



Adam and Eve  
1912  
by Marc Chagall  
Russian painter  
(1887-1985)  
oil on canvas  
160.5 x 109 cm  
Saint Louis Art Museum

# Genesis

*"God is subtle, but he is not malicious."*

—Albert Einstein

In the beginning they were all beginners; no one was advanced. Little by little they learned that Nature favors the firstborn, but God prefers the second; so they had to learn deception. Though the serpent was more subtle than any of the creatures God had made, God had made him; he was Yahweh's protégé, The world's first teacher, and Eve's first lesson after trees was God's predilection for flocks over fruits and Abel over Cain, Though not the reason why—or was it whim? Sibling rivalry was couching at the door And sprang.

At first the covenant was fragile, so the fathers built a fence for Its survival; then as now, the last line of defense was dissimulation. Abram had to say that Sarai was his sister, and they lived well in Egypt so long as she was Pharaoh's wife. As Abraham of the promise, he fancied the younger boy to Ishmael; Sarah easily won the boon for Isaac, who in turn played his dad's Old trick in Gerar: 'Lest I die because of her.' His own Rebekah bested him, scheming to secure the blessing for Her favorite son; who can fault her, for didn't the Lord ordain: 'The elder shall serve the younger'?

But who can forget Esau's exceedingly great and bitter cry: 'Bless me, even me also, O my father!' Didn't Isaac tremble Then and see again, that blind old man, the shadow of the knife Upraised so long ago and sorrow for Jacob who would follow him Along the twisted way of Chosenness to the mad land of Moriah? Lost to his mother, who called the curse upon herself, wily Jacob Fled the springing beast to Paddan-aram; from Bethel of the dream He woke and went to Haran, where he found his kinsmen at the Well and loved at sight Rachel, the younger girl; the seven Years he worked for her went swifter than a week.

But Uncle Laban was a schemer like his sister and had a ruse for Putting Leah in her rightful place as first wife in his nephew's bed. Even so, Jacob in his dotage forgot where favoritism led, and loved Best of all his sons the dreamer, Joseph, who strutted in his pretty coat. The envy of his brothers was the beast that drenched his robe in blood. Yet the promise proved efficacious through doting fathers, meddling Mothers, family strife and reconciliation; deception begat deception Unto the fourth generation; the burden of the blessing was the root of Jacob's limp, until Israel laid his right hand on the wrong grandson, then Blessed them all and gathered up his feet into his bed.

At the end of the beginning the patriarchs and matriarchs must have Known the truth of what the mystics say: 'Nothing' is one of the Names of God, and nothing ceases to exist at the moment of creation, Meaning that creatures must then, for good or ill, make something Of the world. Reading Genesis, one wonders whether it matters To God that the Covenant came to fruition by so much mendacity, So many wiles, and whether without guile the saving story could unfold, Much less have been retold. Is subtlety but the veil that hides the face of Him Who was and is and is to come?

Charlotte Barr, BA'69  
29 April 2004



# CALLED TO THE WALLS

BY LINDSAY CATHRYN MEYERS, MDIV '3

*After spending eighteen years of my life in Texas, one would think I would know about prisons. But to me, prisons were merely plots of land marked by water towers and tall fences rising from the Texas gulf coast plains.*

The Houston nightly local news often reported executions that had occurred that week in Huntsville by displaying a mug shot, name, and crime. As children, we were not permitted to play outside when an inmate had escaped from one of the six prisons located in Brazoria County. Despite the significant presence of prisons in our county, discussions relating to penal institutions, inmates, or the criminal justice system were absent from conversations in the community, in the classroom, at the dinner table, or at church.

I was able to escape any conversations relating to prisons throughout my undergraduate and post-graduate career. While working in the affordable housing industry in Washington, D.C., I heard many discussions about the need for affordable housing for the developmentally handicapped, physically handicapped, or homeless individuals. The community development professionals were silent when it came to matters relating to potential communal responsibility for housing or programs for individuals exiting prisons.

Fortunately, Vanderbilt University Divinity School refuses to perpetuate the silence present in most communities. In my second semester

of my program of studies for the master of divinity degree, I had the opportunity to register for a class taught at Riverbend Maximum Security Institution, the local state prison. The course invited residents of Riverbend and VDS students to begin an exploration of theology inside the walls of the prison.

Similar to the other students from VDS, I had never been inside a prison. In fact, I did not even know where to go to find a prison in Tennessee without a visible water tower and tall fence emerging from the horizon. I initially questioned the rationale for traveling the distance to the prison to engage in theological discussions with individuals who were not students in a divinity school, but the professors' enthusiasm quieted my hesitations and drew me to the fence surrounding Riverbend.

I encountered many fences designed to separate me from my classmates at Riverbend. I was not wearing the "blues." I did not share the standardized shoes or assigned job descriptions. After leaving the prison, I could choose my own dinner and leave my lights on as late as I wanted. I could receive phone calls from loved ones anytime of the day.

In our first class, my mind wandered into imagining the life inside the walls of the prison. To bring me back to the present, the professors asked each of us to introduce ourselves with our name. The task seemed simple, but to the men at Riverbend the task was liberating. The inmates were not asked to identify themselves by the crimes they had committed or the lengths of their sentences. Instead, a name would suffice for entrance into the discussions of theology that have

continued for six semesters.

It is common to acknowledge and affirm difference and diversity at VDS, but, in comparison to the diversity found in the Riverbend classroom, VDS students are quite homogeneous. Instead of focusing on the inherent differences present inside the walls of the Riverbend classroom, our professors invited each of us into a dialogue centered on our common passions. Not surprisingly, the VDS students who traveled to the prison were interested in discussing justice, sexism, racism, and violence within our society. These issues provoke emotional responses and challenge all participants to reconsider the structure of oppressive institutions and to consider how one's participation in these systems may contribute to violence towards one another.

In order to elicit discussions, our assignments included reading challenging theological texts. Just as the professors promised, the words of the theological texts acquire different meanings inside the prison. The words of Paulo Friere, Dorothy Day, Will Campbell, and Walter Wink take on new life while reading them with the Riverbend residents who are hearing the authors' pleas for the first time. Through the reflections of the classmates who are reconsidering their identities, their experiences of the world, and their understandings of the divine, I am forced to reshape my own perspective.

In contrast to other programs at the prison, we do not travel to the prison to offer Bible studies, to counsel inmates, or to preside at worship services. Our journey, however, does include a hope for transformation

of one another. Unexpectedly, some VDS students and Riverbend residents who have rejected belonging to a faith tradition in the past, now call the Riverbend class “church.”

After encountering the prison, it has become impossible for me to ignore the theoretical and practical connections between my theological convictions and the structure of the criminal justice system. In all courses, the VDS professors encourage students to integrate the words of texts we are studying with our experiences in our practice of ministry. Not only is this task necessary, but it is unavoidable. As one Riverbend resident proclaimed quite cogently, “If you take these texts seriously, this is a hard place to be.” Regardless of social location, if one approaches theology and its practical implications seriously, living in the world and practicing the art of ministry will challenge one everyday.

My four-semester experience at Riverbend constantly shapes my other course work at the Divinity School. While attending classes at the prison, I was also exploring political theology in the course “Communities, Traditions, and Differences” with Mary McClintock Fulkerson, PhD’86, the visiting E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of Theology. Here we examined the religious and political traditions that govern communities by exploring the scholarship of John Rawls, Donald Moon, Alsadair MacIntyre, William Connolly, Edward Farley, and John Howard Yoder.

In all communities, we adopt certain traditions and practices to reinforce community values. Specifically, my experience in the prison raised questions concerning the boundaries of communities, as well as a community’s responsibilities to individuals. While the human voices from Riverbend suggest that those inside the walls of the prison are no longer members of the community, the theologians we encountered insist that the razor fences do not absolve “free worlders” from responsibility to “the other.” Our discussions centering on community boundaries and responsibilities encouraged me to envision new paradigms for mission in faith communities.

Similar to my political theology class, the material in the course “Ethics for Human Development Professionals” taught by Paul Dokecki, PhD’68, professor of psychology at Peabody and a member of the John F. Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development, required me to question the ethics of our criminal justice system. From the class discussions I learned that an ethical

professional is measured by one’s ability to strengthen community and foster the human development of individuals. These two ideals seem to be acceptable models for guiding decisions in a professional setting, but how often are these ideals used in governing decisions regarding prisons? The theological texts I have encountered at VDS propose that individuals in prison, despite one’s transgressions, are still members of the community and children of God.

*I encountered many fences designed to separate me from my classmates at Riverbend.*

From the experience of the residents of Riverbend, decisions are based upon safety and cost-effectiveness. In practice, intentional decisions are made to disrupt the formation of community or friendships among the men. I am at a loss to find the theological texts to support decisions that do not support the development of humans and community.

Similar to my course in political theology and professional ethics, my experience at Riverbend inspires my studies of feminist process theology with Visiting Professor Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki this fall semester. Her book, *The Fall to Violence*, suggests that sin is the use of unnecessary violence, a practice which demonstrates a “rebellion against creation’s well-being.”<sup>i</sup> From her understanding of original sin, in light of relational theology, it follows that each person is responsible for enhancing the well-being of any victim and violator in order to stop the cycle of violence defined as sin. From her perspective, transformation of this cycle does not occur from “feelings of love” or “acceptance of the other,” but transformation entails a “matter of intellect.”<sup>ii</sup> Transformation and forgiveness arise from the practice of “willing the well-being of victim(s) and violator(s) in the context of the fullest possible knowledge of the nature of the violation.”<sup>iii</sup> Since I have become acquainted with residents of Riverbend, Suchocki’s words resonate with the pain of victims and violators I encounter inside and outside the walls of the prison. Suchocki’s argument of solidarity and interdependence challenges all to become more involved in practices of communal transformation and self-transcendence.

