

AAR

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The AAR Committee on Teaching and Learning (Eugene V. Gallagher, Chair) sponsors *Spotlight on Teaching*. It appears twice each year in *Religious Studies News—AAR Edition* and focuses on teaching and learning around a particular theme, concern, or setting.

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REFLECTIONS ON A
TEACHING CAREER
IN RELIGION

Edward Mooney, Syracuse University
Guest Editor

From the Editor's Desk



Tazim R. Kassam
Spotlight on Teaching Editor

DESCRIBING A SAD but true fact, Tom F. Driver frankly notes, "In academia you don't get many brownie points for loving to teach" (*RSN* May 2005:16). Yet, as is evident from this issue, even for those who have attained academic eminence through their research, at the end of the day, teaching elicits great love, attention and generosity.

In his special report, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* — as relevant today as it was over a decade ago — Ernest L. Boyer calls for the American academy to enlarge its perspective of what it means to be a scholar by recognizing the diverse roles that faculty juggle to sustain the creative and critical enterprise of learning and education (Carnegie Report:1990). The status of "scholar" in many societies has

derived first and foremost from the capacity to teach — an expressive activity not merely of transmission of knowledge, but through its unrelenting and unending pursuit, of personal and societal transformation and renewal.

It is not a question I get asked much these days, but when I first interviewed for jobs I was regularly asked what drew me to the study of religion. Naturally, I talked about the important role of religions in shaping human history; and described my passion for the aesthetic, poetic and philosophical manifestations of religious life. And then the down-to-earth truth: two professors, in particular, at McGill University — Katherine Young and Charles Adams. The magic of the classroom, the stunning encounter of intellect and passion for a subject eloquently, expertly, and generously shared, the casual common room conversations, the watchful encouragement — all these meant more to me in those years marked by curiosity and experimentation than is possible to describe.

In his article, "Moments for Transformation: The Process of Teaching and Learning," Jeffrey Soleau vividly captures the transformative impact that his philosophy professor had upon him: "Sitting in his class was akin to experiencing a meteor shower... In retrospect, I would describe what happened in this two-semester course as an ontological disclosure . . ." (*JAAR* 65/4:812).

Those entering a life in academe may thus take heart that while the challenges

of an academic career are intense, as many of us know from our own experience, the influence, love and admiration of great teachers persist well beyond the hours when they directly quickened our minds and hearts, and stoked them with the fires of knowledge. Henry Adams aptly said: "A teacher affects eternity." Teachers can never tell when or where their influence stops.

The idea for this issue of *Spotlight* was conceived serendipitously one afternoon over coffee as my colleague, Professor Edward Mooney, mused about what a life of teaching and scholarship had meant to him. Wouldn't it be fascinating, he said wistfully, to hear the thoughts of other scholars in religion looking back on their careers as teachers, tracing their intellectual biography, reflecting on what moved them to teach, on how changes in the world affected their classrooms, on the ways that their writing had intersected with their teaching, and what they saw in the future for teachers entering the field?

Seizing the moment, I promptly invited Ed to guest edit *Spotlight*. Fortunately, he welcomed the prospect of putting these questions to the eminent scholars of religion who graciously agreed to be interviewed for this issue. Through the informal style and flow of ideas that dialogue makes possible, Ed's thoughtfully conceived conversations capture a sense of the intellectual passions, ethical commitments, and delight in learning that nourish an academic vocation capably conceived. ■

Evoking a World You Might Inhabit

Edward Mooney, Syracuse University



Edward F. Mooney is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Sonoma State University, and currently teaches in the Department of Religion at Syracuse University. He is author of *Knights of Faith and Resignation: Reading Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling (1991) and Selves in Discord and Resolve: Kierkegaard's Moral-Religious Psychology (1996)*. He discusses religion, evocation, and teaching in "Against the Boundlessly Loquacious Mind," *International Kierkegaard Commentary: Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses (2003)*, and in "Two Testimonies in American Philosophy: Stanley Cavell and Henry Bugbee," in *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 2003.

Kassam: You taught mainly undergraduates for many years. What would you say to aspiring PhD students preparing to teach introductory classes?

Mooney: Well, first I'd say that teaching might be a career, but it's best if it's a calling. You have to feel compelled by the idea of thinking out loud, for others and with others, in such a way that they acquire their own voices. That means that you're out to do something other than knowledge-transfer.

If you think your job is to be a friendly information-transfer machine, you're in a losing competition with the Web and libraries, and have to end up with a low self-conception. Of course, information is part of the picture, but a young teacher shouldn't fixate on it. Teaching isn't writing up an hour-long, good PhD qualifying exam or dissertation chapter. And it isn't much of a step up, either, to think of yourself as a methods instructor — training someone, for example, in "the method" presumably in use in the academic study of religion. That's what to avoid, on the negative side, as it were. The positive side is easy to state and hard to do. I'd encourage an aspiring teacher about to face beginners in religious studies to think about the particular world that you already find captivating, or compelling, and then try to evoke it, bring it alive for them. Evocation isn't information-transfer or methods-training.

Kassam: Are you saying that teaching is evoking something for students?

Mooney: I think that's the best place to start in thinking about what one does in teaching. It's imparting meanings and possibilities, not just facts.

Kassam: Can you give some examples?

Mooney: I'll try! Let's say I'm teaching Basho's *Narrow Road*, or Camus's *L'Étranger*, or a poem of Emily Dickinson. First of all, I attend to language, word by word. I read aloud. And I hold the book

up for all to see. In a large class, I'll project a passage onto a screen, and we'll read it different ways together. I think part of the recent neglect of texts in the study of religion is related to our discomfort, as a culture, with enjoying the sound of words in books. We're so used to television and movies or dry print news. The great religious traditions are built around beautiful, gripping, wounding language. If a passage doesn't hurt or sting or soothe or caress or provoke, something's wrong. We've forgotten how language does that. I find I have to make it alive for students. You hold up the book and say, "Hey! There's magic in these pages!" And help them find it. Sometimes I bring in a paperback that a friend annotated for me decades ago and tell them how traditions of reading and meaning start like that. I try to get them gripped by words and books. Actually, they're better at poetry than you might expect, but I think that's because they listen to so many lyrics through their iPods. A world gets evoked when words begin to spark. Of course, pictures or music can work, too. But I think words and texts are central, and presently at risk.

Kassam: Where does critique, critical thinking, come in?

Mooney: It's very important. But critique doesn't guarantee a replacement world when the one critiqued collapses. You have to inhabit a world you respect and love if your critique is going to be relevant. You have to inhabit the world you interrogate. Otherwise, your objections miss the mark; people don't know why they should listen. And you learn to inhabit the world of Basho or of a Dickinson poem by letting its words evoke something. If the words do their work, students can get a glimmer of what it would be like to inhabit the world those words evoke. I'm cautious about critique, especially of the strange worlds of religious, or quasi-religious, texts. We push words and worlds away without letting their vitality speak. Of course, if someone gets brash or dogmatic or thoughtless about a presumed knowledge of this or that, critique, in large doses, is the appropriate medicine.

Kassam: You mentioned pictures and music as evocative, as well as words. Would you ever use hymns or chants in class?

Mooney: Maybe chants they hadn't heard before, or shape note stuff. Hymns they knew would be too obvious, and probably backfire. In teaching a beginning course — say one called "Religion and Meaning" — I might have students listen to the funeral pace of a late Schubert Sonata, and listen for the death knell, and have them think about how certain rhythms and sounds induce sadness, and why religion evokes and replicates moments of grief and mourning, and thus lets us relive them. Sometimes an unexpected piece of music works wonders.

Kassam: How does teaching at the graduate level differ from teaching at the undergraduate level?

Mooney: I hear colleagues say that the big difference is that undergraduates need to be initiated into the excitement and rigors of a discipline, while graduate students are already going full steam ahead and only need some direction. That might be partly true. I think an undergraduate

needs to be captivated by the worlds the discipline attends to. But graduate students need reminders in that direction, too. Sometimes I fear that they are so concerned with establishing their academic credentials — which is a real concern, not an illusion by any means — that they forget the pure fun of intellectual exploration and experimentation. As an advisor at the graduate level, I find I have to remind the thesis or dissertation writers to keep their readers excited about what they write about. They have to watch out not to kill the excitement that brought them into a religion graduate program in the first place. If that excitement stays alive, it can get them through a stiff program, and also keep their teaching alive as they get out on the job market.

“*And that's the main thing I try to pass on in a class, the art of evocation, of letting something be evoked through words not yet your own, and then finding . . . words that give back a matching evocation.*”

Kassam: What's the greatest reward of teaching?

Mooney: I think it's seeing a student or several of them — and sometimes, at a magic moment, an entire class — come alive in a moment of discovery. If I set the stage properly, the world I evoke, or that is evoked through my text, will resonate for them, singly, or maybe in pairs, and then all together. If it manages to resonate, then something very valuable has happened. And of course, if in my revisiting I can come at the texts from the right angle, a world dawns for me, as well as for them, in the evocations of a passage. Great rewards, sharable ones, are palpably there in those moments.

Kassam: How does your teaching intersect with, or recoil from, various public, political displays of religion — everything from 9/11 to the death of a pope?

Mooney: If you see things from a broad enough angle, there's something happening all the time that can intersect with the sort of religious themes I work to bring out in my introductory classes. You can feed off the feelings and thoughts students may have about 9/11, say when the topic of compassion or love of neighbor is foremost. Is it realistic to think one can love one's enemy? How does one grieve for one's dead? The connections are endless. And we shouldn't be afraid to make them. It's not a matter of preaching anything. It's a matter of seeing that the sorts of adjustments we make in our daily lives to injustice, hatred, exceptional love, death, suffering, are just the sorts of adjustments religious texts enact and evoke. The trick is to be imaginative in finding the correspondences. Is a killer tsunami the flood from

Genesis? Is it just about as unfair in both cases? The questions are key here, not the answers.

Kassam: Do you see any great changes in the way we teach in religion programs at the undergraduate level?

