At the AAR/SBL meeting we had nearly three hundred alumni and friends sojourning back to Swift on Sunday night, November 18, for a reception with current faculty and students spread over four floors of the building. Our worries that alumni might not, after a long day of conferencing (and schlepping in frustration around the cultureless cavern that is McCormick Place), board buses for the six-mile ride to campus were happily unfounded. At its peak the Third Floor Lecture Hall was packed tightly, elbow to elbow, in a cross-generational, cross-disciplinary, and cross-degree program casserole of animated conversation.

The Craft of Teaching program, formally launched in September 2012, this year brought back over fifteen alumni who are teaching in state universities, liberal arts colleges, seminars, research universities and other contexts (including, inter alia, the Chicago Police Department), to explicate their contexts (geographical, institutional, methodological, legal, disciplinary, pedagogical) for teaching the study of religion, to workshop one of their syllabi (from "New Religious Movements," to "Mythology, Science and Creation" to "War and Peace in 20th Century Religious Movements," to "Mythology, Science and Creation" to "War and Peace in 20th Century Religious Movements," to "Mythology, Science and Creation" to "War and Peace in 20th Century Religious Movements," to "Mythology, Science and Creation" to "War and Peace in 20th Century Religious Movements," to "Mythology, Science and Creation") to "War and Peace in 20th Century Theology and Literature"), and to speak frankly with current faculty and students about the ways in which the Divinity School did and did not prepare them for the transition into full-time teaching (see inset on the Wabash Consultation, page 6). At that consultation current students heard many sage and hard-earned pieces of advice about how to negotiate the challenges and joys of teaching, while also seeing admirable dedication for teaching on display in the Third Floor Lecture Hall as Swift, even as these educators come back to Swift Hall and walks around the building, peering into the classrooms where he studied, treating himself to a sandwich and cup of coffee in “Grounds of Being” (in his day here, “The Swift Kick”).

Alumni of the Divinity School are the powerful presence of the School in the world. We love to see you back in Swift Hall, presenting a luncheon or participating in a conference, or attending a lecture, or just enjoying a cup of coffee. And we love to see you online, on our Facebook page or contributing a Sightings column. And if you didn’t come back this year, we’d love to see you in the future — anytime.

— Margaret M. Mitchell, Dean

THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IS NOT JUST THE PEOPLE WITHIN ITS WALLS AND HALLS or classrooms and coffee shop at any one time, but it is a network of those who, marked by this place, sustain a living conversation the world over about religion and a commitment to conjoining serious intellectual inquiry and human flourishing (as our University’s motto puts it). But the alumni do also come back! In striking ways this academic year has been the year of Swift returns.
Stay up-to-date with news at the Divinity School, bookmark our website at facebook.com/ucdivinityschool.

Marion Receives Humboldt Research Award
Jean-Luc Marion was elected the recipient of a Humboldt Research Award from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. The award is granted in recognition of a researcher’s entire achievements to date to academics whose fundamental discoveries, new theories, or insights have had a significant impact on their own discipline and who are expected to continue producing cutting-edge achievements in the future. Award winners are invited to spend a period of up to one year cooperating on a long-term research project with specialist colleagues at a research institution in Germany.

Marion is the Andrew Thomas Greely and Grace McNichols Greely Professor of Catholic Studies and Professor of the Philosophy of Religions and Theology. He studies both the history of modern philosophy and contemporary phenomenology; Professor Marion has also worked in the areas of Greek and Latin patristics; the history of medieval and modern philosophy; aesthetics; and constructive theology.

Fishbane Named American Academy of Arts and Sciences Fellow
The American Academy of Arts and Sciences recently announced its 2013 class of fellows. Four scholars and one distinguished trustee from the University of Chicago have been elected to the prestigious Academy. Michael Fishbane, the Nathan Cummings Distinguished Service Professor of Jewish Studies in the Divinity School and the College is one of the faculty members elected to this honor, and joins one of the nation’s most prestigious honorary societies and a leading center for independent policy research.

Fishbane studies the ancient Near East, biblical studies and rabbinics (the history of Jewish interpretation), as well as Jewish mysticism and modern Jewish thought. He is currently completing a book that incorporates modern critical and traditional Jewish interpretations of the Song of Songs. Among his many honors, Fishbane has received a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Lifetime Achievement Award in Talmud Studies from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.

