remains a crucial contribution to what Gustafson referred to as "prophetic" ethical discourse.²²

At regional and local levels, "prophecy" must be complemented by living the alternative Christological narrative where, to follow Stanley Hauerwas²³—the church is a social ethic, embodying a community not predicated upon the value of excessive greed presented by a neo-liberal society. We must create "precedent communities" that establish noncompetitive forms of goods circulation, imitating the indiscriminate grace and good distributed by God to the entire creation.²⁴ Local/regional churches have proven themselves as extremely effective redistributive agencies, playing indispensable roles in the lives of the poor, the hungry, the illiterate, the sick, and the marginalized.

To avoid the perceived "traditionalist" slant in Hauerwas,²⁵ and address Schweiker's concern about "the church as outpost of peaceableness in alien lands,"²⁶ engagement in Gustafson's "ethical" and "policy" discourses are also required. This would *inter alia* imply that economics (and not only science or philosophy) becomes a key disciplinary partner for theology. On policy level, the most effective way to be a church, is to be the "salt of the earth," i.e., for Christians to follow their vocation concretely in business and the professions where the real decisions effecting our world are made.²⁷

As an undisputed economic, military and technological leader in the world, there rests a huge responsibility on the United States to use its immense power wisely, and to see its own contextual challenges in a global, rather than nationalistic, framework. There remains, therefore, a crucial task for theologians, ethicists and church leaders in the United States to urge the political powers of the day to actively

support global ecological initiatives, and in a rational manner renegotiate the terms of global trade toward a fairer and more just system. Theological ethics will have to show in what ways the debilitating effects of competitive structures "are maintained only by way of our own complicity in them,"²⁸ and what restitution²⁹ would imply in a global context.

If the leader of the world acts unilaterally; engages in pre-emptive wars to presumably export freedom and democracy; is mainly driven by short-term national interests; and then uses the Christian religion to legitimize these actions, all of us in this small global village are in grave danger. Let us be reminded that the inter-relations of security ("the war on terror"/ news from "the situation room" and "the other" as enemy), politics ("our homeland and our nation") and religion ("our God/god") have shown themselves to be the main building blocks of inhuman ideologies in the twentieth century.

The Construction of Identity and Community in a Pluralist Context

In a recent article, Dwight Hopkins argues strongly for conceptual clarity on the notion of culture, earlier set with "race" and "self" as constitutive of theological anthropology. Although he focuses on the variety of black theologies, one could accept "the reality of culture, the centrality of culture and the necessity of culture being a location for revelation" in a more general sense.³⁰

In this regard, Tinyiko Maluleke made the following incisive observation shortly after South Africa's democratic elections:

"Issues of culture are again acquiring a new form of prominence in various spheres of South African society. It is as if we can, at last, speak truly and honestly, about our culture. This is due to the widespread feeling that now, more than at any other time, we can be subjects of our own

Being precedes bread.

cultural destiny. . . .The reconstruction of structures and physical development alone will not quench our cultural and spiritual thirst. On the contrary, the heavy emphasis on the material and the structural may simply result in the intensification of black frustration. We do not just need jobs and houses, we must recover our own selves.”³¹

This was echoed three years later by Miroslav Volf: “In recent decades the issue of identity has risen to the forefront of discussions in social philosophy. If the liberation movements of the sixties were all about equality—above all gender equality and race equality, then the major concerns in the nineties seem to be about identity: about the recognition of distinct identities of persons who differ in gender, skin color, or culture.”³²

These two interesting views have a direct bearing on a shift in post-liberation South African theology. Whereas black theologies of liberation as “theologies of bread” sought, and still seek, to liberate human beings from racism and classism, there is an upsurge in “theologies of being.”³³ These theologies serve a quest for identity amidst the homogenization effect of globalization in its cultural form.³⁴ The combined powers of the mass media and multinational companies represent an intense struggle between “global/foreign” and “local” in all spheres of life: food, clothing, music, art, language, economics and implicit values.

Whereas the struggle against apartheid necessitated a uniformity of resistance, and was aimed at the right to be “the same,” the post-apartheid struggle aims at a restored subjectivity and agency with the right to be different. But this difference is now no longer embedded in a tyrannical separateness, but in a celebration of difference within a constitutionally guaranteed commitment to unity and equality.

The notion that what Africans need is more development aid and physical infrastructure, however important, is fatally flawed and may in practice “result in the intensification of black frustration.” What needs to be restored and cultivated, is a culturally mediated reconstruction of the self in a personal and collective sense. In political terms, the African Renaissance (an unfortunate project title?) is not so much about economic development only, as it is about restoration of cultural pride and selfhood “to counter the

excesses of European modes of being-in-the-world.”³⁵

The crucial insight, missed by most Westerners, is that restoration of being not only precedes economic restoration, but, in an African situation, is the precondition for economic survival. Being precedes bread. Why? Because in a situation of scarce resources, you need a view of identity that resists economic greed and self-referential individualism. What you require is a notion of identity as identity-in-community which underlies redistribution patterns that in turn guarantee physical and economic survival. You need the survival of (the) community in stead of survival of the fittest.

This is a fruitful point where African and Western philosophies can meet: I refer to the well-known notion of *ubuntu* in which the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* (“I think therefore I am”) is critically restated as “I am because we are.” This provides an alternative vision for human beings to the one at work in the capitalist myth of “the self-made man/woman.”

In order to understand *ubuntu*, the popular misconception of a dualism between “Euro-individualism” and “African communitarianism” should be corrected. The latter would hold that *ubuntu* is the denial of individuality and a form of communal totalitarianism, whereas the former would purport that individuality and freedom is the unique product of Enlightenment philosophy.

However, the Comaroffs, well-known anthropologists working in Southern Africa, argue that personhood is always a social creation no matter how it is culturally formulated. “Nowhere in Africa were ideas of individuality ever absent. Individualism, another creature entirely, might not have been at home here before the postcolonial age. . . . But, each in its own way, African societies did, in times past, have a place for individuality, personal agency, property, privacy, biography, signature, and authored action upon the world. What differed was their particular substance, the manner of their ontological embeddedness in the social. . . .”³⁶

This insight provides a basis for building a theological anthropology on the *ubuntu* concept:

Albert Nolan, Catholic liberation theologian, in his book, *God in South Africa*³⁷ notes that *ubuntu* is the most

... the question about love for one's neighbor.

important African concept to depict the shift from being “objects of” to being “subjects in” society. Malusi Mpumlwana seeks an equivalence between *ubuntu* and *imago Dei*, because God is reflected in love for the other, especially the practice of social love marked by hospitality and accommodation of the other.³⁸

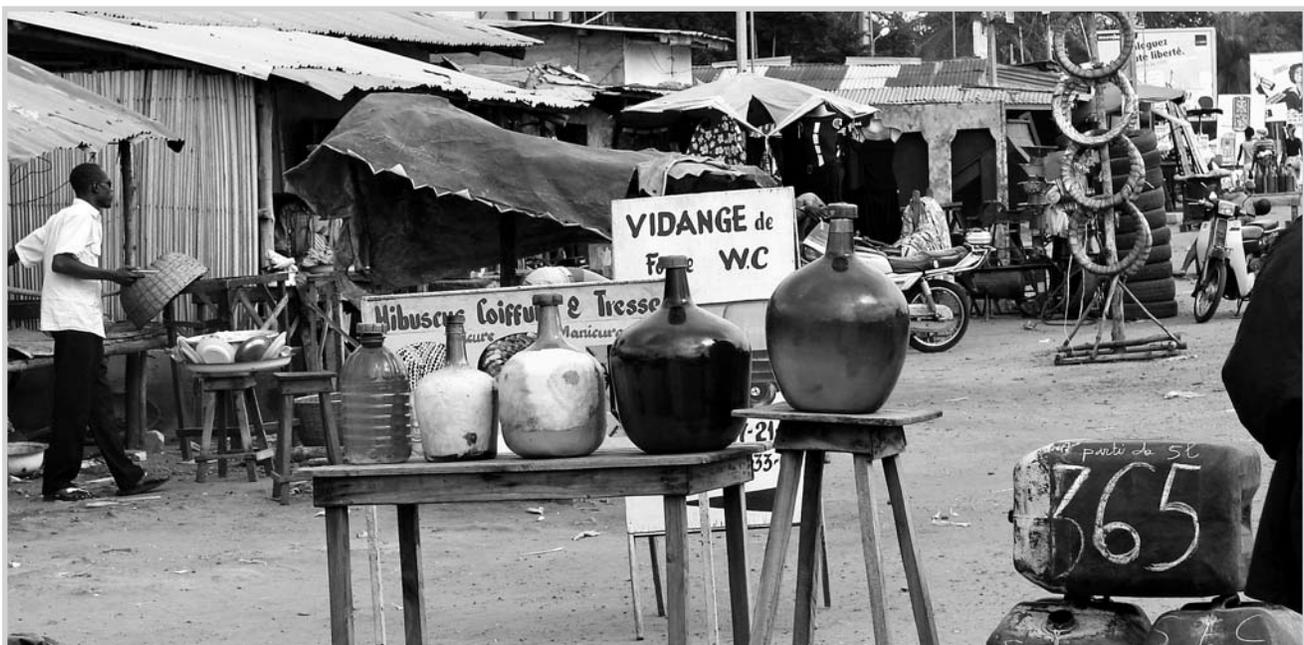
Russel Botman, current chair of the SACC and board member of *Theology Today*, links *ubuntu* to Bonhoeffer's Christological definition of community: Christ exists as community. The question “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?” reveals itself as the question of the very existence of the inquirer. The “who” question is “the question about love for one's neighbor. That means that man cannot answer the question ‘who?’ by himself.”³⁹

The idea that the “who” question cannot be answered in isolation, provides a link to *ubuntu* as a communitarian notion of being-in-community. We are, in the words of William Schweiker, “saturated with otherness.”⁴⁰ On the one hand identity is non-reducible in the sense that persons cannot be translated fully into relations and simultaneously retain their individuality. On the other hand identity is not self-enclosed, because the other is always already present as

transcendental condition for one's own self. Not only is the “who” question epistemologically dependent on the other, *ubuntu* assumes a constitutive, ontological relation between self and others.

