What is in a Name?
When Hell Freezes Over: Feminism, Ontology, and Multiplicity
Theologian Laurel C. Schneider invites readers to consider how the frozen lake in Dante’s depiction of Hell may serve as a metaphor for the “disease of stasis” at the core of Christian metaphysics.

Walking the Path of Reconciliation
Three decades after the capitulation of South Vietnam, a delegation of students and faculty from Vanderbilt Divinity School traveled to a country where they experienced different translations of the word “reconciliation.” Travelers Will Matthews, Nicole Lemon, Benjamin Papa, Kimberly Hibbard, and Zana Zeigler reflect upon their connotations of reconciliation.

A Bountiful Tableau
If Clement of Alexandria were to walk the perimeter of the Frederick Oberlin Divinity Quadrangle, he would discover contemporary representations of the religious symbols he prescribed in the Paedagogus. Essayist Lee Morris Jefferson illustrates the correlations between Clement’s directives for Christian symbolism and the iconographic program of Benton Chapel.

A Room for the Imagination
Religion writer and alumnus Ray Waddle interviews three artists whose muses guided them down the halls of the Divinity School and through the undertow of Music City U.S.A.

A Wondrous Man of Letters
Former students of Professor Dale A. Johnson pay tribute to the church historian and respected educator upon the occasion of his retirement from Vanderbilt University.
The Meaning of James Lawson to Vanderbilt University

The Reverend Doctor James Lawson

The Meaning of James Lawson to Vanderbilt University
From the Dean
attending it and then by attaching its history
miracle. He improved this University first by
accomplished nothing short of a paradoxical
resistance to evil—our finest model of how a
is—in service, in moral leadership, and in his
come to a mature understanding of how he
third time by allowing us, as a University, to
white moderate clergyman with a reputation
soul. To understand this triple paradox, one
whites to be admitted without fanfare to the
commercial practices of segregation,
School of Religion.
The Chancellor, it is remembered,
demanded that he be expelled for breaking
the law. The Chancellor, it is remembered,
Nashville to mediate a reversal of the decision
that the Board of Trust, was on a plane to
Divinity School was born, in which fac-
would write his famous letter and say: “I
could be attributed to more than sleep depri-
it was time.

Looking through my pictures, all six hun-
My feeling completely disintegrated
A week later, as I remained ill, my friend
I was exhausted.
I also discovered a document titled “Letter
French poet and soldier Jean Tardieu, who
I am not suggesting that I have perfected the

Looking away from the wall that divided the
altars into art from the monuments outside, I could not help but notice the
difficulties of children running and cell phones
could not have been admitted without tahranoon to the School of Religion.
But moderation and graduation had their
tragic shortcomings. When James Lawson
was arrested for resisting unjust laws and
practices of segregation, Nashville members of the Board of Trust
demanded that he be expelled for breaking
the law. The Chancellor, it is remembered,
thought that his resignation would make a national mockery
of the University that bore his family’s name.
Permanently expelled from Vanderbilt, James Lawson would have done fine
and well. But Vanderbilt could not be fine or well
without confronting its troubled soul. In the
end a deal was brokered to allow James Law-
son to finish his degree and to retain the
facility.

Through this struggle, Vanderbilt’s mod-
ern Divinity School was born, in which fac-
culty would never again equivocate on justice
or try to sweep questions of justice under the
rug. Confrontations like this time in 1960
have a way of making you stronger if you
don’t kill you. As a result, the Divinity School
has often been called “the conscience of the
University,” a reference of which it still
strives to be worthy.

But tonight, Vanderbilt as a University
community gets its own conscience as it cel-
brates and affirms that the example of love
seeking justice in peace that was James Law-
son in 1960 represents its finest hour and one
worthy of our future as well. For that we
should all be grateful.

Above: The Reverend Doctor James Lawson, D’60, pictured with Divinity School Dean James Hudnall-Beaulier, received the 2005 Vanderbilt University Distinguished Alumni Award. The Methodist minister and civil rights activist returns to campus for the 2004-2007 academic year as a Distinguished Visiting University Professor.

An Absence of Differentiation: Reflections of a Wondering Soul

BY ZANA ZEIGLER, MDIV3

Editor’s Note: For this issue of The Spin, we again invited student Zana Zeigler to create the work of art that would illustrate the cover of our magazine. Based upon an experience during her studies in Vietnam, Zeigler conceived the idea for constructing an altarpiece which she has titled Be. The image of the monument was pho-
tographed by Daniel Dubois of the University’s Office of Creative Services.

To recover from the jet lag of traveling home from Vietnam, I decided to rest for two days before I returned to my work at the Nashville Neurovascular Center. When I resumed working, I became quite
ill. I was exhausted.

While conversing with a good friend who resides in Atlanta, I complained about how
wretched I felt. She remarked that not all of me “cared.” And that I needed to “call
in” the part of me that was still in Vietnam. She was right; I didn’t feel all in one piece. A week later, as I remained ill, my friend
told me to cut off the ankle brace I began wearing while I was in Vietnam. I did not
want to follow her advice, but I did. Perhaps it was time.

My feeling completely disintegrated
could be attributed to more than sleep depre-
vation and jet lag. It was my rebellion against
what seems like endings: the heat, sweat,
hills, some feet, chanting voices, and the ache
of legs used up. Gide’s vision of the altar
and knowing that I shall never see her
again—this woman who took my arm, as if I
were a child, and taught me to cross the
streets of Hanoi. It is the exquisite precious-
ness of having known our differences and
our sameness.

Looking through my pictures, all six hun-
dred of them, I drown in lovely, discrete, and
utterly incoherent moments. I have begun
reading Gide’s book Wandering Through Vietnamese Culture.
He was among the most warm, intelligent, vivacious individuals with whom I visited
and from whom I learned while in Vietnam. I also discovered a document titled “Letter from Hanoi,” composed in 1928 by the French poet and soldier Jean Tardieu, who wrote:

Never have I felt so unstable as since I have come to settle for some time in Hanoi.
That must be due to the climate. It seems to me that in this country more than anywhere else, people are directly subjected to the despairing and capricious power of the ele-
crises which we feel has become a simple puppet linked by strands of invisible thread to the whims of the sun, clouds, mist, winds, and the hours thought changes colour; sen-
sibility is aroused or damped at the same time as a storm builds up, approaches, or break
outs, or dissolves. For my part, not a
day has passed without my mental and physical state going through many successes
phases: from tension to euphoria, from blissful well-being to a mysterious malaise, from
perfect joy to despair. Often I have thought of what our Gide has remarked about the
landscape of Africa: a lack of differ-
entiation. Yes, that’s it, here in Tonkin, too,
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This experience will remain embedded
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Our Featured Artisan

Wandering Through Vietnamese Culture.

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This experience will remain embedded in my memory as my experience in Vietnam. I am not suggesting that I have perfected the gift of insight, but the essence of the experience seems to involve surrendering and dropping judgments. I continued to stand there, and at the same time that I felt inordinately happy, I also began to weep.

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Exemplary Religious Leadership

When I was an undergraduate in 1949, the Joint University Library was closed to blacks; however, the School of Religion, which had its own library on the ground floor of the JUL, chose to allow blacks to use its resources and to check out books from the JUL through the School’s circulation desk. What a wonderful example of religious leadership!

In Praise of Don Beisswenger

The Spire continues to represent the best in journalism. I read every issue with enthusiasm. Thank you for the article “The Gift of Confinement” which reported on the heroic efforts of my early mentor Don Beisswenger. May his tribe increase!

Toni W. Beul, MD’63, PhD’73
Norman, Oklahoma

It is rare to find someone who spends more energy living faith than talking about faith. Don Beisswenger is one of those individuals.

Sheryl James-Andrews, MTS’92

We live in a time that more than any other calls for a prophetic voice; we live in a time that calls us to move beyond “Chardonnay” and to be people of faith and agents of change. Thank you, Don Beisswenger, for your witness for the truth, for kindling in me that voice that challenges our society to be moved beyond terrorism, breathing people of God.

Don Beisswenger’s efforts and experiences have brought concrete meaning to both words. His description of federal penitentiaries sharpens my appreciation for prison ministries sponsored by our local churches, and especially for the Better Futures Program aimed at helping women inmates learn how to improve their lives.

Walking in Jesus’ footsteps can take a lot of “courageous fortitude,” thanks for showing this timorous spirit how it is done with grace and courage. And special thanks to the artist Elizabeth King for her splendid cover illustration which says it all without saying a word.

David T. Irvine, G40
Nashville, Tennessee

We have provided the alumni of Yale Divinity School a link to your article, “The Gift of Confinement,” which includes splendid excerpts from the prison journal of Donald Beisswenger, one of our alumni. I know our graduates will find the story very interesting and inspiring.

Gustav Spohn
Director of Communications
Yale Divinity School
New Haven, Connecticut

Your article featuring the journal of the Reverend Donald Beisswenger moved me to tears and also to a passionate re-commitment of my life to the cause of justice for all. Our Methodist Sunday School class has been studying for five years the writings of Father Thomas Keating. I am reminded of Keating’s insights as I read the prison journal of Reverend Beisswenger.

Pierce J. LeBastard, PAD’72
Albents, Alabama

My sincere thanks for the 2005 fall issue of The Spire with the story of my brother’s imprisonment and the spiritual fallout from his work. Needless to say, I am very proud of my brother and admire his commitment to living out his faith, Vanderbilt also must be proud.

Mitzi Beisswenger Wolf

Your exploration of the talents of young Elizabeth King was masterful. Her invention of the “language of soiled linen” as a means of addressing the soiling minds of intolerance rightfully must have astonished the viewers at U.T. Martin. I would argue, your essay and communication the radical originality of such a mind.

As Subud and other teachings recognize, the element of “shock,” whether gratis or self-induced, can provide unexpected insight. The cover illustration of the mirror and the model affirm a seeing beyond, as did Don Beisswenger’s discovery during his imprisonment.

Pat Burton
Nashville, Tennessee

The Ministry of Presence

Thank you for John Thatamanil’s thoughtful piece “Against Explanation and for Consolation.” I have long since given up looking for an intellectual resolution to the problem of evil. With Professor Thatamanil, I have concluded that to be emotionally and spiritually present with someone who is suffering is all we can offer; moreover, it is better than an explanation. As editor and director of Forward Movement Publications for the Episcopal Church, I intend to reprint Professor Thatamanil’s excellent essay in a forthcoming book of meditations for people in crisis.

Richard H. Schwier, MD’70
Cincinnati, Ohio

It’s No Accident—We Count You in the Fold

I have never been to Vanderbilt Divinity School. I receive The Spire “by accident” because I was graduated in 1945 from the Oberlin School of Theology. I write to express great appreciation for the magazine; the 2005 fall issue is really outstanding.

Roger Robison, Oberlin, BD’45
Hamilton, Montana

With Hope that We Remain Worthy

I just finished the most recent issue of The Spire. Of the four alumni publications I receive, The Spire is the only one I read cover to cover.

David Damos, IMD’74
Jacksonville, Florida

Our Featured artisan, continued

There were differences—differences as obstacles—in the sense that I did not speak the same language as the hosts and the participants in the ceremony; however, this relative, material difference provided the foundation for the intense experience. Notwithstanding that difference, I came to feel a tremendous unity with the celebrants. Not sharing the same language as the hosts proved utterly irrelevant; the impact of the experience was impersonal. Neither personal history nor content was involved or even of marginal importance—personal history; likes, dislikes, background, education, and language became non-present. Time and its partner, history, were immaterial to this experience. An altar serves as a structure that holds and preserves the ideas, images, objects, and memories that have their own lives—a place where they may be. I divided the interior space of the altar-piece into sections to represent the principal themes from my studies in Vietnam—globalization, ecology, economics, and colonialism. By using styrofoam, glue, paper, wire, beads, bamboo from Pier 1, and computer-manipulated photographs, I constructed three-dimensional objects that could be moved by the viewer. I like the idea that there is no one, single perspective from which the elements of the altar-piece can be perceived. I incorporated a group portrait of the Divinity School delegation within a lower register of the altar-piece because it seems appropriate to represent our collective identity on a work of art that celebrates transformation. The photographs also feature a monk and nuns from a Buddhist center in Hanoi and the director of the USA Society, a group dedicated to reconciliation and friendship between Vietnam and the United States.

The altar is subdivided into areas dedicated to the interrelated themes of religious experience, worship, and ritual; ecology; indigenous resources; tourism; Westernization and globalization; cultural transformation; and the intention to create and recognize community. All the elements are surrounded by a collage border of American flags, land maps, statistics, and names of the dead from “The American War,” known to us as the Vietnam War. The shredded texture of the paper compartments a monument created against a backdrop of politics, the War Powers Resolution, and casualties of human lives—casualties of the earth.

The triple altar invites physical contact, and I want the viewer to reach and turn the elements while reading the fragments of tests. Perhaps time will collapse for you as it did for me while standing at the wall during the Celebration of Washing Souls Day and you will experience what Tardieu describes as a “lack of differentiation.” There is no conceivable ending to the enrichments of which my memories of Vietnam may speak, but that is the objective of immersion learning in field education.