Mooney: I think the shift toward visual media, PowerPoint and films for example, is going to continue to grow. I think the danger is that we encourage spectators, viewers of this and that, rather than people capable of sounding their own voices, coming to know the poetic and eloquent registers of their speech. If you slow a film way down, you can let its evocations be more transparent, and give students a chance to muster a kind of dialogical response. Otherwise, you just sit back and let yourself be overwhelmed. Or bored. In contrast, it's hard to be just a spectator of a text. You have to work to bring it alive for yourself. And that's the main thing I try to pass on in a class, the art of evocation, of letting something be evoked through words not yet your own, and then finding words that can be your own, words that give back a matching evocation — of what you've read, but also of the world you inhabit, and a possible one you might inhabit. There's a kind of mutuality in the art of evocation. We wax or wane with the text. Maybe this is a minority opinion, but I don't think texts will go away.

Kassam: Did you always know you'd be a teacher?

Mooney: No. In high school I didn't like school or teachers. I wanted to escape. And in college I was still pretty ambivalent. It wasn't that I didn't like books — or music. I read Emerson in high school, played a lot of music, and read a lot of philosophy and literature in college. I was a contrarian. It took a while for me to realize that teaching didn't mean having to be a clone of someone else, especially when it came to how one taught. By the time I got to graduate school, I began to see that there was a way to teach that wasn't just information-orientated or wedded to a narrow methodology. It took time to figure out what that other way was. I always thought words could set the heart and mind free, because I had experienced moments of that. Gradually I began to sense that was a classroom possibility, too. Now I'm certain that that's a real possibility, and I can point to a good number of teachers much better than I am at that sort of release of the mind and heart toward the world. But the possibility that I could work in a classroom for that sort of freedom was slow to dawn. Many of my friends became dropouts. I feel very lucky to have been able to do what I loved, pretty much following my own instincts, and get a job or career out of it.

Kassam: So you'd place the study of religion among the humanities?

Mooney: I've met some very good people doing exciting work in the area of cultural studies, which is part humanities, part social science. Of course the great theoreticians of religion — Weber, Durkheim, Marx, Freud — all brought philosophical, literary, and historical perspectives together with what we might call behavioristic or scientific-quantitative concerns. Personally, I think the humanistic

See **MOONEY** p.x

Delight in Learning Is Infectious

Margaret Miles, Graduate Theological Union



Margaret R. Miles is Emerita Professor of Historical Theology, The Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley. She was Bussey Professor of Theology at the Harvard University Divinity School (1978–96) and Dean of the Graduate Theological Union (1996 until her retirement in 2002). Her research interests include patristics, women's history, gender studies, asceticism, and Christian art, music, and architecture. Her books include *The Word Made Flesh: A History of Christian Thought* (2005), *Plotinus on Body and Beauty* (1999), *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (1997), and *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's Confessions* (1992).

Mooney: Did you teach undergraduates at Harvard?

Miles: I taught several hundreds of them in my "Religion and Film" course. The course had discussion sections but I had fourteen excellent teaching fellows, so I didn't get as close to most of the students as I might have.

Mooney: You picked films that tied in with religious themes?

Miles: Well, my book, *Seeing and Believing*, came out of that course. I was designing a method for understanding movies as one voice in a public discourse about values. It wasn't about "this film has the leitmotif of redemption" or some other religious theme. I did box-office research and read up on public conversation at the time the movie was produced in order to see how the film responded to these concerns.

Mooney: So you thought of religious discourse as woven into the values of a culture, how they're put together.

Miles: Yes, I used several movies that were specifically about religions — *Jesus of Montreal*, *The Last Temptation* (Christianity), *The Chosen* (Judaism), and *Not without My Daughter* (Islam). I tried to identify the cultural niche in which representations of religion had a successful box office. *Not without My Daughter* had the clearest cultural niche in that it was produced while the Gulf War was threatening; it came out in theaters the week the war started, and left the theaters the week the war ended. It responded to a concern that many, many people had: "Who are these people we're bombing?" The movie, with its starkly negative representation of Muslims, reassured Americans that it was legitimate to bomb them.

Mooney: I know you're interested in Plotinus and delight. I can't resist asking you — what do you think of the phenomenon of *The Passion*? So many people went out to see it, and so far as I can tell, it has absolutely nothing to do with delight — unless we're supposed to take delight in someone else's excruciating pain.

Miles: Well, that's right. I think of *The Passion* as an example of "misdirection," a magician's term for distracting people with one hand while the other hand is doing the trick. The movie is misdirection in that it directs viewers to watch the horrible drama of Jesus's suffering, while ignoring his teachings. In a society that is failing to provide resources for vulnerable people — children, old people, sick people — it invites spectators not to notice that Jesus spent his life teaching and healing. If we focused on what Jesus said and did, rather than on what was done to him, we would get a different image of Christianity.

Mooney: Picking up the idea of delight, it's a kind of perennial worry for academics that they're not being hard enough on students. Don't we have to show students delight in what is taught, how to see its beauty, and sometimes, its terror?

Miles: Delight in learning is communicable. It's infectious. I worry, however, that often the intellectual life of faculty isn't nourishing, so that we have less delight to pass on. A friend who teaches in an undergraduate college told me, "I never have time to read a book, unless it's for the next class." How can a teacher communicate delight in learning if she's not continuing to learn? I think we go into teaching because we love to learn. There's no way that we can pass on anything but information if we stop learning. Also, in the present job market, learning needs to be thought of as a way of life rather than a way to earn money. Presently, if a student does well his teachers say, "You must go on and get the doctorate." But there aren't enough academic jobs to go around. Delight in learning does not require a doctorate. Learning is an end in itself, a way of life.

Mooney: What if the problem is wider than the university? Most jobs don't leave time on the side for people to relax and read and learn.

Miles: Well, that's true, but it's also a matter of values. If we think we need a high standard of living and a new car every year, we sacrifice time to read and reflect. But if students see learning as a way of life, they become addicted to it. They will need to continue to learn, no matter what they do to earn a living. That model is more realistic than urging everyone who loves learning to enter the teaching profession.

Mooney: Has the national political and cultural climate affected the way you teach?

Miles: Scholarship needs to be responsive to the neediness of the world, but sensitizing students to connections between scholarship and the world's needs can sometimes best be done by discussing a Platonic dialogue that presents a world of different values and different perspectives, challenging those that come to us through our media culture. It takes a great deal of creativity and imagination to alert students (and ourselves) to what is missing and needed in our culture.

Mooney: What's best about teaching? Maybe you've answered it — the capacity to continue learning.

Miles: Yes, yes, that's what teaching is about. I think most of us become teachers because, as children, we liked to read. Then, as my mother said in a different context, one thing leads to another.

Mooney: People often want to know what the academic study of religion is all

about. The usual contrast is between the humanities and the social sciences.

Miles: History is my training and my academic home, but there are different kinds of historians. Social historians really like countable things, material artifacts, while intellectual historians like ideas. Each proposes lenses for selecting and examining evidence, but those same lenses block other kinds of evidence. It is often necessary to look, in a refracted way, across two or three disciplines to reconstruct a historical conversation or event. We are just beginning to learn how to do responsible interdisciplinary work. I predict that interdisciplinarity is going to make the present fields obsolete quite soon.

Mooney: Can you elaborate on that a bit?

Miles: Often we don't like what we see when we look at interdisciplinary projects because one of the disciplines engaged in the work is used irresponsibly. But what's needed is not to reject interdisciplinarity, but to refine its methods.

Mooney: Will that redraw the map of departments?

Miles: Many of the younger faculty who are being hired today don't fit comfortably in the present fields. The people who are currently doing the hiring are people who have been trained in the traditional fields of study, but many of those currently being hired have been trained in cultural and critical theory and in interdisciplinarity. They will reform departments and fields.

Mooney: If a grad student has done an interdisciplinary dissertation, what do you pass on as advice when it comes time for a job interview?

Miles: It's an exciting historical moment for interdisciplinary work, but hiring institutions often need assistance in recognizing the disciplinary and institutional relevance of that work. I tell students to position themselves very firmly in one of the traditional fields. If they can show that they are trained in a way those now hiring can recognize, then they can write an interdisciplinary dissertation without penalty.

Mooney: If you were going to give advice to a child who has just returned from college and was excited about intellectual life and realized that you had made that life your life, what would you recommend they read over the summer?

Miles: My granddaughter is a sophomore at Swarthmore, and we were talking about this just last night. She's interested in public policy, which isn't my field, but the books we both read are in critical theory, gender theory, and queer theory. I'd recommend Rosemary Hennessey's *Pleasure and Profit*, because this book examines the economic basis of American cultural life — something we usually ignore in the humanities, where we think that ideas run the world. I'd also recommend reading Freud and his critics, for example, *Unauthorized Freud*, edited by Frederick C. Crews, or Richard H. Armstrong's *A Compulsion for Antiquity: Freud and the Ancient World*. Recognition of Freud's construction of "sexuality" and its problems, for example, challenges the tendency of historians to read historical authors like Augustine through unexamined Freudian assumptions.

Mooney: If you were going to give a final lecture on what's been important in your research and teaching, what might it be about?

Miles: Well, I gave such a lecture this summer at the Colloquium on Violence and Religion in Koblenz, Germany. In it I examined desire and its effects. I looked at the social construction of desire and its role in both determining and concealing values. In the Platonic tradition — Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, et al. — there are two quite different accounts of desire. In one, desire for the good is intellectual, freed from temporal objects. In the other, desire is instigated by sensible beauty, leading to an ever more inclusive love and delight.

The conference focused on René Girard's analysis of the origin of violence in mimetic desire. Girard draws on an epistemology which holds that desire is contagious; we learn to desire particular objects from our neighbor. We desire what our neighbor has, and then we have conflicts that lead to violence. This analysis has obvious explanatory power and importance in helping us to understand the ubiquity of violence, but it is a partial account of the effects of desire. If you go back to Plato, Plotinus, and Augustine you see that the Platonic tradition described two trajectories of desire. Desire (as Girard acknowledges but does not develop) can take one of two directions. A bad eros makes idols of self and other, but there is also a good eros — *concupiscentia* for the good, as Augustine called it — based on the perception of beauty and leading to awareness of the great beauty, the source of all life. A more inclusive account demonstrates that desire underlies the values that inform our more negotiable ideas and actions.