Hammerschlag Joins Faculty
Effective July 1, 2013, Sarah Hammerschlag will join the faculty of the Divinity School as Assistant Professor of Religion and Literature. Hammerschlag, a PhD graduate of the Divinity School, joins us from Williams College. Hammerschlag is a scholar of modern Jewish thought and continental philosophy. Her research has focused on the position of Judaism in the post-WWI French intellectual scene, a field that puts her at the crossroads of numerous disciplines and scholarly approaches including philosophy, literary studies, and intellectual history. She is the author of The Figural Jew: Politics and Identity in Postwar French Thought (University of Chicago Press 2010), which received an honorable mention in Philosophy and Jewish Thought from the Association for Jewish Studies when they announced their 2012 Jordan Schnitzer Book Award. She has written essays on Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, and Maurice Blanchot, which have appeared in Critical Inquiry, Jewish Quarterly Review and Shofar, among other places. She is currently working on a manuscript entitled Sowers and Sages: The Renaissance of Judaism in Post-war Paris.

From Grounds to Gifts: The Divinity Students Association and the Religion Collection
The Divinity Students Association (DSA) recently donated $3,000 to the Library for the purchase of new titles in Religion. The funds were used primarily to purchase patron requests from Divinity students. In order to celebrate the gift, a special exhibit on the Fourth Floor of Regenstein Library was created; the books featured in this exhibit represented the eleven areas of study in the Divinity School. They were selected by Anne K. Knaff, Bibliographer for Religion and Philosophy (and, of course, an alumnus of the Div School), who chose works that reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the academic study of religion, especially as it has been and continues to be practiced and taught here at Chicago.

The DSA receives the bulk of its funding from the student-run and -operated café, Grounds of Being, operating since the 1960s in the basement of Swift. Included in the exhibit are two coffee shop t-shirts, one a “special edition” design on loan from the Special Collection Research Center and the other donated by Grounds of Being.

Changes to AMRS Program
The Divinity School is pleased to announce recent changes to our Master of Arts in Religious Studies (AMRS) program. The AMRS, a concentrated program in the study of religion, is for those in other fields or professions (e.g., law, medicine, business, journalism, the arts) — or those who seek greater knowledge in the study of religion.

The degree can be completed in one focused year of study — or one course at a time. And we are now offering online admissions, so students can begin their studies when they are ready — autumn, winter, or spring. Tuition for this program is now charged on a per-course basis, making this option especially attractive for working professionals.

AMRS students may choose and create their own course of study, in consultation with the Dean of Students and the Director of MA studies. For some, the goal is focused study in one area; others study broadly. Like all our students, AMRS students may take advantage of related coursework across the University and of the vibrant student life in Swift Hall. Recent alumni have focused on Jewish history, law, and philosophy; on foreign diplomacy in the Middle East vis-a-vis the history and current context of the Abrahamic traditions in the Middle East; religion, politics, and Islam; and philosophy and theology in a global context.

New Associated Faculty
Two new Associated Faculty members join the Divinity School in the History of Religions area.

New Associated Faculty
Neubauer Family Collegium Projects Announced
The Neubauer Family Collegium for Culture and Society at the University of Chicago has selected an inaugural cohort of eighteen faculty research projects that tackle complex questions through cross-disciplinary collaboration.

The Divinity School is pleased to announce that among the faculty represented are Paul Mendes-Flohr, the Dorothy Grant Maclear Professor of Modern Jewish History and Thought, as well as several of our associated faculty members: Professors Omar Michalberga (Sociology), Philipp V. Bohman (Music), Daniel Brudney (Philosophy), and David Schlein (Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations). Mendes-Flohr will be a member of the “Working Group on Political Theology.” This project will bring faculty from classics, political science, sociology, anthropology, divinity, Germanic studies, and English together with invited visiting scholars to define and refine a coherent agenda for a long-term, trans-disciplinary research project on political theology, which is a modality of inquiry that has recently re-emerged across the social sciences and humanities. Political theology examines the orientation of politics to guiding values, and searches for the enduring historical influence of theological ideas on political concepts and the formation of political institutions.

David Nirenberg, the Deborah R. and Edgar D. Jannotta Professor of Medieval History and Social Thought, is the founding faculty director for the program. He commented that “whether or not religious values should provide a foundation or an orientation for politics is a burning question in many societies, including our own. With the Divinity School at its center, and a wide array of faculty across the campus who study the influence of religion on political concepts and the formation of political institutions, the University of Chicago is a natural place to think about these questions, or we are particularly excited about the potential of the Working Group on Political Theology to focus our many parallel inquiries in this crucial field.”