A native of Fort Wayne, Indiana, Zeigler earned a baccalaureate in art education from Florida International University in Miami and the master of fine arts degree from the University of Georgia. She is the founder of the Nashville Neuramatic Centers, a clinic specializing in the holistic therapy of soft tissue pain and dysfunction.Prior to her enrollment at the Divinity School, Zeigler served as a staff minister for the congregation at Religious Sciences of Nashville. She will exhibit the requirements for the master of divinity degree at the conclusion of the 2006 fall semester.
A Period of Consequences

Vanderbilt Divinity School’s commitment to promoting “an ecologically wholesome world” and to educating student theologians about the effects of envi-
ronmental destruction was reinforced in a public lecture delivered by the Honorable Al Gore on the first day of classes for the 2006 spring semester. The forty-fifth Vice Presi-
dent of the United States and former Ten-
nessee senator addressed the topic “Global Climate Change” in a multimedia presenta-
tion on the environmental crisis confronting the world.

“If we do nothing about global warming,” Gore stated, “then you mark my words—it’s going to be a bitter cup we’ll be forced to drink over and over again. This is not a polit-
ical issue; it’s a moral issue. What gives us the right in our generation to lay this curse on our children? To do so would be deeply
unforgivably immoral.”

Gore concluded his lecture by noting that repairing the environment is beyond human capability. “We accom-
plished a major environmental victory at the conclusion of the last century with the ozone layer—scientists told us it would never heal, but we took the lead—with a Republican president and a Demo-
cratic Congress—and the rest of the world followed. The earth’s ozone layer, once thought irretrievably damaged, is on the road to recovery.”

Three members of the Vice-

President’s family are alumni of the University. His deceased mother, Pauline, JD’36, was the tenth woman to be graduated from Vanderbilt Law School; his late sister, Nancy, earned her baccalaureate in 1949 from the College of Arts and Science; and his wife, Mary Elizabeth (Tipper), received a master’s degree in psychology from Peabody College in 1976. While Gore was pursuing his baccalaureate at Harvard University, he enrolled at Vanderbilt in the summer of 1968 to study the history of the Middle East and the history of architecture.

Upon returning from Vietnam, he enrolled in the Graduate School before entering the Law School.

She reminded the students that a rain-

bow—embodied in the clouds—represents hope and that Vanderbilt is like a rainbow—embedded in the clouds—represents the fusion of Memphis and Motown soul tunes from the ’60s and ’70s with their vocations in the University and the Medical Center—showcased its talents during the 2006 Commencement Party. The Divinity School counts trumpeter Robert Early among the members of the alumni community; Early, B’71, MDiv’76, serves as executive assist-
ante vice chancellor for development and alumni relations for the University.

The other band members featured in the photograph include trumpeter Steven Smartt, BME’71, MME’72, assistant provost for graduate education and research; gui-
tarist Norman Urmy, retired executive vice president for clinical affairs at VUMC; saxo-
phonist and guitarist Jeffrey Byrd, systems engineer for VUMC Informatics; vocalist Deborah Kemp, physician liaison program; and Carol Byrd, child and adolescent vocal instructor.

Soulful Inspiration

B y day they are known by their formal titles—associate vice chancellor, assist-
ant provost, executive vice president, systems engineer, physician liaison, and vocal instructor. On stage they help comprise the band Soul Incision and are fearless advo-
cates of the motto, “It’s never too late to rock ’n’ roll!”

The band—which name represents the purpose of a university’s career center should not be to advise students on how to assemble their assets in order to climb the highest rung of the career ladder; students should be encour-aged to discover their gifts and to use those gifts in response to the crushing needs of the world.”

“A university student should be encouraged to approach education not as a means for con-
structing a résumé but as an opportunity to discern one’s vocation and the passions in one’s gut, soul, and heart,” remarked the Rev-

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The editor-in-chief of Sojourners maga-
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ation of churches and faith-based organiza-
tions dedicated to overcoming poverty by changing the direction of public policy.

Arc of Hope

T he Arc of Hope, a Christian organization char-
ed with the responsibility of encouraging reflection and dialogue on contemporary issues by inviting distin-

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tions dedicated to overcoming poverty by changing the direction of public policy.
Faculty Kudos

Susan Hylen, Mellon Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, is the co-author of John: Westminster Bible Companion by Westminster John Knox Press. Hylen co-wrote the commentary with Gail R. O’Day; associate dean of faculty and academic affairs and the A.H. Shurtleff Professor of Preaching and New Testament at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University.

Paul J. DeHart, associate professor of theology, is the author of The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology by Blackwell Publishing.

Dean James Hudnut-Beumler announces the following appointments to the faculty of Vanderbilt University Divinity School:

- Paul C.H. Lim, Ph.D., assistant professor of church history
- Barbara McClure, Ph.D., assistant professor of pastoral counseling and pastoral theology
- Graham Reside, Ph.D., director of the Cal Turner Program in Moral Leadership

Senior lecturers James P. Byrd, Alice Wells Hunt, and Jay Geller have been appointed to the rank of assistant professor. Byrd, Ph.D ’99, serves as assistant dean for the graduate department of religion and teaches courses in American religious history. The associate dean for academic affairs, Hunt, Ph.D ’01, offers courses in Hebrew Bible. Geller, who earned his doctorate from Duke University, teaches courses in modern Jewish culture.

From Mortarboard to Ranger Hat

When Jennifer Lynn Compton announced to her family and friends that she had decided to seek admission to a divinity school instead of becoming an environmental engineer, no one was more surprised than she.

Upon receiving her baccalaureate in psychology from Birmingham-Southern College where she was graduated first in her class, Compton was awarded a Rotary Fellowship to study environmental engineering in Australia. She had imagined having a career that allowed her to work in the outdoors—a passion that had developed during twelve years at summer church camp, the family vacations to the Grand Canyon, and twenty-two days of cross-country dog sledding during an Outward Bound expedition in Minnesota. She always concluded any discussion of her career plans with the statement, “And one day I would like to attend divinity school.”

Although Compton was aware of the lucrative employment opportunities that she could pursue as an engineer, she began to realize that her interest in theology was more than a fleeting impulse—that theological education could be reconciled with her interest in the environment and could prepare her to become a steward of Creation.

Of the institutions to which she sought admission, Vanderbilt University Divinity School attracted Compton initially because of the opportunity to receive a theological education within a research university. When she read in the Catalogue about the Divinity School’s unequivocal commitment to the environment, she knew that her calling to serve the environment could be developed at an institution whose mission included “active participation in the struggles of individuals, groups, and for a healthier, more just, more humane, and more ecologically whole world” and “a concern for the effects of environmental destruction and for the securing of equal opportunity for all individuals, peoples, and creatures to enjoy God’s gifts.”

Convinced of Compton’s academic promise and of her leadership abilities for the Church, the administration and faculty selected her as a Carpenter Scholar and awarded her a full-tuition scholarship. Three years later, she distinguished herself by becoming the eighty-seventh Founder’s Medalist in the School’s history. Compton also received the William A. Newcomb Prize for best representing the Divinity School’s paradigm of “the minister as theologian” and for earning honors on her master of divinity project titled “Gathering Up the Fragments: An Ecological Theology of the Eucharist for the United Methodist Church.”

Two days after she was graduated, Compton traded her mortarboard for the ranger hat that she will wear while working for the United States Department of the Interior as a ranger in the Rocky Mountain National Park of Colorado.

“My work requires an awareness of the wilderness and the country, and a curiosity about the world. I learn how to test the earth with my feet. I learn to explore and to develop a philosophical understanding of the environment. The wilderness is a place of infinite wonder. It is the source of inspiration for me. It is the inspiration for me to love the earth and to want to do whatever I can to protect it.”

— Jennifer Compton

For first honors in the Divinity School’s class of 2006, Jennifer Lynn Compton received the Founder’s Medal from Dean James Hudnut-Beumler. A candidate for ordination in the United Methodist Church, Compton is working during the summer as a ranger in the Rocky Mountain National Park of Colorado. “Jennifer is a quiet model of discipline for scholarship and dedication to the sound environment,” remarks Douglas Meeks, the Cal Turner Chancellor’s Chair in Wesleyan Studies and Professor of Theology. “The hallmark of her studies at Vanderbilt has been not only her academic excellence but also her passion for bringing diverse people together for assisted communication and communion of spirit.”

Associate Professor of Theology John Thatai states, “Academic work for Jennifer has never been a mere intellectual exercise; she engages in theology for the sake of personal and world transformation. Her double passion for recovering a deep notion of sanctification and ecological well-being has guided her work at the Divinity School. It is no wonder that she is at home in the wild spaces of our national parks and in the wild spaces of the classroom.”
I t is truly a pleasure and an honor to be at Vanderbilt Divinity School, this time not as a student, but as a speaker. Being here now, with the obligation of bringing to you some of my most current thinking in the area of feminism and theology, I cannot help being reminded of that time, before the disfunction in the long trajectory of Christian religion, got stuck in the ontological ice of trinitarian authority of direct experience, you take away concepts and claims. Nevertheless, I am also insists the divine is not ever subject to our participation in that communion for United Methodists to resist racism, classism, and so authority of women. Such diminishedness and inadequacy of all of our concepts of divinity—thence comes our ability to criticize the real, “a passion that necessitates a certain fuel that drives our grand schemes and narratives toward reduction, definition, and compartments. First, there is the philosophical move of inclusive language efforts to change practice, a nod to Monique Wittig and the rest of us. As this clarity has emerged in my research, I began to see that a feminist theologian—a woman who can think outside the patriarchal images of God—but we must anewly at the same time that we argue for an iconoclastic metaphoric theology, we must engage in the multiplicities of that gathering, also made clear that theological responses to it in the bitter aftermath of important critiques of the very possibility of such. This affirmation speaks directly to what Edward Farley has so aptly dubbed “our passion for the real.” Farley suggests by means of a paradox for the real is an anthropological claim that concern Asian, Latina, White, Black feminist theologians generally under-estimated in strong apophatic or metaphorical terms, valid as it may be for preservation of the patriarchal images of God—but we must.
We can take heart in the fact that divine oneness,...

It is this eternal deepfreeze regulated by Satan's wings that Dante

Dante and Virgil Penetrating the Forest

The implication was that Hallowell's own

An unruly cacophony of anomalies? A fertile

What will happen to the horizon of Western thought if we were to realize that

One/many divide, which is how I character-

If a true/false dualism is rigidly

Summer 2006

One is partly a reference to

The ontological horizon of Western Christian Oneness, even in...
human enmendment in world, bodies, relations, and society. Dante relates his attempts to climb out of the dark valley in which he first finds himself, only to find that his way is blocked by various monstrous animal servants of the story. He is rescued, however, by the appearance of the long-dead pagan poet Virgil, who informs Dante that the only way out of his current fix—the only way to find his way—is through Hell itself. He has, one could say, removed the blindness on his mundane life and glimpses, through the poesy of dream, vision, and the poet’s pen—a closely abutting world of difference. This is a non-reductive awakening that would startle us that eternity is the banal evil that Hell is. Dante does not live with the benefit of Newtonian mechanics or a fully realized science of art, and storytelling. In the case of Dante’s vision, the order of fable suggests, in the metaphor of a carnival of bodily excess. We meet those who in life sought illicit love, those who lied, those who pilfered, those who did not meet their debts, and those whose souls live in Hell but whose bodies still walk around in life. They are cold, they change form, deceive, and, to put it simply, seem to get by with what little they have. If this is Hell, then Hell is life itself in all of the myriad ways that human beings are caught on wheels and pits of woe, need, guilty joy, and excess.

Granted, nobody seems to be having fun in Dante’s inferno (except perhaps for the demonic keepers), but the torments of the damned seem less cruel, allegorically speaking, than merely consequential: the people throughout the Inferno are simply experiencing the consequences of choices they have made. This is what gives the journey its meaning and pain, and the path of all the consequences one might secretly wish on others. The damned are ex- 

The Inscription over the Gate

uner or the occasional cardinal and pope. It is a fantasy of consequence, less along the lines of Eliza Doolittle’s rapturous vision of a royal firing squad that takes out Professor Higgins, and more along the lines of the barefoot, unfettered, confiding, bellow in anger and insult one with another. They are cold, they are smelly, messy place. It is every bit the chill deepens, and the stillness grows; because the poet paints a vivid picture, the reader can imagine that the bodies of the most foundation, the ice of Hell is the funda-

“Before me there was nothing made to be, except one thing was there, named ‘Nothing, I hope ancient, ye who go through me.’”

But here is what is startling. In Dante’s rendering of the Christian vision, the body to become “united in thought and deed.” In one sense, else-

Unconsidered about the modernist separation of fact from fiction, the poet and storyteller can sometimes do more directly, effectively, and art-

not in fact integral to the place, but it is the product of continuous effort on the part of the so-called Prince of the prisoners. What is clear is that in the cold that the two travelers find their way to the heart of Christian metaphysics! The ice is all that Eternity

15
God’s mirror. There is, in the pivotal groin of God’s repressed repressed repressed fluid that gets through which one may glimpse heaven. Satan is the closed, transversal, sexual body of God, the opening, the key to heaven. So in a queer way, Satan, here, is God, to the extent that eternity—one of God’s other names in Christian metaphysics—is motored in Hell.

