

Communiqué

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-COLUMBIA

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Memorials of the Moment

By Nancy Moen

Spontaneous altars spring up like roadside mushrooms to mark the site of highway fatalities. They were also abundant around the periphery of Ground Zero.

As individual expressions of grief and social practices of memorialization, they are a topic of interest to Paul Christopher Johnson, assistant professor of religious studies and a historian with a focus on indigenous religions. Johnson views the use of altars as a “shared religious grammar.”

While conducting fieldwork in New York with immigrants from the Caribbean, Johnson wandered around Ground Zero to pay respects. He went to the place where officials were erecting a viewing ramp and to other sites less traveled.

On those back streets, he found clusters of items that people had left: candles, flags, teddy bears, photos, fruit, flowers and religious icons, as well as written messages and religious texts. Some were Biblical citations, but there were also Buddhist, Native American, Spiritualist and Afro-Latin signs and symbols.

“In the various individual offerings used to help leave grief behind, I noticed a dramatic religious pluralism,” Johnson says. “People are trying to find a shared way to communicate in spite of religious differences.” He speculates that, because of the lack of bodies and the horror of the destruction at the World Trade Center, families of victims might have an enhanced need to express themselves through spontaneous altars.

Unlike formal memorial services, spontaneous altars are unorchestrated and unofficial. They help focus emotions and memories.

Many offerings Johnson spotted were secular in theme. Symbols of pop Americana, such as Mickey Mouse balloons, t-shirts and caps with high school and university logos, sports memorabilia and even colorful pinwheels decorated some makeshift memorials along with those with religious themes.

These hands-on religious enactments are not new to religious expression in America, but they have not been studied.

“In the broadest sense, we all use material objects to remind us of the past and to orient us to the present,” Johnson says. “If you have a fireplace mantel filled with objects that you carefully dust, you have, in one sense at least, an altar.”

In his search at Ground Zero, Johnson found no Muslim symbols at the altars. That disturbed him because of the religious exclusions it implied, but he was not surprised. He points out that Muslims, like Protestants, tend toward iconoclasm, favoring moral precepts and a focus on the personal relation to Allah rather than objects and symbols. Johnson also speculates that the climate might have been too hostile for Muslims near Ground Zero at that time.

(Continues on Page 2)



A visit to Ground Zero in New York added to Assistant Professor Paul Johnson's interest in spontaneous altars as expressions of grief. Johnson found a dramatic religious pluralism in the unofficial memorials.



(Memorials, Continued from Page 1)

According to Johnson, spontaneous altars show an interaction with gods or ancestors and attempt to bring memories of the past to bear on problems of the present. They may also generate unity in that the participants can share an action even if they have radically different theological views.

Johnson appreciates the richness of those differences. Among the religions he studies are Afro-Brazilian Candomblé (related to Haitian Voodoo and Cuban Santería) and the ancestor religion of the Afro-Honduran Garífuna. He is the author of a new book, *Secrets, Gossips and Gods: The Transformation of Brazilian Candomblé*, published by Oxford University Press.

As a scholar, Johnson does not offer theological judgment. He is not concerned with the validity of the gods in question but examines instead what the religions mean to the people and societies he studies.

In his office, Johnson has assembled candles, icons, Garífuna rhythmic instruments and Native American symbols. The collection of mementos reminds him of the people he has met and the work he has done. It's his spontaneous altar of sorts.

Keeping in Touch

If you're trying to reach a fellow graduate, or if you want to make yourself reachable, the department's renovated Web site offers a solution. It will feature a section for contact information for graduates. Please send your information by e-mail, fax, phone or mail. Information will only be displayed at your request.

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The department welcomes news from alumni and friends. Send announcements or milestones to the address listed above.

Varied Perspectives for the Paine Lectures

This year was an exceptionally busy one for the Paine Lectureships in Religion series. The following speakers addressed a wide range of topics from an equally wide range of perspectives.

Andrea Bartoli, founder and director of the SIPA International Conflict Resolution Program at Columbia University, N.Y.: "The Role of Religions in International Conflict Resolution."