The Collegium is named in honor of Joseph Neubauer and Jeanette Lerman-Neubauer, whose landmark $26.5 million gift to the University is among the largest in support of educational figures, comprised of three ranks (Knight, Officer, and Commander). It was founded by the Emperor Napoleon as a reward for devotion and accomplishment in the realm of teaching, scholarship, and research. Later, it was extended to non-French citizens to acknowledge their promotion of French language or significant achievement in the field of education.

Davidson Enters Ordre des Palmes Académiques
In recognition of his contribution to the promotion of French culture, Arnold I. Davidson has been named to the rank of Officer in the Ordre des Palmes Académiques. Entering with the rank of Officer means that Prof. Davidson enters this prestigious chivalric order with special distinction.

The Ordre des Palmes Académiques (Order of Academic Palms) is an Order of Chivalry of France for academics and cultural and educational figures, comprised of three ranks (Knight, Officer, and Commander). It was founded by the Emperor Napoleon in 1807 as a reward for devotion and accomplishment in the realm of teaching, scholarship, and research. Later, it was extended to non-French citizens to acknowledge their promotion of French language or significant achievement in the field of education.

Davidson is the Robert D. Anderson Distinguished Service Professor in the Departments of Philosophy, Comparative Literature, Romance Languages and Literatures, and in the Divinity School (Philosophy of Religion and History of Judaism). He is also on the Committee on Comparative and Historical Studies of Science. He is interested in the historical and systematic relationships between philosophy and theology and has written about twentieth-century European philosophy and theology, as well as on the history of philosophy and theology. He is especially interested in the tradition of spiritual exercises and the related ideas of philosophy and religion as a way of life and moral perfectionism.

SPRING/SUMMER 2013 | 3
The Mellon Islamic Studies Initiative

The Mellon Islamic Studies Initiative, a three-year project funded by a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, is designed to support the expansion and enhancement of the study of Islam at the University of Chicago.

Administered by the Divinity School, the Initiative is a cross-disciplinary, collaborative project that seeks to create a sustained campus conversation about the future of Islamic Studies.

The Initiative brings distinguished visiting scholars, representing a wide range of topics in Islamic Studies, to the University. With one visitor per quarter, the result is a substantive, sustained discussion about both specific topics in Islamic Studies and the more general role of the study of Islam in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Each visitor brings to the community a unique area of expertise, which they then share with the campus by giving a public lecture, teaching a course, and organizing a workshop on their topic of study.

In the past academic year, we saw three visiting scholars. Angelika Neuwirth joined the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations in the Fall quarter 2012. Dr. Neuwirth teaches at the Seminar for Semitic and Arabic Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin, and is widely considered to be one of the world’s leading experts in the study of the Qur’an and Qur’anic exegesis. On October 12, she delivered a lecture on “The Qur’an and the discovery of writing: an epistemic turn in Late Antiquity” and her work was the subject of a workshop held on November 9 entitled “Qur’anic Studies Today.”

During the Winter quarter, Robert Gleave joined the Department of History. A Professor of Arabic Studies at the University of Exeter, Gleave is a specialist in Islamic law, and particularly Shi’i legal and political theory. His recent work focuses on the process of defining legitimate and illegitimate violence in Islamic legal thought. Gleave taught a course entitled “Shi’ism, Messianism and Resistance.” On January 18, he delivered a lecture on “Islam, Violence & the Sacred: Insurgent Shi’ism in Muslim History” and his work was the subject of a workshop March 8 entitled “Studying Shi’i Islam: Prospects and Challenges.”

Leonardo Capezzone joined the Committee on Social Thought this Spring quarter. Capezzone is an Associate Professor of the History of the Arab-Islamic Mediterranean at the University of Rome whose work covers a wide range of topics in medieval Islamic thought and culture, including the history of science.

On October 22, she delivered a lecture on “The Qur’an and the discovery of writing: an epistemic turn in Late Antiquity” and her work was the subject of a workshop held on November 9 entitled “Qur’anic Studies Today.”

Wednesday Worship
Wednesday Worship is held every Wednesday at 12 noon in Swift Common Room for a delicious meal, a speaker, and conversation. Please visit http://divinity.uchicago.edu/news/wednesday for up-to-date information.

Wednesday Community Luncheons
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The fourth and final conferences in the series “The Engaged Mind,” reflecting on themes drawn from the work of Jean Bethke Elshtain, the series is underwritten by the McDonald Agape Foundation.