Mooney: So an analysis of desire can reveal the root of violence?

Miles: Yes, but it can also reveal that desire, based on beauty, seeks an object that everyone can have and without depriving someone else. It can lead, not to competition and violence, but to a more and more inclusive love and delight.

Mooney: So instead of Girard's competition for a small piece of beauty, you get a larger and larger supply.

Miles: Yes, and Plotinus turns attention from the beautiful object that "catches" the eye to the activity of creating in one's self the ability to perceive beauty — a spiritual discipline. Augustine takes that cultivation to a desire for God ("beauty so old and so new," *Confessions* 10. 27) that shapes the self.

Mooney: A lot of academic intellectual work seems to reinforce reasons for despair — how things break down, become incoherent, hide brute power, and so forth. The world is coming apart all on its own without our finding even more reasons to despair.

Miles: Yes. I began to work on Augustine because I couldn't figure out why, for at least a thousand years, his ideas were so utterly attractive and compelling, while our age finds him the villain of everything we dislike, such as disdain for the natural world and the body. Rather than approaching his ideas as abstract philosophical proposals, I endeavored to reconstruct his perspective as much as possible by seeking the circumstances and the conversations that informed his thinking. Then I glimpsed his contagious attentiveness to beauty and delight. ❁

Against a Narrow View of the World

Peter Paris, Princeton Theological Seminary



Peter Paris has taught at Howard University School of Divinity, Vanderbilt Divinity School, and for the past 20 years he has been the Elmer G. Homrighausen Professor of Christian Social Ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary where he is currently chair of the Theology Department. He is a former president of the AAR, the Society of Christian Ethics, and the Society for the Study of Black Religion. His writings include *Black Religious Leaders: Conflict in Unity* (1992); *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches* (1985); and *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* (1994).

Mooney: Have you always taught in seminary programs?

Paris: That's right. What I enjoy in teaching professional students is their commitment to the enterprise. They're trying to figure out how what they're learning in classes will relate to either the practice of ministry or to teaching theology or ethics — my field is in ethics. Sometimes I find it difficult when students have very normative commitments that close them off to alternative traditions. I see a large part of my teaching as introducing students to other perspectives — whatever the subject might be — that they may not have a narrow view of the world, and think that everyone thinks in the same way.

Mooney: I suppose that comes up while teaching ethics.

Paris: Yes, it comes up a great deal, and one of the most shocking things that I say to students is that there is no one ethical argument for anything, but rather that there are a variety of ethical arguments, and that it's important to know something of that variety, so that you can position yourself.

Mooney: Do you find that doing ethics and theology has changed over the decades, or do you think they've pretty much stayed on the same course?

Paris: From the time I went into PhD studies in the late '60s, I have sensed a great difference. Contemporary issues are welcomed into the classroom now, and we welcome struggling with them. That was not the case when I went to seminary in the 1950s. It was almost like you left the world outside of the classroom and you came to learn the wisdom of the ages, only to go back outside of the classroom to try to figure out how to apply it.

Mooney: It would be taboo to bring that outside world into the classroom?

Paris: It wasn't done, and people weren't oriented in that way. And I think this change had to do with the tremendous social turbulence and cultural changes that took place in the 1960s. I was very grateful to be a graduate student at that time. I remember quite

vividly the students at the University of Chicago Divinity School pleading to participate in the decision making at the Divinity school, to sit in on faculty meetings and faculty committees. Well, that was an absolutely radical thought. In the 1950s, that idea hadn't even appeared on the horizons of their imaginations. That was one indication of the tremendous change that was beginning to take place in education, in terms of governance, and then the development of regional, racial, ethnic, and gender studies, which had their beginnings in the late '60s and took on more and more form and substance in the decades that followed.

Mooney: So students raised their voices to participate in the political processes of the university, and then said, well, why can't we bring those things that are of great concern to us into the classroom, too?

Paris: Exactly. I know that the African-American students, in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, started making demands for African-American teachers. These were primarily white schools that had no African-American teachers, and the students began making an argument for the study of the black church. When I was in seminary I was being trained to serve the white church. It would never have occurred to me to introduce my own black church traditions into the classroom discussion. Because of the ethos of the '60s, blacks started saying that we need to study the black church. Usually a white church historian would try to do a course on the black church, and then the black students would see the need for a black teacher who could teach from experience. So it always seemed to me that the impetus for change in these schools began with these students and the demands that they were making, whether they were African Americans or Asians or women. All of these movements began around the same time, when the universities were organized in such a way that these people weren't represented in large numbers in the student body and certainly not at all on the faculty.

Mooney: So you really discovered that there could be a field of study, the study of the black church, in the process of this social change.

Paris: Yes. Before going to graduate study at the University of Chicago in the mid-'60s, I had spent three years in Nigeria, in West Africa. I was very much attuned to the issues of colonialism and the struggle for independence. A hundred and fifty million African people were becoming a sovereign nation. There was a kind of readiness for me to confront the changes in the U.S. Some of the faculty at the University of Chicago had gone to the Selma march, in 1965, and had their lives changed, and that affected their teaching. Al Pitcher, one of my teachers, came back and decided to dedicate the rest of his life to matters of racial justice. He developed a course on the civil rights movement, and then he taught Reinhold Niebuhr in relationship to civil rights. Jesse Jackson was in the course. I got to know Jesse in that context. The Urban Studies Center and various other schools, Medicine, and so forth, were filled with people trying out new ideas, but also challenging the ways things had been done by former generations.

Mooney: That period is still very fascinating to me. It's one that I lived through and remember pretty vividly. I don't know if we've really understood it — there hasn't

been anything else like it, and we are to some extent still feeling the aftereffects.

Paris: I think you're right. I can remember going to the American Academy of Religion meeting and the number of African Americans there could almost all fit into one hotel bedroom because they were so few. Now, as years have passed, and with more students coming into the schools making demands on more faculty, there are a few hundred African Americans — to say nothing of Africans — at the AAR meeting, and similarly with women in general and many ethnic groups. There was still quite a struggle going on as to whether a woman could be a good academician and be involved in women's studies, with a dissertation on something pertaining to women, in the same way as with African Americans; where some wondered whether research centered on African Americans could be respected as real scholarship. That went on for a very long time, and to some extent it still goes on.

Mooney: Has your approach to teaching changed?

Paris: Most of my teaching, about 34 years or so, has been at white seminaries, with a gradual increase of black students. So what I've struggled to do is figure out how I could teach courses in such a way that I could deal with issues of racial and ethnic justice, as well as economic justice, that would welcome the experiences of both blacks and whites, Asians and Hispanic students. That has become my main aim in teaching over the years.

Mooney: So it's an unfinished work in progress?

Paris: Well, I teach a PhD seminar on the "Ethics and Politics of Aristotle," trying to take one of the most ancient fathers of the discipline and then ask the students to write a paper that would be an Aristotelian analysis of a social issue, and that social issue can be located anywhere. For example, if a student is from Nigeria, Korea, or elsewhere, they are asked to take a social issue in that context and view it from an Aristotelian perspective in order to determine how far they can get towards a resolution to that problem that would make sense in the contemporary world. Then they can do a critique of the limits of the Aristotelian way, if they wish. So what I'm saying here is that it doesn't matter what the subject is, whether it's Paul Tillich or Reinhold Niebuhr or H. Richard Niebuhr or public policy generally or African and African-American theologies. A very popular course I've taught is "The Theology and Ethics of Martin Luther King Jr." I want students to bring their own experience into dialogue with the subject matter of the course.

Mooney: So you've avoided that bad choice between the canon — something that's been stuck there for centuries — and on the other hand something more contemporary and engaged.

Paris: Exactly, that's what I've been trying to do, which is not to change a certain tenet, say of Aristotle or Orthodox theology, but to understand it in its own terms by bringing it into our own context and trying to determine its relevance in light of the issues of the day. Contemporary issues pose questions and issues for that which was developed in an earlier day. The question is then to what extent is that which was developed in an earlier day a resource for dealing with contemporary issues, and to what extent can it not be a resource.

Mooney: Do you see any radical issues ahead in how we teach?

Paris: I often ask students, when they are doing a proposal for a paper, to write about why this or that interests them — as well as why they think the academy and the church should be interested in the subject, and then how, with some relevant bibliography, they would go about inquiring into the subject. And so, from my point of view, they're keeping themselves, the research, and the contemporary issues of the day in conversation with one another. I'd like to see a lot more of this; but I also find, and this is quite discouraging, students who want only to follow the interest of the professor. There was a time when Asian students would come and say, "Well, we don't want to do anything with Asian culture, because we would have stayed in Asia if we had wanted to do that." I was told that when Martin Luther King Jr. was studying at Boston University, he and some other African Americans there decided that they would not do dissertations on anything having to do with the African-American experience, because they wanted to be credible. They felt that their professors would not be open to what they had to say.

Mooney: That's both fascinating and disheartening.

Paris: Exactly. Martin Luther King Jr. decided to do a dissertation on the conceptions of God in the thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman. If you read it, you would have no clue that the author was African-American. It has no reference to the racial realities of this country. That's pretty sad. He only becomes "Martin Luther King" afterward. Had he gone to university 10 or 15 years later he could have drawn on his activist interests in his PhD dissertation.

Mooney: What would you say the greatest satisfaction is in teaching?

Paris: Well, I find the whole enterprise rewarding. I'm glad that I'm at a school that takes research very seriously, because that enhances teaching. It's a sine qua non for teaching, really. The idea that you stay at the edge of your discipline is very important. I also like encountering new generations of students and seeing what they bring to the enterprise. I feel very, very grateful for having the privilege of being a professor. I love it completely. My father was a steelworker, and I still feel like I don't seriously work, because I always think of work as being physical labor in the steel factory. The privilege of being paid to have the lifestyle of teaching, reading, writing articles and books, of discussing with colleagues both here and far away, the privilege connected with all the ways I've been able to be in touch and be involved with Africa — this would never have happened had it not been for this particular enterprise, being a professor.