Fortunately, these classes, authors, and men at Riverbend offer me a new voice in

public discussions and private conversations. My experience inside the fence of the prison enables me to engage individuals, evaluate ethical arguments, and question political practices in the social world. Marked by my identity as a free-worlder Tennessean, native Texan, and student of theology, I can no longer participate in the silence that pervades our communities and churches. Mistakenly, debates relating to prisons become centered on the funding, construction, and location of prisons. But, as individuals whose theological education at Vanderbilt Divinity School has endorsed an ethic of care,

we should expand these debates to discussions of communal responsibility to victim and violator. The prison, an institution once only identified by fences and water towers, has now become a community of individuals with needs and resources to share with me.

*The course currently taught at Riverbend Maximum Security Institution is titled “Where We Stand: The Impact of Social Location on Biblical Interpretation in the Southern United States” and is coordinated by alumni/ae Janet Lynn Wolf, MDiv’88, director of public policy and community outreach for Religious Leaders for a More Just and Compassionate Drug Policy; Harmon Wray, MA’85, executive director for the National Association of Sentencing Advocates; and Richard Goode, PhD’95, associate professor of history and senior faculty fellow in the Center for International Peace and Justice at Davidson College.*

*A native of Lake Jackson, Texas, Meyers was graduated in 2000 from Davidson College where she earned a baccalaureate in mathematics.*

i Suchocki, Marjorie Hewitt, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 16.

ii Ibid, 145.

iii Ibid, 144.

*In the dense haze of January, I sit frozen as the brisk lake winds send shivers up the spines of icicles scaling the rugged gutters of my family’s cabin in the Ozark Mountains. With the warmth of a fire on my face, I again feel the blazing Hawaiian sun tanning my skin and lighting my way into an unknown world. For three months I participated in clinical pastoral education with Pacific Health Ministries located in Honolulu on the island of Oahu. I visited patients during the day and spent the rest of my time exploring this tropical paradise and her unique offering of human and natural life. I witnessed the flowering beauty of a land rich with the sun’s graces, and I mourned a land scorched with pain of imperialism.*

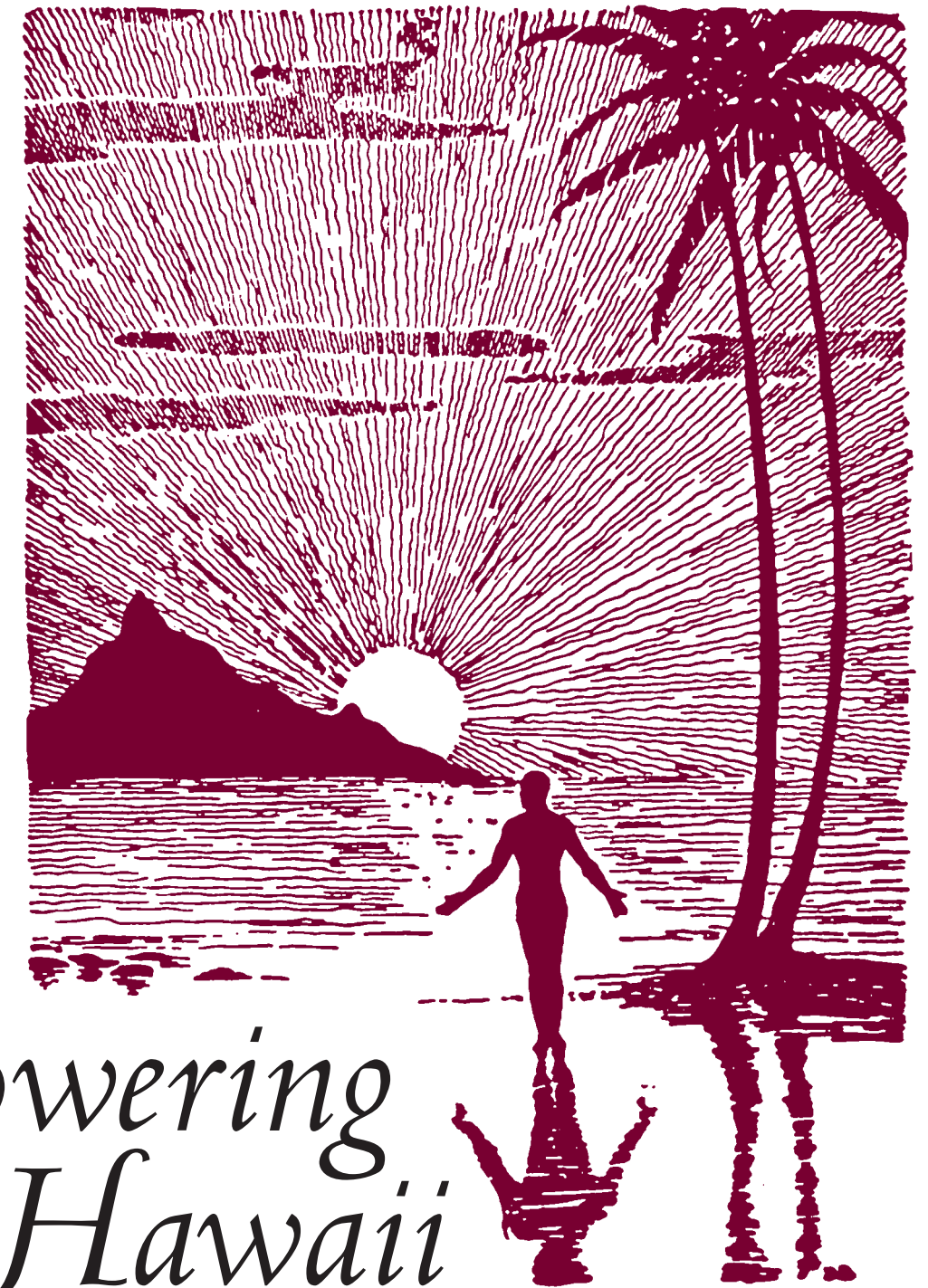
# THE Deflowering OF Hawaii

An Apprenticeship in Talking Story

BY JOSEPH DANIELS BLOSSER, MDIV3

Titling this essay “The Deflowering of Hawaii” seems a rather supercilious assertion coming from a mid-Western boy safely nestled in the logs of his heritage, but besides the literal environmental overtones, I hope this image conveys the intensity I sensed in the Hawaiian experience. Though decades have lapsed, many Hawaiians perpetuate the story of how Western cultures robbed Hawaii’s innocence by commercializing her land, suffocating her way of life, and enslaving her people to poverty and powerlessness. They tell a tale of deceit, arrogance, mechanization, militarization, dehumanization, tourism, and turmoil, but somewhere within the story of their lives emerges the grace, compassion, hope, and “Spirit of Aloha,” which continue to define these islands.

I received the gift of these stories through chance encounters on the beach, conversations in patients’ rooms, nurses’ stations, and especially through the hours spent in the office of my CPE preceptor. Gail, a local Hawaiian woman (residents of Hawaii reserve the term “local” to signify those born and reared on the islands), has served as the chaplain at Kapi’olani Med-



ical Center for Women and Children for over fourteen years, and for me she embodies the essence of the Hawaiian tradition of “talking story.” Heard on occasional southern sun porches over lemonade and sweet tea, the telling of ancient myths, ancestral trials, and moral quips flowed from the lips of nearly every Hawaiian resident I visited.

Academicians have reveled in the importance of story. Ethicist Alasdair MacIntyre writes that “there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories that constitute its essential dramatic resources.” Similarly, religious historian Martin Marty mirrors political columnist Max Lerner’s statement about symbols: “People possess stories, but stories possess people.” Academic giddiness over the power of story, however, often misses a particular story’s richness. The Hawaiian tale is far richer than I could ever express, yet I can tell of my experience, the stories I witnessed, and the lives that shaped my own. Though my apprenticeship in “talking story” lasted only a short time, I hope I can convey both the pain of innocence lost through the collision of cultures and the sense of the spiritual maturity gained through these internal conflicts.

### Plucking the Ripened Pear

I began my relationship with Hawaii a month before leaving the mainland by searching Amazon.com for books to help me understand better the local culture. I soon learned this endeavor prepared me for the Hawaiian experience as well as my reading on the spiritual effects of a hysterectomy prepared me for my first patient, who showed off the Polaroids she demanded the doctor take of her uterus so her children could see their first home.

What I found in that initial Internet quest was a Web site for Hawaiian independence.<sup>ii</sup> It had never occurred to me that someone other than the residents of Texas desired independence from the United States. I was shocked to see a link to Paul Harvey’s “The Rest of the Story” in which he describes the U.S. takeover of a “friendly monarchy” as being crafted “down in the shadowy realms where U.S. foreign policy shakes hands with the devil.”<sup>iii</sup>

On a late summer island-hopping adventure to the Big Island, I kayaked the mile across a crystal blue Kealekekua Bay to the monument marking the landing site of the

first Western vessel on Hawaii. The monument proclaims the place where in January of 1778 Captain Cook discovered the island. Two words have been etched away—“Cook” and “discovered.” At the Bishop Museum for Hawaiian Culture, docents refer to time on the islands as B.C. and A.C. (Before Cook and After Cook).<sup>v</sup> Cook’s arrival set in motion the forces that in 1893 lead U.S. Marines to overtake Iolani Palace at the insistence of a few American businessmen jolted by Queen Lili‘uokalani’s attempts to stifle their growing power.