Upcoming Events
Throughout the academic year the Divinity School hosts or co-hosts a wide variety of lectures, symposia, graduate workshops, and more. These events are announced on our website and our electronic newsletter (At the Divinity School). Of special note: the annual John Nuveen Lecture. The lecture will be delivered by Daniel P. Sulmasy, the Kilbride-Clinton Professor of Medicine and Ethics and Associate Director of the Maclean Center for Clinical Medical Ethics in the Department of Medicine. Join us on Thursday, October 31st, for Professor Sulmasy’s lecture.

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Divinity News and Notes

From Here to There
The Transition to the First Years of Teaching

On Friday, April 12, ten recent Divinity School alumni, representing a wide range of institutions and areas of study, returned to Swift Hall as part of the Wabash Center’s Graduate Programs Teaching Initiative.

Moderated by the Wabash Center’s Eugene Gallagher (PhD 1980) and Dean Margaret M. Mitchell, panelists focused on the biggest challenges faced when moving from graduate education to full-time teaching—and what current students should be doing now to ensure they thrive during the first years of teaching.

The Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion supports teachers of religion and theology in higher education through meetings and workshops, grants, consultants, a journal, and other resources that make the scholarship on teaching and learning accessible. All Wabash Center programs are funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc. To the alumni who returned to Swift Hall to serve on the panel and share their valuable insights with current students, we extend thanks.

Nadine Penne (PhD 1997, Theology), Executive Director of the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion.

Eugene Gallagher (PhD 1980, History of Religions), Rosemary Park Professor of Religious Studies at Connecticut College, where he has taught since 1978. He was the college’s founding director of its Center for Teaching and Learning and served for many years as a faculty fellow in the center. He received the AAR’s Excellence in Teaching Award in 2001 and was named the Case/Carnegie Professor of the Year for Connecticut in 2003.

David Albertson (PhD 2008, Theology), Assistant Professor of Religion at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

Kristin Bloomer (PhD 2008, Theology), Assistant Professor of Religion at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, and currently Visiting Assistant Professor at Harvard University.

Spencer Dew (PhD 2008, Religion and Literature), Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Mattie Allen Broyles Inaugural Year Research Chair at Centenary College of Louisiana and a summer instructor for the BA program of the Chicago Police Department.

Ananda J. Huffer (PhD 2010, History of Religions), Assistant Professor at University of California, Riverside.

Annette Bourland Holzenzga (PhD 2010, Biblical Studies), Assistant Professor of New Testament at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary.

Sarah Imhoff (PhD 2010, History of Judaism), Assistant Professor in the Religious Studies Department and Boms Jewish Studies Program at Indiana University-Bloomington.

Rory Johnson (PhD 2010, Anthropology and Sociology of Religion), Heanon Wilkes Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor at Miami University in Ohio.

Elizabeth Pérez (PhD 2010, History of Religions), Assistant Professor of Religion at Dartmouth College.

Rebecca Raphael (PhD 1997, Religion and Literature), NEH Distinguished Teaching Professor and Associate Professor of Philosophy at Texas State University.

Lee F. Schwitz (PhD 2008, Philosophy of Religion), Assistant Professor at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago.

The Wabash Center’s Graduate Programs Teaching Initiative brings together recent alumni who have been engaged in the day-to-day work of teaching and learning in religious studies, to the benefit of current students.

A Gift You Can Count On

Did you know that you can make a gift to the Divinity School and receive income for life in return? You can ensure new generations of students can afford to pursue religious studies in our programs and answer fundamental questions about humanity. A charitable gift annuity allows you to support the future needs of the Divinity School—and accomplish even more.

A gift annuity provides you and another loved one (if you desire) with benefits in return, such as an income tax deduction and a fixed income stream for life backed by the University’s endowment. To help determine if a gift annuity is a wise decision for you, here are answers to some frequently asked questions.

Is a gift annuity difficult to set up? No. Gift annuities are one of the easiest planned gifts to arrange. You can fund your gift annuity with cash or appreciated securities, and our Office of Gift Planning can easily provide you and your financial advisors with sample contracts and payout illustrations. You may designate the residual of your annuity to support a purpose that is meaningful to you or where it is needed most.

What about the tax implications? You receive an immediate tax deduction for the amount of the contribution less the present value of the payments. In addition, a portion of the income you receive from a charitable gift annuity is tax-free. If you choose to fund your gift annuity with appreciated securities, you will also save on capital gains taxes.