The Divine Comedy is just a medieval story. It is a story built on a theological imagina- tion, how the Heaven might cause Heaven’s repressed repressed repressed to turn the language of Christian piety and is grounded in Dante’s reading of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. From the vantage point of where we now sit, whether he meant it to or not, Dante’s Divine Comedy is really a profound critique of the metaphysics of Christian monotheism. Satan becomes God. Indeed, it cannot be otherwise because in the logic of the One, God can have No Other, no contra- diction—Dante’s God’s repressed repressed repressed.

A good story told only once is a prelude without the song…We should seek to inspire courage in those who would tell new or retell old tales of divine flux, fertility, multiplicity, and depth.

The Hell, Satanric figure, and multitude the damned that Christians imagine as the con- tainer for their fears of real life and messily conse- quence reveals “in the end” a repressed face of Heaven, of God, and of the blessed. Perhaps in the midst of the damned, who are enmeshed in a vast hum and mingled mass, we can discern the body of the blessed saints sitting their nectar in Heaven, but they are the saints themselves. The Inferno is the closest of Paradiso: Hell and even Purgatory are the indispensable contain- ers of the repressed fluidity and ambigui- ty of Heaven, which makes Heaven’s monolithic claim to superi- ority possible. Purgatorio: Dante’s vision of Heaven that inspired millions of Christians in the centuries after him, is a very sterile place. But the Inferno reveals to us that the purity of the saints depends upon repression.

The Divine Comedy is a story crafted out of a particular time and jointish. The Inferno also reveals to us that eternity is the projected head of Oz, requiring mechanical coolant. Coherent living and removed from that body chambered nas- talas of naughty life flowing in the fertile fluids and fire of the living.

In the Inferno, Dante saw Satan let the ice melt, disrupting the Heaven from which he supposedly has been expelled? Perhaps he cannot do so and keep up the façade of his mirror. His mirror is from the god of Ceres, his mirror and repressed same-shame of the god of Ceres, he mirrors the very structure and purpose of the façade of Eternity from slip- ping, the waters of life from thawing. Perhaps, in other words, as the keeper of God’s closet, Satan is God and so requires the maquillage of Hell in order to project the façade of Heaven.

Here’s an image: the satanic snowball melting in Hell might cause Heaven’s repressed repressed repressed to turn rose rouge to sweat and run, revealing the Vauvassière just under the surface of life. Art without a solid base in Hell to hold up the scaffolding of Heaven, the ascending seats of celestial light might slip and tilt into one another, snapping an angelic wing or two. The bent smiles of the blessed might become strained as they disavowed secret pleasures tumble up and out of a closet.

There is a mirror: God’s divinity is not only dead, He was not even at birth, not even at the moment Jesus’ divinity should have made that point clear from the start, but theologians every- where have an unfair tendency to absolutely the obvious from their contempla- tion of theology. They want to take themselves too seriously and forget the utter necessity of laughter for clearing the cobwebs of self-important fabrications.

Theology needs the storyteller’s genius for the arts of word and the repressed gods of political, or theological doctrine to what images and beliefs actually own the grounds. Unconcerned about the modernist separation of fact from fiction, the poet and storyteller can sometimes do more effectively, and artfully expose lies and fabrications on which the dominant institutions, cultures, classes, races, genders, religious authorities, and nations sometimes rely for their power. If Dante intended us to shoulder at the pits of Maldonate, and long for the unchanging spheres of Persephone, he also could not help but show us the Dr. Seuss-like edifice of Christian metaphysics in which Eternity is a clumsy fabrication that exacts—and has—indeed exacted—a horrifying cost on bodies (of people and of water). Good storytellers seem effortlessly to make their tales do dou- ble duty this way. They provide a narrative that always offers more than the sum of the parts. We have a horizon of expectation, looking forward to the possibility of renaissance, and Marduk, the African accounts of Ogun, the Hare, and Isis, the many tales of Jesus, the Buddha, the Prophet, the Underground Railroad, the white whale, the married man, and on and on, there is—always—something more going on to be gleaned from the good (or should I say honest?) story-
teller’s story. This is one of the things that make stories so wonderful, philosophically and narratively possible, and make good stories philosophically and richly interesting. It is also what makes the art and ritual of retelling them so important. A good story told only once is a prelude without the song.

So let us begin. Let rich and complex fluids swirl in this one beginning again for the theology in-chains, cradles, matrices of the Divine. Deep. Shaper, destroyer, and redistributor of land. Source and surface of the divine face. Without absolute beginning or absolute end—water flows through bodies, giving them substance and presence. Close to fifty percent of the substance of human bodies is water. The percentage is even higher among plants. And individual cells in humans and other animals are often over eighty percent fluid. Without the fluid properties of water and oil that plump cells and shape flesh, we all blow into dust. Life is, quite literally, a fluid environment. And just as traditions and Scriptures tell us, it is life itself.

With that in mind, it makes sense that an ontology of life too staid to attract us. Getting it “right” lies in a supple posture toward truth and toward the stories we have been given to tell, again. Getting out of the ice on our quest for a poetic metaphysics of multiplicity and flux and flux in order to require some new tools for theologians: humility, humor, doggedness, and a willingness to start over, again and again.

If Dante intended us to shoulder at the pits of Maldonate, one thing is clear from the start, but theologians everywhere have an unfair tendency to project the façade of Eternity from slipping, “getting it “right” lies in a supple posture toward truth and toward the stories we have been given to tell, again. Getting out of the ice on our quest for a poetic metaphysics of multiplicity and flux in order to require some new tools for theologians: humility, humor, doggedness, and a willingness to start over, again and again.

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Catherine Keller, feminist liberation theologians like Ivone Gebara, feminist philosophers and poets like Audre Lorde, Luce Irigaray and Mary Daly, I believe in the possibility of a dance in Christian metaphysics. What is more, poetic, tough thinking, humor, and the ontological suspicions of those untaught bodies or of change are the tools required for navigating our way clear of the (master’s) house of eternity. We need these tools to begin—again—to challenge the onto-philosophy of one for the resurgence of the elemental.xxii

In conclusion, I recommend that theologians who wish to move beyond the One/many divide in search of always-returning, always paroxysmic divine incarnations should now do three things. We should be concerned with our own poverty of story-telling about divinity in the world today. We should seek to inspire courage in those who would tell new or retold old tales of divine flux, fertility, multiplicity, and depth. Finally, in order to do this, theologians should begin—again—to think a metaphysics of flux and multiplicity that articulates a more plausible and energizing framework than an arid dominology of One for the elementary for the elemental.xxii

Before earning the doctorate in philosophy in 1997 from Vanderbilt University as a Harold Stirling Vanderbilt Graduate Scholar, Laurel C. Schneider received the baccalaureate in international studies from Dartmouth College and the master of divinity degree from Harvard University. She currently serves as an associate professor of theology, ethics, and culture and as director of the master of divinity degree program at The Chicago Theological Seminary. Because the foundation for Professor Schneider’s lecture is from her forthcoming manuscript under contract with Routledge Press, no part of the text of the Antonette Brown Lecture may be reproduced without consent of the author.

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Editor’s Note: Of the eleven students from Vanderbilt University Divinity School who traveled to Vietnam during the summer of 2005, only one had reached young adulthood by April 30, 1975, when tanks driven by the North Vietnamese Army entered Saigon and toppled the United States-backed South Vietnamese regime. Another student had entered her adolescence while another had not celebrated her second birthday. Eight members of the VDS delegation had not been born when Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Minh City. The first images they saw of Vietnam were from news tapes or history textbooks.

Thirty years after the capitulation of South Vietnam, the United States is now Vietnam’s largest single trading partner; bilateral trade between the countries has reached $4 billion, and the former enemies now find themselves united by commerce. Exploring the relationship between the two countries were recent graduates Lindsay Blackwater, Dana Irwin, Amanda Owen, and Ryan Owen, and current students Angela Howard, April Larson, Will Matthews, Nicole Lemon, Ben Papa, Kimberly Hibbard, and Zana Ziegler. They were accompanied by Trudy Stringer, assistant dean for student life and associate director of field education, and Robin Jensen, the Luxe Chancellor’s Professor of the History of Christian Art and Worship. The Spire gratefully acknowledges the generosity of Professor Jensen in permitting us to illustrate four of the students’ theological reflections with photographs from her portfolio.
What is in a Name?

BY WILL MATTHEWS, MDIV3

“... O! be some other name: that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet...”

SHAKESPEARE’S ROMEO AND JULIET, II, II, 42-44

There is a disconcerting section in the Gospel of Mark that has been dubbed “The Little Apocalypse.” In the thirteenth chapter, the Evangelist foretells the end of time and predicts desolation, sacrifice, and suffering—days when the sun will be darkened and the moon will provide no light—when the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers in heaven will be shaken.

I become uncomfortable when reading these verses in Mark’s Gospel. But amid the violent images of destruction and darkness, Mark also presents to us a profound insight that may very well answer a question that often challenges our faith: Where in the world is God?

“Be alert,” Mark records Jesus as saying. “Be alert, for I have already told you everything...”

My full Christian name is William Charles Matthews. If you were to travel to San Diego, California, and visit the naval cemetery located on the grounds of the United States naval base, perhaps you would discover a tombstone bearing the inscription of my name—William Charles Matthews. The tombstone commemorates my father’s brother who also was his best friend—my uncle and the man for whom I am named.

Uncle Bill died in 1979, the year before I was born. He was flying an F-14 fighter jet on a routine training mission off the San Diego coast when the aircraft malfunctioned and plummeted into the Pacific Ocean.

He had attended the Naval Academy in Annapolis in the early 1960s—not because of any military-leaning, as my father tells the story, but because he was in love with the idea of flying. Enrolling in the Academy to receive training as a naval pilot, according to Dad, was the way for Uncle Bill to achieve his ambition to become an aviator.

But as with most every soldier, my uncle never envisioned what his service would entail. After he was graduated with commendation from Annapolis, Uncle Bill continued his education when he entered the war zones in Vietnam.

My father finds it difficult to read the letters my uncle composed during the war. His correspondence is riddled with regret, remorse, and outright disgust for what he witnessed in Vietnam. Reading Uncle Bill’s letters, I understand that he wished he did not have to be part of a war machine, but he had little choice but to follow orders. And perhaps the most haunting of those orders was to drop from his F-14 fighter jet the chemical Agent Orange that American companies designed to destroy the dense Vietnamese jungles serving as hideouts for Vietcong soldiers.

Four decades later, the effects of Agent Orange on the Vietnamese population remain horrific. One and even two generations later, children of family members who were exposed directly to Agent Orange are being born with severe physical deformities and mental incapacities.

One year ago, William Charles Matthews traveled to Vietnam—not my uncle, but I, his namesake—for the first time, but somehow, strangely, on a return trip.

During the second week of the journey I took with twelve colleagues and professors from Vanderbilt University Divinity School, I visited a place called Friendship Village, a sprawling campus on the outskirts of Hanoi for children suffering from the effects of Agent Orange. We served as first-hand witnesses to the ramifications of the war America waged in Vietnam.

The experience at Friendship Village resulted in our becoming consumed by sickening feelings of guilt for the atrocity that had been perpetrated upon those children by the nation we call home, the world’s lone superpower. And I felt especially guilty, knowing the man for whom I am named was an integral part of the horrors of the war.

But what is important about this narrative is not the fact that we were there, or even the feelings that we felt while we were there. The import of this story lies in the ways we were welcomed by the director of Friendship Village, who was overjoyed that we had made the trip and who had prepared for us a table with a feast lavish enough to feed a group twice our size.

There were bowls and bowls of steaming rice and noodles, plates piled high with egg rolls, freshly caught fish cooked whole, and half-dozen bottles of fine wine.

But we could barely eat. Crippled with shame, we did not feel as though we even deserved to be there, much less partake in the splendid meal that had been prepared for us. What right did we have to be afforded that privilege? What right did we have to be accorded such hospitality? And why in the world would the director of the village be so nice to us? We were, after all, Americans. We were representatives of the country that had created the necessity for this village. What right did we have?

What was reaffirmed for me that day by the director of Friendship Village is that God’s work in the world is not carried out retributively. We do not always receive what we believe we deserve—in fact, we rarely do. And thank God.

Reconciliation transcends logic; it transcends every inner sense of what is just and right. Reconciliation creates a place for healing; it creates a table at which all are welcome; always; and it creates a new and common path on which we can all begin to tiptoe together, even for two countries that not so long ago had been engaged in brutal conflict against each other. Reconciliation transcends names.

The director of Friendship Village was an ambassador of reconciliation that day in a way that was so profound that it initially escaped us. In the midst of pain, suffering, and dislocation—in the midst of shame and guilt, despair and anger—in the darkest of dark moments—the director of the village loved us, welcomed us, and prepared for us a table that was beyond our highest expectations.

“Be alert, stay awake,” our God of renewal, rebirth and reconciliation seemingly was yelling at us that day.

But we did not hear.

And so we just sat there at that table, staring at but hardly eating the meal that had been prepared.