Mooney: I sense a happy kind of interweaving of these different strands in your teaching and activism that makes each more important.

Paris: Yes. In my own work I started off by doing a book on *Black Religious Leaders*, and then one on the institutions that they belong to, *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*, and then eventually *The Spirituality of African Peoples*, which enabled me to explore the subject more widely and more deeply. All of that has been integrally a part of this whole process. ✪

Loving the Future

Rebecca Chopp, Colgate University



Rebecca S. Chopp is the President of Colgate University and Professor of Philosophy and Religion. She is the former Dean of Yale Divinity School and the former Provost at Emory University, where she was the Charles Howard Candler Professor of Theology at the Candler School of Theology. She is the author of *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (1986), *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God* (1989), and *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (1995).

Mooney: You've taught a lot of graduate students over the years and have been a mentor to them. What do you say to them about the best things in a career, the best things in the profession?

Chopp: I've tried to write about and tell people about the love of the subject in both senses — the subject of theology and also the subject who learns, the student, and just as important, my learning and listening as a teacher. In a profound sense teaching is about bringing together how a human being interacts with theology and the incredible traditions of thought represented in theology. I think that is what I'd stress: that the teacher both teaches the subject, theology, but also is the subject, the human being, the one who needs to listen to set the occasion for that interaction. As a teacher I've always been fascinated by how one crafts the classroom or, to use the hostess metaphor, "sets the table" for people to learn. I know that some faculty members understand teaching as just a means of conveying information. I tend to be interested in a more interactive model of teaching/learning. I'm more interested in how a student brings his or her own questions to reading the text, and listens to how the text talks back to her, as well as to the other students.

Mooney: I suppose it's that "setting of the table" that allows the class to take off and transform the setting.

Chopp: Absolutely! You know, another metaphor that might describe the teacher's role is that the teacher orchestrates the class.

Mooney: If you were to isolate particularly memorable moments in your career, what would you say about mentoring PhDs, for example, or the classroom?

Chopp: There are times of mentoring my graduate students that are memorable and important times to me. And then there are times in the classroom when you get the whole class into a discussion and they kind of transcend themselves. David Tracy, my teacher, talks about how the conversation takes over, and I've seen that happen. I've seen it happen in lectures and

I've seen it happen lots of times in seminars. It is really memorable when, in a sense, the conversation is a community that everyone is just fully into and the students are engaged in the discovery of the conversation itself. I find those memories rewarding, as well as very, very gratifying.

Mooney: You've taught at both the undergraduate and graduate level. What would you say about the rewards or trials connected with each?

Chopp: You know, I think the reward for me, of both, is seeing the individual develop intellectually. For undergraduates it's the tools of critical thinking and basic knowledge; for graduates the rewards and the trials have to do with mentoring students as they develop into peers.

Mooney: Did you find that the undergrad students you particularly connected with went on to do graduate work in religion?

Chopp: Many of them did. But I also connected with many who didn't.

Mooney: Have you seen any big change in students over the years, or just ripples and little things?

Chopp: I think that on the undergraduate level students are more anxious about what I would call the "résumé phenomenon" — and I guess I would say that phenomenon exists on the graduate school level as well. Early in my career, PhD students weren't preparing papers for publication and weren't giving lectures at the AAR. Ministry students weren't so worried about getting a thousand and one things on their résumés. The unfortunate side of this phenomenon is that it's harder to take the reflective space to really learn. And it has become more about the production of knowledge as a technical accomplishment than an engagement in an ongoing conversation. I think that's the most serious thing that has changed.

Mooney: So the kinds of things that people worry about as they get ready for tenure have filtered down.

Chopp: Yes, I guess you're right.

Mooney: How about the field itself?

Chopp: I think the field has been radically transformed. There is a robust pluralism of methods, topics, and approaches. This diversity has allowed, and I hope encouraged, Christian theology to take a look at itself as one topic among many. Different voices are coming from different cultural perspectives, races, places in the world. That has allowed theology to enjoy a much broader conversation. Michael Sandel calls for the public to be shaped as a "clamorous dialogue," and I think that's how theology might be shaped in the current situation. When I was trained, there was a foundationalist model in place for theological knowledge and claims of truth that has been radically questioned. The role of technology has transformed teaching and research, making resources more readily available than ever before. The final change I guess is that the study of religion used to be a discipline that fairly few wanted to study in the '70s and '80s. Then suddenly, in the '90s, the study of religion became of much greater interest to more scholars and much more visibly present in the public.

“Religion is a force in the world We ought to insist that no person could have a liberal arts education in this country without understanding something about the nature of religion and its role in everything from politics to economics to family life.”

Mooney: Perhaps the role of developing graduate students has changed similarly. If you have a foundationalist model, then it's pretty clear that you begin with the foundations, and then build up. You can chart the course that a model graduate student would take. But how do you orient a graduate student to a "clamorous dialogue?" Does a student have to take in all sides? How do you get through graduate school with so many different angles on your subject?

Chopp: You know, that's such a great question, and I think we're all in a process of trying to figure that out. It also is a question for how you teach a basic introduction to the study of religion. When I was at Emory teaching in the Graduate Division of Religion we experimented with a methods course to orient the graduate student to the various methods for thinking about or defining religion. It was an attempt to provide students with tools for the study of religion while letting them learn about the history of the study of religion.

Mooney: If religion connects more with the social sciences, you might find more set ways of doing things. On the other hand, if it connects with the humanities, you might expect a plurality of ways of doing things.

Chopp: Yes, I think that's true. I think the study of religion is at a very interesting place right now. Disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, and the social sciences are becoming integrated into the very nature of the study of religion, even theology. For many years, theologians thought of themselves as being closely related to philosophers. The integration of social science perspectives is a dramatic transformation in the field, and one you can see in other disciplines as well.

Mooney: Do you think the prominence of religion on the national scene, from concerns about the religious right to concerns about Islam, as well as any number of other concerns, creates new challenges for teaching in religion?

Chopp: I think the prominence of religion on the national scene provides possibilities and responsibilities for religion scholars. Religion is a force in the world, and we are understanding it in a far more complex and interesting way than ever before. We question if the term "religion" really makes sense in our contemporary reality. We ought to insist that no person could have a liberal arts education in this country without understanding something about the nature of religion and its role in everything from politics to economics to family life. I think it's very important to seize the moment and educate people to think critically and imaginatively about religion. The danger of the moment is that a lot of the discourse out there in the public

isn't critical or creative. The subject of religion is popular and receives a great deal of attention, but a lot of the discussion doesn't have any rigorous underpinnings in theory.

Mooney: And a lot of it freezes into ideological positions where all you can do is battle.

Chopp: A very good example is national debates about creationism. It is amazing to think that we are here in 2005 and see people talk of evolution as just one kind of theological perspective. To me that speaks to a lack of critical understanding of religious thought.

Mooney: Have you ever hesitated to open up a particularly hot issue for fear that things might get out of hand?

Chopp: No, I don't think I have. Long ago I learned to open up class with a discussion about the ethics of conversation, and to initiate with every class a kind of contract, if you will, or a kind of ethical statement. I think of teaching and learning as a kind of ethical activity, and if things ever got out of hand then class members could just go back to the statement. Most classes would come up with similar statements, things like: "All ideas are worth exploring," "No attacks on another person," etc. I tried to develop a structure whereby hot topics were safe to talk about. And I taught many times in areas, such as feminist theology and liberation theology, that were fairly contentious.

Mooney: So as a teacher you can create a kind of safe atmosphere to think those things through that, in a more public square, might get overheated. You get to the heart of what a student might be nervous or anxious about and can avoid an ideological shouting match.

Chopp: Yes, I think you're right. And as teachers we all learn from our students, as they learn from us. And I've found it delightful how often students can take the most sophisticated or profound argument and just get it. I'll never forget discussing works of feminist theology about the metaphorical language of God, discussing feminist theologians and then thinkers such as Tracy and Ricoeur, and I'll never forget this one woman who was clearly moved by the discussion. Then she pointed out that her grandmother would say, quite forcefully, that God is not a metaphor. And here she was, realizing that it was a wonderful insight that, yes, God is a metaphor. But she also realized that new insight had to be balanced out by this living reality her grandmother stood for.

Mooney: Do you see any radical changes ahead in the way we teach?

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Allowing the Possibility of Multiple Truths

Daniel Boyarin, University of California, Berkeley



Daniel Boyarin is Professor in the Departments of Near Eastern Studies and Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley, where he pursues research in Talmud, Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity, religion and systems of sex and gender, rhetoric of interpretation, and the politics of rhetoric/philosophy in Antiquity. His publications include *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity (2004)*, *Sparks of the Logos: Essays in Midrashic Hermeneutics (2003)*, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man (1997)*, and *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity (1994)*.

Mooney: How would you characterize the difference between teaching graduates and undergraduates?

Boyarin: For me, the difference is incredible, but it's partly a condition of where I teach as well. I teach entirely different kinds of things to undergraduates than graduates. My undergraduate courses are most often fairly large, lecture-type courses on general topics, like "Judaism in Late Antiquity." Half of my teaching is in the Rhetoric Department, where I give a course on the history of rhetoric in Antiquity. The other half is in Near Eastern Studies. It's a very, very different experience than graduate teaching, which for me is more like sitting down with a group of junior colleagues and working through a text together — an experience during which I learn a great deal from the students.

Mooney: Do you have any problems capturing your audience at the undergraduate level?

Boyarin: Well, for the most part no. I'm a good lecturer, which is something I just figured out over the last few years, because before I came to Berkeley I never taught undergraduate courses. Also, I went to a college where there were no large lecture courses given. So I'd really never had the experience of it. I learned how to do it by team teaching with another, much younger colleague who had had a great deal more experience with that kind of teaching. I learned from her.

Mooney: As teachers-to-be, and often very young ones, we were seldom given any instruction in what you might call the rhetoric of teaching.

Boyarin: Right. And it's turned out I've got a flair for it. It's just a gift. I'm funny, I'm spontaneously funny. And that turns out to be a tremendous asset. I actually enjoy that type of teaching, which I had dreaded throughout my entire career.