When should I set up a gift annuity? Depending on your age and when you or your loved one may need the income you can fund an immediate or deferred gift annuity. You must be at least 55 years old to fund an immediate payment gift annuity. Although there is no minimum age to fund a deferred gift annuity, you must be at least 55 to begin receiving payments.

To obtain more information, contact Heather McClean in the Office of Gift Planning at (773) 834-3117.

The Craft of Teaching Program’s Inaugural Year

In my judgment, the syllabus is the most important piece of writing one does in the academic field.” With this declaration, Prof. Jonathan Z. Smith, Robert O. Anderson Distinguished Service Professor of the Humanities, Associate Faculty in the Divinity School, and author of On Teaching Religion (Oxford Press, 2012), commenced the winter Dean’s Craft of Teaching Seminar, in which a distinguished alum or faculty member reflects on a recently taught course.

This popular series has become the flagship program of the Divinity School’s innovative Craft of Teaching in the Academic Study of Religion, a year-round curriculum designed to prepare graduates to be thoughtful and effective educators in religious studies. The program has brought together students, faculty, and alums for events including seminars, presentations, small group discussions, panels, and student-faculty conversations, all focused on various aspects of the teaching of religion. Student coordinators and faculty conveners have developed sessions on topics as diverse as contemporary pedagogy, teaching and learning as embodied practices, syllabus construction for introductory Bible courses, and mentorship as a pedagogical model—to name a few.

Alums have made an especially important contribution. This year’s Craft of Teaching Seminar invited included Rebecca Raphael (PhD 1997) Associate Professor of Philosophy andistinguished Teaching Professor in the Humanities at Texas State University; Susan Marcus, and Michael Kinnamon, (IAM 1976, PhD 1980), Spahr-Halligan Visiting Professor of Ecumenical Collaboration in Interreligious Dialogue at Seattle University’s School of Theology and Ministry and the Divinity School’s 2013 Alumnus of the Year. Others who have contributed programs include Charles Mathews, (IAM 1992, PhD 1997), Professor of Religious Studies and Director of the Virginia Center for the Study of Religion at the University of Virginia, Anne Kraut, (IAM 2002, PhD 2011), Bibliographer for Religion and Philosophy at the University of Chicago, Jennifer Oldstone-Moore, (IAM 1997, PhD 2000), Associate Professor of Religion at Wittenberg University, and Elizabeth Wilson, (IAM 1984, PhD 1992), Professor in the Department of Comparative Religion at Miami University of Ohio. In April, over sixty graduate students and faculty gathered for a panel discussion featuring ten recent alumni discussing the transition from graduate school to the first years of teaching. The panel, part of a pedagogy consultation made possible by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, also featured alums Nadine Penne, (PhD 1992), Executive Director of the Wabash Center, and Eugene Gallagher, (PhD 1980) Rosemary Park Professor of Religious Studies at Connecticut College. The panelists, representing different institutional contexts and research specializations, offered wide-ranging advice and encouragement on everything from improving student motivation to balancing teaching with research and other life commitments.

The Craft of Teaching Program has helped make pedagogy an especially conscious topic of conversation between faculty and students. Student-faculty discussions have featured Dan Arnold, Associate Professor of the Philosophy of Religions, Kevin Hector, Assistant Professor of Theology and of the Philosophy of Religions, Paul Mendes-Flohr, Dorothy Grant MacKay Professor of Modern Jewish History and Thought, and James T. Robinson, Associate Professor of the History of Judaism. In addition, panel events have included Simeon Chavel, Assistant Professor of Hebrew Bible, Kristine Culp, Associate Professor of Theology and Dean of Disciples Divinity House, Cynthia Linder, Director of Ministry Studies and Clinical Faculty for Preaching and Pastoral Care, Lucy Pick, Director of Undergraduate Studies and Senior Lecturer in the History of Christianity, and Jeffrey Stackert, Assistant Professor of Hebrew Bible.

This robust faculty involvement, together with the invaluable contributions of alums and current students, has made the inaugural year of the Craft of Teaching Program an auspicious start to a program that will facilitate the Divinity School’s ongoing efforts to educate the next generations of scholars and teachers of religion.

Brandon Cline, Area Assistant for Pedagogical Initiatives and coordinator of the Craft of Teaching Program.

For more information, as well as to view audio and video recordings of select past events including Prof. Smith’s winter Craft of Teaching Seminar, please visit the program website (http://divinity.uchicago.edu/teaching), or email Brandon Cline (bdcline@uchicago.edu), Area Assistant for Pedagogical Initiatives and coordinator of the Craft of Teaching Program.