Chip Callahan, MU assistant professor of religious studies: "Black Oaths and Sacred Hills: Religion, Class and Conflict in Eastern Kentucky's Mine Wars, 1931-32."

Louanna Furbee, MU professor of anthropology: "The Miracle of Lomantán: The Religious Antimere of the Zapatista Revolt."

Edward Gray, independent scholar, Atlanta: "Earthquakes and Religion: Responding to Natural Disasters in California."

Greg Johnson, assistant professor of religious studies, Franklin & Marshall College: "Ancestors Before Us: Manifestations of Tradition in a Hawaiian Dispute."

Ahmet Karamustafa, associate professor of Islamic thought, history and religious studies, and director of the Religious Studies Program, Washington University, St. Louis: "Religion as a Private Matter: Early Islamic Approaches."

George Landes, Davenport Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and the Cognate Languages, Columbia University, N.Y.: "Challenges in the Interpretation of the Book of Jonah."

Elaine Lawless, Curators' Distinguished Professor of Folklore and English, women studies, religious studies and anthropology at MU: "Woman as *object*: Religion's Complicity in Violence Against Women."

Dana Kaplan, Oppenstein Brothers Assistant Professor of Judaic and Religious Studies, director, Danciger Program in Jewish Studies, University of Missouri-Kansas City: "Future Trends in American Judaism."

J.N. Mohanty, professor of philosophy, Temple University: "Is Gandhian Ahimsa (Non-Violence) a Viable Option in Today's India?"

Lisa Poirier, visiting assistant professor of religious studies, Miami University, Ohio: "Furs, Beads, and People: Contact and Exchange in Colonial New France."



While in El Salvador, Robyn Ricks, at left, did everything from mixing concrete and mortar to hauling cinder blocks. Above, two of the families building Habitat houses gather with Ricks and the team from North Ireland.

South of the Border

A graduate's perspective of Habitat for Humanity in El Salvador

By Robyn Ricks, AB '98

"While adequate shelter is not the cure for every poverty...the importance of a decent place to live cannot be overstated, for with it comes stability and promise, family unity, hope and a foundation from which individuals reach their full potential."

— Nicolas P. Retsinas

At some point during our lives, many of us crave the transforming experience that may be provided only by travel. There are many ways and means by which to satisfy that craving and embark on an adventure. One such way, Habitat for Humanity, provides an open gate to anyone with creativity and a generous spirit.

This summer I spent one month in El Salvador with Habitat. Looking back, I find myself grateful for a month of intense experience and even more grateful to be in the arms of Missouri again. For anyone who feels the urge I felt, I offer this advice: The challenges of El Salvador are experienced in different degrees depending on the traveler and the situation.

My first assignment was to act as a rather under-qualified translator for 15 men and women from Northern Ireland. We were ferried back and forth to work daily in a cattle truck. The point of Habitat for Humanity is to build the future. And build we did.

Volunteers worked side-by-side with families and local men hired to help with the construction. There were no electrical tools, and no one was exempt from any task. I shoveled gravel, white earth and sand into wheelbarrows to haul it to the houses. I dug out trenches for a foundation

in wet, heavy clay. I mixed concrete and mortar by hand with shovels and carried cinder block after cinder block 100 yards to where they were needed. I sifted sand from gravel, and the list goes on. There were days when the mud and the sweat felt like the most healing combination in the world. We somehow overcame the language barrier and told jokes with improvised sign language. We played soccer with school kids and played music in the streets.

When the Irish group and I left Guayabal on the final day, the moving service the families held for us, the tears in their eyes and the chicken they cooked (regardless of the expense) left us feeling that we had accomplished something more than we realized as we struggled through the hot days. Yet as we walked away, we were haunted by a peculiar mixture of guilt and gratitude, the inevitable accompaniment to knowing we would all be returning home to a much easier world.

For more information on Habitat for Humanity, visit www.habitat.org. For a full version of Robyn's report, visit the alumnae/alumni section of the department Web site at www.missouri.edu/~religwww/.