“Be alert,” Jesus said. “Be alert, for I have already told you everything.”

Prior to his matriculation at the Divinity School, Will Matthews was an investigative reporter for the Inland Valley Daily Bulletin in Ontario, California. He received his bachelorate in journalism from Chapman University where he served as editor-in-chief of the student newspaper.

Left: Children of Friendship Village; Right: Making flowers

Left: Learning to embroider; Right: The second generation of Agent Orange
Unto the Breach of the Comfort Zone

BY BENJAMIN PAPA, BA’95, MDIV3

“Once more unto the breach, dear friends...”

Shakespeare’s “Henry V,” III, 1

A page from the Divinity School’s travel seminar to Vietnam, our class met one morning with two representatives of the United States Embassy in Hanoi. After making an informative presentation about their work in Vietnam, the officials answered a number of practical and theoretical questions from the students, primarily about issues of economics and globalization.

At the conclusion of the session, my colleague, Dana Irwin, asked one of the officials about his previously stated position that Vietnam would be better off in many respects if the country were to adopt certain American customs. The Westerner then suggested that given the opportunity to change pollutes the environment, that traditional farming and agricultural economies do not, by their very nature, pollute the environment. Traditional farming and agriculture, therefore, do not in any way, pollute the environment, as much as more modern industrial economies. The official suggested that given the opportunity to industrialize, regardless of whether the change pollutes the environment, that Vietnam would seize such an opportunity. On a more personal level, my experience at the embassy helped me to understand that, in fact, the opposite may be true.

This experience helped me uncover a stereotypical paradigm from which I perceived the world—I, too, was experiencing the mild anxiety that the sanitation raised for me. I am aware of the classist and “privileged” nature of my response to my experience. I am accustomed to a level of cleanliness that is “over the top” in terms of what humans need to be healthy, and perhaps what is most ironic in view of my ecological commitments is that many of the chemicals and detergents that are used to maintain an ultra-clean public sphere are themselves destructive to the ground water. On a more practical level, my experience at the embassy helped me to understand that, in fact, the opposite may be true.

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Take a walk with me.

BY KIMBERLY HIBBARD, MTS2

... as we walk…

Shakespeare’s Tragedy and Chronica, Part II, 1571-1579

As you reach the top of the lake, you can stop and watch the group of women dancing as they wave fans; if you’d like to try it for yourself, there is a beginners’ group that meets at the edge and sits on one of the many benches and meditate or simply watch all the activity. Whatever you decide to do, I hope you feel as I do—that there are no barriers of language, nationality, gender, and class have disappeared—here, we are just two more people in the community that forms around the lake each morning.

We continue until we see the Opera House, the large impressive yellow building where it is easy to imagine men in toreadors and women in formal gowns as they step out of carriages and enter the building. Here we cross the street where we reach the round-about; we can use the crosswalks, but beware, these are new features of Hanoi’s streets and no guarantee that traffic will stop for us. Now it’s straight ahead to Hoan Kiem Lake. We know that such a desire draws me to the lake; I longed to be in community with my fellow travelers and with the people of Hanoi. But the long-distance community was not just for an affirmation of self but also of a worldview that considers all parts of Creation as interconnected. Such a world-view suggests that the health of the planet and the possibility for peace lie in our ability to understand ourselves to be and to live as part of a single community. Entering into the flow of morning activity at this lake, described by the Rough Guide to Vietnam as the “soul” of Hanoi, left me hopeful that such community is possible.

But take another morning walk with me, this time in the cool mountain air of the northern Vietnamese village of Sa Pa on market day. Hmong women and young girls seemed to reduce me to the “rich American” stereotype, but for me to see them only in terms of their ethnicity and gender. And it was not only in Sa Pa this reductionism matters; in meetings with officials or in casual inter- actions, I often saw those with whom we met only in terms of nationality or profession, and I often felt as if I were seen in a similar way. “They” were Vietnamese, directors, professors, waiters, shopkeepers, amongst others, “rather, do something less physical, perhaps the role of a member of a delegation, a student, a consumer, a Christian. Perhaps the language barrier was a contributing factor, but I suspect that even if we had spoken the same language we still would have found it easy to see each other only partially.

The difficulty in forming community is not limited to the international sphere. Our history and current events demonstrate that it is a national problem as well. Seeing one another only in terms of race, gender, age, economic status, political persuasion, or religious affiliation has us as a nation from creating community. And the problem persists when we look closer to home. Violence in our schools, pockets of poverty in our cities, and partisanship in our political governments point to our failure to build community.

Given the difficulties in forming community, perhaps it would be easy to lose hope that our desire for community—desires that are rooted in our need to belong—are worth the effort. “To be, or not to be: that is the question…”

To be, or not to be: that is the question…

BY NICOLE LEMON, MDIV

“From the moment I arrive, they begin to stare. In pagodas, in markets, on any street from Hanoi to Sa Pa—morning, noon, and night—stares abound. Their stares are not inviting but cold and distant. As I walk the busy streets and carefully traverse the lanes of traffic, I become increas- ingly sensitive to the stares I receive. At times, these stares are accompanied by the mockery and ridicule of pointing and laught- ter. I perceive that I am no longer seen as a person, but as an object.”

On the last day of our trip, we travel approximately two hours outside of Hanoi to visit the home of a Vietnamese man and his family. The center of their modest home is adorned with elaborate altars. As the family prepares a generous feast, I engage in con- versation with my colleagues. While talking, I suddenly begin to feel uneasy. I look up and find myself arrested in a mutual gaze with our host. In the sheer awkwardness of that moment, I offer him a smile and hope he will reciprocate the gesture. He does not; there is no response other than a strangely pro- longed gaze.
acknowledgement, nonetheless. This man was completely indifferent toward my presence; I realized at the end of our visit that for as long as he stood, this man still did not see me.

While the stares I receive from most people in Hanoi are cold and distant, the gazes assume a different character in Sa Pa, a beautiful mountainous region of villages that various ethnic minorities call home. When we arrive at Cat Cat Village, home to the Hmong people, I am greeted with warm and welcoming stares by the people walking to the market to sell their goods.

During our sojourn, I have a brief, yet unforgettable exchange with a young woman. I ask her to tell me how she identifies herself. Before the young woman can respond to my question, our tour guide, standing in close proximity, declares, “She is Vietnamese.”

Immediately, and with conviction, the young woman responds, “No! I am not Vietnamese; you are Vietnamese!” Her sharp retort still echoes in my ears. As I reflect upon the young woman’s response, I consider the possible reason for the man’s gaze. I perceive his gaze to be a reminder of the harsh reality of racial prejudice that transforms human subjects who are seen into inanimate objects that are merely seen into inanimate objects that are merely. Moreover, I question whether or not he would have treated this young woman with the same indifference with which he treated me.

Although our group had many meetings during our trip, we never discussed the possibility of ethnic prejudice in Vietnam. I am compelled to consider the possibility that ethnic minorities in Vietnam experience the same prejudice people of color experience in the United States. For instance, how can anyone make peace and reconcile with someone who is not seen? With the exception of my time in the ethnic villages, the rhetoric of peace and reconciliation seemed to be a contradiction to my experience. I have yet to resolve this contradiction; I have yet to reconcile the hopeful rhetoric with the reality of my lived experience.

The essayist was graduated from Swarthmore College where she received the Baccalaureate in the Divinity Quadrangle with funding from the American Student Society. The architectural firm overseeing the project was Brush, Hutchinson, and Gwinn, currently named Hutchinson and Associates based in Atlanta. Gwinn was the chief architect of the chapel, an endeavor in which he took great pride. Langdon Gilkey, a professor at the Divinity School from 1954 to 1963, had a central role in the development of Benton Chapel. Gilkey was involved especially in the planning of the main stained glass window for the chapel along with Robert Harmon, an associate of Emil Fries, Incorporated, of Saint Louis, Missouri, the artist of the Word of God window. Gwinn outlined in a pamphlet an interesting depiction of the Crucifixion based on Luke’s Gospel. As the central figure Christ hangs on the Cross, the present thief on the left remains undistorted and linked together with Christ by the mantle of color. The figure of the thief on the right side of Christ is less stable, symbolizing the lack of faith of the thief and suggesting chaos perpetuated by unbelief. The window encapsulates the all-inclusiveness and omnipresence of God by depicting the letter “Alpha” at the bottom of the window complemented by the letter “Omega” at the top. All the elements that reside between these two Greek letters represent the power of the Word of God as interpreted in vivid stained glass imagery.

In the late second century, Clement of Alexandria provided a manual of appropriate symbols for early Christians to utilize as a sign or seal of their faith in Christ. Upon examining Clement’s stylistic directives, visitors to Vanderbilt University Divinity School’s Benton Chapel may be surprised when gazing at the ironwork adorning the chapel’s exterior and discovering the same symbols Clement endorses.

The Laity’s Primer on the Art Work of Benton Chapel

A Bountiful Tableau

The essayist was graduated from Swarthmore College where she received the Baccalaureate in religion with honors and served as president of the African American Student Society.

Benton Chapel contains small and large groups of artworks, such as the exterior ironwork, that go unnoticed beyond the dominant stained glass window above the entryway. The ironwork features of Benton Chapel are a little-recognized element of the overall artistic program of the structure; however, they are compelling in their simple material beauty and by their ability to convey larger themes through the use of well-known symbols. Before entering the chapel, one only has to glance skyward to understand how the small elements of the chapel convey a theological message through recognizable symbols and how the works of art in the chapel, on every scale, will complement one another and employ a visual language to enhance the acts of worship that occur within the walls.

Benton Chapel was constructed as part of the Divinity Quadrangle with funding from a John D. Rockefeller grant awarded in 1939. The architectural firm overseeing the project was Brush, Hutchinson, and Gwinn, currently named Hutchinson and Associates based in Atlanta. Gwinn was the chief architect of the chapel, an endeavor in which he took great pride. Langdon Gilkey, a professor at the Divinity School from 1954 to 1963, had a central role in the development of Benton Chapel. Gilkey was involved especially in the planning of the main stained glass window for the chapel along with Robert Harmon, an associate of Emil Fries, Incorporated, of Saint Louis, Missouri, the artist of the Word of God window. Gwinn outlined in a pamphlet an interesting depiction of the Crucifixion based on Luke’s Gospel. As the central figure Christ hangs on the Cross, the present thief on the left remains undistorted and linked together with Christ by the mantle of color. The figure of the thief on the right side of Christ is less stable, symbolizing the lack of faith of the thief and suggesting chaos perpetuated by unbelief. The window encapsulates the all-inclusiveness and omnipresence of God by depicting the letter “Alpha” at the bottom of the window complemented by the letter “Omega” at the top. All the elements that reside between these two Greek letters represent the power of the Word of God as interpreted in vivid stained glass imagery.
The Word of God Window

Intentions of the Artist and Architects

The theme of the central window in Benton Chapel of Vanderbilt University Divinity School is the Word of God, a reference from both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. At the base of the window are the waters of chaos, an element depicting the moment prior to Creation when the Spirit of God moved upon the waters and the Creation became manifest through the Word of God.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, the earth into a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, and God’s Spirit hovered over the water.

GENESIS 1:2

By the Word of God the heavens were made; their whole array by the breath of His mouth; He collects the oceans together as though in a wineskin; He stirs the deeps in columns.

PSALM 148:6-7

In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

JOHN 1:1-2

Above the waters of chaos, one sees the Word of God represented as a seed with the vertical inscription, logos, which transliterated from the Greek means word. The seed is cast into the newly created world represented by the mantle containing figures of God’s creatures.

One who receives the seed in rich soil is the one who hears and understands the Word and yields a harvest and produces a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.

MATTHEW 13:23

(details from this register of the window are reproduced on the inside cover of this issue of The Spire.)

Entering the Creation is the Word of God Incarnate, Jesus Christ, represented by His Cross. On either side of His Cross are the crosses of the imitators who were crucified with Him. The crucified thief over the left retains form and integrity, because of the faith of the place consequentely, the thief is linked with Christ by the mantle of color which also contains the Chalice, the article of Communion with Christ’s Body and Blood. Because of the other thief’s failure to accept Christ, the cross on the right disintegrates into the chaos. The dramatic forms surrounding the Cross suggest the dramatic kinetics of this episode.

Surmounting the Cross and the Star of David is a red mantle which represents the Communion of Saints and their relation to the created order which Christ has come to redeem. The move- ment from the Greek letter Alpha in the lower register of the window to the letter Omicron in an upper register suggests the inclusiveness in time and space of the omnipotent God.

The Word of God Window was executed by artist Robert Harmon in association with Emil Frei, Incorporated, of St. Louis, Missouri. Harmon also prescribed the color patterns of the three hundred window panes in the cruciform chapel.

Funding for the purchase of The Word of God Window was provided by alumni of Vanderbilt University Divinity School in appreciation of the late Dean John Knox Pinxten and for the School. Benton became dean of the School of Religion in 1939 when he also accepted an appointment as a professor of the psychology and philosophy of religion, he served as the chairperson of the Graduate Department of Religion from 1942 to 1944. Benton’s University tenure as professor and dean concluded upon his death in 1956, the year when the School of Religion was renamed Vanderbilt University Divinity School.