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An Interview with Alireza Doostdar

CIRCA: Your degree was in Anthropology, but your work seems tremendously interdisciplinary, drawing on Anthropology, Islamic Studies, History of Science—how do you find U of C and the Divinity School, as a place to interact with faculty in other disciplines?

AD: One of the most valuable benefits of being at the Divinity School is the wealth of opportunities for interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary conversation and collaboration. In the brief few months that I have been at the Divinity School, I have had the opportunity to participate in an extremely stimulating interdisciplinary conference on SH'sm sponsored by the Melton Islamic Studies Initiative, speak at a Midwest Faculty Seminar on Islam in and the West, offer comments on Professor Dan Arnold's new book on Buddhist philosophy of mind and cognitive science at a Wednesday Dean's Forum, and participate in weekly student presentations at the Islamic Studies club or "Magic." This is to say nothing of the many opportunities for intellectual engagement beyond the Divinity School, at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the Anthropology Department, and elsewhere. As a graduate student at Harvard, I felt blessed to be able to engage fruitfully with scholars in anthropology, history, Islamic studies, Middle Eastern studies, and history and sociology of science. At U of C and the Divinity School, the opportunities for such engagement are no less vast.

CIRCA: Your work has focused on the production of the category of superstition, and on what you call the ‘scientific imaginary.’ Can you tell us a bit more? How do these ideas interact?

AD: I have been interested in the work of boundary maintenance through which certain forms of knowledge and practice are set apart as valuable and legitimate while others are condemned off as illegitimate and worthless. The category of superstition has been one concept that has aided such boundary policing in Iran since the late nineteenth century. Since that time and to varying extents up to the present, modernists have found it necessary to promulgate science as a means of social transformation and progress, and to eradicate or at least weaken certain beliefs and practices as well as the social formations that sustain them and that they in turn help to reproduce. In part, the production of superstition has depended on its demarcation from legitimate forms of knowledge—primarily science, but also (among modernists who did not harbor animosity toward religion) a reformed Islam (and sometimes other religions) cleansed of illegitimate popular accretions. This demarcation has itself often depended on what I call a scientific imaginary—a constellation of attributes born of the wide spread prestige accorded to science. These attributes include the privileging of empirical observation and testing, trust in the judgment of European and American scientists (even, or perhaps especially, when these judgments are not themselves about science), and the deployment of modern scientific concepts and models outside of their immediate context of use. But different modernists have had different conceptions of science and hence of the range of its relevance and application. Hence while some thinkers have seen modern science as a panacea for all social ills, others have suspected that science may breed its own forms of superstition. On the other hand, while many of science’s champions have held strong materialist commitments, others have defended ascetically spiritual uses for science. Thus I write about early twentieth century modernists who attacked popular superstitions while attaching their hopes to French-imported Spiritism as a high road to achieving a universal scientific ethics. Or on the other hand, Muslim leaders trained in the haww in Qom who attacked popular spiritist sainctness as baseless and dangerous, while accepting the validity of European scientific Spiritism. Or modernist Muslim intellectuals who argued for readings of the Qur’an that would be hospitable to contemporary scientific discovery and attempted to popularize the use of scientific and technological models to understand matters of Islamic doctrine such as human striving toward God, and the nature of heaven and hell. As I see it, the scientific imaginary also includes an element of utopianism: an optimistic faith in some future ideal condition of humankind that will have spiritual and scientific progress as a key feature. This is an optimism that inspires people as different as the Constitutionalist politician Khalil Khan Saqafi (1863–1942), the interim Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic Mehdi Bazargan (1907–1995), the current President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (born 1956), and many of the ordinary people that I came to know during my fieldwork.

CIRCA: In your courses here, how have you found it working with a mix of students, students who approach religious studies from a variety of disciplinary commitments?

AD: A delight as well as a challenge. This is only my second quarterly teaching, but I have already worked with MA, PhD, AM, and PhD students from the Divinity school, master’s students from the MAPSS and CMES programs, and other doctoral students from anthropology, NESC, and elsewhere, as well as a few undergraduates. As a teacher, I always have a set of issues I want to get across in my classes: these of course include specific concepts and facts (historical, anthropological, and so on), but more importantly they have to do with refining certain social-scientific ways of looking at the world and grappling the ethics and politics of this kind of “theoretical practice.” Different students will bring diverging backgrounds and commitments to my classes, and hence to the questions we discuss as a group. The challenge for me is partly to understand and recognize these differences and to try to adapt my own teaching as best I can. But in part, this also involves a recognition of the truth that people will come away from class with very different fruits, which should instill at least a bit of humility by my goals. One way I try to promote this diversity of learning goals, interests, and disciplinary perspectives is to encourage conversation among the students themselves, both inside and outside of class. There is nothing I find more delightful than to see that students are already engaged in debate when I step inside the classroom, and to hear them continuing the conversation as we leave.