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Before the invasion, U.S. Foreign Minister to Hawaii Stevens wrote to the Secretary of State saying, “The Hawaiian pear is now fully ripe and this is the golden hour for the United States to pluck it.” Speaking of the Hawaiian delegation sent to negotiate annexation with the U.S. government, locals were known to say that they were “[e]lghteen men representing nobody.”<sup>vi</sup> The dominance of U.S. business spread from whaling to sugar and to pineapple, and finally to tourism, but this is not my story to tell.<sup>vii</sup>

As my plane landed in Honolulu, I learned that Hickam Air Force Base shares runways with the International Airport. Soon my ride picked me up, and we merged onto Interstate H-1. Though my first reaction was to laugh at the conception of an Interstate in Hawaii (“I think they’re building a tunnel”), I soon learned that Hawaii’s three interstates connect military bases, including the infamous H-3, which due to rugged landscape and lawsuits over its passage through sacred land makes it the most expensive per-mile interstate ever constructed. I encountered signs of the military everywhere I went. As I hiked to the top of Diamond Head, an old crater and popular

tourist attraction, I found it strewn with military bunkers. On a hike into Oahu’s windward (East coast) rainforest, my friends and I discovered three bunkers over five miles into the dense forest. Besides the Buddhist Obon Dances, the greatest parties of the summer all took place on military bases, of which there are more in Hawaii than any other state. And of course, I spent a day at Pearl Harbor indulging in the deep rumblings of my patriotism, which both turned my cheeks red with embarrassment and brought water to my eyes with pride. The residents of this strategic island bear both the painful memory of “a date that will live in infamy” and the weight of guarding against that date ever coming again.<sup>viii</sup>

While most military personal receive treatment at Tripplar Army Hospital, which announces its healing purposes to the world through a bright pink exterior, a few patients drifted my way when pregnancies became complicated. My first military couple caught me by surprise. As I entered the room, the young husband arose from his chair. When I introduced myself as the chaplain, he apologetically snapped to attention. I was shocked and slightly embarrassed. Though I could see he was a few years my junior, I could not explain the formalities of this private. The child of a former submariner, I at least pulled myself together enough to say “at ease,” but despite my insistence that I need not be saluted for I was not in the military, I received a formal greeting with each visit. A fellow CPE student and retired army chaplain explained that chaplains are always military officers and the private simply followed his learned procedure.

### Quilting Sensibilities

My understanding of the military’s role in Hawaiian life and the roots to the title of this essay grow out of the interpretation provided by two scholars at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Phyllis Turnbull and Kathy Ferguson contend that “Hawai‘i is coded as a soft, feminine, welcoming place, waiting and receptive...In military discourse, the erotic appeal is more convoluted...Hawai‘i appears as a weak female needing manly protection from a dangerous world.”<sup>ix</sup> Indeed the history of Hawaii suggests the aggression of the Western male and the continued defeat of the islands and her people. Before the heavy presence of the military, the scene of Western dominance played through the saga of mis-

sionary zeal. Though painful in part, the religious landscape of these islands also exudes one of its most resilient resources.

Many of the patients I visited on the OB-GYN floor and in the neonatal nurseries were young women arrested amidst the conflicting values of their ancestors, parents, and peers. A young girl desired my presence after terminating her twenty-week pregnancy. As I sat with her, I asked if she would like to bless the baby. Unsure, she nodded and replied, “Whatever you do for everyone else.”

As I began the patchwork blessing quilted of Catholic, Hawaiian, and my own Disciple of Christ traditions, the girl began to weep. Though “unreligious” herself, she claimed the words reminded her of the times her mother made her attend church, but the traditional Hawaiian blessing with Te leaves and saltwater stirred deeper memories of her grandmother’s life. She was a woman caught not between two religious worlds, but among three.

I visited the Kawaiaho Church (one of over a hundred United Church of Christ congregations on the islands) midway through the summer. Prominently situated near the state capitol and the former royal palace, this old stone church is Hawaii’s mother church—the first permanent church building on Oahu. Though James Michener’s depiction of the early missionaries in his book *Hawaii* appears somewhat harsh, a contemporary scholar argues that “[t]he missionaries were horrified at a Hawaiian lifestyle that was at once casual and oriented to human gregariousness.”<sup>x</sup> Indeed, the Calvinism of the first missionary families and their connection to the business interests of the islands would serve as an appropriate example for Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*.

What I witnessed at the mother church would have appalled the missionaries. While they mostly sought to obliterate the Hawaiian language, today this church holds services in both English and Hawaiian. While the churches I serve debate the appropriateness of a single American flag in the sanctuary, no such qualms appear at Kawaiaho as alternating American and Hawaiian flags line the balcony. This building, once the heart of a smothering Western theology, now embraces the language of the islands, displays the seating boxes of past Hawaiian royalty, and affirms Hawaii’s independence and interdependence.

The rainbow on the Hawaiian license plate seeks to embody the diversity of these islands and the residents’ ability to turn their differences into marks of beauty. An older female patient mistook me for the custodian when I arrived in her room and then through profuse apologies offered me something to drink. Unable to stand, she simply pointed to the many cans of Ensure at the foot of her bed. I politely declined and soon found myself immersed in the depths of a woman’s struggle for spiritual meaning at the precipice of her physical life. She learned and practiced the ways of Buddhism during her early years in Japan, but upon coming to Hawaii, she had been unable to find a fitting teacher. She found instead several Christian friends and joined a Full Gospel church. While neither the Buddhist teachers she sometimes saw nor her Christian minister could support her *dual religious dabbling*, she found richness in the mix.

“Oh, I know you don’t want to hear all of

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this,” she said. “You are just supposed to tell me about Jesus and heaven and hell, right?”

If that were my task, I had missed the mark. I told her about my CPE program, the religious diversity of the chaplains, and the different countries from which we came.

She smiled slyly and asked, “So, you think Jesus and the Buddha are friends?”

They’d have to be to share as rich a soul as hers.

### A Challenge to “Normalcy”

The missionary invasion deflowered the religious sensibilities of local Hawaiians, but many have found new life through their matured embrace of these once conflicting religious sentiments. The gifts of diversity, however, seem only to come through its challenges. I have witnessed the difficulties my female friends face in their journeys toward ministry, but my maleness, whiteness, thinness, and height have made my validation come too soon. But in Hawaii, this story

changed; in Hawaii I am *haole*. Resident white Hawaiian scholar Judy Rohrer writes:

Hawai‘i is perhaps the only place in the United States where the “invisible center” (the white, male, heterosexual, Christian, able-bodied “norm” that maintains its power by hiding it) is forced into partial visibility. Perhaps that is because knowledge of the violence that it took and continues to take, to create that “center” is so close to the surface here... In Hawai‘i you get called on your haoleness; you are confronted with your race—an especially unpleasant experience for those who have denied it all their lives.”

When I entered some patient’s rooms, I was respected and honored, but I could sense the uneasiness of others, especially women from the Micronesian islands. Even some local Hawaiian women distrusted my intentions

and revealed little of themselves. Being a man in a women’s hospital and a haole in Hawaii challenged the “normalcy” of my life.

Haole originally appears to have meant “foreigner,” but it can assume a derogatory nature, depending on the words preceding and following the appellation. Some of the patients explained that the word means “breathless” in Hawaiian. It seemed an appropriate name for the breathless sailors hoisting themselves onto Hawaii for the first time; coincidentally they add this word for breathless also means “without Spirit.” Though perhaps inaccurate historically, this interpretation more precisely reveals the feeling associated with the term’s contemporary usage. If only in glimpses, I began to confront the power structures on the mainland that hoist my life into its delusions of normalcy. The Hawaiian story began affecting my own; Hawaii’s struggles became my teacher.

One afternoon I received word that a

middle-school-aged girl had lost her baby sixteen weeks into the pregnancy. She spoke very little, and I, wiser after several disasters earlier in the summer, spoke less. She did not like the middle-aged father, and everyone told her the loss was for the best—now she could finish school. She, however, had prayed that God would save the baby because she wanted a child to love.

"I tried praying," she said, "but now I'm done talking to God."

I could only sit with her in the silence. I had no answers to offer. As God's representative in the room, I was as silent as the God to whom she had prayed. I cannot say how God worked in that young girl's life, but she worked in mine. Her voice was God's voice teaching me to guard against my arrogant desire to solve her problem—God's voice whispering the wisdom of soulful silence—God's voice illuminating the pain of the world and calming me enough to sit in its midst. She helped me see that I can know no answers to her story or the Hawaiian story, but I can stop, and I can sit, and I can listen. The maturity of her struggle ultimately revealed the pain of my innocence escaping.

As I read Dag Hammarskjöld's book *Markings*, one musing leapt at me after a particularly long day of snorkeling on the infamous North Shore: "Sun and stillness. Looking down through the jade-green water, you see the monsters of the deep playing on the reef. Is this a reason to be afraid? Do you feel safer when scudding waves hide what lies beneath the water?"<sup>1</sup> Growing up a white male on the bluffs of the Missouri river, the deep brown streams of my life have hidden the monstrous truths far better than Hawaii's clear blue bays. At home I could snorkel all day and never glimpse the structures of power, money, and religious privilege just beyond the end of my nose. In Hawaii these structures remain hidden by the sun's brilliant reflection off the water, but a dip below the surface reveals the immensity of struggle shielded from view. In Hawaii I began learning to see and swim among these monsters of the deep.