Let us note a few Christological and ecclesiological implications for reconstructing personal and communal identity:

Faith in Jesus as the Christ has significant “identity” consequences. If “identity” refers to socially constructed self-understanding, conversion is at once an identity shattering and identity re-constituting event. Whatever cultural or religious achievements I may count on are considered nothing in order to gain Christ, says Paul (Phil 3:4-11). I am nothing less than a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). I am crucified with Jesus Christ and I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me (Gal 2:20). As a redeemed human being, the “accidental” features of my concrete existence (woman, African, gay, handicapped, middle-class) are affirmed in Christ, become sources of joy, and are in the faith community no longer grounds for exclusion and marginalization, but exactly seen as rich diverse gifts, contributing to the up-building of the church.



... cynical observers say that the most helpful function of a post-apartheid church is to bury people.

I am in Jesus Christ in whose identity there is no contradiction between the “catholicity” of the pre-incarnate *Logos* or post-resurrection Lord, and the “particularities” of the man from Nazareth, the *ecce homo* who is the suffering Jesus. Though the notion of the “catholicity of persons” is, in contrast to Catholic and Orthodox traditions, weakly developed in Reformed theology, Scripture declares that Christ dwells in every Christian through the Holy Spirit. Every believer is, in the particularity of her concrete existence, also a catholic person, carrying the image of Christ’s wholeness. My catholicity is, however, simultaneously constituted by its relation to other believers, the communion of saints, the Catholic church.⁴¹

The church as Catholic, *ubuntu*-community practices social love and reflects Christ in a redeemed sociality where cheap grace is denounced for the sake of discipleship (Bonhoeffer), and individual persons discover that genuine personal identity is only possible in a “community of love.”⁴² In this manner, faith in Christ, and participation in the church, can and indeed do play a significant role to still “the hunger for identity, meaning and self-worth,”⁴³ probably the most urgent anthropological needs of the African continent.

Loss of Dignity and Community Due to HIV/AIDS⁴⁴

I cannot attend any church commission meetings on a Saturday,” says a colleague. “I need Saturdays for funerals—sometimes three on one day.”

“I need Saturdays for funerals.” Some cynical observers say that the most helpful function of a post-apartheid church is to bury people.

That the AIDS-pandemic is a massive human catastrophe needs no further argument. That we need continued reflection on the anthropological and theological implications is equally clear. We should note the illuminating point made by Saayman and Kriel (a missiologist and physician respectively) in 1992⁴⁵ and repeated by Saayman in a 1999 retrospective evaluation: “The HIV/AIDS pandemic is not,



like many previous pandemics such as the 1918 flu epidemic, maintained and contained by biological mechanisms (e.g., insect vectors, droplet spread or the development of immunity by the population), but by social behavioral patterns with essential religio-cultural dimensions.”⁴⁶ They argue that the dominant biomedical model is reductionist, as it only deals with the effect of the virus. This model is notoriously hesitant to address the simple fact that the HIV-virus is mostly spread by human behavioral sexual patterns. This marks the disease as essentially socio-cultural, requiring moral and ethical interventions by taking underlying religious world-views into regard.

Christian churches in societies where AIDS is a dominant reality find the AIDS-pandemic very difficult to deal with.

One reason relates to an inadequate reflective framework to in some way “locate” AIDS on a theological map. Crude ideas about sin and judgment are totally inadequate to deal with the complexity of questions ranging from God as creator and “keeper” of creation; theodicee-models in

The consequences are predictable and real . . .

relation to divine providence; the relation between Christ's suffering and the AIDS sufferer; models for being the church; and very literally, the question of hope and eschatology amidst physical decay and death.

The second reason relates to the nature of AIDS as a primarily sexually related disease. Churches are under normal conditions hesitant to publicly address issues of sexuality, except when campaigning against its "negative" manifestations in debates about pornography, teenage pregnancy, abortion, prostitution and sex before marriage. In societies where sex as a public topic is in any case considered a cultural taboo, and where actual sexual behavior is regulated by hierarchical and patriarchal social structures, the church is doomed to silence, and very cautious about sex education programs. People whisper about who died of what, but very few are able to speak up and speak out.

These two conditions — an inadequate theological interpretative framework and religio-cultural silence — create a terrible vacuum into which the AIDS-sufferer is cast. The consequences are predictable and real: AIDS has become the "leprosy of our time" (Saayman and Kriel) with all the social marginalization and dehumanization that accompany views of persons with a disease which is both incurable and infectious. Both these elements are driven by devastating myths: that a cure is possible through sexual intercourse with babies or virgins; and that infections can occur via normal human interaction in the school, at work or in the home.

No wonder Nelson Mandela remarked: "Many who suffer from HIV and AIDS are not killed by the virus, but by stigma." He then tellingly adds: "Do not stigmatize people with AIDS. Show them care, support and, above all, love. You have to sympathize with them. It is your duty to be human."⁴⁷

"It is your duty to be human" brings us to the anthropological question, again set in the context of Christ and the church.

In the *Apostolicum* the church is named after the second Person in the Trinity: The church is a Christian church. The office of Christ has its roots in the Old Testament messianic "anointed one," reserved for prophets, kings and priests. I choose to develop the priestly metaphor, because Jesus became the sacrificial lamb by showing God's love against

cultural norms of social acceptability like touching, healing, conversing and eating with the ritually impure and socially shunned sinners. *Imitatio crucis* implies for those who are coanointed (the kingdom of priests, 1 Pet 2:9), a sacrificial life-style that touches, heals, converses and eats with those who are — in accordance with cultural-religious norms — socially marginalized through their HIV-status.

"Where would Jesus go if He came to earth today?" was asked in the Easter Sunday CNN program (8 April 2007). One participant, Rick Warren, remarked: "There is no doubt we will find him amongst AIDS-sufferers and their orphans."

Let us turn to the church.

It is a well-known fact that statistically speaking African Independent Churches are one of the fastest growing group of churches in South Africa, going against growth patterns in mainline churches, no matter whether the latter have a predominantly black membership or not.⁴⁸ This empirical observation immediately calls forth the question of why this is the case. One of the most plausible explanations is that these churches address the issue of healing — the balancing of life and cosmic forces — in an encompassing way. This healing is reinforced through rituals and real forms of alternative community and identity that transcend all ethnic boundaries. AIC's provide the communal setting for coping-healing in the widest sense of the word, because the loss of an immune system (in the case of AIDS) can only be "healed-and-coped" with if there is not also a loss of the commune-system.

The WCC report on AIDS appropriately includes under pastoral care and counseling the observation: "By their very nature as communities of faith in Christ, churches are called to be healing communities," because "the experience of love, acceptance and support within a community where God's love is made manifest can be a powerful healing force."⁴⁹

Fear is one of the dominant emotions of HIV-positive persons and AIDS sufferers: Fear for loss of health and physical ability; fear that others might find out; fear of their reaction once it can no longer be hidden; fear of treatment, if available; fear of job-loss and income; fear of death and the future of those who remain behind.

The bible teaches us that fear is only conquered by love,

In the act of grace we are not only recipients, but are constituted as a community
of the embraced—and therefore embracing—people.

and love may be concretely expressed in embrace. Again the structure of theological thinking and ecclesiology serves us well:

When the trinity turns to the world, writes Ireneus in his *Against Heresies* (5,6,1), the Son and the Spirit become the two arms of God by which humanity was made and taken into God's embrace. When God sets out to embrace humanity-as-enemy, the result is the cross: the arms of the crucified are open. "We, the others—we the enemies—are embraced by the divine persons who love us with the same love with which they love each other and therefore make space for us within their own eternal embrace."⁵⁰ In the act of grace we are not only recipients, but are constituted as a community of the embraced—and therefore embracing—people.

The context of HIV/AIDS requires us to radicalize Volf's explication of embrace and its phenomenology in two ways: First we need to move from metaphor to the physical realm of actual embrace. Volf argues that "I am not interested here so much in the physical embrace itself as in the dynamic relationship between the self and the other that embrace symbolizes and enacts."⁵¹ In our case I am particularly interested in the physical embrace or at least openly touching, as this breaks through sociocultural and religious taboos.