CIRCA: What do you like best so far about life in Chicago, after Cambridge and Iran?

AD: Chicago has all the benefits and excitement of a major city (along with its problems, of course) while it also allows for a calm academic lifestyle. At least this is how I have found Hyde Park so far. It is nice to have the full range of cultural offerings in Chicago within our reach (to say nothing of the range of cuisine, which we have not yet really begun to explore much), but also to be able to walk to campus, the Museum of Science and Industry, or the lake. And of course, there are few cities in the U.S. from which you can so easily fly all over the world. That is, I appreciate what Chicago offers, but also that it makes it easy to escape once in a while.

Alireza Doostdar is Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies and the Anthropology of Religion. He spoke with us recently about his work and his teaching—in Chicago and beyond.
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The Divinity School’s ministry program attracts students who are committed to seeking the common good as they cultivate vocations in public religious leadership. When they leave Swift Hall, graduates lead congregations and work in a variety of faith-based organizations they serve as chaplains in hospitals and prisons and on university campuses.

As religious community in our culture takes on new forms, so our alma mater develops new forms of ministry—they staff college diversity offices, advocate on Capitol Hill, organize in communities around the country, and lead brand-new congregations that meet in coffee houses or around dinner tables. And some of these adaptive leaders engage their vocation as public theologians through ministries of writing. Any one who has spent much time in Swift Hall reading texts both ancient and modern might be surprised to hear written described as an innovative form of contemporary ministry. Certainly, members of religious communities have always been writers, as have the scholars whose vocation it is to study their texts. This new wave of authors has much in common, in fact, with those religious writers whose purpose it was to communicate the insights of their faith and practice to a wider audience in plain and public language. Like the best of those, whose powerful prose spoke a fresh word into complicated times and places, today’s writers mine the rich resources of their traditions in conversation with the challenges of our contemporary context.

In early April, on the eve of the annual student-organized ministry conference, current students, program alumni, friends and colleagues gathered at Swift Hall to celebrate the publication of the first book by our Divinity School ministry alumni. Authors Lee Hull Moses and Bromleigh McClenaghan graduated with MDIV degrees in 2004 and 2005. Lee is currently the pastor of First Christian Church in Greensboro, North Carolina; Bromleigh is the associate for congregational life at Rockefeller Chapel. Each is the mother of two small children, and it was the experience of becoming parents within weeks of one another—and the lively, thoughtful conversations that sustained them in their sleep-deprived early months of motherhood—that lay the foundation of their shared work, Hopes and Fears: Everyday Theology for New Parents and Other Anxious People (Alban Institute, 2012).

Like many new parents, the writers felt their partners had been avid readers of parenting literature as they awaited the first children, volumes by pediatricians, psychologists, and developmental specialists. Few books offered theological reflection on the parenting task (Moses and McClenaghan named the work of alums Bonnie Miller-McLemore as a significant exception to this rule), and so they determined to bring their theological reflections on motherhood to a broad audience.

A panel of respondents described their experiences of hopes and fears as the book event. Current student Thandine Gobleidile (who spent last year as a full-time intern at First Christian Church in Greensboro) noted that the book put in her mind of Augustine's first Christian Church in Greensboro) noted that the book put in her mind of Augustine's Confessions, which she had also read recently: “In my read, when we practice confession, we use our own stories or stories from our lives to point beyond the specific and particular of ourselves to more general notions about human experience and also beyond human experience towards God, to whom we relate in humility (confessing our fallibility and sin), in reverence and gratitude (confessing God’s glory and grace), and in trust and faith (confessing just this).” McClenaghan and Hull Moses do just this in Hopes and Fears. They confess to their own shortcomings as partners, parents, people of faith and as parents. They confess the grace and glory of God in the midst of intimate relationship, changes in their bodies with pregnancy, and the birth of their children all in the context of a world that holds both the possibility of destruction and the potential for transformation. They confess their own faith as they both struggle with and take comfort in the reality of evil and God, and how to live into their sense of faith and calling as both pastors and parents. Within this mode of confession, they pose the following questions that have long challenged Christians: discerning God’s call in our lives; bodies, embodiment and identity; the gap between rich and poor; suffering and evil; naming and the desire to be unique while also belonging; and trust and faithfulness among other topics.