One cannot deny the pain brought through the loss of a child or the necessity of a hysterectomy, but many patients I visited also gave voice to the emotional and spiritual pain inflicted by Hawaii's cultural milieu. Hawaii and her people taught me a new way



Captain James Cook, a British sailor changed the course of history for Hawaii when he and his ships, the *Resolution* and the *Discovery*, entered the sheltered waters of Kealahou Bay, "the pathway of God," on the morning of January 17, 1778. Reportedly the first Westerner to enter the bay, Cook was perceived initially by the Hawaiians to be a returning god when he arrived during a religious festival.

to see my life and my place in the world. Many there have endured hardships, but they retain a spirit of generosity and kindness. While builders long ago etched Jesus' command to "Go and make disciples of all nations" into the cornerstone of my home church, Pidgin, the plantation language of the Hawaiian people, gives this imperative a new meaning:

Den Jesus go near dem and say, "God wen give me all da power, so now I in charge a everything all ova da world an inside da sky. So you guys, go all ova da world and teach all da difern peoplos, so dey can learn bout me and come my guys. Boy, and God's Good an Spesho Spirit. Teach um how fo do everything dat I wen tell you guys fo do. An you know wat? I goin stick wit you guys all da way, till da world goin pau."<sup>2</sup>

I now go, not to impose my story and my language, but to listen, to engage, and to grow in the language of others so that together we might construct anew the narratives of our lives. Perhaps Hawaii's innocence was not the only one lost; perhaps the loss of innocence engenders drops of maturity.

*The essayist was graduated in 2001 from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth where he earned a baccalaureate in economics and in religion. A Carpenter Scholar at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Blosser will receive the*

*master of divinity degree in May 2005.*

<sup>1</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of a Tradition," in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), 89-112.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Marty, *The One and the Many: America's Struggle for the Common Good* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997), 143.

<sup>3</sup> "Hawaii – Independent and Sovereign," <<http://www.hawaii-nation.org/>> 9 January 2004.

<sup>4</sup> "Paul Harvey – The Rest of the Story – Overthrow of Hawaiian Monarchy," <<http://www.hawaii-nation.org/paulharvey.html>> 9 January 2004.

<sup>5</sup> "Bishop Museum," <<http://www.bishopmuseum.org/>> 9 January 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Noel J. Kent, *Hawaii: Islands under the Influence* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1993), 63.

<sup>7</sup> See Kent or Queen Liliuokalani, *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen* (Boston: Tuttle, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Day of Infamy," December 8, 1941.

<sup>9</sup> Phyllis Turnbull and Kathy E. Ferguson, "Military Presence/Missionary Past: The Historical Construction of Masculine Order and Feminine Hawai'i," in *Women in Hawai'i: Sites, Identities, and Voices*, Vol. 38 of *Social Process in Hawai'i*, ed. Joyce N. Chinen, Kathleen O. Kane, and Ida M. Yoshinaga (Honolulu, U of Hawaii P, 1997), 94-107.

<sup>10</sup> Kent, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Judy Rohrer, "Haole Girl: Identity and White Privilege in Hawai'i," in *Women in Hawai'i: Sites, Identities, and Voices*, Vol. 38 of *Social Process in Hawai'i*, ed. Joyce N. Chinen, Kathleen O. Kane, and Ida M. Yoshinaga (Honolulu, U of Hawaii P, 1997), 138-161.

<sup>12</sup> Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, trans. Lief Sjoeborg and W.H. Auden (New York: Knopf, 1965), 121.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 28:16-20, *Da Jesus Book: Hawaii Pidgin New Testament* (Orlando, Florida: Wycliffe, 2000).

# gleanings



Camilla Clay Andrews, MTS'04, is congratulated by Bettye Goah and John G. W. Goah following the act of worship in Benton Chapel. As laity in the black church, the Goahs were recognized during Commencement 2004 for fulfilling the requirements for the Kelly Miller Smith Institute Certificate Program in Black Church Studies.



Traveling from Ann Arbor, Michigan, to attend his son's graduation was Robert Picken, father of Conor Adam Picken, who received the master of theological studies degree and has accepted a position with Dell Computer, Incorporated.



Among the new members of the Vanderbilt University Divinity School alumni/ae community are Maurice Edward Harris, MTS'04, and Kyung Lee, MDiv'04.

Commencement Photographs by Mark Andrew Caldwell, MTS'04



Returning to campus to participate in the spring graduation exercises, Andrew Paul Barnett, MDiv'03, was reunited with a former professor, J. Patout Burns Jr., the Edward A Malloy Professor of Catholic Studies.



During the 2004 spring semester, Bryan Bennington Bliss anticipated two commencements—graduation from the Divinity School and fatherhood. He and his wife, Michelle, became the proud parents of Eleanor Grace (Nora), who had the distinction of being the youngest guest at the Divinity School's exercises. Bliss received the master of theological studies degree and also served as field education intern for this issue of *The Spire*.

## Commencement 2004

Ninety-six graduates from the Divinity School and the Graduate School's Department of Religion were welcomed into the Vanderbilt University alumni/ae community on Friday, May 14, 2004. Chancellor Gordon Gee conferred the master of divinity degree upon thirty-four students, the master of theological studies degree upon thirty-three graduates, and the joint master of theological studies and doctor of jurisprudence degree upon one student during the commencement exercises on Alumni Lawn. Thirteen students received the master of arts degree in religion while fifteen members of the class of 2004 were awarded the doctorate of philosophy in religion.

### Kudos for the 2003–2004 Academic Year

Founder's Medal for first honors in the Divinity School

Robert Odell Wyatt II, MTS'04  
Nashville, Tennessee

Academic Achievement Award

Maria Mayo Robbins, MDiv'04  
Nashville, Tennessee

Banner Bearer for the Procession of Degree Candidates

Jonathan Daniel Rhodes, MDiv'04  
Nashville, Tennessee

William Newcomb Prize for receiving honors on one's senior essay

Mary Leigh Pittenger, MDiv'04  
Nashville, Tennessee

for her essay titled "But If We Confess Our Sins: The Role of Confessional Narrative in Spiritual Care"

Umphey Lee Dean's Award for best exemplifying the School's vision

Vincent Kevin Campbell, MDiv'04  
Nashville, Tennessee

Florence Conwell Prize for outstanding preaching

Katherine Jeannine Lauer Rigler, MDiv'04  
Mount Juliet, Tennessee

Saint James Academy for outstanding sermon

Kaye Harvey, MDiv'04  
Franklin, Tennessee

W. Kendrick Grobel Award for outstanding achievement in biblical studies

James William Barker, MTS'04  
Johnson City, Tennessee

J. D. Owen Prize for most successful work in Hebrew Bible

Robert Justin Harkins, MTS'04  
Lexington, Kentucky

The Nella May Overby Memorial Award for honors in field education in a congregation or community agency

Emily Kate Nourse, MDiv'04  
Corpus Christi, Texas

Elliott F. Shepard Prize in church history

Mark Edward DeCogliano, MTS'04  
Nashville, Tennessee

Wilbur F. Tillett Prize in theology

Joshua Bradley Davis, MTS'04  
Florence, Alabama

Chalice Press Book Awards for academic accomplishment by Disciples of Christ students

Sunny Beth Buchanan, MDiv'04  
Blue Springs, Missouri

Nancy Jean Humes, MDiv'04  
Stow, Ohio

Luke-Acts Prize for the outstanding paper on an aspect of Luke-Acts

James William Barker, MTS'04  
Johnson City, Tennessee

Bishop Holland Nimmons McTyeire Award presented by the United Methodist Student Association at Vanderbilt University Divinity School for outstanding service to the School and to parishes

Kaye Harvey, MDiv'04  
Franklin, Tennessee

Student Government Association Community Service Awards

Jonathan Daniel Rhodes, MDiv'04  
Nashville, Tennessee

Viki B. Matson, director of field education and assistant professor of the practice of ministry

Betty Ford Award for service to the faculty and students of the Graduate School's Department of Religion

Heather Randall McMurray,  
doctoral student in Hebrew Bible  
Nashville, Tennessee



Emily Kate Nourse, MDiv'04 received the Nella May Overby Memorial Award for honors in field education in a congregation or community agency. A native of Corpus Christi, Texas, Nourse earned her baccalaureate from Texas Christian University in Fort Worth before entering the Divinity School. Among her guests who attended Commencement 2004 was alumnus Will Connelly, MTS'03.

## Incense and the Mere Christian

After Robert Odell Wyatt II earned a baccalaureate in English from the University of the South, he decided to leave the idyllic setting of Sewanee mountain and move to Evanston, Illinois, where he would enroll in Seabury-Western Theological Seminary. But before he completed the first year of his theological education, he found himself preparing to move again—across the street to the English department of Northwestern University—after he ran afoul of the seminary dean on the subject of incense.

“The very reverend dean was a Virginia gentleman who wore French cuffs and hailed from the Old School, and he was extremely rigid about the liturgies he would permit in our chapel,” recalls Wyatt. “He decreed that incense was forbidden in any service because he did not want to offend those who preferred lower church practices. But in a fit of generosity, he told the degree candidates for the class of 1969 that they could assume the responsibilities for planning their commencement services. When the seminarians elected to use incense in the act of worship, the dean immediately withdrew his permission and informed the students that he would prescribe the liturgy for their graduation exercises.”