Mooney: One often runs into the presumption that teaching big classes of undergraduates is not the most desirable thing to do.

Boyarin: This was actually new material to me, the material on ancient rhetoric. I got so excited doing the preparation. I spent a whole

year preparing it before I had to give it. That changed the course of my research. I actually have an entirely new research project that was generated out of the necessity of having to teach this undergraduate course.

Mooney: So there's an unexpected payoff.

Boyarin: A tremendous one. And that research payoff has also led to the teaching being exciting, and therefore more exciting for the students as they are actually, excitedly thinking and learning and developing what I want to think about, too.

Mooney: How has your specialty changed over the last few years?

Boyarin: I was trained as a Talmudic philologist. I worked extensively with manuscripts and lexicographical linguistic matters of interpretation on a very local level, for many years, both in my scholarship and in my teaching. I taught in Israel before I came to Berkeley, and in Israel I taught in a Talmud department. There I did not need to explain what the Talmud was or why it was important or interesting. That was a given, both for the undergraduates and graduates. The research and the teaching were very much in the tradition, but in the terms of the tradition, not against the grain.

In coming to Berkeley, there was a shift in all this. It was partly a result of my coming here, but also caused by a shift in my own desires. I wanted to translate, as it were, in such a way that these texts would become part of a larger intellectual canon — in the university and the research enterprise, but also in the university and the teaching enterprise. That was the goal I set for myself, very explicitly, in terms of my own work, in terms of my pedagogy, and in the terms of the pedagogy of my writing as well.

Mooney: How would you characterize the kind of inquiry that comes out of the Talmudic interrogation of texts in contrast with the Socratic questioning of positions that universities take to be definitive of what they do?

Boyarin: That's what my current research is about. It's exactly on that question. My current project is a book called *Exit Plato*. The subtitle is *Rhetoric, Politics, and Sex in the Ancient City*. I ask: "What is the status of dialogical engagement — dialectic? How is truth conceived of? How is language understood to communicate or not communicate truth?" I want to know how these questions are dealt with in the three traditions: in ancient Greek thought, early Christian thought, and Rabbinic writing.

Mooney: So it's really a three-way project.

Boyarin: Yes, with the ancient Greek material understood as one of the most important inputs into both early Christian and Rabbinic traditions. With regard to the notions of truth, authority, democracy, I look at the possibility of there being multiple truths. There's also a deep consideration of the role of the Sophists, and Sophism in the formation of ways of thinking in the Hellenic/early Christian/Rabbinic world.

Mooney: Do you see your work as social science or something closer to literature or parts of the humanities?

Boyarin: I find it difficult to understand the kind of work that I do as being very different from the work an anthropologist does, or an interpretive sociologist, or a historian. Obviously, there are different intellectual formations involved. I could understand calling what I do humanities and have that be not

much different from what my brother does, and he calls it social science. We're in conversation with each other, we think about the same kinds of issues, use the same kinds of theoretical materials. He's called a social scientist because he was trained as an anthropologist, and I'm called a humanist. The idea of a big difference makes no sense to me whatsoever.

Mooney: Did you always know that you would be a teacher?

Boyarin: No, not always. When I went to college I thought I was going to be an actor, and it was during my undergraduate years that I became first of all religious, which was one key thing. Then I determined that what I wanted to spend my life doing was being a scholar of the Talmud. I didn't think I was so much choosing a teaching career, as much as a life of scholarship, and teaching was the obvious concomitant of having chosen a life of scholarship.

Mooney: There are certainly a number of things going on in the world that are religious in origin and impact. Do they affect your teaching?

Boyarin: For at least the last 20 years I've been conceiving of my teaching and my research as having an explicitly political design.

Mooney: Is it about the presentation and acknowledgement of differences, so there can be dialogue instead of wars?

Boyarin: That's certainly the most general formulation of it. I've been very committed to three kinds of social/ethical/political causes: feminism, the struggle against all forms of homophobia, and the struggle against all forms of racism. I'm sure that sounds like a very familiar, very politically correct listing, but that's my listing. Especially in the latter category, for me it's been the struggle against Jewish racism as manifested in our Jewish politics directed at our immediate others, the Palestinians. Lately, what has come to the fore is the ways in which in the United States religion is being mobilized in what I think is the devil's work — anti-feminism, homophobia, etc.

Mooney: So scholarship plays out against the background of these wider things, even if the classroom doesn't turn out to contain these particular problems.

Boyarin: Exactly. It's not as if I'm promulgating a particular political line; that would be heavy-handed — and abusive — because of the power relations in the classroom. Through a kind of historicism, I try to open up possibilities for the other ways in which things could have gone. I'm giving a course called "The Rhetoric of Religious Discourse." We've been reading Paul's Letter to the Galatians. I tell the students, many of whom are committed Christians, that it's not my goal to make anyone less or more religious. But I do want them to understand that there are other legitimate ways of looking at and understanding the very texts that they claim as their basis — not to delegitimize their readings, or say that their readings are wrong, but to allow for the possibility that others in good faith have other readings of the same texts. Now that is an intervention in their religious lives. A part of many of their religious traditions is that "ours is the only possibility," so to that extent I am subtly intervening. But that seems to me to be an entirely legitimate kind of meddling with in the very terms of university teaching.

Mooney: If the university never meddled

with the hearts or minds of students, then it probably would have failed. If you had a teenage nephew or niece entering their freshman year of college who asked you what to read and mull over this summer on the beach, what would you recommend?

Boyarin: Well, one book I would recommend very strongly is Talal Asad's *Genealogies of Religion*. That strikes me as richly reflective on the study of religion. In a more specialized way, I would recommend to anybody to read Peter Brown's biography of Augustine, just to show to what level aesthetic or literary religious studies can aspire, at their best. For a person interested in Judaism, there's a book by one of my great teachers, Abraham Joshua Heschel, may he rest in peace. It's called *Heavenly Torah: As It's Been Refracted through the Generations*. It is a masterpiece of writing on religion as well as religious writing. It's a beautiful book, and also good beach reading: it's 800 pages long.

Mooney: You mentioned that you became religious in college, as an undergraduate. Was there a particular text that was important there?

Boyarin: Initially I got very attracted to Far Eastern mysticism. We were reading the Taoist classics. At the time I was seeing a therapist, and he said, "Well, don't you know anything about Jewish mysticism?" And I said, "I didn't even know there was a Jewish mysticism." And at that point he told me about the Zohar. I got an English translation, and I read it and got very interested. Then, at about that time, I had a dream that I was in Israel studying. I took this as a sign that I should be in Israel studying. I arranged to study at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, to study the Zohar and Kabbalah. Of course when I got there people told me I couldn't possibly study the Zohar and Kabbalah if I didn't first study the Talmud. So I began studying the Talmud, and I was hooked. I could not have been more enchanted. But I was still not religious. During that year I met the woman I married. We had to go see the rabbi who was going to perform the wedding. I remember him asking me why I'm not religious, why I don't keep the commandments, and I said "Because I don't see any light from them." And he said, "From the study of the Talmud do you see light?" And I said "Yes." And he said to me words I'll never forget. He said "Keep studying!" He didn't try to persuade me to become religious, he just said "Keep studying," out of this complete faith about what the Talmud says about studying — that it would bring one to the light of God. As it happened, it was only a few months later, I was already married, and we were living in Vermont when in the middle of the night I had a vision. I'm not sure whether I was asleep or awake, but I had a very, very clear vision of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. I was so impressed by this vision that I woke up my new, young wife, and I said I wanted to become orthodox. And she said, "Fine — let me sleep!" [Laughing] We woke up the next morning and called the local rabbi and said, "Ok, we want to be orthodox, how do we do it?"

Mooney: So you've traveled a path from religious studies, in the broad sense, to entering into a religion in a serious way, and now each feeds the other.

Boyarin: Yes. ☺

Embracing Embodied, Mediated Knowledge

Katie Cannon, Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education



Katie Geneva Cannon is Annie Scales Rogers Professor of Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, where she pursues research in Christian ethics, womanist theology, and women in religion and society. She recently served as Davidson College's Lilly Distinguished Professor of Religion and is currently the president of the Society for the Study of Black Religion. In 1974 she became the first African-American woman to be ordained in the United Presbyterian Church. Her books include *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (1995) and *Black Womanist Ethics* (1988).

Mooney: You've taught graduates and undergraduates. Do you have a fondness for one or the other — or both?

Cannon: Being a visiting professor at Davidson College this semester, which is an undergraduate liberal arts college, has convinced me that I really like graduate teaching. My home base is the seminary, Union-PSCE in Richmond. I like the specificity of doing graduate teaching in the world of theological education. I enjoyed my eight years on the faculty at Temple, an urban research university, in the Department of Religion, where we taught the seven major religions of the world. Then we added African indigenous religions and African religions in the Americas. But there's something about being able to train folks for ministry which I really like. My family has been involved in the Presbyterian Church for more than five generations, really since we arrived here from Africa. African-American ministers in my denomination were formative in helping me develop a critical God consciousness. Theological education is what I get excited about. Yes, I enjoy teaching undergraduates. I enjoy the ever-hopeful expectancy of the traditional 18-to-21-year-old student. I truly appreciate the simplicity of their life-giving energy, but, all in all, I like graduate teaching more than I do undergrad.

Mooney: By the time that they are in seminary they're interested in participating in a religious life pretty seriously, and with undergraduates you have no idea what they're interested in.

Cannon: In seminary, people who take my courses know that I'm a liberationist, so they know that I'm going to push the envelope. They know it's not going to be a glorification of inherited, malestream, Eurocentric, Christian traditions. Seminarians know we are going to look at justice issues, counter falsely constructed realities, and investigate every line of demarcation between the valued haves and the devalued have-nots.

Mooney: So they're not immediately

rebellious when you lead them like that. You can feel them riding along with you.

Cannon: I think that's one of the advantages of being an African-American woman teaching in predominantly white schools. Most of our present-day students — black, white, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American — have never had a black woman as a teacher. The fact that I embody difference means that students who elect to study with me tend to be open-minded regarding patterns of diversity.