Second: Volf is at great pains to guard against both dissolving the self in the other and retaining the reciprocity of embrace. Concerning the latter, he says: "Before it (embrace) can proceed, it must wait for the desire to arise in the other and for the arms of the other to open,"⁵² because others may sometimes simply want to be left alone.

Now this makes sense in situations of reciprocity where the capacity for "desire to arise" is assumed. But the social and physical base for prior confirmation of desire might not always be present. The danger against which Volf rightly warns, is to turn embrace into a self-asserting overpowering of the other. In our situation the greater danger is to wait with open arms—and because of non-reciprocity—turn away, thinking that we have at least tried. No, on balancing the dangers, we must risk actual embrace, knowing that "a soft touch is necessary."⁵³

Thus: A truly Christian (Christ-like) church will be a healing and embracing community—a home for AIDS

orphans, a refuge for the socially outcast, and a source of hope for a whole society in the grip of death.

What message can we as African theologians give our American colleagues with regard to HIV/AIDS?

American theologians would do well if they, with their considerable intellectual and infrastructural resources, participate in theological reflections on the AIDS pandemic. There is still so much to do in creating adequate reflective frameworks.

On the policy level, there is a huge stumbling block to bring the cultural-religious model on par with the biomedical model. If the millions spent on medical research (rightly so) were matched for information and education programs, infection rates could have dropped by now. Prevention is in this case the only cure.

International pharmaceutical companies, some of whom are listed on the New York stock exchange, have at least two particular responsibilities. First: To maintain the highest ethical research methods and not misuse the predicament of Africans and laxer controls as excuse for unwarranted biomedical trials. Second: To make anti-retroviral medicine (so far the only answer to contain the HIV-virus) available at the cheapest sustainable price.

We ask you humbly not to use AIDS in the promotion of Afro-pessimism. That is the easy way out. The Christian way is one of solidarity: We—including the healthy ones—are all living with AIDS. There is no distinction. Is it not true that if one part of the body suffers, we all suffer? (1 Cor 12).

The cradle of humanity lies in archeological Africa. The joy of humanity here, and elsewhere, lies in an anthropology confronting the burning questions of our day through faith in Christ, participation in his body, and representative action in the world. ✕

The cradle of humanity lies in archeological Africa.



Endnotes

1. The core question in our context is not so much human uniqueness eloquently addressed by Wentzel van Huyssteen in *Alone in the World?*, but rather human dignity (bound up with the integrity of creation).
2. Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 13-52.
3. Hopkins argues that the disparate voices in theological anthropology “share at least one common theme: the use of culture, self, and race” (*Being Human*, 51). There is a remarkable coincidence between his observation and what I propose: “culture” links to my points 3 and 4; “self” to points 2 and 3, and “race” to point 1.
4. Obviously “the church” can refer to the institutional (denominational) church, the ecumenical church, a local faith community, or believers pursuing their vocation in the world. These different meanings will be apparent from each context below.
5. Kuyper’s legacy is contested due to the variety of possible readings of his work. In my view, the very structure of his theology is problematic and leaves him open to misappropriation. For a more extensive arguments, and analysis of original Dutch sources, read Johann Kinghorn (ed.), *Die NG Kerk en apartheid* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1986); W. H. Velema, “Kuyper as theolog. Een persoonlike evaluatie na dertig jaar,” *In die Skriflig* (23 / 91, September 1989), 56-73; P. J. Strauss, “Abraham Kuyper, apartheid and the Reformed churches in South Africa in their support of apartheid,” *Theological Forum*, XXIII/1, March 1995), 4-27.
6. D. G. Warneck, *Evangelische Missionslehre. Ein missionstheoretischer Versuchs III* (Berthes: Gotha, 1897), 237-254.
7. See Jan de Bruijn, “Calvinism and romanticism: Abraham Kuyper as a Calvinist politician,” in Luis E. Lugo (ed.), *Religion, Pluralism and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper’s Legacy for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 45-58.
8. Warneck, *Missionslehre III*: 23, my translation.
9. Kinghorn, *Die NG Kerk en apartheid*, 87.
10. On pietism and mission, read David Bosch, “Nothing but a Heresy,” in John de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Apartheid is a Heresy* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1983), 25-38. For a general overview of theological pietism, see Christian Peter’s contribution in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 8, 291-293.
11. See Kinghorn, *Die NG Kerk en apartheid*, 55-58.
12. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/4: The Doctrine of Creation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1961), 79, 80.
13. For the text, accompanying letter, and initial theological reflections, read G. D. Cloete and D. J. Smit (eds.), *A Moment of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).
14. The text of the *Message*, as well as other important church witnesses, are to be found in Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Between Christ and Caesar: Classic and Contemporary Texts on Church and State* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1986).
15. I follow Ulrich Beck’s distinction here between globalization as a process and globalism as the economic result of such a process. Globalism is expressed in the ideology of neo-liberalism where the multidimensionality of society is reduced by mono-causal economic views. For Africans, the elimination

of politics by the market leads to a serious loss of agency and creates new forms of dependencies. See Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 9-11.

16. See Ellen T. Charry's discussion of freedom as understood in a sapiential sense in her editorial, *Theology Today* 62 (2006), 459-64 (460).

17. See Schweiker's interesting remark that "overhumanization" is the combined effect of secularism and scientism. This is an ideology and social condition in which maximizing of power becomes a good in itself. William Schweiker, *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 202.

18. The philosophical translation of this partisan choice for the poor has been eloquently developed by John Rawls in his notion of distributive justice where the position of the least advantaged representative person, and the most burdened societies in the commonwealth of peoples, serve as criterion and reference point for establishing a just the socio-economic order. Read the "domestic" version of Rawls' ideas in *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1972) and his "global" version in *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). One of the best theological interpretation of Rawls that I know of is Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, *Vorrang für die Armen. Auf dem Weg zu einer theologischen Theorie der Gerechtigkeit* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1993).

19. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit. A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM, 1977), 355.

20. Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 89.

21. See for example the variety of biblical traditions in "Gott und Geld," title of the *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* (Band 21, 2006).

22. *Varieties of Moral Discourse: Prophetic, Narrative, Ethical and Policy* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College, 1988).

23. *After Christendom? How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).

24. Kathryn Tanner "What Does Grace Have to Do with Money? Theology Within a Comparative Economy," *Harvard*

Divinity Bulletin (Spring 2002), 6-9.

25. Read Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 140-161 where he makes the specific point that Hauerwas (and Macintyre) suffer from "excessive rhetoric" against liberal ideas and present a new traditionalism, not helpful to sustain a democratic political order. Hauerwas' response convinces me that his call on the church to be church is not a sectarian withdrawal from the world, but a focus on the unique agency of the church to act as servant in the world. See Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 215-241.

26. Schweiker, "Humanity before God," 2.

27. See Tanner who explicitly states: "My theological anthropology appears, indeed, to be a task- or vocation-oriented one" (*Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 68). This must be read in the light of the strong link she forges between the trinity and the vocation to spread the gifts that are ours in Christ. On vocation and the realities of business, read Shirley J. Roels, "The Christian calling to business life," *Theology Today* 60 (2003), 357-369. For broader discussions, read "Christian perspective on business ethics," the special edition of *Business and Professional Ethics Journal* 23, no. 4, (2004).

28. Tanner, "What Does Grace Have to Do with Money?" 9.

29. Restitution is an extremely emotive issue, but theologically an indispensable part of reconciliation and encompassing peace (*shalom*). Redistribution of land, writing off debt, and preferential trade conditions, are all issues on the agenda, though not always cast in the context of "restitution."

30. Dwight Hopkins, "Black Theology: The Notion of Culture Revisited," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (November 2005), 74-83 (74). Hopkins draws on Randwedzi Nengwekhulu for a three-part description of culture in terms of labor, spirit and art.

31. Maluleke as quoted in Tony Balcomb, "From liberation to democracy: Theologies of bread and being in the new South Africa," *Missionalia* 26, no. 1 (April 1998), 70.

32. Miroslav Volf, "'The Trinity is Our Social Program:' The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement," *Modern Theology*, 14, no. 3, (1998), 403-423 (408).