Upon learning of the strident comments Wyatt had exchanged during a campus protest about the dean's domineering character, the gentleman of the Old School summoned the young seminarian from Tennessee to his office and suggested Wyatt might be happier matriculating at the University of Chicago Divinity School or walking across the street and introducing himself to the English faculty at Northwestern.

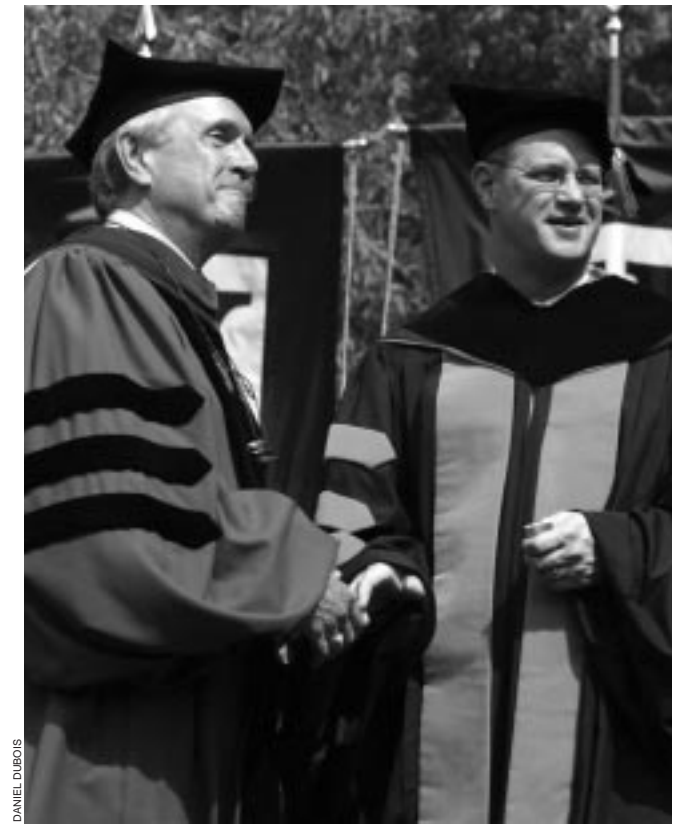
“He gave me ten days to reach my decision,” remembers Wyatt.

Four years after he ventured onto Northwestern's campus, Wyatt was graduated with the doctorate of philosophy in English and religion and began his vocation in the academy as a professor of journalism. Dur-

ing his tenure of twenty-five years at Middle Tennessee State University, where he directs the Office of Communication Research in the College of Mass Communications, Wyatt returned to Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in 2002 to complete his certificate of Anglican studies, and he also enrolled in Vanderbilt University Divinity School to pursue the master of theological studies degree.

For maintaining the highest grade point average in the Divinity School's class of 2004, Wyatt was named the eighty-fifth founder's medalist in the history of the School. When conferring the honor upon Wyatt, Chancellor Gordon Gee cited Wyatt's contributions to research on public opinion, attitudes toward free expression, international communication, and the relationship between religion and the media. He has served as the director of the Middle Tennessee Poll, a survey conducted twice each year for soliciting area opinion toward major institutions and current political events; book review editor for the *Tennessean*, a research advisor for the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University, and four-time chairperson of the nonfiction jury for the Pulitzer Prize. For his study in the problems of international communication among Israeli Arabs, Jews, and Americans, Wyatt received the Worcester Prize from the World Association for Public Opinion Research.

“When I enrolled at the Divinity School, I had doubts if I would be successful in the pastoral theology courses; I always thought my ministry in the church would involve teaching and preaching, but in my courses with Bonnie Miller-McLemore and my field education practica with Viki Matson and Trudy Stringer, I developed a passion for applied theology,” explains Wyatt. “From my cross-cultural study in Mexico and my travels in India, I began to understand that if



Robert Odell Wyatt II, MTS'04, received the Founder's Medal for first honors in the Divinity School during the 2004 Commencement Exercises conducted on Alumni Lawn. Vanderbilt University Chancellor Gordon Gee conferred the honor upon Wyatt as Divinity School Dean James Hudnut-Beumler presented the medal. Cornelius Vanderbilt's gifts to the University included the endowment of this award given since 1877 for first honors in each graduating class.

I were going to be a Christian who relates to people across cultural lines, I had to become, in the words of C. S. Lewis, a 'mere Christian' who endeavors to understand the cultures of others on their terms and to understand my culture differently. To my great surprise, when I took the general ordination examination, my highest score was not in church history but in pastoral theology.”

Ordained as a transitional deacon on June 20, Wyatt has accepted a call as curate, or associate priest, for Making Excellent Disciples, an initiative funded by the Lilly Endowment for the Church of the Transfiguration in the Diocese of Chicago. “I have always felt called to return to Chicago, and theologically and liturgically Chicago is a better setting for me than Tennessee,” says Wyatt, who describes himself as “High Church, socially liberal, and rather theologically conservative.” Prior to his ordination to the priesthood in December, he will return to India, at the request of his bishop, to participate in a study to support free expression and democratic values within the country and to establish ties with the Church of South India.

## Confessions of a Half-Mad Divinity School Student

BY BRYAN BENNINGTON BLISS, MTS'04

*It is rumored—at least in the whispers that collect in divinity school hallways—that theology students are at a higher risk for mental breakdowns.*

*Call it an urban legend, or existential dread—but anyone who has ever endured a theological education would respond with an emphatic: “Amen!”*

Vanderbilt University Divinity School was supposed to be my definitive answer to the slippery questions about God. Surely the wise professors, with their hefty student loan payments, and Ivy League educations would have the answers—right? But, there are no answers here—only more questions.

Before I enrolled in graduate school, I was living and working with a false sense of comfort of having received an undergraduate liberal arts education. There is no better inoculation for intellectual arrogance than graduate education, especially theological training. If you had asked, before graduate school, my opinion on the Bible, I would have waxed theologially on the subject. Now, I don't have much to say. If you want to know anything about Jesus, I suggest you find someone who is not affiliated with any school of religion. The last person who asked me to explain the nature of God was met with a vacant, slightly neurotic stare, and a barrage of incoherent mumbling.

It's best just to ignore me, and let me shuffle by the wayside.

Divinity school breeds this sort of odd behavior. For some, the deconstruction of long-held religious beliefs is a severe shaking of their foundations. Others choose to ignore the academy, and treat their education as a formality—another hoop in the ordination process. I haven't been so lucky. I was seduced by the academy. And now, like all illicit affairs, I am left with an aching sense of confusion and a growing debt of student loans. Unlike financial aid, confusion cannot be consolidated. There is no knowledge lending institution that is willing to loan you the answers at a good interest rate.

There should be a disclaimer in every

divinity school bulletin. Something like: “While (Insert name of institution here) is committed to providing a comprehensive theological education to all of its students, it cannot provide said students with any answers.” But, this would not work—most incoming students think they have the answers. And I pity them.

The first semester of divinity school is relentless. It's not only the work. It's the realization that you know nothing. What you thought you knew—no, you don't know that. Every statement becomes crucial, a constant weighing of the arguments inside your head. Every belief is held against the critical methods of some long-dead thinker.

During my first semester, I was furiously typing on my laptop when my wife asked me what I was researching. Wild-eyed, I looked up at her, and grunted the words: *soteriology...pneumosomethingorther.*

*There is no better inoculation for intellectual arrogance than graduate education, especially theological training.... You come to realize that the answers are not as important as the questions. And even though it goes against every fiber of your existence, you accept that you are not God and that you will never have a concrete answer.*

She looked at me, and was quiet for a moment. Then, she said, “Well, good for you.”

She might as well have patted me on my head and given me some milk and cookies. Divinity school makes you unable to relate to normal people. My wife does not care about soteriology, or pneumatology. She'd rather talk about salvation and the Holy Spirit.

I suspect law and medical students don't have this trouble. Sure, they discuss *prima facie* evidence, and polycythemia, but it's not the same. They have tangible evidence; we have God.

Only one person can be blamed for this decision—my undergraduate advisor, of course. Theology? One more year and I could be a lawyer; four more years, and I could be Bryan B. Bliss, M.D. But, I suspect law and medicine have their downfalls, too—like lots of money and virtually guaranteed employment upon graduation. Sounds terrible.

And there are other downfalls of divinity

school. You cannot go to a family meal, or any other gathering without being asked to say the invocation. People suddenly think you need t-shirts, neck ties, hats—and anything else they may find with a picture of Jesus on it. Your friends will inquire, “Why are you going *there*? Do you want to be a minister?” They will suddenly treat you differently. You are God's spy, trying to gather the dirt He needs to indict each of your friends and send them to Hell. But all you wanted to do was to contemplate God.

So, for two or three years, that is what you do. You think about God. You come to realize that the answers are not as important as the questions. And even though it goes against every fiber of your existence, you accept that you are not God and that you will never have a concrete answer. But you will have a master's degree—granted one in theology—to rebuke the demons who visit in dreams and

mock you with stethoscopes and legal dictionaries.

Along the way you meet people who have come to divinity school in search of truth; they are just like you, in search of the unknowable and frustrated at most turns. This struggle creates a bond where you don't have to speak; you only have to look and sympathetically nod in agreement. All problems in divinity school are the same—they just go by different names. These fellow students are young and old, black, white, yellow, brown, gay, straight, or any conceivable combination. You argue with them, and jokingly banish them to Hell for their theological beliefs.

Then someone in your class dies, or gives birth to a child, and the community comes together to form an insulated nucleus of support. Suddenly the reason you attended divinity school becomes clear; the truth so desperately sought is annoyingly simple. The truth is the community.