Faculty Kudos

Beckman presents paper on medieval studies

Trish Beckman presented a paper titled "Margaret Ebner, Heinrich of Nördlingen and the Transmission of Mystical Authority" at the International Congress on Medieval Studies. This research will lead to a comparative study of the use of women's vernacular in mystical texts during the Middle Ages. She published a short article after Sept. 11 that highlighted pedagogical method and the role of religious studies professionals in response to religious violence. With Steve Friesen, she served on a panel for the AAR to present her experience with the interview process and hiring tips for new candidates in the field. She was invited by a Southside Chicago congregation that has a companion parish in Haiti to teach adult education and preach about the intersection of Christianity, Voodoo and African religions in Haiti. On campus this year, she served on the Women's History Month Committee to help organize "Global Feminisms: Worldly Women." In conjunction, she brought in two guest scholars to speak about feminism and Islam. She also participated in the Colleague Circles program for new faculty. This summer, Beckman joined colleagues from other universities at a five-day teaching workshop called the Wakonse Conference on College Teaching.

Raitt Fund Nears Goal

In spring 2001, the department solicited contributions to the Jill Raitt Opportunities for Excellence Fund to honor Raitt's contributions to the department since its founding in 1981.

With the help of generous friends and graduates, the fund is nearing \$10,000, the amount at which University endowments begin paying out accrued income. When this newsletter went to press, the amount received for the fund was \$9,090. That means the department only needs another \$910 to begin generating income for the department.

Alumni wanting to contribute to this fund or to complete a pledge, can send gifts to the Department of Religious Studies, 221 A&S Building, Columbia, MO 65211.

"You could be the donor to put this over the top!" says department Chair Steve Friesen.

Callahan returns to the department

After spending two years teaching in the department as a visiting instructor, Chip Callahan is returning to the department this year as an assistant professor. This spring he completed his dissertation, "Working with Religion: Industrialization and Resistance in the Eastern Kentucky Coal Fields, 1910-1932," which he is preparing for publication. He has already begun research on his next major project, once again exploring religious practices and ideas that emerge from the occupational context of work cultures, in this case, seafaring. Over the past year he responded to a panel of papers in the Art(s) of Interpretation in the Study of Religion Group at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, gave a talk on the politics of material representations of community memory at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Wash., and presented a Paine Lecture, "Black Oaths and Sacred Hills: Religion, Class, and Conflict in Eastern Kentucky's Mine Wars, 1931-32," at MU. Callahan is excited to join the MU family in a more regular capacity this year.

Clart works on Daoist translation

Philip Clart has been on research leave throughout the 2001-02 academic year, engaged in a study of the relationship of Daoism and literature in late Imperial China. As part of this project, he has been working on translating an early-seventeenth-century Daoist novel. He spent two months in Taiwan, where he conducted field and library research on the religious cult of the novel's protagonist, the Daoist immortal Han Xiangzi. He presented a paper at a conference on "Historical Perspectives on Popular Culture and Popular Religion in Post-Mao China" at the Université de Montréal in May and gave two lectures at the Academia Sinica in Taipei, Taiwan. He also completed several articles, which will appear respectively in *T'oung Pao: International Journal of Chinese Studies*, *Ethnologies* (Journal of the Folklore Studies Association of Canada), a volume of essays edited by Roman Malek on *The Faces of Jesus in China*, and in the new *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, edited by Robert Buswell.

Cohen works on ancient, undeciphered script

Signe Cohen presented a paper on her work towards a decipherment of the Indus Valley script at the American Oriental Society conference in Houston. She demonstrated that the language underlying this ancient, undeciphered script is unlikely to be Indo-European or Dravidian. Cohen's research on this topic will continue. In the meantime, her article "On the Middle Indic Ending -e as a 'Magadhism'" will be published this fall in *Acta Orientalia*. She is completing a study of the ritual feeding of Brahmins in connection with ancient

Hindu funerary rites. And, for those who read Norwegian, Cohen's volume on Vedic religion, including her own verse translations from the *Rig Veda*, will be published this fall.