Katherine Willis Pershey, Associate Minister of the First Congregational Church in West Springs, Illinois and herself an author (Every Day a Beautiful: A Story of Faith and Family) pointed to the need for resources that offer practical theological reflection on life experiences from a classical or liberal perspective. She plans to use the book to stimulate theological conversation among parenting groups in her congregation. But it may have been the response of a third panelist which confirms the promise and power of practical theological writing: Jessica Sipos is a member of the Rockefeller Chapel worshipping community, an Anthroposophist student, and a mother. Asked to describe her experience of the book, she said: “It is a conversation I have wanted to have a part of since I became a mother nearly five years ago. As an anthroposophist, I know that at the core of many human beliefs and practices is a desire to control the inexplicable and unchangeable. What is most inexplicable and unpredictable than a human infant? ... we need to read and learn so desperately in order to get a grip on this overwhelming responsibility. … I am wary and uncertain in conversations about God, I don’t know their classics, I don’t even know how to understand it anymore. My comprehension of faith, the nature of God, is like a language I have had at a child’s level of depth and insight. But while reading the book, I felt I was in a conversation I could keep up with … I have used the same language. But when Lee talks about the Celtic idea of life’s holiness shining through in certain places in certain times, I know I call it “sublime,” those moments with my child when time seems to stand still and the only thing I’ll remember forever. They both use the word “grace” to describe moments when we or someone else rises above everyday limitations (like exhaustion) to get beyond understanding to something supernatural. I am not sure I have a word for those moments, but I know them, and I like the thought of it.”

Cultivating Vocations

Ministry Program Update

Sightsings: Cats and Clerics: A Medieval History

A cross the pages of a fifteenth-century manuscript track the paw prints of a cat who has first stepped into the ink, then sought to plant itself in the middle of its owner's attention. Snapped by the medievalist Emir Abdurrahman, the image went viral, an instantly recognized example of a "long and glorious historical movement" of cats walking across work. In this case the writer was a bureaucrat, working on a collection of government correspondence.

The Dubrovin manuscript is not the only example of the casual mayhem cats created for medieval writers. Medievalist Thirza Porck points to another fifteenth-century manuscript from what is now the Netherlands. The scribe anglicizes the name where the page has been damaged: “Curious be the pesy cat that unlaid over this book during the night in Deventer and because of it many others [other cats too]” (translation by Porck). Both writers probably had the cats around for the practical purpose of rodent control. Yet as a routine part of daily life, cats might have also served an important role for the Dutch copist in his or her pursuit of a more realized spiritual practice: the Dutch scribe was creating a particular collection of devotional material, one aimed at those who aspired to a higher level of piety and were interested in the whole range of Christian efforts in this regard, from the earliest flowering of Christian asceticism in the fourth-century Egyptian desert to the latest trend of the Devotio Moderna.

The bond between monk and companion animal captured in the poem is not limited to the medieval world. If you have ever trained a dog, it is very likely that you have drawn upon techniques developed by the monks of New Skete in New York State and Pennsylvania. Their classic dog-training manual, How to Be Your Dog’s Best Friend, is one element of the various businesses the monastery relies upon to support itself. The manual opens by acknowledging that many might find the idea of monks breeding and training dogs to be an odd combination, but what follows suggests the extent to which the fruit of monastic training manifests itself in the continual effort to perfect all relationships, even those of the humble household pet. Perhaps this is why Michael Walsh, commenting on the retirement of scholar-pope Benedict XVI, wrote in his (translation by Rob Green), “Pope Benedict XVI, a man who has learned how to look for it and the author celebrates what he has found in his lifetime together.

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Go Green! *Circa* is also available online as a PDF document, which you can download to your desktop. You can read current and past issues of *Circa* by visiting http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/circa. If you would prefer not to receive *Circa* via postal mail, please let us know by emailing Sara Bigger, Associate Director of Development, at sfbigger@uchicago.edu. We will send you a link when *Circa* is available for viewing online!

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student life

Divinity School faculty and students took an evening to bowl and, perhaps, drink beer, at the Seven Ten Lounge in Hyde Park.

Photography: Collin Soderberg-Chase