A constructive Christian theology paper quickly muddies the water, and truth once again becomes nothing more than a tall tale third-year divinity school students speak about in hushed voices, first-year students at their feet.

This, however, isn't an acceptable answer for most people. The worst question a divinity school student confronts is: “What are you going to do when you graduate?” There are variations of this question such as: “What are you going to do with *that* degree?” For some, the choice is easy. They will be ordained ministers, and go straight into a church. For others, the choice isn't so clear. When confronted with the question of vocation, I generally smile, shrug my shoulders,

and give a very profound, theological answer:

“I have no idea.”

People, of course, do not want to hear this. They want to know why you left your job to go to school; and your wife, husband, or partner is equally mystified. Luckily, you are in divinity school—surrounded by people who not only understand but also are living in the same ambiguity. And this is the beauty of divinity school; it is a community of wanderlusts, the weary travelers who have no other place to go—or who majored in philosophy as undergraduates.

Somewhere, in the shadowy corners of my head, a voice is screaming for me to stay in divinity school as long as I can. A recent

graduate proffered this advice: “It's tough out here, stay. Stay!” And, he probably is right. The world is not like divinity school. Not everyone is going to care when your wife is sick, and I do not envision conversations about theodicy by the office water cooler. But, ultimately, you have to be graduated and face the real world. I find myself frighteningly close to this reality. And, even though I do not know what I am going to do when I finish, or even why I came to divinity school—I abide. At least I wasn't committed.

*The essayist serves as youth minister at the First United Methodist Church in Salisbury, North Carolina.*

## Lección de Geografía

During the 2004 summer term, thirteen Vanderbilt University Divinity School students and Trudy Stringer, associate director of field education, traveled to Mexico for a field education immersion experience in the social, political, and economic circumstances affecting the country's population. The cross-cultural course was designed through the Center for Global Education at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Upon returning to Nashville, Lisa Dordal, MDiv3, a research coordinator for the Center for Mental Health Policy at the Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies, composed a series of poems in which she reflects upon the questions inspired by the trip. “Twenty-three million Mexicans, approximately twenty percent of the population, live in the United States, and the reason so many Mexicans make the perilous journey across the border is because there are so few economic opportunities in Mexico,” explains Dordal. “I learned that poverty is worse than at any other time in the past fifty years; seventy-five percent of the population lives in economic poverty that may be attributed to inadequate policies set forth by the Mexican government, greedy transnational corporations, and grossly unjust trade agreements with the United States. Amid the poverty, however, there is hope to be found in the work and activism of Base Christian Communities, of nongovernmental organizations, and of dedicated individuals.”

The *Spire* is pleased to publish a selection from Dordal's field education portfolio titled *Text Shots of Cuernavaca*.



“Vasco de Quiroga teaching the Indians”  
1929-1930  
by Diego Rivera  
Mexican painter  
(1886-1957)  
the tenth grisaille from the mural titled  
*History of Morelos, Conquest and Revolution*  
The Palacio de Cortes, 16th century  
Cuernavaca City  
photographed by Joseph Daniels Blosser, MDiv3

## Geography Lesson

*Where is Mexico?  
She is here —  
washing our dishes,  
picking our strawberries,  
building our houses.*

*Living, working, and dreaming.*

*Mexico on the move.*

*Where is the church?  
She is here —  
in the sweaty palm of my hand,  
the hand holding the bread I wish  
to share with you, my neighbor,  
across a whole new border.*

—LISA DORDAL  
(1964 - )

## A House Built on Partnership Celebrating Seventy-Five Years of Disciples at VDS

BY BRANDON L. GILVIN, MDiv'02

Alumni/ae, faculty, administrators, and friends of Vanderbilt Divinity School gathered for dinner at Nashville's Woodmont Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, on November 17, 2003, to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of a place dear to them—the Disciples Divinity House. An important institution in the history of VDS, the Disciples House has supported over five hundred Disciple students and has been home to students from other faith traditions as well.

Forged in 1927 under the leadership of George Mayhew, professor of history and religions at the Vanderbilt School of Religion, the Disciples House began as the Disciples Foundation. Since the beginning of the Disciples movement, education for ministry had been a priority, and Mayhew envisioned a fairly new ideal in the South—that Disciples could best obtain higher education for ministry from faculty in an ecumenical, university-based setting while maintaining a lively Disciple community. Vine Street, a local Disciples congregation, embraced the vision and provided early support and leadership in the Foundation's establishment.

The first Disciples House was purchased in 1941 and became home for students and their spouses. In 1952, the Board of Higher Education of the Disciples of Christ recognized Vanderbilt Divinity School as one of its approved theological institutions, and an increasing number of Disciples students moved to Nashville, making a new and larger Disciples Divinity House necessary. The present building was completed in 1958 and has housed numerous Disciples in its forty-five years of existence.

Former residents of the Disciples House will tell you that living there proved to be an integral part of their education at Vanderbilt by providing a unique sense of community and helping them to develop lifelong, collegial relationships. "I have been enriched in so many ways by this community," says alumna Kara Kleinschmidt, MDiv'04. "The seventy-fifth anniversary was a great way to celebrate the ways Disciple Divinity House has affected the lives of its residents. I am honored to be a part of such a long tradition

of Disciples of Christ presence, and I am anxious to learn of the community's developments as we move toward our one-hundredth anniversary."

A significant element of the celebration actually began several days before the celebration dinner. As part of an initiative on "Transition into Ministry" funded by the Lilly Endowment, current Disciple students and recent alumni/ae gathered at the House for a workshop on Practical Theology and the Practice of Ministry conducted by Don Browning, the Alexander Campbell Professor of Ethics and the Social Sciences, *emeritus*, at the University of Chicago Divinity School. After examining the practical uses of theological discourse and reflection in the life of communities of faith, participants explored Browning's case study model as a way for contextualizing instances in congregational life into a theological schema.

"This workshop was extremely relevant considering the mission of the Disciples Divinity House," said Heather Godsey, MDiv'03. "The educational component complemented the dinner quite well and reminded me of why I am honored to have been part of the DDH community and how important the DDH community was during my years at Vanderbilt."

The celebration included a video presentation filmed and edited by John Dyer on the House. Nashville singer and songwriter and lifelong Disciple Andra Moran provided music for the evening. Celebrated Disciples preacher Fred Craddock, PhD'64, was scheduled to speak; however, a family illness prevented his attending. Among the individuals intimately connected with life at the House and who commemorated the House's anniversary included H. Jackson Forstman, dean of Vanderbilt University Divinity School and the Charles Grandison Finney Professor of Theology, *emeritus*; Mary Katherine (Kaki) Friskics-Warren, MDiv'92, executive director for Renewal House Resi-



A three-story apartment building located at 2005 Grand Avenue and dedicated on February 26, 1942, served as the original Disciples House although the Disciples Foundation has been affiliated with Vanderbilt University Divinity School for seventy-five years. The building was sold to the Methodists in 1957 and the current Disciples House was erected.

dential Services, a recovery community in Nashville for mothers with addictions and for their children; and C. Roy Stauffer, MDiv'71, DMin'72, senior minister at Lindenwood Christian Church, Memphis, Tennessee. Sunny Beth Buchanan, MDiv'04, and current resident Nathan Brown, MDiv'3, spoke on their experiences in the Disciples House community.

Alumni/ae from past decades of the House's existence, ministers and church members from Tennessee, friends and trustees of the House from all over the country, and faculty members whose careers span the history of the House attended the anniversary celebration. For longtime friends of the House, however, there was one conspicuous absence, at least in the physical sense—Herman Norton, BD'49, MA'51, PhD'56, dean of the House through its formative years of 1951-1986. Norton died in 1992, but his influence on the trajectory of the Disciples House, as well as on the lives of the students who lived there, was commemorated in stories shared over dinner, not only by the featured speakers, but in casual conversations.

Our gathering at Woodmont Christian Church, whose congregation also has supported the mission of the House, was not merely a time to revel in the glories of the past. As Brown remarked, the anniversary was also a time to keep in mind DDH's contributions to the future work of the church. "We find importance in the Disciples Divinity House at Vanderbilt because of the quality of leadership it produces for the church and for God's ministry on earth," explained Brown. "I find God's promise in the Disciples Divinity House at Vanderbilt because I find hope in the ministries that are repre-

sented in this room, the ministries that are continuing to flourish in our denomination, and for the ministries that are created by institutions such as the Disciples Divinity House at Vanderbilt that will allow God's church to exist in the future."

Disciple students have a long history of leadership in the Divinity School, including key roles in student government and other campus organizations, strong participation in programs such as the recent grant in theological education in a global context, and providing leadership for the annual Antoinette Brown Lecture. Currently, there are twenty-five students in the Disciple community at Vanderbilt Divinity School, eighteen of whom live in the House. They are all involved in a variety of activities at the Divinity School and in the greater Nashville community, making the House an exciting place filled with activity, often operating at a frenetic pace, but it is a pace that supports an



GERALD HOLLY, APRIL 1988

The leadership of Herman Norton at the Disciples Divinity House of Vanderbilt University was acknowledged during the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Disciples Vanderbilt Foundation. Norton began his studies at Vanderbilt's School of Religion in 1947 and for thirty-five years, (1951-1986) served as dean of the House.

energetic ministry for providing leadership for the future church.