Friesen published on relation of Rome and Revelation

Steve Friesen finished a major research project last year and started another one. The publication of his book *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford University Press) marked the culmination of several years of work studying the worship of the Roman emperors and the Book of Revelation. He is doing research on poverty and economic issues in the churches founded by Paul. He presented early findings on that topic at the conference on "Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches" at Harvard Divinity School and in the annual "Weltin Lecture on Early Christianity" at Washington University in St. Louis. He also edited a book that came out last year on *Ancestors and Post-Contact Religion: Roots, Ruptures, and Modernity's Memory* (Harvard University Press). An interview with Friesen about the book was featured in the American Academy of Religion's *Religious Studies News* in March 2002.

Johnson studies secret religions gone public

Paul Johnson finished his book, *Secrets, Gossip and Gods: The Transformation of Brazilian Candomblé* (Oxford University Press). Published in July, the book explores the issue of how a local and oral religion bound by ethnicity and race negotiated its relation to the nation-state and the public sphere. The basic question is: What happens to religions organized around secrecy after they go public? He continues his new project with the Garifuna of Central America, where he is exploring transnational migrations between Honduras and New York and the impact migration has on a religion traditionally tied to a specific territory. He spent time in the Bronx in fall 2001, then he returned to Honduras in summer 2002 to document the return of New Yorkers to the homeland for a key ritual event, a week-long ritual called the *dügü*. Growing out of these ethnographic interests and problems, Johnson offered a new course last spring on Religion and Globalization.

Raitt settles into her new home and keeps on working

After her wonderful retirement party in April 2001, Jill Raitt bought and remodeled a home in Columbia where she moved at the end of June. Her horse, Irish, remains on the old farm. However, her dogs, Cal and Ollie, love their new backyard, and Raitt loves the big windows and openness of her house on Cliff Drive in the East Campus Neighborhood, "the friendliest neighborhood in town." Once settled, she began work on Religions, the Professions, and the Public, a project that might become a reality next spring. She presented a lecture, "Where the Spirit Blows: Church Reform from 1450-1700" on Aug. 3 at Fordham University in New York. She will present two more in June 2003: "The Vocation of the Theologian," a plenary session for the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, and "Christian Feminism and Globalization" at Valparaiso University in Philadelphia. She is also writing a long article for a new encyclopedia of spirituality to be published by Blackwell's of Oxford, England. In fall 2002 she is teaching a seminar on the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas and a short honors course on Religion, the Professions, and the Public. A friend asked her how she spells "retirement." She answered "w-o-r-k-i-n-g."

Welch works on a course on religion and peace-making

Sharon Welch was awarded a development leave for her research on postcolonial comparative religious ethics. She also received an award from the International Affairs committee to develop a new course on religion and peace-making. In Sept. 2001, she was one of the first MU faculty members to receive Faculty Performance Shares. Her essay, "Return to Laughter" was published in *The Religious: Blackwell Readings in Continental Philosophy*, edited by John D. Caputo (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002). Welch is also involved in an interdisciplinary study of the efficacy of Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed* in multicultural education. She is working with faculty in education, theatre and counseling psychology.

Graduates Making News

Three students earned master's degrees in religious studies last year, doubling the number of alumni from the department's young graduate studies program.

Mark Clark's thesis, "The Authority to Create Authority," discussed the papal coronation ceremony of Roman Emperor, Henry V. Clark contends the coronation was no mere "ritual," but rather was fraught with political significance as part of the ongoing "investiture controversy" in which each party — Pope and Henry, King of the Germans — tried to use the ceremony to affirm power over the other.

Rachel Haverstick defended her thesis on new religious movements, "Shamanism, Spirit Possession, and Reconstruction." She examined the relation between spirit possession and gender roles in the religion called Asatru, with which she conducted ethnographic research, as well as in other religions she considers under the rubric of American Reconstructed Religions. She demonstrates these groups' appropriation of academic constructs like "shamanism" for their own innovative purposes.