(Documentation of the intentions of the artist and architects is from the Divinity School’s archives. Scriptural citations are from The Jerusalem Bible, reader’s edition.)
Infant with Ashes

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; Call a solemn assembly, gather the people, Sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders; Gather the children, even nursing infants. 

Joel 2:15-16

Midday, midweek in March, the eschatological moment: Reminded that we are dust, and unto dust we shall return, I receive my ashes, glad of one more chance for metanoia. Sooty forehead bowed and soul-subdued, I find my pew, Following a mother and her child returned to theirs.

From their inward gaze my eyes open on this pair; young Woman kneeling, infant asleep on the seat between us, That same smudge blazoned on his brow as ours—the same! But how? Is he a sinner too, so lately christened, callow, Sweet? Whose zeal was this: the mother’s or the priest’s?

I come to this sight fresh from teaching Job, who saw His virtue burned away and heard the Voice from the Whirlwind call his purity illusion. Who is good? Do we Call innocent those who are but ignorant of their guilt?

In Nineveh even the animals wore sackcloth, didn’t they?

Grace to the mother who gathers her infant at the breast.

Lady of silences, calm in your distress that death sucks Even the blooms of spring, I pray: Ora pro nobis Peccatóribus, now, in this noon of our new creation, And at the hour when our hearts refuse to turn again.

Charlotte Barr, BA’69

One’s a songwriter-playwright, another’s a music critic, and the third is a performance artist-poet—three different career trajectories. But Jill Webb-Hill, MEd’91, D’96; Bill Friskics-Warren, MDiv’84; and Marcus Hummon, D’88, have this in common: They’re following their own peculiar creative muses, and they all were shaped by Vanderbilt Divinity School.

They each arrived at the School on a hunch. They dimly discerned a need for vigorous ideas, clarity about matters of faith, and a sense of community—all ballast for their budding creative impulses. They weren’t seeking a clergy track or a traditional vocation. What exactly they were looking for eluded definition. What they got was news of liberation, an encounter with seriousness and purpose, and a framework for the play of ideas.

Webb-Hill, Friskics-Warren, and Hummon, were all pulled along, too, by the undertow of Music City. Nashville altered their horizons with its music, its stages and studios, and its regional obsession with sin and salvation.

So their vocations took shape at the mysterious intersection of personal biography and graduate school rigor and serendipity. These writers and artists enrolled because the Divinity School invited them to take the time to catch the sound of their own voices and questions. The School gave them room for the imagination.

And they hung on to the three interests that mattered to them—words, music, compassionate ideas—showing the world, and themselves, what’s possible.
A PECULIAR POETICAL ALCHEMY

S

he tells stories, one after another, about broken-down, small-town characters, people eaten up with gossip, sex, mean- shine, love, loss, self-defeat, perseverance, and God... the human condition with a Southern twang and a bluegrass soundtrack.

One story salutes a faithful member of Eastern Star, the women’s auxiliary of the Masonic Lodge. Another tattles on the most flirtatious woman in town, “Vickie Pickle’s Masonic Lodge. Another tattles on the most

God... the human condition with a Southern

shine, love, loss, self-defeat, perseverance, and

A Peculiar Poetical Alchemy. The record is shot through with
traits of risk and redemption in a close-knit world of ice cream socials, gravel driveways, and country churches, and it forever haunts the recording.

The process—Bennie Miller-McLemore, the Car-penter Professor of Pastoral Theology and Counseling; her predecessor, the late Liston Mills, the Oberlin Attonor Professor of Past- 

toral Theology and Counseling; and Vander-

bilt Chaplain Gay House Welch, PhD’80. He brought musicians in who played unbe-


tantism—haunts the term, too, just as it haunts the recording.

“Religion is so deep in the culture, you can’t write about the South without confronting it. I have no affection for the damage it could do but affection for the people who grew up in its midst.”

Jill Webb-Hill may not always want to be Minton Sparks. It’s a vocational calling for her, but she’s wary of letting it take over her life. Sometimes her work can feel as lost as can be,” she says. “Well, the more lost the better. If you get all the way lost, you run smack dab into the middle of your real life instead of going down a path that’s already been taken.”

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Friskics-Warren rides an irresistible dialectic—the call of theology, the passion of pop music, the harsh truth of human pain, yet the ultimate urge of human transcendence. “I’ve always been uncomfortable with hard-and-fast distinctions between the sacred and the secular,” he says. “I guess I’ve been trying to sort out what means for as long as I can remember.”

Based in Nashville, Friskics-Warren today is a nationally known music writer whose new book, *I’ll Take You There: Pop Music & the De facto Deaconship,* embodies his roving impulses—the life of the mind, the heart, the streets.

“Little Richard screaming ‘a-wop-bop-a-lu-bop’ and pounding manically at his piano is as magnificent an expression of someone trying to break through to some higher plane as I can imagine,” he declares. Friskics-Warren discerns a spiritual dimension behind all sorts of human endeavor. Arriving at Vanderbilt Divinity School in the early 1980s, he discovered transcendent impulses behind the feared syllables of contemporary theology—Tillich, Husserl, Gutierrez. But he was identifying transcendent yearnings with other names, too—Van Morrison, Public Enemy, Johnny Cash. “As a graduate student in theology at Van- dertbilt, I usually was downtown Nashville and then for six years worked two years for Storefront Ministry in the world of daily need. Starting in 1987, he attended to the taken-for-granted or everyday whether we know it or not. Ed was a revelation who quickly became an addiction.”

By his reckoning, Friskics-Warren’s vorac- ious interest in music goes back to age four and the early, giddy epiphanies of the Beatles—specifically February 9, 1964, when the Fab Four first aired on the Ed Sullivan Show. “With those harmonies and pressing rhythms, the Beatles were reaching for some- thing well beyond my suburban childhood,” he recalls. A few years later, deeper into the 1960s, he discovered Sly and the Family Stone—the jarring pointings of their second “There’s a Riot Going On.” The adult world of social tumult was cracking in his sensibility.

At Vanderbilt he bridged the worlds of music, writing, and social action. Besides Farley, two other people were decisive. “Theologian Sallie McFague (the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of Theology, emeritus) taught metaphorical theol- ogy and demanded that we write well,” he recalls. “She always impressed upon us the value and power of language. Her models of God encouraged us to be creative with image and metaphor, and the cliché quotient routinely went down when she was the teacher.”

And he met a woman early on at Vander- bilt who would become his wife, Mary Katherine (Kaki) Warren, MV ’92. They mar- ried in 1985 and are the parents of a son, Kaki Friskics-Warren, who would become a leading local voice for prison ministries and advocacy for the families of prisoners, blinded for her husband a new way of seeing the world—an empathy for the dispossessed. “She embodied a justice-seeking theology, a commitment to being where hurting peo- ple were and lifting them up and resisting whatever kept them down,” he says. “She taught me the importance of hospitality to folks who are struggling. That’s where God is at work in the world. In order to align with God, you’ve got to get busy.”

Her example drove him more fully into the world of daily need. Starting in 1987, he worked two years for Storefront Ministry in downtown Nashville and then for six years as director of the Nashville Coalition for the Homeless. He resigned from that position in 1994.

“I felt the leadership should be coming from the homeless and the former homeless themselves—the people who had experi- enced the humiliations and indignities of liv- ing on the streets,” he said. “I took to my first music, music, and wrote about the Music, and wrote about the Music...”

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Marcus Hummon is a gold-standard Music City songwriter who has created hits for such big-name performers as Sara Evans, the Dixie Chicks, Wynonna, Tim McGraw, and Rascal Flatts and who won his first Grammy this year.

It’s his living and his glory. And yet other ambitions haunt him.

Hummon is preoccupied with tumultuous ideas, world-changing themes—monotheism, racism, Shakespeare, the Civil War, the afterlife, the dynamics of peace and hope. For him, it’s an artistic quest that was marked early by a globetrotting childhood as the son of a U.S. State Department official and later by a pivotal year at the Divinity School.

Without leaving country songwriting behind, Hummon has been pouring himself into aesthetic expressions that can accommodate his big-canvas concepts. Where others fear to tread, Hummon marched straight into a new creative challenge—musical theater and folk-rock opera.

“If you’re a civics duty, contends Hummon, “Artists have a civic duty to be fearless.”

He’s at work now on a new creation, Tut, perhaps his most ambitious so far—a dual narrative that poonders the emotional world of 1350 B.C.E. Egypt with its elaborate royal burial practices and the twentieth-century obsession of the archaeologist, Howard Carter, who discovered Tutankhamun’s tomb in 1922. The work-in-progress is shaping up to be an expansive meditation on tourism, finitude, and immortality.

“We’re driven by lust, power and greed, but ultimately, immortality is the endgame, the big question,” Hummon says. “What fascinates me is how the Egyptians dealt with death. Nobody died like the Egyptians.”

Hummon is used to embracing the big picture. Born in 1960, he was a precocious kid who got to see the world, spending part of his childhood in Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Italy. His parents exposed him to art and literature along the way. He learned a deep affection for Islamic culture and got acquainted with Africa, its beauty, its soaring political conflicts. He took up guitar and piano as a teenager, as well as sports.

Returning statute for college, he played football at Williams in the early 1980s. The music prevailed. He went to Los Angeles to get his start as a performer and wound up being intrigued by reports about the Nashville scene, a synergistic colony of new music writing. In 1996 he moved to town and quickly got signed as a songwriter with a music publisher.

“I found a unique songwriting culture in Nashville—a fellowship, the seriousness of a community,” he says. “By 1998, this place was on fire.”

He had grown up Christian in his far-flung boyhood, but the evangelical Protestant accent of Southern culture was alien to him. He wanted to understand it, the better to succeed in Christian songwriting if need be, so in 1987 he spent an open-ended year at the Divinity School, a pivotal turn for him. He encountered ideas, he found diversity, and he met his wife.

“What I loved about Vanderbilt Divinity School is you could say anything,” he recalls. “Social justice was a priority. People weren’t kidding around about that. And the School embraced diversity. That’s what I was struck by—the courage to have real dialogue. In my time, that included shouting matches. That was great.”

He remembers Walter Harrlecen, the Distinguished Professor of Hebrew Bible, exeri- to, with special fondness. “I don’t know of anyone who could speak of the Hebrew Bible in such a way,” Hummon once remarked, “as the man he was.”

Within days of arriving at Vanderbilt, he also met a student colleague, a dynamo named Becca Stevens. “My first date with this beautiful woman was literary: learning out a homeless shelter, then maybe a beer afterward,” he recalls. “You fall in love with a person, but also with that person’s vision of the world. Becca is a woman of dogged hope who sees a sense of possibility in everything.”

Soon they married, and they are now the parents of three children. Stevens is an Epis- copal priest at Saint Augustine’s Chapel on Vanderbilt’s campus and founder of Magda- lene, a residential housing and recovery pro- gram for local women with a criminal history of prostitution and drug abuse.

After his Vanderbilt year, Hummon got a record deal as a country artist. He toured exhaustively, but ultimately, immortality is the endgame, the bigger picture. He didn’t fit him. It wasn’t much fun.

If I’m not going to challenge myself and people around me, then I’m not going to be vital or worthy of the people spending time and money to go see what I create. I don’t want to be just an entertainer.

“If I’m not going to challenge myself and people around me, then I’m not going to be vital or worthy of the people spending time and money to go see what I create. I don’t want to be just an entertainer. Artists have a civic duty to be fearless,” he says. “If I’m not going to challenge myself and people around me, then I’m not going to be vital or worthy of the people spending time and money to go see what I create. I don’t want to be just an entertainer.

“So I got a taste for the grandeur, the reach of theater when American Duet, his co-written musical play about two young men (one black, one white) searching for their artistic identities, premiered with the Actors Bridge Ensemble in Nashville in 1999.

“The first night, it was an incredible feeling to see the audience enjoy it,” he says. “And I remember thinking, ‘I’ve found it.’ It might be a fluke, but I want to keep doing this. This felt like home. As a theater writer you write to create those big moments of life and art. Each story has come from my own life and theological underpinnings. But I look back to classical ideals of theater. The ancient Greeks challenged their leaders, and Arthur Miller once remarked, ‘Other than saving someone’s life on a medical gurney, writing a great play is the best thing you can do for a culture.’ I want to follow in that tradition.’

He’s in contact now with the New York theater world, probing new opportunities for staging his works. His music is rousing, optimi- mistic, inviting audiences to feel something deeper. It carries ambivalent themes of reli- gious nonviolence and violence, too, the unyielding contradictions of the twenty-first century.

“I bounce between grace-filled images of fallen feathers from an angel’s wings; the shattered pieces of our past; the art of theater when

When all is said and done, what else have I but a stained glass love, and are we not for you how could this love come shining through?"

Hold the pieces in your hand and think of how glass is made from sand, how sand together becomes clay, and clay is flesh when God breathes our way.

When all is said and done, what else have I but a stained glass love, and are we not for you how could this love come shining through?"

The Art of

It’s her living and his glory. And yet other ambitions haunt her.