Perhaps Mark Miller-McLemore, dean of the Disciples Divinity House, describes most accurately the occasion of our seventy-fifth anniversary: "Disciples House has been through some challenging times in the last decade, so it was great to celebrate all the good—for the Christian Church and for the

Divinity School—that has emerged from this unique partnership. The event gave testimony to the School's influence on the more than five hundred Disciple graduates of Vanderbilt and the quality of ministers in congregations and the larger church—as teachers and as forces for shalom in our communities. And the significant presence of Disciple students and faculty has shaped for generations the School's role and vision

of its place in American Protestantism and in Nashville. It is a relationship that has been fruitful."

The essayist recently served as minister-in-residence at Central Christian Church in Lexington, Kentucky, and has accepted an appointment in Nairobi, Kenya, with the Overseas Ministries of the Disciples of Christ.

## A Practical Writer

The life of the Reverend Doctor Perry H. Biddle, DMin'73, exemplifies Vanderbilt University Divinity School's commitment to educate ministers as theologians.



The Reverend Doctor Perry H. Biddle, DMin'73, author of eighteen books for clergy and laity, has donated a collection of his publications to the archives of the Jean and Alexander Heard Library.

In the three decades since earning his doctorate in ministry from the Divinity School, Biddle has written eighteen books for clergy and laity including practical guides for preaching the lectionary, conducting weddings and funerals, hospital visitation, and coping with suicide. He has also written a devotional book for newlyweds and another volume relating humor with healing.

As a gesture of appreciation for the Divinity School's contributions to his theological education, Biddle has donated a signed collection of his books published by William B. Eerdmans, Westminster/John Knox Press, Abingdon Press, Upper Room, Children's Sermon Service (now CSS), Desert Ministries, and Smyth & Helwys to

the University's special collections and archives department of the Jean and Alexander Heard Library.

An alumnus of Davidson College, where he recently celebrated his fiftieth undergraduate class reunion, Biddle earned the master of divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, before receiving the certificate in theology from New College of the University of Edinburgh. He returned to Union to pursue a second master's degree in theology and then accepted his first pastorate at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Memphis. Before his retirement from the ministry in 1997, Biddle served congregations in Mobile, Alabama, and in Starkville, Mississippi, where he was met by opposition from the congregation for his support from the pulpit for the civil rights of African Americans and

the integration of congregations and public schools.

After he was graduated from the Divinity School, where he received the Florence Conwell Prize for his accomplishments in preaching, Biddle accepted an appointment as pastor of Old Hickory Presbyterian Church, a position he held for fifteen years. An avid traveler since his first trip in 1953 by cattle boat to Israel, he has visited thirty-eight countries and preached on five continents.

Biddle's most recent excursion was to Buckingham Palace in London to witness the presentation of the 2003 Templeton Prize to Professor Holmes Rolston III with whom he matriculated at Davidson and at Union Theological Seminary. Biddle nominated Rolston for the Templeton Prize, the world's largest annual award given to an individual whose scholarship and spirit of inquiry in science and religion have contributed to a greater appreciation of the transcendent and the metaphysical.

During his retirement years, Biddle continues to audit courses at the Divinity School and remains active in the Academy of Parish Clergy, The North American Academy of Liturgy and the Presbyterian Writers Guild.

## A Rite of Passages Reflections on the Consecration of a Bishop

BY THE REVEREND TERRY RANDOLPH  
PANNELL, MTS'01

*The state of New Hampshire traditionally makes the national news only during presidential election years. Accustomed to an invasion of politicians and journalists during the primary season, these hearty, independent-minded New Englanders found themselves in the spotlight again in 2003 when another election was conducted—not a presidential primary—but the election of a bishop for a diocese in the Episcopal Church.*

Growing up in the South, I must admit I did not spend much time thinking about New Hampshire. All I knew was that it was one of those tiny states wedged somewhere into that mythical land known as New England. The only person I had met from New Hampshire was a seminary classmate at The University of the South's School of Theology in Sewanee. Susan and I were candidates for holy orders, and after we were graduated, neither of us really expected to see each other again. But when Gene Robinson was elected to be her new bishop, I decided to board a plane for Manchester.

I was not sure what to expect upon my arrival. The November weather was as cold and damp as the mood of Episcopalians who opposed Gene Robinson's election. *Passionate* is not an adjective that immediately comes to mind when one describes Episcopalians who are known as the "frozen chosen." The New Hampshire election, however, stirred up a hornet's nest, to employ a cliché, and suddenly Bible thumping Episcopalians—a real oddity if ever there were one—were scurrying about the land and threatening schism if the consecration occurred.

Susan was assigned to serve as a deacon



at the consecration. She told me to expect heavy security because of the threats made against Gene's life. The people charged with planning and overseeing the consecration also were worried that protesters would try to disrupt the worship service. Given the presence of the national media, it was the perfect venue for anti-gay activists. Never one to miss an opportunity for publicity, the infamous preacher Fred Phelps, attended by his entourage from Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, was scheduled to fly in from Kansas.

On the way to Manchester, I thought about the protesters who would be there and tried to rationalize why people have such visceral reactions to people they do not even know. I replayed in my mind the time, when by accident, my sister and I were stranded in downtown Tupelo, Mississippi, during a Ku Klux Klan parade. Sharpshooters with rifles, riot police, and a police helicopter were on the scene to keep circumstances from getting out of control. I remembered seeing men dressed in white hoods and hearing them shout a litany of racist slogans. It was frightening to witness hatred so closely, and as the plane landed in Manchester, I could not help but wonder if the fear I experienced in Tupelo would be resurrected during the protests of Gene's consecration.

The rite was to be held at the University of New Hampshire in Durham, and the diocese had rented the university's sports arena to accommodate the crowd. When we arrived for the services, there was a long line of people waiting to enter the building. SWAT teams with binoculars and walkie-talkies were located on top of the buildings and were screening carefully the crowd

below for signs of trouble. Déjà vu. What a bizarre image—armed police watching over people who had come to pray together, to celebrate the Eucharist, and to witness the consecration of a bishop.

I learned later that plain-clothed police officers also were stationed at several locations inside the building. Both Gene Robinson and Frank Griswold, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, wore bullet proof vests under their vestments. Unbeknownst but to a select few was a man who was vested in a white alb and was sitting behind Gene Robinson during the entire worship service. As it turned out, the man was the Chief of Police for the University of New Hampshire, and his role was to shield the new bishop-elect should there be an attempt on his life. The chief was nicknamed affectionately "Bishop of Durham."

The sidewalk leading to the arena had been cordoned off on each side to contain the protestors. There were approximately two hundred people on one side who braved the weather to lend their support to New Hampshire's newest bishop-elect. On the other side, there were twelve representatives from the Phelps group carrying large placards with proclamations denouncing gays, the Episcopal Church, and Gene Robinson. As we walked by they shouted that all sodomites would burn in hell. I joked with the people next to me that, being a southerner, I was already acclimated to the heat and that I had never really cared much for cold weather anyway.

There were more hurdles to go through when we arrived at the building's entrance. Each person had to present a ticket before entering, and then we had to walk through

metal detectors, like the ones you see in airports. Everyone, though, adapted to the security measures, and the mood inside was jovial, in contrast to the atmosphere outdoors. People waved to one another and to the bishops who were directly above us in a glassed-enclosed area overlooking the lobby. After we entered the arena, I could see why the diocese had to hold the service in a hockey arena. An estimated four thousand people had traveled from all parts of the world to participate in Gene's consecration.

*A long history of ecclesial suppression of minority voices, the condemnation of homosexuality, and the unwillingness to acknowledge and respect the reality of diversity in God's creation reflects our institutional dishonesty.*

It was a long journey to New Hampshire for someone who started out with the odds stacked against him. Gene Robinson had been injured severely at birth by physicians attending his mother during his delivery. Because he was paralyzed for weeks as an infant, the family made plans for his funeral. He recovered from the paralysis and grew up in a poor family of sharecroppers in rural Kentucky. His early formation as a Christian came through the auspices of the Disciples of Christ. When he was a senior at the University of the South in Sewanee, Gene was confirmed as a member of the Episcopal Church and later attended seminary. And now he was about to be consecrated a bishop.

We knew that objections would be expressed. In the Episcopal Church's ordination liturgy, the presiding bishop must ask those present if there are any reasons why the candidate should not be ordained. Three people who had been chosen by various groups within the Episcopal Church and who were opposed to Gene's election were escorted to the microphone where they could deliver their statements. This was the moment we all dreaded. Everyone had already heard or read every reason under the heavens why a non-celibate gay priest should not be consecrated as a bishop.

The first objection came from an elderly priest from Pennsylvania who began by describing graphically his interpretation of homosexual behavior. Mercifully, the presiding bishop intervened and asked him to spare everyone the details and articulate his opposition more cogently. Two other people came forward to read their objections. The Suffragan Bishop of Albany, New York, objected on behalf of a group of bishops who saw the consecration as a threat to the Anglican Communion. The final objection was

presented by a member of a congregation in the Diocese of New Hampshire.

People's hearts went out to Gene as the objections were read. Mark Andrew, Gene's partner of fifteen years, Gene's daughters, and his former wife—all who know Gene better than anyone—listened patiently as representatives claiming to carry the mantle of orthodoxy attacked him and those who had elected him. It was a painful and embarrassing moment for many of us to witness. At the same time, as an Episcopalian, I was proud that my church respects its members enough to make room for voices of dissent to be heard.

After being thanked for their statements, the small group perfunctorily left the building, and following a pastoral response from the presiding bishop, the service continued when he asked the question, "Is it your will that we ordain Gene Robinson a bishop?"

With a thunderous voice, thousands of people in unison said, "It is our will."