33. Balcomb, "From Liberation to Democracy," 68.
34. For an analysis and theological evaluation of cultural globalization, read Piet Naude, "The Challenge of Cultural Justice Under Conditions of Globalisation: Is the New Testament of Any Use?" in Cilliers Breytenbach, Johan C. Thom and Jeremy Punt: *The New Testament Interpreted: Essays in Honour of Bernard C. Latagan* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 267-287.
35. John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, "On Personhood: An Anthropological Perspective from Africa," in Klaus-Peter Köpping, Michael Welker, and Reiner Wiehl (eds.), *Die autonome Person—eine europäische Erfindung?* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2002), 67-82 (80).
36. *Ibid.*, 78.
37. *God in South Africa: The Challenge of the Gospel* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), 188.
38. For discussion and reference, see Balcomb, "From Liberation to Democracy," 71.
39. D. Bonhoeffer, *Christology* (London: Collins, 1960), 31-2, as quoted in Russel Botman, "Who is 'Jesus Christ as community' for us today?" *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (97, March 1997), 32 (non-inclusive language retained).
40. William Schweiker, "Humanity before God," 7.
41. For an Orthodox perspective, read John Zizioulas, *Communion as Being: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985). Though one might argue that Zizioulas's "catholicity of being" may not do full justice to the particularity of a person, the huge stride toward seeing in each person the fullness of humanity in Christ, must not be underestimated. For a discussion of Zizioulas and Ratzinger, see Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).
42. Bonhoeffer, as discussed by John de Gruchy, "Christian Humanism," 52. See Schweiker, "Distinctive Love," 112-117, where he argues for Christian love commands as basis for humanism, though he does not develop an ecclesiological point of view in the way Bonhoeffer does.
43. Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 20.
44. A longer version of this section was earlier published in *Scriptura* 98 (2002), 433-440.
45. W. Saayman and J. Kriel, *AIDS—The Leprosy of Our Time?* (Pretoria: Unisa, 1992).
46. Willem Saayman, "AIDS—Still Posing an Unanswered Question," *Missionalia* 29, no. 2, (August 1999), 212.
47. Nelson Mandela, Unpublished speech on AIDS day, 1 December 2002, Bloemfontein, South Africa.
48. In 2002 African Independent Churches comprised 40.8% of all Christians in the country and they grew from 3.9 million to 4.9 million members in the short period between 1996 and 2001. For a detailed discussion and analyses of data, see Jurgens Hendriks and Johannes Erasmus, "Religion in South Africa: The 2001 population census data," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (March 2005), 88-111.
49. World Council of Churches, *Facing AIDS. The Challenge, the Churches' Response* (Geneva: WCC, 1997), 106-107.
50. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 129.
51. *Ibid.*, 141.
52. *Ibid.*, 142.
53. *Ibid.*, 143.

JOHN CLIFFORD HOLT

The Spirits of the Place

Buddhism and the Religious
Culture of Laos

I am surprised and quite thrilled to be here today. This is an unexpected honor for me. I wish to warmly express my great thanks to the Divinity School Trustees for recognizing my career in this way. I have always been very proud to be a graduate of the University of Chicago and so I'm gratified to know that some people at the Divinity School, in turn, also think highly of me. Thank you very much for this recognition.

This event is surprising to me because during my first two years at the Divinity School beginning in 1973, I had some serious doubts that I would be able to survive the rigor of the academic program in the history of religions, and it may be that some of my teachers, or some of the spirits of this place at that time, including Frank Reynolds (who has always supported me generously and unstintingly), Joseph Kitagawa, Mircea Eliade, Jonathan Smith and Charles Long, also entertained doubts about my possible survival. As it turned out, after I had managed to work through my second year at the Divinity School in the spring of 1975, I was, indeed, the only one out of seven graduate students with whom I had entered who continued on for further studies. Some had been asked not to continue while others figured they had better uses to make of their time. We—'my batch' as they say in Sri Lanka—must have an exceedingly dry growing season, following as we did upon rather banner monsoon years that had included the likes of Bruce

Lincoln, David Carrasco, Sam Gill, Joanne Waghorne, Helen Hardacre, John Strong, Gene Gallagher, Tamar Frankiel and others who have gone to distinguish themselves as fine scholars and teachers in the field. In any case, from those first two years at Chicago, I have many memories of doubt, or maybe at the time it was almost terror, about my future prospects. If Max Weber could argue that Protestant belief in predestination was a catalyst for inner worldly asceticism, then surely the degrees of insecurity some of us experienced as graduate students caused us to bury ourselves in Regenstein Library seeking measures of reassurance from our own acts of inner worldly academic asceticism. Academic asceticism was in those days, as I imagine it still is, the spirit of this place.

It may seem that I am characterizing my first two years at Chicago as kind of "inverted *in illo tempore*." But what I am really trying to indicate is that Chicago introduced me to serious critically and creatively engaged analytical



Cutting edges have a way of becoming rusty.

thought. My very first experience of this at the Divinity School, at least the earliest that I can remember, about two weeks into my first term, occurred right here in this room. Norman Perrin, the famous biblical scholar, was introducing Columbia's Morton Smith, who was, I think, equally or even more famous than Professor Perrin at that time. Morton Smith had just published his well-known book *The Secret Gospel*, which had received a lot of publicity, featured as it was in some of the national news magazines, including *Time* and *Newsweek*. Norman Perrin's introduction of Morton Smith must have lasted at least half an hour. I can't remember many of the stinging criticisms that Professor Perrin advanced, but I do vividly remember that among the many assaults he launched was his comment that Smith's *Secret Gospel* belonged alongside the pulp fiction sold at drug store counters in suburban shopping center malls! Morton Smith never got around to his prepared comments, but spent his time retaliating quite vigorously. The exchange that followed between them, as you might suspect, got very animated, such that for months afterward we students referred to Professor Perrin (when he was out of earshot anyway) as "Stormin' Norman" (after the then-Chicago Bulls All Star guard 'Stormin Norman' Van Lier). In any case, the spirited debate between these two world-class scholars was absolutely fascinating to follow, an excellent paradigmatic example of how to defend, how to formulate creatively, how to advance, retreat, modify, and, if necessary, to exaggerate in the pursuit of truth.

As I have reflected about those years of graduate education at Chicago, I think we students were taught more by the examples set by our professors in their own work as scholars than by any of the actual content that they may have passed our way in the classroom. Much of that content, provocative as it may have been at the time, is now probably dated anyway, as will be the content now being debated thirty years from now. Cutting edges have a way of becoming rusty. But what I especially remember is how our professors all worked so very hard. The work ethic here at the University of Chicago, I believe, has probably always been second to none. I know that as a result of my time spent here, I seem to have been working very hard ever since.

In relation to this work ethic, several years ago, I read an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that published the results of a survey on the social life of three hundred universities in America. I really don't know how such surveys actually can hold any validity, but we seem to be awash in these kinds of things these days. Anyway, the results had been formulated in a ranking of sorts and the University of Chicago received the dubious distinction of being ranked three hundredth, or at the very bottom of the list. When I mentioned this a few months later to Jonathan Smith who, at the time, I think was dean of the undergraduate college or its master of humanities, he paused for a moment and then finally replied, "I'm quite surprised at that; I didn't realize that students at Chicago had a social life."

In deference to Mr. Smith, I can attest with certainty that his comment is not entirely true. Indeed, we graduate students had a very lively social life—but largely in the basement of Swift Hall, in the coffee shop. I think it was in the coffee shop where the "History of Religions Club," or better, the academic arm of the HR Shamans softball team, was first born. I don't know if it still exists, but the HR Club was basically our means to invite visiting scholarly luminaries to meet with us for a lively discussion. We'd invite visiting scholars like Benjamin Ray, Reggie Ray, Hans Penner or Carsten Colpe, etc., politely for tea, read some of their works ahead of time, and then try to question them as best as we could until they were made to feel, at least a little bit anyway, challenged or, if we went too far, even somewhat uncomfortable. We were usually, but I think not always completely, civil. That is why when two of my own students now at the Divinity School asked me a year ago if I might be interested in coming back here for a "tea," I thought to myself, "How about a game of softball instead?"

I suspect that the ethos of the Divinity School has not changed greatly in the thirty years since I was a student here. I imagine that the faculty still teaches by exemplifying critical discourse in the classroom and by their ambitious publishing agendas. I imagine that perhaps the students, while fretting over their current plights, push themselves beyond their previous limits in their quests to produce serious academic inquiries. At Chicago, I think it has never been a question

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it was very hard work indeed.



of where you came from, what your pedigree has been in the past, but rather a matter of what you were working on in the present and what you might possibly be able to contribute to the critical contemporary conversations of the time. With your indulgence, I'll now try to do a bit of that today.

I wrote this piece mostly last spring while I was still in Laos writing a book on the Lao apprehension of Buddhism, especially in light of the dramatic political changes that Laos has endured during the past century. Over the years, it turns out that most of my writing has been done in Asia where I am much more free to concentrate and remain undistracted because of the relative absence from teaching and institutional preoccupations back in Maine, the increasingly bureaucratic hassles of everyday life in America, not to

mention the experiences of dismay I continuously feel about the political and religious directions of this country, all of which have a tendency to get me preoccupied, distracted or just plain crabby. Moreover, having lived for six years in Sri Lanka and for another two in other parts of South and Southeast Asia, many of my best friends are in that part of the world. If I have had some questions about what I have been working on over the years, or need some help getting materials translated from medieval Sinhala, it has been easy to communicate with these friends personally and often informally, and not through a stultifying electronic means. And, of course, I could readily get myself out into the religious culture itself and make my own observations and inquiries directly, since I have a good modicum of fluency in Sinhala. Moreover, over the years, I have become quite familiar with library and archival resources in Sri Lanka. In Laos during this past year, I had none of the advantages that I have in Sri Lanka, including anything but the most rudimentary facility of spoken colloquial Lao, just enough to be polite. Though, of course, the religious culture was ready at hand all around me, it was very hard work indeed. Yet I still managed, somehow, to find a way because I was relatively unencumbered and could immerse myself almost completely in the local religious culture and in my thoughts about it. Probably the most important reason that I like to write from Asia is captured in this quote from Paul Mus, the great French historian of religions who grew up in Southeast Asia, who said, "Working at a great distance from the object of study, one sometimes risks confusing a library with a country." The opening point I make is simply that: I think it makes a great deal of difference if we can abstract ourselves from the dependency of our American social and intellectual contexts to achieve a certain degree of intimacy with the cultures we want to understand. That way, by forgetting about our usual contexts, we lessen the risk of simply, or only, writing our own little selves, our personal penchants or proclivities, into our analyses of cultures that are, frankly, not simply reducible or relevant to our own private, social, political and historically situated contemporary contexts or our private imaginations. It sometimes seems to me that a good deal of postmodern and postcolonial thought is extraordinarily self-absorbed. While writing

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about Asian religious cultures, it has been important for me to be directly engaged existentially and to feel a sense of responsibility to the people about whom I write. Indeed, one of the major shifts in the trajectory of my work occurred many years ago when I decided that I was primarily interested in people rather than in interpreting texts, how they live their lives religiously in response to social change, rather than norms laid down by monastic or scholastic elites. That methodological prologue aside, let me really begin substantially this time.