“Artists have a civic duty to be fearless,” he says. “If I’m not going to challenge myself and people around me, then I’m not going to be vital or worthy of the people spending time and money to go see what I create. I don’t want to be just an entertainer. Artists have a civic duty to be fearless,” he says.

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A Wondrous Man of Letters

What-a wondrous man is this, O history, history!
What-a wondrous man is this, O history!

With women, Jews, and kings, he made it interesting,
Through the halls of Divinity, we’ll sing on.

When from this School he leaves, we’ll sing on; we’ll sing on;
When from this School he leaves, we’ll sing on.

We’ll sing his memory in Vanderbilt history,
Through the halls of Divinity, we’ll sing on; we’ll sing on.

Through the halls of Divinity, we’ll sing on.

T o commemorate Professor Dale Johnson’s tenure of thirty-seven years at Vanderbilt University, alumni were invited by Dean James Hudnut-Beumler to compose letters to Professor Johnson upon the occasion of his retirement. We are pleased to publish excerpts from the correspondence Professor Johnson received, and we dedicate this issue of The Spire to him in appreciation for his commitment to scholarship and his concern for the intellectual and spiritual formation of his students.

Knowing of Professor Johnson’s interest in Sacred Harp singing, students from the Divinity School and the graduate department of religion also paid tribute to him during the final community coffee hour for the academic year by singing “What a Wondrous Man is This,” their variation of the Sacred Harp hymn, “What Wondrous Love Is This.” In honor of the Drucilla Moore Buffington Professor of Church History, emeritus, they sang.

Above: Dale A. Johnson, the Drucilla Moore Buffington Professor of Church History, emeritus

I t has happened every semester since I began teaching five years ago: students shuffle into my courses in church history and expect to spend the term learning dates, names, and events. This is what “history” is to them. What they don’t know is that I learned to teach church history from Dale Johnson, a fellow who never allowed history to be just the facts. Sure, there were always “chronological items of the day” to master. But church history always had to mean more than that: you insisted that we see broad patterns, discern connections, and most impor-
tantly determine why any of these matters to us today. At long last, I learned that this is what you meant when you asked the haunting question, “What is the problem here?” Because of your influence, I had no right to imply that my own students with a similar question of relevance: “So what?” I require my students to construct an accurate story based upon the facts of history, and they must learn to assess historical materials—especially primary source docu-
ments—in their historical contexts. But the task that always puzzles them at first is that they must reflect on the relevance of historical issues for people of faith today. With what questions are the people of the past strug-
gling that are relevant for us today? How is our situation different from theirs, and what impor-
tantly determine why any of this matters to us today? I came to the Divinity School from a small town and was anxious about being in a strange land. Your reassurance inspired me to understand study as conversation, even a sacred conversation.

STEVE MONEHOLLEN, MDIV’72, DMIN’73

G ood fortune did not have to mean just the facts. Sure, there were always “chronological items of the day” to master. But church history always had to mean more than that: you insisted that we see broad patterns, discern connections, and most impor-
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I clearly remember my first meeting with you when I entered the Divinity School. I was working in the Divinity Library with Steve Gordy and Nancy Braun. Steve, as usual, was somewhat irrelevant and began teasing you. Nancy panicked, grabbed me, and said, “That is Dale Johnson; what could Steve be thinking?”

From other students I had heard that you were a pastor to your students, that your teaching style was engaging and dynamic, that you were a person of integrity and a teacher with a dry wit, and that I needed to hurry and take your class that would become the most moving learning experience I had at the Divinity School. The large, green, unwieldy computer print-outs you distributed felt sacred.

The atmosphere at the School was charged with excitement that year. Sallie McFague was the new dean, the women’s community was growing in new numbers, McFague was the new dean, the women’s community was growing in new numbers, and the Black Seminarians were making their presence known. I remember believing that I was absolutely in the right place and could not believe my good fortune. The School was an oasis where honest dialogue prevailed on the Vanderbilt campus. I did not know then that you would become a cen-
tral champion to the women’s office and lend your aid to our struggle to find our collective voice and to learn about the history of our efforts. I recall thinking that you were, at first glance, an unlikely hero for the women’s community, but slowly we began to gravitate to the sound of your voice in the halls, in meetings, and in your classrooms. You became committed to our cause, and as a scholar, you began to research the women who had spoken for centuries before us and documented their words; you developed a class that would become the most moving learning experience I had at the Divinity School. The large, green, unwieldy computer print-outs you distributed felt sacred.

NADIA LAHRUSSKY, PhD’84

W e all never forget the assignment that changed me as a scholar, or rather challenged my view of myself as one who could become a scholar. The question we were asked to discuss was “What was at stake in the Lord’s Supper controversy?” Your writ-
ten comments inspired and enthused the ambivalent student I was at that time. I began to see myself in a different light, with possibilities for vocation that I had ignored, if indeed I could imagine them at all. It was amidst the themes of the Reformation, in the context of your classroom, where complexi-
ties and possibilities came alive intellectually and theologically for me. Your vocational tap-
entry ignited the collective of those deep connections, a tapestry woven of threads from the church, the academy, and the lives of those who make them possible.

My son, born in 1985 at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, has been accepted to the Divinity School. In our earlier discuss-
You once said to me in response to my complaining about the relevance of church history for persons studying pastoral care that history teaches us much about the patterns of religious responses and the depth of historical truths that live on in people’s lives. I have often remembered your words as I sit with families and friends as they struggle with pain, guilt, redemption, and suffering. Being able to see the parallels between what has gone before and current struggles often affords me the relevance of tradition and the comfort of the Word.

Jo Clark Wilson, MDiv’78

There can be no doubt of what will always be my favorite moment of any of your classes—there was a most remarkable rendition of the “Vear of Bray.” But what I have taken away with the most gratitude is your kindness. Many were the times when I gave graceless, incorrect, or even absurd answers to your questions in class, but you never once made me feel stupid. As an artist with an interest in theology, I had developed the required church history compendium of my degree program, but not after I had had one of your courses. Now, eligibility to bring church history back to life and show the relevance to current issues and reflections of faith in a talent—no doubt—but your genuine concern and affection for teaching, for your students, and for the ministry of Vanderbilt Divinity School to the world is what has made you outstanding.

Sandra Ward-Angell, MDiv’85

The Commodore will accompany Professor Johnson to the golf course during his retirement. Among the gifts the professor of church history received from students to commemorate his thirty-seven years of service to the University history are a large golf bag, an engraved golf putter, and a gold watch. Students also presented him with a golf club and a golf ball. The Commodore will accompany Professor Johnson to the golf course during his retirement.

Andrew Thompson, MDiv’01

I appreciate the example of piety, or as the Methodists term it, “holy living” that you provided for us. I learned from you that it is important to love the people we serve as God loves them. I knew you shared this “pastor’s heart” not only with those entering ordained ministry, but with those entering the teaching field. You reminded us that we could have knowledge, but if we did not have love, it was in vain.

Daryl Fassler, MDiv’76

I distinctly remember your criticism of my senior essay which was comprised of several sermons addressing issues of prison ministry. You stated the sermons sounded more like messages. This criticism was quite difficult to hear—not only because your words as a professor meant much to me—but because I had tried to gain more experience preaching, but the minister in setting for my field education would not allow me to preach.

Years later, I preached at Trinity Presbyterian Church where you attend; my sermon alluded to the brutality of the death of Jephtha’s daughter and the brutality of Matthew Shepard’s death—and how no one attempted to prevent these deaths. After the service, you sought me and said the words I had forgotten I had wanted to hear: “That was a very good sermon.”

Emily R. Cheney, PhD’94

Two of the parties you and Normal sponsored for students stand out in my memory—one on Martin Luther’s birthday and another one when you played a board game titled “The Reformation.” I cannot recall the details of the game except that I was Spain, and two other players represented the Turkic Empire and the Popc formed an unholy alliance against me, sank all my ships and destroyed my army.

You are a model of good teaching that still influences my own strategies and practices for lectures, seminars, and examinations. We all laughed easily in our seminars which were full of good humor; we looked forward to coffee and to lunch with you at a table in the refectory, and we felt we could come to you with our problems and concerns. For example, Robert Early came to your office after you had needed a wife, and we all watched him find Kim there.

Match.com has nothing on you.

Betty DeBrec, PhD’88

During the 2005-2006 academic year, Vanderbilt University Divinity School claimed three Rhodes Scholars among the facility. Ted Smith, appointed in 2003 as an assistant professor of divinity and director of the program in theology and practice, was in residence at Jesus College, Dale Johnson, who began his tenure in 1960, read modern history at Worcester College, and Brad Braxton, appointed in 2004 as an associate professor of homiletics and New Testament, matriculated at Trinity College. As a Rhodes Scholar, Johnson served his second baccalaureate at Oxford in 1959 and returned to the university to earn the master of arts degree in 1963.

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Andrew Thompson, MDiv’01
**Conscientious Objector**

I shall die, but that is all I shall do for Death.
I hear him leading his horse out of the stall; I hear the clatter on the barn-floor.
He is in haste; he has business in Cuba, business in the Balkans,
many calls to make this morning.
Though he flicks my shoulders with his whip, I will not tell him
what my heart does. With his hoof on my breast, I will not tell him
whether the boy hides in the swamp.
I will not tell him that I am this close to forty-five, that I am
of no use to my enemies either.
Though he promise me much, I will not map him the route to any man's door.
I will not tell him where the black cream from these grapes,
I will not tell him the whereabouts of my friends or of my enemies.
I shall die, but that is all I shall do for Death; I am not on his pay-roll.
I shall die, but that is all I shall do for Death.

*Conscientious Objector* was among the poems Maya Angelou recited during her lecture at Vanderbilt University on February 27, 2006.

**Age Divine, or Confessions of a Dutiful Daughter**

BY AMY LYLES WILSON, MTS2

O prah tells those of us who are mid-
die-aged that fifty is the new thirty. I am this close to forty-five, so I am
not sure what that means for me. If it means I am really twenty-something, then my body
owes me an explanation for the widening
stomach bug. The Wilsons perse-
vere. So I wasn't sure what my parents' reac-
tion would be. Would they disown me? Even
worse, would they make me stay in law school?

...I spent my first semester waiting for a dean to toss
me out of the ivory tower once word got around that
I was not bound for the pulpit or a doctorate....

So that's how my parents told me to go and do what I wanted to do, that I didn't have to become a lawyer just because everybody else seemed to think it made sense. To
this day I don't know what kind of fruit my parents thought I might be, but I remain grateful for their understanding. The next day I dropped out of law school and enrolled in graduate school to study journalism, with
my parents' support, and my own dreams intact.

I was still lugging some of those same
books around that I was used to carrying in my bag.

So it was with my own kind of fear and
imagination that I attended Histo-
y of Religion in America for the first
time. Quickly scanning my peers for anyone who looked as
if he or she might have some
thing like this:

...I spent my first semester waiting for a dean to toss
me out of the ivory tower once word got around that
I was not bound for the pulpit or a doctorate....

BY AMY LYLES WILSON

Amy Lyles Wilson

**gleanings**

**Conscientious Objector**
Age Divine continued
event those who know the Reverend Arnold Slater, D’32, well may have been surprised that he kept a December 2005 preaching engagement. He had broken his hip two weeks prior to the commitment; however, Slater, pastor emeritus of Pilgrim Congregational Church in Chattanooga, was determined to continue an annual tradition of preaching a sermon on the occasion of his birthday. While he may have been confined to a wheelchair, there was nothing confined in the spirit of the one-hundred-year-old Arnold Slater. The centenarian preached an enthusiastic Christmas sermon before a congregation of two hundred friends and family members who gathered in Patten Chapel on the campus of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Slater still speaks with the lift of his native English. He came to Vanderbilt after the Congregational seminary was he attending in Atlanta closed its doors.

“The denomination informed the ten seminarians that arrangements had been made with Vanderbilt for us to finish our studies there,” remembers Slater, “so in 1929, we came to Nashville.”

“At Vanderbilt we found the kind of institution that we thoroughly enjoyed,” he continues. “Vanderbilt had good scholarship—academically it was fine—but we liked the spirit,” he adds. “It was broad, it was not narrow-minded; it was not sectarian, and it gave us what we were looking for at that time—a broad, inclusive sense of fellowship in the ministry. And we found that the professors were very open, very honest, and very good.”

Slater’s years at Vanderbilt were not without a major effort. “I was just about to complete my time there, and I had just married,” he says. “We were living in Wesley Hall, which housed the divinity students, and it burned to the ground. And even with clothes, notes, Bibles, everything—every single thing—burned to the ground. And when we went back, we were broke, and that, we had nothing except our faith and the knowledge in our heads.”

His Vanderbilt days proved important not only in his ministerial life but in his personal life as well. “I served a little church, Highland Chapel, just north of Nashville in a town called Ridgedale,” he says. “That is the reason I married my wife, and I served that church on the weekends for about three years while I was a student at Vanderbilt. For a number of years, they depended on the Vanderbilt students to serve their congregation on the weekends, and it was very, very satisfactory.”

Another Vanderbilt experience planted the seeds for his ministry during the turbulent civil rights era.