Mooney: So they don't think that you're just pushing some party line but that you're speaking from your own experience.

Cannon: When I was teaching at the Episcopal Divinity School, one of the things we would talk about is the idea that professors must bring our own views into the classroom. Since I am a liberation theologian and a Christian womanist ethicist, students know my age, they know my birth-date — because we don't do disembodied ethics. We embrace embodied, mediated knowledge, meaning that I bring my biotext and students bring their existential stories, rooted in remembering, to the common, centering point in each course of study. It is impossible to do liberation ethics sitting in armchairs, working only from the neck up. Seminarians do not have to agree with me, and I don't have to agree with them, but instead we create dialectic space — a learning environment where we can sandpaper with each other's thesis, antithesis, and synthesis as we maximize what we need to know about the subject matter.

Mooney: Do you think students have changed over your years of teaching?

Cannon: I first started teaching theology in 1977 to an eclectic group of adult-learners at New York Theological Seminary. I taught women and men who supported their families by working full-time jobs during the week, studied all day on Saturday, and preached every Sunday. Some of my students administered large inner-city congregations, having earned only a high school diploma. Other storefront ministers had bachelor degrees but lacked formal theological training. A few of our students had their Master of Divinity degrees from other seminaries, so they took courses with us in order to enhance their knowledge regarding the theological gifts of the black church, especially how to do urban ministry effectively.

When I traveled north from New York City to Cambridge to teach at the Episcopal Divinity School, I moved into a more affluent teaching environment. Some of the seminarians had been to the best prep schools in New England. Others were Ivy League trained or graduates from one of the Seven Sister colleges. Working with colleagues who were amongst the first generation of feminist liberationist scholars teaching across the disciplines in theological education meant that as faculty we met regularly to hone our skills for shifting pedagogical paradigms. I learned that there is a world of difference between working-poor students who diligently study after eight hours of day labor in order to prove their ontological worth and seminarians of affluence who presuppose an ideology of meritocracy, an inbred monumental sense of somebodiness.

“We embrace embodied, mediated knowledge, meaning that I bring my biotext and students bring their existential stories It is impossible to do liberation ethics sitting in armchairs, working only from the neck up.”

Mooney: For some groups of students, do you have to affirm their worth, first and foremost, rather than push them someplace new?

Cannon: We have to help those who are “piecing together a world that exists only in fragments” to understand all the stuff they need to know, though it may not be pertinent to their immediate lives. For instance, I had to learn how to read German in order to write about African-American women, because doctoral programs that require the study of foreign languages have credibility and higher academic currency in the greater scheme of things.

In 1992, when I joined the faculty at Temple University, there were 5,000 black students in a student body of 33,000. With more than 100 black faculty in the various colleges throughout the university, I felt as if I had died and gone to heaven because our brand of scholastic sophistication was the order of the day. Yes, Temple was an awesome African-centered think tank throughout the decade of the 1990s. I was privileged to tap into real and enactable black power by working with professors and graduate students in geography, sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, philosophy, political science, education, dance, rhetoric, and English.

Mooney: It sounds like you've adjusted with your audience and you've had several different kinds of audience through the decades.

Cannon: Yes, and I love the students with whom I am a co-learner. Each teaching experience is a genuine growing edge for me. However, I think I did my best teaching at the Episcopal Divinity School from 1984 to '92 because I had seminarians who enrolled in every class that I taught, which meant that I created a variety of different ways to teach Christian Social Ethics. EDS was a living lab for me, an accelerated place to study discursive bodies of knowledge and to craft a portfolio of pedagogical methodologies that I continue to refine each semester.

Mooney: Did you always know that you would be a teacher of some sort?

Cannon: When I was three years old, my mother took my five-year-old sister and me to school. She enrolled us in the Mount Calvary Lutheran Kindergarten, the only nursery preschool that was available to black kids in Kannapolis.

Mooney: What state was that?

Cannon: North Carolina . . . right in

the Piedmont section. We lived in a textile mill town owned by Mr. Charles Cannon. Of the 40,000 residents, most of the whites were from the mountains of Appalachia, while most of the blacks were from the foothills, having worked, after the Civil War, as sharecroppers and tenant farmers. I will be forever grateful to the members of the “Alpha Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Freedmen in America” who opened a day school for black children at Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church in 1902. By the time I turned four in 1954, I had internalized wholeheartedly the church's legacy of love and learning. From that point on I wouldn't play Cowboys and Indians, nor would I jump rope or shoot marbles. I wouldn't even dance around the circle as Little-Sally-Walker unless we began our playtime activities by playing school. I was always the teacher and I assigned a lot of homework. Yes, I've always loved teaching. Later, as a rebellious teenager in college, I didn't want to major in education because my mother wanted me to be a teacher. Eventually, after changing my major every semester, I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Education.

Mooney: I was just imagining how different the world would be if, on playgrounds across the country, kids were playing school. I don't think that's a game I've seen there in a while.

Cannon: Until this conversation, I never understood my love for playing school as being unique. I thought it was something that every child did.

Mooney: I'm sure you have standard topics for Christian ethics. How about other things that are in the news all the time, hot issues — do these things work their way into your class?

Cannon: Yes, I use the case study method to teach several ethics courses. Especially helpful are the two case study anthologies edited by Christine Gudorf. She and her co-editors look at contestable issues in world religions, as well as specific moral dilemmas in church and society. There's always room in each of my courses for students to do the work that their souls must have. For example, if there's a contemporary issue that's not in one of the case study textbooks that is pertinent to seminarians and their communities of accountability, then there's always an assignment in which students write their own case study after participating in a living lab. If there's an ethical topic that really strikes their fancy, they research it and then visit a resource center or a social service agency or talk to an individual who can provide them with experiential data.

Mooney: Did your specialty in religious ethics come pretty early on?

Cannon: Well, I started my doctoral studies in Hebrew Bible. I finished all the course work, and when I was getting ready to draft comprehensive exams, my advisor said that due to the fact that I was pastoring a church in East Harlem that he could not in good conscience sign the renewal form for my Ford Foundation Fellowship. Without scholarship money I couldn't stay in school. At that time I didn't understand the politics of the PhD. No one told me that I needed to devote all of my time to

See **CANNON** p.x

Helping a Mind Grow

Mahmoud Ayoub, Temple University



Mahmoud Ayoub is Professor of Islamic Studies and Comparative Religion at Temple University. A graduate of the American University of Beirut with an MA from the University of Pennsylvania, he earned his PhD in the History of Religion at Harvard University. His research interests center on Islam, especially the interpretation of the Qur'an over the centuries, and interreligious dialogue. His publications include *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* (1978), *The Qur'an and Its Interpreters* (2 volumes, 1984), *Crisis of Muslim History: Religion and Politics in Early Islam* (2003), and *Islam in Faith and History* (2005).

Mooney: Do you think your teaching changes between classes of undergraduates and graduates? And are the rewards different?

Ayoub: Undergraduate teaching, unless it's a small seminar like I'm doing this spring, tends not to be participatory. When I ask students, even my Jewish students, "Participation is an important part of your grade, so why don't you participate?" they say, "Because we think you are giving us a lot of information and we do not want to interrupt you and annoy the other students who want to learn more." Now that says something about my teaching. I tend to teach like a book. At times I get classes that are very lively and very good; they challenge what I say and we engage through conversation. But often, students just take notes, and I know they are attentive although I do not see them because I am blind. Probably my teaching is affected by the fact that I am blind. It means I put a lot of emphasis on lecturing, though I tell students to interrupt me anytime.

Mooney: Do you use the Internet to connect?

Ayoub: I use it to receive the work of my students and to keep in touch with them. But I don't want it to replace the contact between teachers and students. I attended an AAR session on teaching Islamic studies and saw how widely the Internet is used. I think that it's interesting that this becomes a goal in itself. When does the real teaching take place? Maybe those who rely on the Internet so much err by relying on it to do everything.

Undergraduates come to teachers with personal problems that they have to deal with. I have a student who is struggling to get her BA. She has to live in a foster home, and her 12-year-old brother also lives in a distant foster home and he may be taken away, so she has to be treated differently — I give her more time to do her work and make sure that her grade does not suffer. The teacher-student relationship must always be more than simply the imparting of knowledge — it's helping a mind to grow, and in this sense nothing can take the place of contact between teachers and students.

Mooney: Is there a particular undergraduate class that stands out for you?

Ayoub: I think that students generally enjoy my "Introduction to Islam" course because I relate it often to what they are familiar with either from Saturday school if they are Jews or Sunday school if they are Christian. In this regard, I find that the most "headache" students are the Muslim students who think that, because they are Muslim, they know everything and don't have to read. They want to have A's in the course. You can praise the Arab states, but they don't want to accept it when your analysis isn't completely positive. Most of my colleagues don't like teaching what we call "Introduction to Western Religion," but I like it very much because I see the continuities, on so many levels, between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. I always include at least one class on Zoroastrianism because of its influence on the three monotheistic religions and also the fact that it serves as a bridge between the ancient religions of India and the major religions of the Middle East. I believe in being text-grounded — whatever I teach I like to have textual support for it. Nowadays there is more interest in religion and ethnicity or race and all these things that are modern and American.

Mooney: What is lost when these texts are left behind?

Ayoub: I believe there is an irreplaceable value to the traditional methods wherein a person becomes very familiar with a text as a primary focus of a religious tradition. Now the emphasis is more on the use of singers such as Yusuf Islam and Cat Stevens and so on. I think that these are entertainers and are not scholarship. I'm glad that I will be quitting soon and doing some writing, you know, of the books that I have not had the chance to do, before I die. I think that the old-style teachers and scholars like me must learn to accept things more graciously than we often do.

Mooney: Did you always know that you would be a teacher?