Recently, I was asked to give an account of my previous and current work to a small group of international scholars, scientists, artists, writers, and composers at Rockefeller's Bellagio Study Center in Italy, an occasion that forced me to think outside of the boxes of South and Southeast Asia and the history of religions. I'm trying to do the same for you, so I begin, as I did in Bellagio, by recalling what became a formative experience for me in Sri Lanka. In 1983, I was directing for the first time the Inter-collegiate Sri Lanka Education or ISLE program, our study abroad venture that has just celebrated its twenty-fifth year. During the

course of that memorable time in Kandy, I heard many lectures from various faculty in the humanities and social sciences from the University of Peradeniya, none of whom were aware of what the others had lectured on. As a result, an uncanny number of these lectures began with almost the identical refrain: "In Sri Lanka, the Sinhala people have preserved the Theravada School of Buddhism unchanged for the past twenty-five hundred years," or something to that effect. It occurred to me as I was preparing to give a resumé of my previous work that three of the four books I had written about Buddhism and the religious culture of Sri Lanka were all aimed, in one way or another, at responding to this refrain. A good slice of my academic career, therefore, could easily be reduced to a simple "Oh yeah? Well, then read this!" For each of these studies dealt fundamentally with the problem of religious change, with a subtext or thesis that the reason that the religious culture of Sri Lanka, including Buddhism, had survived for two and half millennia was not because it had been so jealously guarded or conserved to remain unchanged, but rather because of the manner in which people of that religious culture had



... religious ideas don't count for very much
in contemporary Laos.

been so elastic, creative, inclusive and transformative in their perspectives and dispositions. In my first book about Sri Lanka written during my first extended stay in Kandy, I had written about how the Mahayana Buddhist *bodhisattva*, Avalokitesvara, had been absorbed into Sinhala religious culture and then transformed into a national guardian deity who was thought to be in the process of becoming the next Buddha, Maitreya. In the second book about Sri Lanka, I had written about how Kirti Sri Rajasimha, an eighteenth-century king of Tamil Hindu Saiva origins, was actually a catalyst for a great monastic, literary, and artistic renaissance of Theravada Buddhist culture before the landslide onset of colonialism when the trajectories of the tradition dramatically changed once again. In the third book, I had shown how political and demographic changes in Sri Lanka had abetted the introduction of the Hindu deity Visnu into Sinhala Buddhist culture, such that he eventually became perhaps the most ubiquitous divine presence on the island as the deity who protects the Buddha *sasana*, replete with an extensive folk literature and cult that rationalizes his now thoroughly Buddhist identity. In retrospect, what I see I have tried to do in these books is to dismantle a facile reading of a "boundaried-conceived religious tradition" (Theravada Buddhism) that has recently been invoked to support a post-independence militant, but historically naive ethnic consciousness enlisted to bolster religious nationalism. I am currently working on a book entitled *Sri Lanka: History, Politics and Culture* that seeks to illustrate not just the rich and diverse heritage of the island's Buddhism, but the rich and diverse cultural heritage of the island per se. Beyond that, to generalize my work a little further, it has been concerned with the more primary historical issue of how changes in political conceptions of power almost always have consequences for changes in religious culture. I am not trying to reduce religion to being simply a consequence of political machinations, but I am trying to show that in historical and social contexts, the two are not easily divorced. It was that maxim that I quite consciously brought to my current study on Buddhism and the political order in Laos.

What I discovered at the outset of my studies in Laos, and this may sound a bit offbeat for a scholar of religion, is that religious ideas don't count for very much in con-

temporary Laos. Indeed, they barely exist at all. So it would be quite unproductive or counter-intuitive to pursue them, if you can find them, with any intention of examining an existentially important phenomenon. At the outset, I know that sounds pretty strange. Perhaps it is, but let me try to explain why it is, I think, nonetheless true.

To be frank, there remain very serious limits to public discourse, given the contemporary social and political contexts of Laos. While Laos, still following Vietnam, is now a "capital-hungry" country that has opened itself up to the outside world after being closeted for almost two decades following its 1975 revolution, it is still a one-party state and there is still very little talk, if any, about making a transition to some form of democratic governance. Public discourse, where it does exist, is largely controlled by the state and consists essentially of declarations and reports from government sources. Critical discourse, whether political, religious, literary or generally intellectual, is simply not a matter of the public domain. It has been this way since 1975. If there was much in the way of open debate before the revolution, and there actually wasn't much to speak of then, either, then the 1975 revolution resulted in a kind of intellectual retardation for the country. Twelve percent of Laos' population fled the country in 1975, including most of the people involved in education, the professions and skilled labor, in addition to those who had operated government affairs. For the first ten years thereafter, the government's leadership, and much of its administration, was Vietnamese. Most of its assistance from and contact with the outside world was limited to the Soviet Union and other socialist bloc countries. History and the present were read publicly and exclusively through the lenses of orthodox, Stalinist spectacles. The Pathet Lao leaders, Kaysone Phomvihane and Prince Suphanouvong, had been schooled in Marxism through Vietnamese pragmatic prisms, and there are no documents or tracts of thought that I know of written by either of these two political leaders that indicate anything other than an expedient, strategic or practical genre of thought. Abstraction was not one of their suits.

But as I hinted earlier, I don't think religious thought counted for much before the revolution either. Part of the reason for that involves the paradox of French colonialism in Laos. While the French carried the burden of the 1789

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revolution to bring the universal values of liberty, equality, and fraternity to the “darker” regions of the unenlightened world that they colonized, they actually did extremely little to educate the indigenous people of Laos, whether ethnic Lao or highland tribal. In fact, they did not build a single high school in French Laos until the fascist Vichy government built a two-year secondary school in Vientiane during World War II. Indeed, the French established a pattern later emulated by the communist Pathet Lao hardliners led by Kaysone who came to power in 1975: they administered the country as a kind of extension of Vietnam and used Vietnamese bureaucrats to run the country as a part of their larger Indochina colony. This was, apparently, easier and far less expensive than educating the Laos to abet the French colonial enterprise, and also reflective of the well-known European colonial strategy used in Asia (perfected by the British in South Asia), to use one set of people to administer or control another. In any case, aside from a tiny Buddhist educational institute built in Vientiane in 1931 to counteract Thai Buddhist influences, the Vientiane high school was the only secondary institution in Laos until the French finally left the country in 1954. (The French had educated the Lao royal elite by either sending them to Paris or Saigon.) The legacy of this neglect continues to have an impact in Laos today, as the educational infrastructure of the country is still somewhat rudimentary. For instance, only a quarter of the population now receives a high-school education and less than three quarters achieve the equivalent of a fifth-grade education. This is one reason why the Buddhist *sangha* remains a vibrant institution. It is one of the few channels for gaining a high-school education and entering a stream of upward social mobility for the eighty-five percent of the population that lives within the village context of subsistence agriculture. The National University of Laos opened its doors for the first time only in 1996. The curriculum at the university, as at the branch university located in Luang Phrabang where I lived, is very heavily oriented towards business administration, economics and information technology.

Having noted how Marxist and colonial politics have had a less than robust positive impact on education and the cultivation of critical public discourse, I would also assert

that any approach to the study of Lao religious culture that is geared primarily towards an examination of religious doctrinal conceptions would be misguided anyway. Whether taking a “history of ideas,” or a more philosophical approach, or an approach focused solely on literary analysis of Buddhist monastic texts, any abstract approach would also be somewhat out of focus, if not largely irrelevant, to understanding Lao religious culture at large. In 1917, when Louis Finot undertook his inventory of Pali canonical texts in Laos, he was not only unable to locate a complete edition of the Tipitaka at any one monastic location in the country, but even after his inventory was completely finished, he could not account for the presence of a complete Tipitaka throughout the entirety of the country itself. Indeed, Steven Collins has written in related fashion about the problematic conception of a Pali canon per se within Southeast Asian cultural contexts. Moreover, the value of Pali for the Lao, as I came to discover, is found predominantly in its power to secure protection from spirits, rather than for the substantial Theravada Buddhist ideas it articulates. As Richard Davis has put it, “The [Lao] themselves are not of a particularly reflective or philosophical temperament. Although they are Buddhists, they are not given to pondering the ultimate nature of things.” I don’t think that it would be unfair or inaccurate to say that the Lao have rarely been interested in conceptual abstractions in the first place. In Laos, one looks in vain for a religious thinker like Buddhagosa in the fifth century or Parakramabahu II in the thirteenth century in Sri Lanka, who somehow reflects the intellectual zeitgeists of the age, or a reforming thinker who paradigmatically recasts the trajectories of social or cosmological thought. There are several reasons for this.