“We had a professor who was very interested in civil rights, and some of us who were in his sociology class went over to Fisk University for a number of weeks,” Slater says. “We studied over there, and we got to know the students at Fisk, and that experience influenced our commitment to the civil rights movement.”

Slater, who was called to Pilgrim Congregational in 1944, was a well-respected member of the Chattanooga community by the 1960s when tensions surrounding civil rights reached a boiling point in many southern cities.

“It has always been a part of my belief to be inclusive,” he contends. “Fortunately, my church here in Chattanooga was willing to let me take my positions, even though sometimes my positions were not acceptable to a number of other people in town. All I did was to get with other people who had similar hopes and aspirations, and we met for weeks and weeks wondering how we should approach this business of desegregation. We had no plans; we did not want to make any unusual gestures. We would work with some of the black leaders and discuss our ideas with them, and then we would come in and meet with us. Whenever we had an opportunity, we would speak at a school and present our concerns and our interests. And when the very difficult days came and the stores were preventing the blacks from going in and eating, some of us decided that we would protest such discrimination. I was probably one of the first white men to eat with a black person in one of our downtown restaurants,” says Slater.

“And I must say there were times when we had meetings, even at my church, when we got phone calls saying that we better discontinue our efforts against segregation, or we would be sorry for what we did. Of course, we didn’t say any attention—we kept on going. But we were not aggressively belligerent; we just quietly believed that desegregation ought to come around. Wherever we went, as a group or as individuals, got an opportunity to give our point of view, we did it. And fortunately, we think—we like to think, anyhow—that the influence of this group that had met for months before desegregation became a real part of the Chattanooga community was that we had created an atmosphere in which black leaders and white leaders could meet with mutual respect.”

In 1971, Slater took a well-deserved retirement—or so he thought. Several Chattanooga residents who spent their weekends on Chickamauga Lake had been meeting for Sunday morning services.

“I had retired, and I thought I was through with the church, but I was mistaken, but I happened to be there...
The Habit of Moderation continued

The Sunday the minister who had been serv-
ing them resigned,” Slater says. “There were Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, even Catholics, and one Jewish family,” he recalls. “We just met as a fellowship, and we had short, brief informal services. We did not organize; we had no leadership, no decisions, no stewards, no treasury; they just called me to serve as pastor from year to year. It turned out I served thirty-four years up to last year. And it turned out to be one of the most satis-
fying experiences of my whole ministry. I hope I’ll be able to serve them this summer.”

And how does he feel about having turned one hundred years old? “All I can say is, God is good to me,” Slater answers. “I’ve had good health all my life—oh, I’ve had some occasions where I needed to go to the hospital—but I’ve been very, very happy. And satisfied. And when some-
body asks me how I account for my longevi-
ty, I say, ‘just by being moderate in my habits—moderate in my eating, moderate in my exercise, moderate in my fun. In other words, I try to be a reasonable person who believes that God has given me a body and that I should take care of it.’

Slater’s daughter, Betty Soward, adds, “Most of all, I think he determined, point-
ing out that her father also recovered from stomach cancer seventeen years ago. “He has been very happy, very satisfied. And when some-
body asks me how I account for my longevi-
ty, I say, ‘just by being moderate in my habits—moderate in my eating, moderate in my exercise, moderate in my fun. In other words, I try to be a reasonable person who believes that God has given me a body and that I should take care of it.’”

Earl W. Downing, Oberlin, BD’54, of Brighton Townhip, Michigan, was featured in an article published in the August 18, 2005, issue of the Livingston Community News. The Methodist minister was recog-
nized for his commitment to the Brighton Center for the Performing Arts and for his project, Mission to Poland, a volunteer educa-
tional program for teaching English in Krakâw and Tarnîw.

Lawrence H. Balleine, MDIV’75, is the author of From a Soldier of Rome to a Soldier for Christ: An Easter Source Drama published by CSS Publishing Company. He recently com-
pleted a forty-day trip down U.S. Highway 41 from upper Michigan to Miami which will serve as the basis for his next book on Lenten themes. The Spirit is grateful to John R. Kil-
linger Jr., who taught homiletics at the Divinity School from 1964 to 1985, for sub-
mitting this class note. Alumnus/ae also may be interested in Professor Killenger’s most recent book. Winter Solstice: Through the Spiritualidad of the Winter Days, published by Crossroad Publishing Company, in which he recounts his experience at the Divinity School. Professor Killenger Jr., who taught homiletics at the Divinity School from 1964 to 1985, for submitting this class note. Alumnus/ae also may be interested in Professor Killenger’s most recent book. Winter Solstice: Through the Spiritualidad of the Winter Days, published by

Mary Fern Richin, BSN’75, MSN’94, MT ’06, works in community outreach with the Nashville YWCA Domestic Violence Center. She writes, “My work with vulnera-
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Alumni/ae Class Notes

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Barbara G. McGarey, MDIV’78, of Duncan, Oklahoma, has received the doctorsate of ministry from McCormick Theological Seminary after successfully defending her thesis titled “New Medium, New Community, Same Mission.”


James McKeown, MDIV’71, DMin’95, is the author of Possessing Joy: Building a Wealth of Joy in a World Starved for Love published by iUniverse.com. Minister of the First Christian Church in Weeping Water, Nebraska, McKeown wrote the book in an effort to connect the psychology and spirituality of joy to human fulfillment.

Bryan C. Bangeri, MDIV’75, DMin’97, research associate at the Foysier Center for the Study of Ethics and American Institutions at Indiana University in Bloomington, is the author of Counting to God and Nature: Toward a Theocentric, Naturalistic, Theological Ethics published in the Princetone Theological Monograph Series.

W. Alan Smith, MDIV’79, DMin’95, professor of religion at Florida Southern College in Lakeland, participated in the 2005 Oxford Round Table at Lincoln College, Oxford Uni-

verse, where he presented a paper titled “Faith-Based Initiatives Meet the Public Schools: Florida’s School Voucher Program and its Effects on Education, Faith, and Pub-
lic Policy.” Established in 1989, the Oxford Round Table convenes to discuss major issues in religion, including the role of religion in the United States and England. The subject for the 2005 meeting was “Religion, Educa-
tion, and the Role of Government.”

James J. H. Price, PhD’79, professor of reli-
gious studies at Lynchburg College in Vir-
ginia, is the recipient of the 2006 T.A. Abbott Award for Faculty Excellence given by the Board of Directors of Higher Education and Leadership Ministries of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. In his letter of nomination, Dr. Vernon Miles, dean of Lynchburg College, remarked, “Professor Price demonstrates character and conviction in his ability to interact with all individuals by treating them as worthy of attention and equality. His actions infer that he truly believes that each individual contributes to the greater good of society and that each individual is important. Winter Solstice: Through the Spiritualidad of the Winter Days, published by Crossroad Publishing Company, in which he recounts his experience at the Divinity School. Professor Killenger Jr., who taught homiletics at the Divinity School from 1964 to 1985, for submitting this class note. Alumnus/ae also may be interested in Professor Killenger’s most recent book. Winter Solstice: Through the Spiritualidad of the Winter Days, published by Crossroad Publishing Company, in which he recounts his experience at the Divinity School.

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William Edwin Jacobs, MDIV’76, DMin’98, is the author of Answers to Unanswered Questions of Life and Religion published by Victory Publishing Company in Decatur, Illinois. The book ventures answers to vital questions of philosophy and religion from a scientifically enlightened trans-denominational Christian perspective. Having served congregations in Indiana, Florida, and Illinois, Schmidt has served Episcopal parishes in West Vir-
ginia, Missouri, and Alabama.
Gregory Reece, MDiv’92, is the author of A Place Between Heaven and Earth, a book the publica tion of the King by I.B. Tauris Publishers. Reece explores the reasons why the cult of Elvis Presley has become something posthumously and how the King of Rock ‘n’ Roll has become transformed into a god-like figure.

Ellen T. Armour, PhD’92, who has begun her tenure as the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Associate Professor of Theology at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, and Susan M. St. Ville, a therapist at the Madison Center, are coeditors of Bodies Citizens: Reli gion and Justice Butler published by Columbia University Press. Among the essayists are Teresa Homsey, PhD’94, assistant professor of religion and director of the women and gender studies program at Drury University, and Ken Stone, PhD’94, professor of Bible, culture, and hermeneutics at the Chicago Theological Seminary.

Christopher Sanders, MDiv’95, the former director of development and Alumni/ae relations at the Divinity School, has been named director of development at St. Luke’s Community House in Nashville. He will maintain his connection to the Divinity School by serving as an Alumni/ae council representative for the class of 1995.

Evan Flexberg, PhD’96, lecturer in pastoral theology and pastoral counseling at Vanderbilt University Divinity School and the graduate department of religion, has earned the certification of Diplomate from the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. She is the founder of A Talking Place Pastoral Counseling Service in Brentwood, Tennessee.

Jonathan Paul Strandford, PhD’96, has been appointed to the board of trustees for the Fund for Theological Education. As a trustee elected by the Association of Theological Schools, Strandford will serve a term of three years and help the board fulfill its mission to encourage a new generation of people to consider vocations in ministry and theo logical scholarship. He serves as director for theological education for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Unit for Voca tions, and will begin his work in Chicago as director of the steering committee of the ELCA fund for Leaders in Mission.

Cynthia Ann Curtis, MAT’97, MDiv’06, the 2006 recipient of the Elliott F. Shepard Prize for academic distinction in the discipline of church history, has accepted a one-year teaching appointment in the religion department of Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee. Curtis also conducts a Bible study class for high-school students at Christ Church Cathedral.

Monica Anita Coleman, MDiv’06, has been named assistant professor of systematic theology at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago where she served for two years as director of womanist religious studies and assistant professor of religion.

Daniel Grant Deffenbaugh, PhD’03, associate professor of religion at Hastings College, was named the 2005 Nebraska Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). A pulpit supply minister for the Central Nebraska presidency, Deffenbaugh also serves as vice president of The Open Table, an ecumenical organization that pro vides food for the hungry.

Asha Daley Hunter, MD’04, recipient of the 2006 Nella May Overby Memorial Award for honors in field education from the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. She is the founder of A Talking Place Pastoral Counseling Service in Brentwood, Tennessee.

Jane Ellen Nickell, MDiv’06, was appointed chaplain of Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania, on February 1, 2006. An ordained minister for the United Methodist Church, Nickell is completing her work toward the doctorate of ministry at the University of Denver.

January 12, 2006, was the J.D. Owen Prize for accomplishments in the study of Hebrew Bible at the Divinity School, serves as minister of congregational care at the Temple Church in Nashville, Tennessee.

George Wyatt Cunningham, MDiv’05, was ordained to the order of deacon and Received the J. D. Owen Prize for accomplishments in the study of Hebrew Bible at the Divinity School, serves as minister of congregational care at the Temple Church in Nashville, Tennessee.

He is the founder of A Talking Place Pastoral Counseling Service in Brentwood, Tennessee.

July 23.

Ard works in marketing, national policy, and program development for the Rural Coalition (Coalición Rural), an alliance of regionally and culturally diverse organizations dedicated to building a more just and sustainable food system that returns to minority and other households, farmers and rural communities. The alliance works to ensure just and fair working conditions for farm workers, protect the environment, and deliver safe and healthy food to consumers. Walker was graduated in May 2005 from the Washington College of Law at American University and is an associate in the financial institutions department for the firm of WilmerHale. They reside in Washington, D.C.

Theology and the University of Denver. He has been awarded fellowships to pursue a doctoral degree in philosophy in the fall of 2007.

Shelli Yoder, MDiv’06, has been appointed executive director of the Eating Disorders Coalition of Tennessee, a nonprofit organization estab lished in 2001 by health professionals and community leaders as a resource of hope, help, and support for anyone affected by disordered eating.

Bryan Bennington Bliss, MTS’06, director of youth and young adults for Williamson’s Chapel United Methodist Church in Mooresville, North Carolina; his wife, Michelle, and their daughter, Eleanor Grace (Nora), announce the birth of Bryan Ben nington (Ben) Bliss II. Ben was welcomed to the Bliss family on Father’s Day, June 18, 2006.

Jason Crosby, MDiv’06, was ordained to the ministry on April 2, 2006, at the First Baptist Church of Battle Creek, Michigan.

Aman Maran Aed, MTS’06, Michael Waller, MTS’05, and Courtney Evans, MTS’05, celebrated the second anniversary of their wedding on August 14, 2006. And works in marketing, national policy, and program development for the Rural Coalition (Coalición Rural), an alliance of regionally and culturally diverse organizations dedicated to building a more just and sustainable food system that returns to minority and other households, farmers and rural communities. The alliance works to ensure just and fair working conditions for farm workers, protect the environment, and deliver safe and healthy food to consumers. Walker was graduated in May 2005 from the Washington College of Law at American University and is an associate in the financial institutions department for the firm of WilmerHale. They reside in Washington, D.C.

Theology and the University of Denver. He has been awarded fellowships to pursue a doctoral degree in philosophy in the fall of 2007.
Lindsey Blackburns, MTs’06, traveled during the summer of 2006 to Kinshasa, Congo, where she served as a volunteer at an HIV/AIDS hospice.