Spencer Johnson completed his thesis on, "Yama: The Changing Mythology of a Hindu God." In his thesis, he traced the historical development of the Hindu god of death, Yama, from the earliest sources to the present. He then related the historical transformations in the depictions of the god of death to changing views of death, afterlife and reincarnation in Hinduism. He has begun doctoral studies in the department of South Asian studies at the University of Texas at Austin, where he will continue focusing on Sanskrit, Hinduism and the history of India's mythology.

Greg Ealick, AB '01, moved to New York last fall with his wife, Cynthia, to work on a master's in religion at Columbia University. After Sept. 11, Ealick found that his studies in Islam provided him a new way to think about current events, often bringing up more questions than answers. Currently in Brooklyn, Ealick will move closer to Manhattan this fall to finish up his class work except Arabic, which he will complete before his May commencement.

Catching Up with Jawad Qureshi

After receiving a bachelor's degree in religious studies in 2000, Jawad Qureshi did what many graduates do: he took a year off from school to work and travel. Qureshi's travels, however, were more serious than many such journeys. He made pilgrimage to Mecca and visited Istanbul, Jordan and Jerusalem, all sites of relevance to his studies.

Qureshi returned to his studies the next year when he started a master's program in Islamic studies at the University of Georgia in Athens (<http://www.arches.uga.edu/~godlas>). He worked with Ken Honerkamp and Alan Godlas and focused on classical Arabic, manuscript studies and Islamic thought, with a special interest in Sufism.

After his first year at UGA, Qureshi developed his international experience. He spent a summer in Irbid, Jordan, at the University of Yarmouk as a fellow with the University of Virginia's Yarmouk Arabic Intensive Summer Program. Upon returning, he taught first year Arabic at UGA and completed a master's thesis on "The Book of Errors: A Critical Edition and Study of Kitab al-Aghalil of Abu `Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 412/1021)."

For academic year 2002-03, Qureshi is abroad again, this time working in Syria as a Fulbright Scholar. His project involves further work on classical Arabic at Damascus University. He is also doing research on the writings of Abd al-Ghani al-Nablusi, a Damascene Sufi and scholar of the late Ottoman era.

As for his plans after that, Qureshi hasn't made a final decision yet. "One option is to start a PhD in Islamic studies after I return," he says. "However, most people I know who have gone to Syria have fallen in love with the country and didn't come back right away. So at the moment, I will have to wait and see."

Chip Callahan Returns

The department announces that Richard "Chip" Callahan has joined the regular faculty as assistant professor of religion in America. Callahan completed his PhD at the University of California at Santa Barbara in June. He wrote his dissertation on "Working with Religion: Industrialization and Resistance in the Eastern Kentucky Coal Fields, 1910-1932" with Catherine Albanese as his adviser. Callahan will teach the sequence of courses on religion in America as well as overviews of Native American religions and African American religions.

Impressive Array of Awards

Highlighting the achievements of students is one of the great pleasures of teaching. The Department of Religious Studies has three awards that annually recognize five outstanding undergraduates and master's students.

The Larry and Paula Chapman Scholarship is awarded annually to undergraduates with a record of high quality academic work. This year's awards went to two seniors. In the two required senior seminars, Jennifer Haasis wrote on "Magic According to James Frazer: A Look at 'Secular' and 'Religious' Tales in the Western Tradition," and "Creating a Homeland: The Story of the Puritan Religion in America from Migration to Modification." This year she began a master's program at University of Missouri-St. Louis, where she is focusing on early American history. Ryan Lincoln wrote on "Totems, Taboos, Trekkies and Televangelists: Durkheim's Theory of Religion Applied" and "Taking Up Serpents: The Local Phenomenon of Appalachian Serpent-handling." He entered the Master of Divinity program at Harvard Divinity School in September.

The George Landes Scholarship goes to two students entering the master of arts program. Jon Lanman comes from Southeast Missouri State University, where he finished a bachelor's degree in religious studies with a 4.0 GPA. He is especially interested in examining the connections between mythology and literature. Johannes Strobel will be joining the program mid-year. He has studied information science and theology at the University of Saarbrücken, Germany, and is now working on his doctorate in information science and learning technologies at MU.