According to the Luang Phrabang chronicles, Theravada Buddhism doesn’t reach Laos from Khmer Angkor until the middle of the fourteenth century. The earliest versions of these chronicles, however, date to the early sixteenth century and recent archaeological and epigraphic studies suggest that Theravada didn’t form a substantial institutional presence in the Lao cultural regions until the early sixteenth century as a result of being drawn into political relations with the northern Thai Lan Na *mandala*. This is more than two thousand years after the beginnings of Buddhism as a

... performance of *basi* is the Lao response to liminality...



religious movement in India, more than twelve hundred years after Theravada self-consciousness can be definitively affirmed in fourth- and fifth-century Sri Lanka, and about five hundred years after the Theravada Tipitaka made its way to Pagan, Burma. In other words, the Lao were the last of the major ethnic groups in Southeast Asia to accommodate Theravada, long after its orthodoxy and orthopraxy had become normative or fixed. What changes or new wrinkles that the Lao have brought to Theravada are a consequence of their own indigenous religious culture, consisting primarily of the ritual veneration of spirits, *phi* and *khwan*, which actually provided the lenses through which much of Theravada has been construed. This is the matter I want to highlight and emphasize: to understand how the Lao have understood Buddhism, one has to understand the nature and dynamics of the agrarian-based indigenous religious culture; that is, Lao spirit cults. In turn, understanding the vitality of the spirit cults helps to explain the rugged persistence of this aspect of Lao religious culture despite recent systematic attempts to eradicate it. I also want to indicate that, given what I have just said about religious and critical

thought in Laos, I do not mean to make the case that its religious sensibilities and sensitivities are not sophisticated and subtle. Indeed, they are. It's just that we, as historians of the religions usually trained to elucidate the significance of written texts, are not especially well adept at fielding these subtleties.

One of the cardinal tenets of Buddhist thought, Theravada and Mahayana alike, is that there exists no *atman*, no soul, no self, no essence that transmigrates from moment to moment, from place to place, or from one lifetime to the next. There is only conditioned (karmically determined) consciousness dynamically engaged in a time-space continuum. The soteriological quest of Buddhism, as it is framed within Pali monastic sources, is basically aimed at "unconditioning" this consciousness, or freeing it from karmic conditioning. Yet, one of the two most basic metaphysical ideas intrinsic to Lao religious culture is *khwan*, a nearly untranslatable term but one, nonetheless, rendered fairly accurately as "vital essence." *Khwan* is obviously a direct contradiction to central principles of Buddhist thought. Rites known as *sukhwan basi*, the calling back of the vital essence when it strays outside of the body, are ubiquitous in Lao social life, conducted on virtually every occasion of transition: soon after birth, at puberty, at marriage, when leaving from or returning to the village for extended time periods, when beginning a new business venture, when entering a newly constructed house, etc. The performance of *basi* is the Lao response to liminality, a quintessential rite de passage, aimed at stabilizing the relation between spirit and body as the individual encounters significant change. After five hundred years, there is no sign whatsoever that the notion of *khwan* has been seriously challenged by the Buddhist principles of *anatta* (no self) or *anicca* (change).

The second most important metaphysical idea, if we need to use that term, is *phi*. I want to talk about *phi* in a bit more depth, because it is this notion that has significantly conditioned the manner in which Buddhist thought and practice has been understood in Laos. *Phi* are spirits: spirits of one's ancestors, spirits of those who have died violently, spirits of the rice fields, guardian spirits of the household, of the village, of the *muang* (collections of villages), and of the *mandala* (Lao political regions). From what I have briefly

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regarded as powers of place.

indicated, it is clear that most *phi* are associated with various types of space and that some, such as village *phi*, are clearly more powerfully dominant in some contexts than others, such as household *phi* or a family's ancestral *phi*. Indeed, the imagined hierarchy of power among various spatially associated *phi* turns out to be a mirror image of indigenous Lao constructions of political order. Families are part of villages, villages are part of *muangs* and *muangs* constitute *mandalas*. Wherever you are in Lao religious culture, there are several *phi* who are responsible for the space you inhabit, with the lowest given immediate jurisdictional power. Unlike in Buddhist constructions of the cosmos, however, *phi* are not necessarily who they are as a result of the ethics of karma. River or mountain *phi*, for example, are essentially just that: the power or spirit of the river or mountain, much like Japanese *kami*. They are not heroes or villains either. From what I have been able to understand, *phi* represent a power associated with their places of jurisdiction, or associated with the qualities of experience that human beings have shared in those places. There is no question, though, that they are regarded as powers of place. For certain, *phi* are not a matter of the sacred made manifest. What they are, at base, are markers of an indigenous ontology of power.

Now I need to backtrack a bit and refer to those three previous books I have written on Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka. In each of those books, I think I have contributed to unpacking the manner in which Buddhists, historically, have read and interpreted other aspects of religions of culture in India and Sri Lanka and proceeded to assimilate them, how they have generated interpretations that have rationalized the inclusion of many beliefs and practices that seem, on the surface, not to be very Buddhist at all.

Little of this sort of "Buddhist reading" has occurred in Laos. The cults of the *khwan* and *phi* per se have remained largely impervious to a Buddhistic transformation. What I finally came to understand, however, is that something of the converse has taken place in Laos: to understand how Buddhism is construed among the Lao, one has to realize that it is through the ontology of the spirit cults that principal Buddhist ideas and symbols have been consistently understood. That is, rather than assuming the position of

doing the reading and interpreting, Buddhism has been read, or subordinated, if you will, to a local regime of understanding.

I can briefly illustrate this by explaining how the ontology of the spirit cults continues to dominate the religious episteme of the Lao, despite avowals of most Lao that they are first and foremost Buddhist in their religious identity. During the final month of my stay in Luang Phrabang, I had a long conversation one evening with a middle-aged Lao woman who had recently converted from Buddhism to a pentecostal form of Christianity. During the past year she had taken employment with a non-government organization that, while ostensibly focused on poverty alleviation, was ultimately concerned with converting village Lao and highland minorities. When I asked this woman for the reasons she had converted, she told me that as a Christian she is now well protected from malevolent *phi* by "the biggest spirit of all" and so has come to live with a measure of peace in her life. When I asked her if by "the biggest spirit" she had meant "Holy Spirit," she answered, "Yes!" In thinking over the significance of this conversation later, I came to the



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following considerations. The first was that Christian missionaries have been quite adept in terms of the manner in which they have presented the “power” of the gospel. Rather than arguing against Buddhism, they have correctly read the religious terrain that they hope to transform as one dominated by the spirit cults. Moreover, those evangelical and pentecostal forms of Protestant Christianity that emphasize the power of the Holy Spirit can probably be expected to prosper in Asian religious cultures that, like Laos, are characterized by persistent spirit cults. (Previously, I had come to a similar conclusion about how the recent rise of spirit cults in Sri Lanka has been accompanied by a concomitant increase in conversions to evangelical or pentecostal strains of Christianity that stress the power of the Holy Spirit.) But more germane to my concerns here, it would also seem to be the case that my conversation partner had actually exemplified a primary thesis of the book I was working on: she had interpreted the cardinal principles of religion, in this case Christianity rather than Buddhism, through the prism of a spirit cult ontology. It then made sense to me that, if the Phra Bang, the Buddha image of Luang Phrabang from which this city has taken its name, could have been functionally or analogously understood as a kind of powerful *mandala* or *muang phi*, then the Holy Spirit could also be rendered as a type of powerful spatially transcendent *phi*. Here, the spiritual power claimed by Christianity in the form of the Holy Spirit is being construed as a form of effective protection in the same manner as the power of the Buddha, *dhamma* and *sangha* have been rendered. Just as most Lao see no conflict between being Buddhist and venerating or placating *phi*, so my friend saw no conflict in continuing to believe in *phi* while becoming a Christian. Indeed, her rationale for becoming a Christian was determined because she now believed that the Holy Spirit provided the most effective way of gaining protection from malevolent *phi*, more effective than ostensibly Buddhist means.

From these types of conversations, I came to see more clearly how and why the dominant function of popular religious culture in contemporary Laos remains, even in a Christian context, a matter of enlisting benevolent powers for the purpose of seeking protection against unpredictable

forces that emanate from unfamiliar places and their associated malevolent *phi*. For that reason, then, I also decided to entitle the book I have been writing *Spirit(s) of the Place: Buddhism and the Religious Culture of Laos*. In that book, I am endeavoring to show that because of the ontology of the spirit cults, Buddha, *dhamma* and *sangha* are understood as aspects of power to be tapped, as individuals, families, villages, and *muangs* (regions), etc., have negotiated life’s unpredictable vicissitudes, including those brought about by calamitous social and political change.