John McFadzean Felddacker, MDiv’06, the 2006 recipient of the Umphrey Lee Dotson Award for exemplifying the mission and vision of Vanderbilt University Divinity School, serves as associate pastor at West End United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee.

William Travis Leiter Garn, MTs’06, serves as associate youth minister at Brentwood United Methodist Church.

Peter Whitley Gray, MTs’06, a postulant in the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi, attends Virginia Theological Seminary in preparation for ordination in the Episcopal Church. He attended Vanderbilt University Divinity School as a Carpenter Scholar and received the Academic Achievement Award and the Wilbur F. Tillitt Prize in theology during Commencement 2006.

Sherry Narimore Harris, MTs’06, serves as an associate pastor at Vestavia Hills United Methodist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.

Amy Kahelen Jay, MTs’06, attends the law school of the University of Law at the University of Louisville.

James Andrew Metger, PhD’06, received the 2006 Luke-Arts Prize at Vanderbilt University for his dissertation titled Reading Consumption and Wealth in Luke’s Travel Narrative. He has accepted an appointment as visiting assistant professor in the department of religion and philosophy at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa.

Kristen Michelle Taylor, MTs’06, has accepted a position with Teach for America as an elementary school teacher in Saint Louis, Missouri.

Obituaries

H. Hugh Kelfy, BD’44, of Brewerton, New York, on May 10, 2006, at the age of 89. He served as pastor in 1971 as a minister for the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ.

Donald H. Fortune, Oberlin, B8, of Lake Wales, Florida, on October 14, 2006, at the age of 77.

Thomas D. Peterson, BA’42, BD’52, MA’56, of Greenfield, New York, on December 21, 2005, at the age of 82. A trustee for the Wesley Health-Care Center and a board member of the Foundation for Banque Music in Saratoga Springs, he was ordained as a minister for the United Methodist Church in 1951 and served congregations in New Jersey, Massachusetts, and New York.

George A. Parsons Jr., Oberlin, BD’49, of Columbus, Ohio, on June 30, 2005, at the age of 84. A developer of work projects around the world, he traveled to Nicaragua to immunize youth during a severe outbreak of polio in 1969. Parsons served twenty-five years as senior pastor of Garfield Memorial Methodist Church, and he will be remembered for his progressive theology and visionary thinking.

Don E. Marrieta Jr., BD’50, PhD’59, of Palm Beach, Florida, on March 30, 2006, at the age of 79. A former Methodist minister who later became an Episcopal priest and environmental activist, Marrieta served as the first Adelaide Snyder Professor of Ethics at Florida Atlantic University. He won the Philosophy of Sexuality, Introduction to Ancient Philosophy, Beyond Certainty: A Phenomenological Approach to Moral Reflection, and From People and the Planet: Holism and Humanism in Environmental Ethics. He also served as coeditor for Experiential Philosophy and Experiential Activism.

Donald Eugene Kirby, MDiv’52, of Nashua, New Hampshire, on May 9, 2006, at the age of 86. A retired Methodist minister who served congregations in Tennessee and Florida, he also worked in addictions counseling and management through his appointment as a惩戒ive director of regional alcoholism councils in Nashville and Hartford, Connecticut, and as an addictions program supervisor for the city of Cleveland, Ohio, and for the state of Florida.

Churchill Hunt Cox, BD’53, of Peru, Indiana, on March 5, 2006, at the age of 85. He was a minister in 1973 as a minister for the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ.

Robert F. Berkley, BD’53, of South Hadley, Massachusetts, on December 23, 2005. An ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, he taught for forty years in the religion department of Mount Holyoke College.


J. William Turley, BD’58, of Morgantown, West Virginia, on December 5, 2005. He was pastor, rector, of the Spruce Street United Methodist Church in Morgantown.

Herman Dix Archer, BD’59, of Memphis Tennessee, on December 3, 2004, at the age of 73.

James R. Denney, MDiv’62, of Bluefield, West Virginia, on October 29, 2005, at the age of 72. A minister for the West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church, he served as a pastor for thirty-six years.

Howard A. Hayes, DMin’64, of Johnson City, Tennessee, on October 14, 2005, at the age of 98. Among the founders of Midwest Conference Ministers’ Agency, he served as a senior pastor where he served as academic dean and professor of church history and assumed these roles at Minnesota Bible College in Rochester. He also held faculty appointments at Milligan College in Tennessee and at Bluefield College of Evangelism in West Virginia.

John R. Long, DMin’66, of Dalton, Ohio, on January 30, 2006, at the age of 86. A retired Lutheran pastor for the Ohio Synod, he served as president for the Ohio Chaplain Association and was a member of the Board of Mental Health in Wooster.

George E. Sanford, BD’57, of Aclacha, Florida, on February 14, 2006, at the age of 81.

Harold Evan Borgwall Jr., BD’68, of Cumming, Georgia, on February 16, 2006, at the age of 62. A member of the American Psychological Association and the Northern Indiana Methodist Conference, he served as director of the rope and St. Charles United Methodist Church Counseling Center in Georgia from 1979 to 1992.

Edwin Franklin Belser, MDiv’69, of Pellman, Arkansas, on June 25, 2005, at the age of 65. A member of the clergy for the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church, he earned his degree in educational administration from the University of Alabama and held membership in the Alabama Counseling Society.

Ralph E. Hoffman, MDiv’70, of Inverness, Florida, on April 1, 2006, at the age of 81. He was pastor of the Inverness Christian Church of Inverness where he served the congregation from 1968 to 1989 and where he returned as volunteer pastor of pastoral care in 2004. He will be remembered for his profound commitment to community service.

William Fulton Conner, PhD’75, of Great Falls, Montana, on March 7, 2006, at the age of 81. A professor of philosophy at Phillips University in Enid, Oklahoma, he later served the congregation of First Christian Church in Hamilton, Montana.

Stuart Moore Jr., DMin’76, of Springfield, Tennessee, on February 25, 2006, at the age of 75. He was a retired minister for the Presbyterian Church.

Roland Morris Travis, DMin’76, of Eilcott City, Maryland, on April 30, 2006, at the age of 80.

Jean Tallmon Bruhn, MDiv’81, of Millford, Nebraska, on April 18, 2006, at the age of 61. An accomplished pianist and music educator, she taught in the public school systems of Denver, Colorado, and Alberdeen, South Carolina, before moving to Charlotte, North Carolina, where she was named outstanding teacher of the year. While pursuing the master of divinity degree at Vanderbilt Divinity School, she served as musical director for Woodline United Methodist Church in Nashville. She graduated first in her class and received the Founder’s Medal during the 1981 commencement exercises. Upon her ordination, Bruhn served congregations in the Methodist Conference of Nebraska.

Clayde Jackson Wood, DMin83, of Springfield, Tennessee, on July 15, 2005, at the age of 90, following an illness of eight weeks. A partner with his father in the Pike & Brown Insurance Agency of Columbia, he was a real estate investor and worked at his office daily until the onset of his illness. A former trustee of Scarritt College, he was active in civic affairs and served as treasurer of the First United Methodist Church of Springfield for thirty-five years.

William Sloane Coffin, of Stratford, Vermont, on April 12, 2006, at the age of 81. A Presbyterian minister and civil rights activist, Freedman Rider, and antiwar campaigner, Coffin sought to inspire and encourage a generation and to call for an end to the Vietnam War and American military participation in said war. He was a tireless advocate for nuclear disarmament. He preached that courage was the only virtue possible, and he argued that the true patriot is “one who maintains a lover’s quail with one’s country.”

Alan J. Miller of the Divinity School will remember Coffin from the two academic terms he was in residence as the Anne Potter Wilson Distinguished Visiting Professor. Inscribed on the memorial card which the School received from the family was Coffin’s celebrated aphorism: “God’s love does not demand that we show him our love; it forces us to seek value; it creates value. It is not because we have value that we are loved; it is because we are loved that we have value. Our value is a gift, not an achievement.”

Karen Lynn Dolan, C’84, of Nashville, Tennessee, on May 1, 2006, at the age of 52, from the effects of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). As registrar for the Graduate School of Vanderbilt University, she will be remembered by the students in the graduate department of religion for her kindness, efficiency, candor, sense of humor, and courage.

Robert W. Funk, PhD’73, of Santa Rosa, California, and head of the Westar Institute, formerly also of Nashville, Tennessee, on July 1, 2005, at the age of 79. A professor of New Testament, the University of Arkansas, and a fellow at Harvard’s Divinity School from 1969 to 1969 and chair of the graduate department of religion, Funk was a distinguished teacher, writer, translator, and publisher in the field of religion. He retired from the University of Montreal to found the Westar Institute in 1996. A research and educational institute dedicated to the advancement of religious literacy, Westar’s first project, the Jesus Seminar, reviewed the quest for the historical Jesus begun by David Friedrich Strauss in the nineteenth century and later taken up by Albert Schweitzer at the beginning of the twentieth century. A Guggenheim Fellow and Fulbright Senior Scholar, Funk served as Annual Professor of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem and as executive secretary of the Society of Biblical Literature.

William Sloane Coffin

Robert W. Funk

Karen Dolan

William Sloane Coffin
Lou H. Silberman, the Hillel Professor of Jewish Literature and Thought, emeritus

Lou H. Silberman, the Hillel Professor of Jewish Literature and Thought, emeritus, of Tucson, Arizona, on June 6, 2006, at the age of 91. Before his appointment to Vanderbilt University in 1952, Silberman served as a rabbi in Omaha and in Dallas. During the twenty-eight years of his tenure at the University, he chaired the undergraduate department of religious studies, helped to establish the graduate department of religion, advanced the Judaica collection at the Divinity School Library, and encouraged Jewish and Christian communities to engage in critical dialogues about the implications of the Shoah in the years following World War II. For his distinguished service to Vanderbilt, he received the Thomas Jefferson Award in 1979. Silberman also was among a group of Vanderbilt professors who offered their resignations over the expulsion in 1960 of civil rights leader and Divinity School student James Lawson.

“If anyone built Jewish studies at Vanderbilt, it was Lou Silberman,” contends Dale Johnson, the Drucilla Moore Buffington Professor of Church History, emeritus. “His quiet dedication made Jewish studies an important part of the religious studies field of vision.”

“He was a patient but demanding mentor for graduate students and younger faculty members,” says Daniel Patte, professor of New Testament, early Christianity, and religious studies. “Professor Silberman’s scholarship found its most powerful expression in the cultures and religions of the world. In more than twenty years of study and writing on the subject I have become convinced of a major shift in Christianity’s North Atlantic Center of gravity. Contrary to many predictions, religion has survived with greater strength into the twenty-first century, and equally surprising, so has Christianity with ever-greater diversity.”

LAMIN SANNEH

Lamin Sanneh, Yale historian and missiologist, was born in the Gambia, West Africa, and is descended from the nyanchos, an ancient African royal line. Reared in an orthodox Muslim family, Sanneh received his education on four continents and traveled to the United States to read history. He subsequently became a naturalized citizen and converted to Christianity. Earning the doctorate of philosophy in Islamic history from the University of London, Sanneh served as a professor at Harvard University for eight years before his appointment in 1989 to Yale. An exceedingly prolific writer within the discipline of religious history, Sanneh is the author of The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World; Whose Religion is Christianity?: The Gospel beyond the West; and The Crown and the Turban: Muslims and West African Pluralism. Among Sanneh’s books that have made significant contributions to interreligious dialogue is Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture. In recognition of his contributions to scholarship, the Republic of Senegal bestowed the title Commandeur de l’Ordre National du Lion, the country’s highest national honor. He also received appointments from Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI as consultor to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

Philanthropist Edmund W. Cole, president of Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad and treasurer of the Vanderbilt University Board of Trust, endowed the annual Cole Lecture Series in 1892 “for the defense and advocacy of the Christian religion.” Cole’s gift provided for the first sustained lectureship in the history of Vanderbilt University.

Vanderbilt University Divinity School announces the 107th Cole Lectures to be delivered during Reunion and Homecoming 2006 by Lamin Sanneh, The D. Willis James Professor of Missions & World Christianity and Professor of History Yale University

World Christianity and the Global Balance of Power

Thursday, October 19, 2006, 7:00 p.m.
Friday, October 20, 2006, 10:00 a.m.
Benton Chapel

“World Christianity is not a free-standing phenomenon but a movement in active interface with the cultures and religions of the world. In more than twenty years of study and writing on the subject I have become convinced of a major shift in Christianity’s North Atlantic Center of gravity. Contrary to many predictions, religion has survived with greater strength into the twenty-first century, and equally surprising, so has Christianity with ever-greater diversity.”

—LAMIN SANNEH

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She arrived at Vanderbilt Divinity School with more questions than answers.

You supported her during the lectures…the seminars…the colloquies…the research papers…the exegeses…the sermons…the practica…and the hours of discernment.

As she leaves the Oberlin Quadrangle, she’s prepared to meet the challenge of more questions.

By your gifts to our annual fund, students at Vanderbilt University Divinity School become the beneficiaries of a rigorous theological education in a research university setting. Your generosity supports our mission to educate the future leaders of faith communities and the next generation of the Academy. Help us fulfill our commitment to prepare today’s students for tomorrow’s questions.