Ayoub: I've always looked forward to being a teacher. If you look at the prologue in my latest book, *Islam: Faith and History*,

“ *The teacher-student relationship must always be more than simply the imparting of knowledge — it's helping a mind to grow, and in this sense nothing can take the place of contact between teachers and students.* ”

I talk about my own religious experiences as a starting point. I've always wanted to be a teacher but not a teacher of the blind. My argument was from the beginning that the fact that blind people were blind need not mean that they only be taught by blind people. Blind people should be integrated and I wanted to teach at a university. So when I defended my PhD thesis at Harvard and stood alone with both copies of the thesis that were returned to me by my committee members I started to believe that I made my point and got what I wanted, and so, in my own way, I became a teacher.

Mooney: That's quite an accomplishment. You were first educated in Lebanon?

Ayoub: Yes, at the American University in Beirut. And then at the University of Pennsylvania and then at Harvard University. I read some of Wilfred Cantwell Smith's books when I was doing my MA at the University of Pennsylvania. I wanted to continue with him, and so I went up and talked to him and ended up doing my degree with him.

Mooney: How has the international climate — and by that I mean the changing perception of Americans in general and the political leadership of the world of Islam — how has that affected your teaching? Has it made it easier? Has it made it more difficult?

Ayoub: In some ways it made it more difficult, for the simple reason that now whatever I say that is positive about Islam rubs against people's nerves. I'd say positive things, of course, about Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, whatever. I think there is a truly spiritually moving positive center in every religious tradition — otherwise, it cannot survive. What's difficult to deal with is the popular idea that Islam is only negative. Then whatever I say that might be positive about it is taken to be apologetic. Of course, I'm very happy when my ideas are challenged so that way I can either modify them or defend them. Teaching post-September 11 is so much more challenging than before.

Mooney: What would you say to aspiring graduate students about teaching?

Ayoub: I would say to every student, including my son who is now going to graduate school, that for anything you get interested in, you should really dedicate your life and energy to it, to your specialty. The main thing for a person is for him or her to really know what he or she wants to do and to find their orientation. I really think the most important aspect of teaching is to impart knowledge to young minds who will find a use for it in their relationships with the rest of the world. When I taught in California, at San Diego State, I taught the world religions course. There would be a lot of students who came to me to be enlightened. They would go watch

the sunset and so on. I used to say in the first class that I come to class with the conviction that religion is a body of knowledge and it is my responsibility to acquaint you with it. But I'd add that it's not my responsibility to make you less or more religious or in any way to lead you to enlightenment. You can use what you learn here, later on, in any way you like. But I don't want to trivialize religion and make it simply a New Age business. You teach a course on world religion or an introduction to Islam, or a course on comparative mysticism, and you see the students' attitudes changing, and you feel that you have done something. Now you have to be careful when you get through to students, either undergrads or graduates. I learned a great deal from Wilfred Cantwell Smith, but I never tried to be him, and I don't want students to take my ideas and say that now they have the answers for everything. If I can train their minds to think more independently, then I think I have done my job well.

Mooney: If you had a teenage niece or nephew who was just beginning to mature intellectually and was getting ready to go off to college, what would you give her to read over the summer?

Ayoub: I recommend to anybody who wants to learn anything about Indian philosophy a book that I've read more than once and I have always enjoyed, a book by a German writer, Heinrich Zimmer. The book is called *Philosophies of India* and I find that extremely enlightening, wonderful, entertaining reading. There are so many good books out; some of the better ones are on cultural anthropology and art history. I sometimes get ideas from cultural anthropology of the 19th and 20th centuries to apply to the study of religion. But I always tell my daughter, "Don't go into religion — it is a lot of struggle and you may not get rich" [laughing].

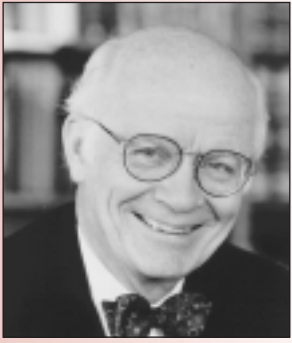
Mooney: I noticed that you have done a lot of work with interfaith groups.

Ayoub: I have done a lot of writing both in Arabic and English on that subject. I try to say what I've seen, you know, through the worlds and societies that I've been in. I try to create areas of understanding and greater tolerance, and this can be done through interfaith relations and dialogue. I am aware that interfaith dialogue could be unacademic and kind of emotional, and so I try to stay with the texts. You know, I try to do interfaith dialogue through some kind of accessible, academic possibility but also point to what I see as the goal of interfaith dialogue, namely, to cultivate a delicate space — in humanity — where Muslims could strengthen or deepen the faith of Christians and vice versa. ❁

“ *I think there is a truly spiritually moving positive center in every religious tradition — otherwise, it cannot survive. What's difficult to deal with is the popular idea that Islam is only negative.* ”

Get Them Inspired First

Martin E. Marty, University of Chicago



Martin E. Marty is the Fairfax M. Cone Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus at the University of Chicago, where from 1963–1998 he taught religious history. He also co-directed the Fundamentalism Project for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Among Marty's recent publications are *Education, Religion, and the Common Good: Advancing a Distinctly American Conversation about Religion's Role in our Shared Life with Jonathan Moore (2000)*, *Martin Luther (2004)*, and *The Protestant Voice in American Pluralism (2004)*.

Mooney: How is teaching different from pastoring?

Marty: When I retired somebody asked me how I'd like to be remembered and I said that my dream would be to be remembered as a good teacher. My father was a teacher, my brother and my sister were teachers; it never occurred to me not to have a teaching dimension. And I would also say that I never quite got out of being a pastor. Cardinal Bernardin used to say to me, "My priests ask me to be pastoral to them — they just want me to be mushy and soft." And then he added, "A shepherd has a crook, and you've got to hold the sheep back by their necks on the edge of the cliff." Jerald C. Brauer, the teacher who brought me to the University, both as faculty and student, said, "Marty, remember, pastors can't flunk anybody and teachers have to," and I think I've always kept that in mind.

Mooney: How does pastoring fit in with the aims of education?

Marty: Good teacher-pastors have an instinct to pick out a person in a room who's overlooked, whose ego's been battered. In my own career, placing so many PhD graduates, one of the things I've discerned is that disappointment can be almost as devastating as depression and maybe even despair. Coming in second on a good job, or having your book turned down when you invest these years of scholarship, ego, and family can really kill people. I've been in some PhD exams where I've felt that someone was being unjustly flunked, and the faculty sort of walked away and abandoned them. I've stayed behind and run them through the most rigorous thing they could have, and then when they come up for review a second time with different faculty, they did very well. So, you can relate to people with empathy, understanding their circumstance — which is really, really crucial — whether you're dealing with parishioners or post-doc's.

Mooney: You have to consider religious texts both in a parish and in a university setting. What's the difference?

Marty: Paul Ricoeur made a distinction between three things you can do with a classic text. First, you can study the world behind the text — that's really been my life

because I'm a historian. "How did it get to be?" Second is what Ricoeur calls the study of the world of the text. You have students take a text and relate it to their world, but you still stay within the text in a way. You can do that either in adult education, or in an Episcopal church, without being preachy. Third is, as Ricoeur says, when you have to confront the world in front of the text. You use the text, in your teaching or your preaching, to entertain the possibility of a different way of living than your audience would otherwise consider. When people show up in a believing community, in a synagogue, in a church, they know they are looking at a text that their community has paid attention to for 2,500 years, and that people have built an institution surrounding the text. You don't have to apologize for looking at that text, you can get right into it. In the classroom, there's a different covenant, even if it's the same text.

Mooney: What's the difference between teaching undergraduates and graduate students?

Marty: At the University of Chicago graduate faculties teach a lot of undergraduate classes. The biggest difference is that in graduate school, virtually everybody is there because they have credentials in the topic. They have a baccalaureate or master's degree, they're reading the books you've been reading. They're hanging out and sharpening their skills. With the undergrads, you have people who know exactly what they want out of college and others who don't. So sometimes interesting things happen in the undergraduate classroom. I had this student once in a course on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. She talked much about suffering, and the guy next to her said, "What are you talking about? You are well off, you go to a privileged school, you have high tuition but it's paid for, you've got it made, how can you talk about suffering?" She said, "Mr. Marty, should I tell him?" Well, she had fibromyalgia, and was always on medication. When she was done, the guy next to her said, "Well at least you didn't take refuge in some nut religion like Christian Science." Sitting next to him was a big football player who said, "I'm a Christian Scientist, I resent that." And we were off and running for a whole quarter.

Mooney: Do you think your approach to teaching has changed over the years?

Marty: I was 35 before I stepped into a classroom to teach, so I was scared, and I think that led me to lecture. I thought I had to really load up and unload. But I came to like courses which allowed us to concentrate on six to ten books a quarter. We sat around a table and talked them out. A huge difference that came about in my teaching between 1962 and 1998 was the presence of women.

When I was a graduate student at Chicago, '54–'56, the only women in any of my courses would be the occasional daring nun from one of the Catholic colleges who had a scholarship to get a degree in history. There was an all-male ethos, a dispensing of knowledge that took for granted what was important in a subject, and so on. Then, very suddenly, about half of the students in most of my courses were women. What this meant was that as they read all those texts they found different things in them. When I started teaching, you'd teach history as it's recorded only in bishop's successions and monastery reforms and church conventions, but that's not what most people think religion is about. Our historical approach changed greatly. You could call it social histo-

ry, history from the ground up, material culture history, whatever. Suddenly the topics came to be childcare, adolescence, all the things that we are writing about now.

I also teach a much more religiously diverse history. I started out at an all-white male, mainline Protestant world. If you took a list of my recent dissertation advisees you'd see Roman Catholics, Evangelicals, blacks, Hispanics, with mainline Protestants a minority. In 1950, '54, '56, mainline Protestants ran the country, ran the state department, were in "Who's Who," or in "The Making of the American Mind." Later, we have Maya Angelou, Ralph Ellison, Saul Bellow, Flannery O'Connor. I didn't spend one minute, in those early years, teaching what went on in African-American churches. Well, by the end of my teaching, I would have any number of students who would do dissertations on worship in black churches.

Mooney: How do you characterize the issues facing the study of religion now?