Be that as it may, my recent experiences in Laos have forced me once again to realize that in order to understand a religious culture, we need more than an abstract theoretical approach that levels the field to a kind of “one size fits all” interpretation. As I have learned in both Sri Lanka and Laos, while we need to listen to the local idiom more than we project our own, we also need to be analytically suspicious of what we hear. I think it is interesting that what I first heard about Buddhism from Sinhalese scholars in Sri Lanka, how it hadn’t changed for twenty-five hundred years, turned out to be more of a political rather than a historically accurate statement. In similar fashion, what I’ve heard from Lao people about their proclivities for spirits turns out to be more than simply a religious statement, but reflective of something intrinsically political as well. After all, what the spirits represent are powers of places. While the spirit cults seems to function as an interpretive lens, they have also functioned historically as a kind of indigenous cultural, and hence political, resistance: first to Theravada Buddhism, then to French colonialism, and finally to Stalinist Marxism. It is interesting, further, that “religious-minded” (in the Geertzian sense) Buddhists, enlightened French rationalists, and Stalinist-oriented Marxists all tried systematically to undermine or to eradicate spirit veneration, perhaps in recognition of its intrinsic political significance for the Lao. In my book, you can read about how all three failed. In Laos, for the time being anyway, the spirit cults persist. Indeed, they remain constitutive of the spirit(s) of the place. ✕



LEO O'DONOVAN, S.J.

Transforming Grace

In Memory of Anne E. Carr

In the late winter of 1982 we were driving up the North Shore of Boston to visit Marblehead and then Gloucester, where we would drop in at Eastern Point Retreat House, a place of prayer and grace for so many, and afterward have lobster at some old restaurant on the harbor. I was responsible for a convention on “Power as an Issue in Theology.” Anne had agreed to lead a workshop on “Women and Power in the Church.” As we came to the bend where the highway turns breathtakingly toward the beach and the sea at Swampscott, I asked how plans for the workshop were going.

“Oh, well!” she said. “We have fine panelists—and there’s lots of interest.” “Well, I look forward to it,” I said. “But you can’t come,” she replied. “Oh?” “It’s for us,” she said. I understood.

I adored her.
Didn’t you all...adore her?

Earlier this week on the phone David Tracy said simply: “Of course, everyone adored her.” Certainly his mother Eileen Couch did, as close a friend as Anne ever had, and also, as Anne put it to a University of Chicago graduate recently, “her mother, too.”

This homily was delivered on February 15, 2008 in St. Thomas the Apostle Church, Chicago, Illinois.

I. The Loss

What was it we loved? Well, everything about her. The way she wore her hair, when there was still an auburn glint in it, and then when it went gray and finally white. The way she took your hand. The sparkle in those gentle, sky-blue eyes. (They were her father’s.) The way she said, “Who’d a thunk?” (That was her mother.) The steady stride of her slender form and, then later, the way she needed your arm. The ripple of her chuckling laughter—“Uh huh!” The readiness of her humor. The fact that it was never at anyone’s expense, except perhaps her own. “Well, they’re calling it elective surgery,” she said before one of those four awful

The way she questioned.

brain interventions, “and I’d rather not elect it.” (Thank you Dr. Hekmat, for your extraordinary care.) The way she listened. The way she questioned. The way she asked what you’d read, or seen, or heard. The way she delighted in being presented by young Christopher, her godson, with the light bulb dotted with black by a magic marker to look like her shaved head after the first surgery in 1979. The way... she was.

The way she cared for her family—devotedly, dependably, deeply. The way she cared for her B.V.M. community—for Catherine and Lois and so many other women she loved—gratefully, givingly, with all her gifts. The way she appreciated colleagues, especially at Chicago but in fact all over the country and indeed abroad—with sympathy, insight, patience, sure judgment, an inclusive openness, a true sense for the creative, the timely, the compassionate. And of course her devotion—personal, lively, detailed, enduring—to her students, whom she loved to teach and who taught her, as she thought, so much.

The way she could find joy in ordinary life—over breakfast with her Mass buddies from this church, at a bridge game, or on the great early spring trips to Florida with Anne Patrick and her sister Maureen. The way she could find joy—and share it. Jerry Herman may not have known it, but when he wrote his song “Life is in perfect order, with Anne on my arm,” he wrote it for Anne Carr. In the early spring of 1978, Anne, Roger Haight and I drove to Holland, Michigan, to see the annual Tulip Festival and Parade (all high school bands!). We walked the fields of radiant red and gold and green and then, halfway home to Hyde Park, had dinner in a grand old German restaurant. It was better than a week’s vacation in Europe.

And, of course, because she was so intelligent, there was the occasional, wonderfully witty irreverence. Anne Patrick recalls visiting her the summer after her third brain surgery in 1996 at the rehab hospital in Chicago, where she was getting therapy that would allow her to learn to swallow and walk again. Anne presented the patient with Anne’s then new book, *Liberating Conscience*, and the patient wanted (unrealistically) to get dressed and go to the book signing that had been arranged in Hyde Park. Because of her difficulties in swallowing, Anne was only allowed to

drink beverages that had been thickened to the consistency of a milk shake. She said she was thirsty and asked Anne Patrick to get her a coke. The good friend said she couldn’t do that because the rules were that she had to have everything thickened in order to be sure she didn’t choke on it. The patient was angry with her friend and exclaimed: “Forget the rules. Didn’t you write the book on conscience?”

I do believe that well before she read Karl Rahner, Anne Carr knew that all the longing, searching, reaching beyond of our lives only matters if we pay close, appreciative attention to ordinary things, to the daily particular, to whatever in fact real people celebrate and suffer. And so of course she could write her masterful doctoral dissertation, under David’s direction, on the methodology of Rahner’s theology, a most instructive book still, arguing that it was a twofold, transcendental and historical approach that Karl proposed.

“Oh no, they can’t take that away...,” the song goes. But death has—implacably, silently, finally—taken Anne from us. Monday’s news has left us dumb, distraught, hollow. How could anyone so wondrously wrought, so clearly chosen, so precious and honored in God’s eyes, so clearly a disciple whom God chose so that others might know and believe and understand that one alone is God—now be gone? (And let us remember that when Isaiah so described the Servant, Israel had not yet come to any clear hope of true resurrection from the dead.) A gleaming winter sun may have turned the skylines of New York and Chicago into towers of diamond these past days. But for many of us in this church there was little light, scarce comfort, only a deadly constriction at the heart as we realized our loss.

“There is no substitute for them,” Karl Rahner wrote seventy years ago in wintry Innsbruck. “There are no others who can fill the vacancy when one of those whom I have really loved suddenly and unexpectedly departs and is with me no more. In true love no one can replace another, for true love loves the other person in that depth where she is uniquely and irreplaceably herself. And thus, as death has trodden roughly through my life, every one of the departed has taken a piece of my heart with her, and often enough my whole heart.”

... she herself appeared as a graciously transforming presence on the theological and ecclesial scene.

II. The Search

And yet. And yet. Anne herself had not only the courage of her faith and vocation—witness her thoughtfully decided signing of the famous 1984 ad in *The New York Times*. She had also a reasoned conviction that despite all appearances God offers the church new hope and future. Despite all the disparagement and displacement of women in the Catholic (and also broader Christian) community over the centuries, she argued in her ground-breaking book, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (1988), that the experience of women today was a new and blessed source of renewal for the Church. Strong essays with wonderful titles—"Engendering the Future," "Of Angels and Gargoyles"—had prepared the way. "My religious community, the Sisters of Charity, B.V.M.," she then said, "has long provided a context of love, debate, and support for my conviction that the movement of women is indeed a transforming grace in our time." With typical clarity, concision and comprehensive vision she continued: "While feminism presents a challenge to Christianity today, it is a challenge that is a powerful grace in its call for the church to be faithful to its own transcendent truth, to the deepest meaning of its symbols, its great tradition and the new experience of over half its members."

Readers of English editions of the book, and then of German, Italian, French and Portuguese translations, met here a deeply rooted appreciation of Christian tradition coupled with courageous hope for its true future. The argument was detailed and thorough, vigorous and unequivocal, but also calm and balanced, a marvel of a call to arms not with swords but ploughshares. If the moment in church history offered a transforming grace, in the author's view, she herself appeared as a graciously transforming presence on the theological and ecclesial scene.

Who are we, then, recalling her serene but steady call for a community of full equality, dignity and personal participation, not to hope also in an absolute future beyond our present, piercing loss?

Though probably best known for *Transforming Grace*,

Anne confided to me that she was most pleased with *The Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of the Self* (also published in 1988). Here, as the citation for her John Courtney Murray Award from the Catholic Theological Society of America in 1997 noted, "she was able to develop more amply the mystical-prophetic style of theology characteristic of her writings." "The search of many, whether Christian or not," she had earlier written, "is for an integral way, a spirituality, sometimes called a mystical-political orientation, that unites the concerns of both self and world." In Merton she found a spiritual theologian whose self was a journey of faith in the world. And a fellow wayfarer whose struggle mirrored much of her own.

Anne was not given to speaking much about her personal doubts concerning meaning and value in life. But in Merton, I believe, she found, and was strengthened by, a growing maturity even with respect to the framing of the question. How can one give oneself to God, surrender to the divine plan, become an agent of providence, unless one has first (also) risked becoming some-one? In Merton she found a religious author for whom the question of selfhood was ongoing, with startling changes of perspective emerging at successive stages of his life. He lived the issue of continuity and change in the spiritual self. As did Anne. As do most seriously reflective contemporary Christians. "From the young self-negating and world-denying monk of 1949," she wrote, "to the mature self-affirming and world-embracing Asian traveler and religious seeker of 1968, there is striking change as well as deep continuity in the search for the true self."