This year the department named the first recipient of the Community Service Award, an award made possible by a gift from Elizabeth MacKenzie in honor of her father, John H. Patrick. Undergraduate majors and minors and



Jennifer Haasis and Ryan Lincoln earned the Larry and Paula Chapman Scholarships for their academic work and writing skills.

master's students who demonstrate a commitment to academic achievement and community service are eligible. This first winner of this award was Silas Allard, whose work also earned him the Hesburgh Award for the sophomore class.

In addition to these department awards, religious studies undergraduates scored another first this year by earning two of the four Hesburgh Awards granted on campus. Each year, a campuswide competition selects one winner from each of the four undergraduate classes. The criteria for the awards are academic scholarship and service, so all nominees are excellent students with exceptional character and years of involvement in volunteer work.

Linda Russell won the award for the junior class. A double major in religious studies and journalism, Russell has been a member of the Chancellor's Leadership Class and the United Ambassadors Team on campus. Next year she will also be an Honors College Ambassador, treasurer of the Religious Studies Club and president of From the Four Directions Native American Student Organization.

The award for the sophomore class went to Silas Allard. Allard has been active in several student groups, including Amnesty International, Students for a Free Tibet (as treasurer), the Religious Studies Club (as president), and the Mizzou Activism Network. He helped organize the Amnesty International Refugee Camp last year and participated in community activities such as the Missouri River Cleanup and the Columbia March Against Hate. Because of his activism, MU's Peace Studies program named him a Student Peacemaker of the Year for 2001.



MU Hesburgh Award winners are, from left, Linda Russell of religious studies, Katie Nelson, Sara Bondoili and Silas Allard of religious studies.



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Et Cetera

by Steve Friesen, Department Chair

What a difference a year makes! The department has seen many changes over the past 12 months. One of the biggest has been in the faculty. Last year we were waiting for two new colleagues to arrive and getting ready for a third search. The new colleagues, Trish Beckman and Signe Cohen, have now been here for two semesters and are making strong contributions to the department and the campus. The third search was also successful. We hired Chip Callahan for our position in Religion in America. So we have all of our regular faculty positions filled for the first time in several years.



Another big change has been our location. On Jan. 2, we began moving into a new suite of offices on the second floor of the Arts and Sciences Building. The offices were completely renovated before the move, so we now have excellent space for our work. In addition to nine faculty offices, we have a large administrative work area, a multi-purpose area with a table to sit and chat (and share snacks!), an area for our TAs and a seminar room.

Please drop by if you're in the neighborhood. We love to show people around. If you can't make it to Columbia, you can take the virtual tour on our newly renovated Web site (another change). If you do make it to

Columbia for a visit, you'll notice one more change. In January, Cheryl Smith moved from the engineering college to join us as administrative assistant.

Those of you who have been following Missouri news are aware of some other changes that have been difficult for the whole UM System. Because of shortfalls in state revenues, higher education took significant budget cuts during the past 12 months and will probably receive further cuts next year. I am glad to report that these budget problems have only had minor effects on the department so far. But we expect that the University will have serious challenges to face in the coming months.

In spite of these difficulties, we are committed to pursuing our strategic priorities. For several years we have been working to add new positions in Jewish studies, Islam and Native American religions. Recent world events have shown that these areas of teaching and research are even more urgent than many people thought. While the prospects for funding are not good at the moment, we must continue to work on these issues.

We are also committed to maintaining our tradition of strong classroom teaching and personal attention to students. That has been a hallmark of the department and will continue to characterize our work. Last year was exceptional in this regard because of the opportunities we had to honor several excellent students. I'm looking forward to more opportunities to recognize others this year.

Through all these changes, it hasn't been easy to stay in contact with many of you. I hope that we have not lost contact with any graduates or friends. Please drop me a note or e-mail if you can. I'd love to hear from any and all of you. Let us know what you're doing, where you are located now and what changes you have been through.