Marty: Well the biggest change is the switch to a global scale. I'm looking out my window and seeing kids coming home from school. A lot of them could draw a map of Iraq, Iran, or Saudi Arabia or Jordan, more easily than they could one of Iowa or Illinois. Who, other than Muslims and specialists, cared twenty years ago about Islam? Also, the Christian world is shifting dramatically, with fewer Christians in the northern world and many, many more in the south. One estimate is 18,000 more believers in sub-Saharan Africa alone in the last 24 hours. So we better talk about HIV-AIDS, etc. and their role in Christian history and prospects. Asia is closer to us than ever. I wrote a short history of Christianity in 1958, it's still in print, and I don't think it mentions Africa after Augustine. It says nothing about the Church in Korea.

Domestically, I would say that there are two or three big things facing religious studies. The role of women continues to develop as a topic. Then there's religious pluralism. The curiosity about what a Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, or maybe even a Catholic is doesn't match the curiosity about what a Muslim or a Jew is, what the boat people are, or the Mexicans. We're trying to figure it all out. Will Herberg wrote *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* in 1955 and he only devoted a few lines to evangelicalism or pentecostalism. The next big change would be the rise of spirituality. Many students will say, "Yeah, I'm not a member of a religious institution, I'm not sure I'm religious, but I'm very spiritual." The shelf in Borders bookstores that used to say "Religion" has expanded to four or five shelves that read "Christianity," "Hinduism," "Buddhism," "Asian Religions," "Ancient Religions," "Spirituality," "Astrology," "Occult," "Metaphysical." They readers are trying to make sense of their inner life and the world around them. It's protean, it's hard to grab, but it is where the students are.

Mooney: Do you see any radical changes ahead for the professional study of religion?

Marty: Well, by the '50s there was a strong sense of self-consciousness about religion in the university, as though it really didn't belong here. University people are supposed to be atheistic and skeptical. And, it is assumed, it would be embarrassing for someone to admit she is a Catholic or a Protestant or whatever. The style was "More secular than thou." Looking at religion was like looking at specimens in a locust museum.

Now that spirituality is so hot, and evangelicals make so much noise about their faith, there's a license to everybody to be more overt, open, and explicit, to be less embarrassed. How that affects the study of religion is still an open question.

Also there's the continuous debate about what religious studies is. When I see how indefinable English and Comp Lit are today, after critical theory and all that, lacking a definition doesn't bother me much. There are four or five ways to go at things in religious studies, and the first one is scientific, as in social scientific. I get the *Scientific Study of Religion* and the *Review of Religious Research*, and half the pages are statistics, regressive analysis. They measure, measure, measure. The historian goes at religion differently, looking at the past. There is an approach through poetry, the imagination. Literature is textually analytic. Ethics and theology feature practice, the will, and moral structures, through which you try to change the world. So a theological seminary will take a text with a desire to change the world. An archaeological center will take a text and see whether or not it matches up with what they dig up in a grave, which will be scientifically measured. Religious studies does more than measure, and it shouldn't be reductionist as in "religion is nothing but . . ." — nothing but what Freud thought it was, or what Marx thought it was, or whatever. There are many legitimate modes of the study of religion, none of which is exhaustive.

An awful lot of the roots of religion and ritual are bound up with theater and dance and so on. Let's go to Black Elk, the noted Sioux holy man who was delivered to the public by poet John G. Neihardt. We find out later that for years he was a Catholic catechist. One can undertake the social scientific study of how many Lakota Sioux converted to Christianity and how many didn't? How many became priests after 150 years or so of missions? The answer is zero — all I need is a statistic like that and I've made a big point. Now history. Why is a Jew adopted in the tribe of the Dakota Sioux? Friend Harvey Markowitz was also Harvey Horse Looking.

Mooney: If you were talking to a grandchild interested in what you do, what books would you recommend?

Marty: My granddaughter is quite likely going to be a religious studies major in her final two years in college. She found her way toward it on her own. Anybody who goes into this line shouldn't miss reading Augustine's *Confessions*. It's so rich, its discourse on memory is just enthralling. There's Pascal's *Pensées* and Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*. I'd have them read books in which you get engagement with the great minds, Kierkegaard, etc. — very short books that they can fit in their knapsack and take along, and that will rock them to the bottom of their souls. Have those who would do religious history read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Mooney: You light fires.

Marty: If they read Simone Weil's *Waiting for God*, if they read Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers From Prison*, or Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" — probably the best such document we have since Lincoln's "Second Inaugural" — then they know what it's about. The key is to get them inspired first, and then let the analytic side come through. ■

CANNON, from p.vii

studying. Instead, I had been formed in an educational culture that said, “everything that I learned I needed to loop back to the community.” So I resigned as the supply pastor at the Presbyterian Church of the Ascension, joined the administrative faculty at New York Theological Seminary, retook the matriculation exams, borrowed thousands of dollars so that I could learn how to read German and Spanish, and enrolled in ethics courses. After a one-year leave of absence, I started the PhD program all over again.

Mooney: So that opened up a slightly different career path for you?

Cannon: It gave me another competency. Most people studying the Bible know very little about ethics, and most people doing ethics know very little about the Bible [laughing]. In my teaching I am familiar with both. Students argue, “But the Bible says . . .” and I say “Wait a minute — let’s exegete that specific pericope, and let’s look at how this particular scriptural passage fits into the overall biblical canon.” Students learn early on that the Bible is just one of many sources for ethical reflection and moral discernment.

Mooney: What would you recommend if you had a niece or a nephew who was going off to college and asked

you, “Gee, I have this whole summer ahead of me, what should I read?”

Cannon: Well, this semester I wrote in the margins of students’ papers the title of books that they need to read over the summer, depending on their intellectual interests. Also, I’ve been thinking about the course I will teach in the fall at Williams College as the Visiting Sterling Brown Professor in Religion. I’ve decided to use more anthologies in my classes. I want students to get a comprehensive lay of the land. Therefore, the two must-read anthologies that I recommend are *Body and Soul: Rethinking Sexuality As Justice-Love*, edited by Marvin Ellison and Sylvia Thorson-Smith; and *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, edited by Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins. Oftentimes, when I am out on the lecture circuit, I talk about major ethical issues that cause the greatest friction in western Christianity: human sexuality and mental illness. Far too many God-fearing people lack the will to wrestle with the theoethical data regarding body and mind. That’s why I recommend these two anthologies so that young women and men can grapple with human sexuality in the 21st century from a holistic liberation perspective. Several students who read these texts in my feminist liberation theology class said, “These books changed my life!” That’s why I now recommend them to you. ☛

MOONEY, from p.ii

approach should be vigorously defended. The social science path doesn’t need defense, as I see it. It already has an impressive momentum as things stand. It’s the foundational texts that seem in danger of disappearing. In a typical university, it’s business or management in the ascendant positions, social science and natural science in the middle, and the humanities, with their texts, at the bottom and shrinking everyday.

Kassam: What would you recommend for summer reading for a bright niece or nephew who approached you?

Mooney: First, I’d check up on what they were already planning to read, and talk about that, if I knew anything about it. Then I’d turn them toward the *Dao Te Ching*, *The Book of Job*, some Kafka, some Zen. If they were precocious and theoretically inclined, I’d have them read some Freud or Kierkegaard or Marx on alienation. I’d let them scan my library for ideas.

Kassam: If you were to deliver a “Last Lecture” on the occasion of your retirement, what notes would you sound?

Mooney: I had a chance to reflect out

loud on teaching for an audience of friends and colleagues when I retired from a position in California a couple of years ago. I talked about the importance of evoking the appeals (and downsides) of certain ways of life and their values. I stand by that theme. Education is an overwhelmingly reverent (and massively irreverent) ceremony of evocation. We don’t need to pass on dead letters from the past. We need to resurrect the dead, so far as possible. The worthwhile letters are the ones we can bring back from the past into present dialogue. Down the road a bit, I’d talk about deep religious sensibilities and their carrying power — their power to carry us through the ordeals any human must face at any stage of life. When I actually did that retirement talk, I played some Schubert and read some Henry James. The title *Wings of the Dove* comes from the Psalmist: *Fear and trembling are come upon me; oh, that I had wings like a dove.* Since Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* is the single text I’ve written most about, it was easy to link James’s prose to those other religious lyrics. James, the Psalmist, and Kierkegaard explore a fragile balance of intimacy and loss, of anxiety and mitigating hope. You can’t get more human or religious or scholarly than that! ☛

CHOPP, from p.v

Chopp: I think there will be more and more opportunities with technology to provide information, engage in conversations around the world, and things like that. But at the end of the day I still think it’s going to be about conversations with real life experiences. I think the tools will change, but I think the nature of teaching will retain continuity with the past.

Mooney: If you had a niece or granddaughter back from her first year of college who asked you for a summer reading list, what would you recommend for nourishment?

Chopp: I have a couple. Augustine’s *Confessions*; Schleiermacher’s *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*; Cornell West, *Prophecy Deliverance!* And something on critical theory.

Mooney: At some schools there’s a tra-

dition of giving a last lecture as one retires, a kind of wise summation. If you had a chance of that kind, is there a theme you’d foreground?

Chopp: Well, a friend once gave a presidential address — I believe it was when she was president of the MLA — a speech I only read and never heard her give. She talked about the importance of teaching what one loves and letting the students see the passion you have for the subject matter. That has always struck me. And I think I would play off that to make a related point. Hannah Arendt says that teaching is the act of loving the future enough to give the students — she calls them children because she’s thinking about primary education — the ability to ask and answer their own questions. You’re teaching what you love to show the passion of living with ideas and truth, but you’re also doing it so they will find theirs, not yours. ☛

Spotlight on Teaching Solicits Guest Editors and Articles

AAR members interested in guest editing an issue of *Spotlight on Teaching* are invited to submit the title of a theme focusing on teaching and learning in the study of religion, along with a succinct description (500 words) of the theme’s merit and significance, to *Spotlight’s* general editor, Tazim R. Kassam. In addition to issues devoted to specific themes, problems, and settings, *Spotlight on Teaching* will also occasionally feature a variety of independent articles and essays critically reflecting on pedagogy and theory in the field of religion.

Please send both types of submissions to:

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In the Next Spotlight on Teaching:

Teaching about Religion Using the News