If one takes the threat of emptiness seriously, I believe, the discovery of a companion like Merton can easily make him a favorite—as it did, I think, for Anne.

III. Adoration

And so we are bereft of a woman we loved, yet bequeathed her witness of courageous hope. Have we really lost the luminous presence Susan Ross spoke of so tenderly when Anne retired from the Divinity

You are surrounded and imbued with her love.



School on May 12, 2003? Will we ever know again the remarkable love of her God, along with the unparalleled lack of all intellectual hubris, that former Dean Franklin (Chris) Gamwell recalled last night at the Vigil in this church?

Which symbol is more promising, more real? The heavy darkness in our hearts, or the quiet radiance that always accompanied her, even in her most painful diminishments?

Early in the last century Rabindranath Tagore wrote:

Death is not extinguishing the light
but putting out the lamp
because the dawn has come.

A few days ago, on learning from Cathy Hillkert of Anne's death, a former student wrote: "She was a very important part of my life in Chicago. . . . There was a seamless continuity of justice, intellect and love such as I had never experienced before in any human being. . . . The best way I can describe it is a constant, gentle presence of God, unlike anything I have ever felt."

For all my love of Christ and belief in the Spirit, I need help here.

It comes from you. Some of you are friends of many years. Some are family whom I have known almost as long as I have known Anne. Some I know only as Anne's friends. That is enough.

For today, in fact since learning of Anne's death, something new is happening: You are surrounded and imbued with her love. Your love for her is welling beyond what you

have expected. I see it. I feel it. It is as if in her dying is her rising.

No, it is not "as if." It is because she died in Christ that she rises in him, too. And that her love, with his, now floods you all, fires our love for each other, raises an affection among us that we had not known, calls us more strongly together, forgives our follies, impels us to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, to care for the sick and free the imprisoned—to live as if for the first time the Gospel on Five Fingers, as Teresa of Calcutta used to say: You-did-it-to-me.

Don't you see the tongues of fire above each bent and mourning head in this church? Don't you see the triumph of love? Yes, you do. Because you loved someone forever.

And this is the first miracle.

The second is like it. I do not hesitate to say before you, even as we prepare to proclaim the Eucharistic Prayer, that I adored Anne Carr.

"Of course," David, "everybody adored her."

But what, really, is "adoration"?

I don't really know.

The words, the theology and its distinctions, the liturgical expression, yes. But the reality?

It is more than love, it would seem. More than joy, which Thomas Aquinas called "the overflow of love." It is not a matter of putting someone on a pedestal. Anne reminded us that pedestals can separate and segregate.

Awe somehow accompanies it. And reverence. A desire for song, dance perhaps, the profound bow, the offering of a gift, something that means one's self.

To adore must mean to see someone against the white radiance of eternity, to love without all self-regard, together as a community to look up with singing yet serene hearts toward the glory that would otherwise render us prostrate.

Tell us, Anne, what adoration is.

For now you know. ✕

AMEN.

Fr. O'Donovan's homily is being published in both *Criterion* and *Horizons* (the College Theology Society's journal, of whose editorial board Anne Carr was a long-time member).

Alumni News

CATHERINE L. ALBANESE, Ph.D. 1972, Professor and Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, published *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultured History of American Metaphysical Religion* (Yale University Press, 2007). It is the co-winner of the American Academy of Religion Best Book of the Year in the historical category. It is also the winner of the Bronze Medal from IPPY.

CHESTER GILLS, Ph.D. 1986, Professor of Theology at Georgetown University, has been appointed Amaturio Chair in Catholic Studies and Director of the Program on Church and Inter-religious Dialogue in the Berkley Center of Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown.

MARK A. GRANQUIST, Ph.D. 1992, has been appointed Visiting Professor of Church History at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Granquist has served in parish ministry or ELCA higher education since his ordination in 1988, working variously as a youth and education pastor and religion professor. Previously he was visiting assistant professor of religion at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota.

DAVID HEIN, M.A. 1977, is Professor and Chair of Religion and Philosophy at Hood College in Frederick, Maryland. He published *Geoffrey Fisher: Archbishop of Canterbury, 1945–1961* (Pickwick Publication/Wipf & Stock).

MICHAEL S. HOGUE, M.A. 2000, Ph.D. 2005, is Assistant Professor of Theology at Meadville Lombard Theological School. He has received the 2008 John Templeton Award for Theological Promise. The award recognizes the twelve best post-doctoral young scholars on the basis of their doctoral dissertations related to God and spirituality.

WESLEY V. HROMATKO, M.Div. 1973, a minister in Lake Wilson, Minnesota, recently published two articles, “Hosea Ballou” and “Unitarianism to 1961” in *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief* (Prometheus Press, 2007).

WESLEY A. KORT, M.A. 1961, Ph.D. 1965, Professor in the Department of Religion at Duke University, was awarded the Richard K. Lublin Distinguished Teaching Award for 2007–2008. This award is given for “ability to encourage intellectual excitement and curiosity in students, knowledge of a field and ability to communicate it, organizational skills, mentorship of students, and commitment to excellent teaching over time.”

LOWELL W. LIVEZEY, 1943–2007, Th.M. 1968, D.Min. 1970, Professor of Urban and Religious Studies and Director of the Ecologies of Learning Project at the New York Theological Seminary, died this past December. Livezey studied, taught, and wrote on the agency of religious organizations—especially churches, synagogues, mosques, and other worship centers—in large urban areas. His Chicago project (1992–2002) resulted in the book *Public Religion and Urban Transformation* (New York University Press, 2000), as well as more than thirty-five scholarly papers and



conferences. Contributions may be made to the Lowell W. Livezey Fund, Ecologies of Learning, New York Theological Seminary, 475 Riverside Drive, Suite 500, New York, New York 10115.

GERALD MCCULLOH, 1941–2008, M.A. 1968, Ph.D. 1973, died at the age of sixty-six in February. He had served as a Loyola University of Chicago faculty member in Theology and was ordained by the United Methodist Church. A memorial service was held on Friday, February 29. Contributions may be sent to *disabilityworks*, c/o Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 200 East Randolph, Suite #2200, AON Center, Chicago, Illinois 60601.

NICK PATRICCA, M.A. 1969, Ph.D. 1972, is professor emeritus at Loyola University Chicago. He won the Oscar Wilde Award (Dublin) in writing for theatre and the Onassis Distinction Award (Athens) for a new play in 2006. A world premiere of his play “The Defiant Muse” was performed at the Victory Gardens Theater in 2007.

TED PETERS, M.A. 1970, Ph.D. 1973, is Professor at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. In 2007 he published *The Stem Cell Debate* (Fortress Press) with coauthors Karen Lebarz and Gaymon Bennett, and is publishing *Immortal Lines? Theologians Say “Yes” to Stem Cells* (Roman and Littlefield, 2008). For the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the 1859 publication of Charles Darwin’s *The Origins of Species*, he will publish Darwin’s book accompanied by a scientific and theological commentary with biologist Martinez Hewlett (Abingdon Press, 2009). After a decade and a half as editor-in-chief of *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, Peters has stepped down as of January 2008. He will continue as coeditor of *Theology and Science* with Robert John Russell.

SELVA J. RAJ, 1952–2008, Ph.D. 1994, has died at the age of fifty-five. He was Chair and Stanley S. Kresge Professor of Religious Studies at Albion College in Michigan. A historian of religions specializing in Hinduism, popular Christianity in India, and other Asian religions, his main research interest was in the ritual exchange among Hindus and Catholics in southern India. He recently served as chairman of the Conference on the Study of Religions of India (CSRI), an international professional association for scholars committed to the academic study of Indian religion, and recently edited, with William P. Harman, Ph.D. 1981, *Dealing with Deities: The Ritual Vow in South Asia*. A

funeral service was held on Tuesday, March 25, 2008. Donations can be made to the Selva J. Raj Memorial Scholarship in Religious Studies, Office of Institutional Advancement, Albion College, Albion, Michigan 49224.

KRISTEN RUDISIU, M.A. 1999, received her Ph.D. in Asian Studies from the University of Texas at Austin in 2007. She started a new position as Assistant Professor of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University.

JOHN G. STACKHOUSE, JR., Ph.D., 1987, recently published his seventh book, *Making the Best of It: Following Christ in the Real World* (Oxford University Press, 2008). The book received endorsements from, among others, University of Chicago alumnus Richard Mouw and former Divinity School professor Robin Lovin. Stackhouse is in his eleventh year as Sangwoo Youtong Chee Professor of Theology and Culture at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada.

WADE WHEELOCK, M.A. 1973, Ph.D. 1978, is in his fifteenth year of coministry at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Canton, New York. He has published *Considering the Asian Religions* (TEACH Services, Inc., 2007).

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Criterion, The University of Chicago Divinity School, 1025 East 58th Street, Chicago, IL 60637. Volume 46, number 2 (Spring/Summer 2008).
Editor: Terren Ilana Wein (terren@uchicago.edu). Copyright © The University of Chicago Divinity School 2008. Back issues are available
online at <http://divinity.uchicago.edu/research/criterion/index.shtml>.



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