That massive sound wave of affirmation washed away the objections made earlier and lifted everyone's spirits.

All stood in silence as Gene knelt before the presiding bishop. Moving forward and encircling Gene, over forty bishops of the church—including the theologian and former

Lutheran Bishop of Stockholm, Krister Stendahl—laid hands upon Gene as the presiding bishop spoke the words, "Father, make Gene a bishop in your Church. Pour out upon him the power of your princely Spirit."

New Hampshire had a new bishop, and the Episcopal Church had made history.

By all measures, Bishop Robinson has conducted himself with exceptional dignity and grace as he continues to perform the duties of his office. Though his election and consecration have triggered negative reactions from some within the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion, the actions also have revealed the church's discomfort when addressing human sexuality and religion. A long history of ecclesial suppression of minority voices, the condemnation of homosexuality, and the unwillingness to acknowledge and respect the reality of diversity in God's creation reflects our institutional dishonesty.

In his book titled *This Far by Grace*, Neil Alexander, the Bishop of Atlanta recounts a meeting at the Episcopal Church's General Convention in Minneapolis during the summer of 2003. Bishops were debating whether or not to give their consent, which is required by the church's canons, to Gene's election. One conservative bishop, who thought Gene was a gifted and experienced priest suitable for the office of bishop, suggested that if Gene had just kept his sexuality and his relationship with Mark Andrew a secret, there would be no problem in making him a bishop. Bishop Alexander writes that at that moment he felt he had to vote in favor of Gene's election because it was time for us to tell the truth.

Two months later, there was a University of New Hampshire student standing outside the arena on the day of Gene's consecration. The young man held up a sign with the inscription "God is Love."

The student obviously knows the truth.

*Pannell, an Episcopal priest, resides in Shreveport, Louisiana.*



## Alumni/ae Class Notes

**Please Note:** Class Notes appear only in the printed version of this publication.





## Divinity School Administrators, Faculty, and Benefactors

Former Vanderbilt University Divinity School Dean **John Robert Nelson**, of Houston, Texas, died from the effects of cancer on July 6, 2004, at the age of 83. During his deanship at the Divinity School from 1957 to 1960, the institution experienced significant developments in the size and diversity of the student population, in the scope of academic programs, and in the breadth and quality of the faculty. The construction of the Oberlin Quadrangle, the present location of the Divinity School, occurred under the guidance of Nelson.

An ordained Methodist minister, Nelson was graduated from Yale University where he earned a master of divinity degree and from the University of Zurich where he received a doctorate in theology. He served on the staff of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, and was acknowledged during his life as an ecumenist whose interest in theological education was characterized by encouraging different denominations to talk constructively about the path to unity.

Nelson's tenure at the University, however, was not without controversy. When James Lawson, D'71, was expelled from the University in 1960 for his participation in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's efforts in desegregation, Nelson protested the expulsion and eventually resigned from the University. Upon learning of Nelson's passing, Lawson told the Associated Press, "Robert Nelson was at the center of the crisis at Vanderbilt. He handled the crisis with poise, Christian strength, and character."

Following his resignation from the University, Nelson served the academy as a professor and later as dean of Boston University's School of Theology. He developed

an interest in the discipline of bioethics and was instrumental in advancing the study of the relationship among medical ethics, genetics, and theology and in promoting ethical and religious guidelines on cloning in conjunction with the National Institutes of Health. In 1985, Nelson accepted an appointment as director of the Institute of Religion at the Texas Medical Center.

(Source: *The Vanderbilt Register*, July 19-August 1, 2004 issue, page 7)

Former Vanderbilt University Divinity School Professor **James Daniel Glasse** died on July 11, 2004, at his home in Orinda, California, at the age of 80, from the effects of cancer. Ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA), he served at the Divinity School from 1956-1969 in the roles of associate dean and professor of practical theology and field work. Following his tenure at VDS, he was appointed president of Lancaster Theological Seminary in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He is remembered as an outstanding preacher whose sermons were known for their clear theology and humor; he expressed his passion for justice during the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s and throughout his life in active support of the oppressed and suffering. The author of *Education for Ministry*; *Profession: Minister*; *Putting It Together in the Parish*; and *The Art of Spiritual Snake Handling and Other Sermons*, Glasse was developing two manuscripts, *Beyond Professional Ministry* and *Ministry in the Interim*, prior to his illness. He was honored for his contributions to theological education by honorary doctorates from Occidental, Ursinus, Elizabethtown, and Dickinson Colleges.

Retired businessman, civic leader, and Vanderbilt University Divinity School benefactor **Albert Werthan**, of Nashville, Tennessee, died on July 3, 2004, at the age of 97 from complications related to a fall. He was preceded in death by his wife, Mary Jane Lowenheim Werthan, BA'29, MA'35, the first woman elected to serve on the Vanderbilt University Board of Trust. The Werthans endowed the Divinity School's chair in Jewish Studies and Hebrew Bible.

"He was incredibly generous with his time, his energy, and his resources," explains Jack M. Sasson, who was appointed in 1999 as the first Mary Jane Werthan Professor of Jewish Studies and Hebrew Bible. "I got to know Albert only during his last years, but to the end, his mind was supple, engaged, and vastly searching. He always enjoyed entertaining company, and when we went out for supper and the bill was read to him (because he could no longer see), he would instantly calculate the gratuity, putting my Pentium to shame," remarks Sasson. "But I will remember him most for his optimism and for his enduring hope about the future of his people, his nation, and humanity. I feel very privileged to hold his family name as my academic title."

Werthan and his daughters, Elizabeth and the late May Werthan Shayne, also endowed the May and Morris Werthan Scholarship in honor of his parents. He referred to the establishment of the scholarship as an opportunity for the family "to live the fourth commandment."

# Come and Feast

## AT THE TABLE OF IDEAS

### AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY DIVINITY SCHOOL



#### THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2004

##### COMMUNITY BREAKFAST

*"The World Reads the Bible: A Global Bible Commentary"*

featuring Daniel Patte, *Professor of Religious Studies, New Testament, and early Christianity*

7:30-8:30 a.m.

Divinity School Refectory

To make reservations, please call 615/343-3994.

##### MINISTRY FORUM I

*"Preaching Paul: An Ancient Apostle and the Contemporary Pulpit"*

featuring Brad Braxton, *Associate Professor of Homiletics and New Testament*

10:00 a.m. until noon

All Faith Chapel

To register, please call Kitty Norton Jones at 615/322-4205.

##### MINISTRY FORUM II

*"Practical Theology for Pastoral Ministry"*

featuring guest lecturer Dale P. Andrews, *The Frank H. Caldwell Associate Professor of Homiletics at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary*

1:00-3:00 p.m.

All Faith Chapel

To register, please call Kitty Norton Jones at 615/322-4205.

##### COLE LECTURE I

*"The Bible: The Development of An American Book"*

featuring the Reverend Professor Peter John Gomes, *The Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and Pusey Minister in The Memorial Church Harvard University*

7:00 p.m.

Benton Chapel

#### FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2004

##### COLE LECTURE II

*"The Bible: Beyond the Culture to the Gospel"*

featuring the Reverend Professor Peter John Gomes, *The Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and Pusey Minister in The Memorial Church Harvard University*

10:00 a.m.

Benton Chapel

#### THURSDAY, JANUARY 20, 2005

##### COMMUNITY BREAKFAST

*"Dealing with Religious Difference: Christian Responses"*

featuring John Thatamanil, *Assistant Professor of Theology*

7:30-8:30 a.m.

University Club of Nashville

To make reservations, please call 615/343-3994.

#### THURSDAY, MARCH 3, 2005

##### COMMUNITY BREAKFAST

*"The Holiness of Beauty: Knowing and Praising God through the Arts"*

featuring Robin Jensen, *The Luce Chancellor's Professor of the History of Christian Art and Worship*

7:30-8:30 a.m.

University Club of Nashville

To make reservations, please call 615/343-3994.

#### SATURDAY, APRIL 9, 2005

##### MINISTRY TODAY

*"The Image of the Invisible God: A Visual Theology for Orthodox Protestants"*

featuring Robin Jensen, *The Luce Chancellor's Professor of the History of Christian Art and Worship*

9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.

Vanderbilt Divinity School

To register, please call 615/343-3994, or you may register online at [www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity). Continuing education units may be earned.

*"Wisdom is bright, and does not grow dim. By those who love her, she is readily seen, and found by those who look for her."*

—THE BOOK OF WISDOM 6:12-13  
THE JERUSALEM BIBLE

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leaders, Vanderbilt University  
Divinity School announces the  
establishment of the*



# Mills-Buttrick Society

The Mills-Buttrick Society commemorates the legacies of Liston Mills (1928-2002), the Oberlin Professor of Pastoral Theology and Counseling, *emeritus*, and David Buttrick, the Drucilla Moore Buffington Professor of Homiletics and Liturgics, *emeritus*. By transforming the standards of the practice of pastoral care and of preaching within the academic community, Professors Mills and Buttrick contributed significantly to the Divinity School's mission of educating ministers as theologians. While Liston Mills defined ministry within the framework of pastoral theology and psychology, David Buttrick encouraged students to discover their prophetic voices.

We celebrate the service of these two distinguished and beloved professors by naming, in honor of their commitment to the ethos of Vanderbilt University Divinity School, a donor society for congregations. For information regarding membership in the Mills-Buttrick Society, please contact Kitty Norton Jones in the Office of Development and Alumni/ae Relations by calling 615/322-4205 or writing her at [kitty.a.norton@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:kitty.a.norton@vanderbilt.edu).