

# NumeNews

NEWSLETTER OF CARLETON COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION

## RELIGION DEPARTMENT CELEBRATES 50 YEARS



50TH ANNIVERSARY GALA DINNER AND PROGRAM

On January 14, the Carleton Religion Department celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. The festivities began with a symposium, moderated by Professor of Religion emeritus, Richard Crouter, on “The Role of Religious Studies in a Liberal Arts Education.” Presenters included Amy Carr ‘89, of Western Illinois University, Paul Powers ‘90 of Lewis and Clark College, and Rachel Wheeler ‘91 of Indiana University—Purdue University, Indianapolis—all of whom are Assistant Professors of Religious Studies. Judith Berling ‘67, Professor of Chinese and Comparative Religions at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California served as the respondent. A lively discussion followed among the more than 80 people in attendance who crowded Leighton 304.

The gala dinner and program later that evening in Great Hall included more than 130 current faculty and staff, as well as current Religion majors and alumni. Chaplain Carolyn Fure-Slocum ‘82, herself an alumna of the department, gave the invocation, and President Robert Oden, also a member of the department, praised the Religion Department as ‘possibly the best in the country.’ David Smith ‘61, Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at Indiana University, who graduated from Carleton before the Department offered a major, served as master of ceremonies for the evening.

Anne Patrick offered introductions of the emeriti faculty in the Department: Ian Barbour, David Maitland, Bardwell

Smith and Richard Crouter, and remembered Bob Wood, an adjunct member of the Department for many years who passed away in 1996. John Mason ‘68, Judith Berling ‘67 and Jewelnel Davis, former Carleton Chaplain and Carleton Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa* praised the work of our senior colleagues. Additional tributes from Parker Palmer and Robert Russell, who could not attend the event, were read, and Grace Huenemann ‘66 offered her heartfelt words of appreciation.

A slide presentation containing historic pictures of the Department was shown and archival materials related to the founding of the Department in 1955 were on display. David Maitland supplemented these with reminiscences of the ethos of the College in the years just before and after the Department was established.

Copies of the many tributes offered, as well as the presentations from the symposium, can be found on the Religion Department’s web site, [apps.carleton.edu/curricular/religion](http://apps.carleton.edu/curricular/religion).

The program concluded with two very special announcements: the establishment of the Ian Barbour Lecture in Religion and Modernity, and the creation of the Bardwell Smith Prize in Religion. The lectureship will celebrate Professor

Barbour’s ongoing commitment to understanding the relation between religion and science in the modern world, and will draw to campus on a regular basis scholars and thinkers whose work illuminates the implications of modern ideas and practices for religious people, and of religion for people in contemporary societies.

The prize honors Professor Smith’s intellectual legacy of cross-cultural study and commitment to life-long learning. This prize will be awarded each year by the Department of Religion to a student who exhibits a pas-

sion for the life of the mind, a willingness to take intellectual risks, and a desire to grow and change as a young scholar.

We are grateful to all the alumni and friends of the Department who contributed so generously and enabled us to honor two of our senior colleagues in this way.

This special anniversary celebration would not have been possible without the help of many people. The Department wishes to thank especially Jill Tollefson, our administrative assistant, Laura Nathan ‘08 for her technical assistance, Eric Hillemann, the College archivist, and the student musicians who provided entertainment during the reception. We are especially grateful to President Rob Oden and the Dean of the College for providing the financial support necessary to make this event possible.

**50**  
The Carleton Religion Department Celebrates  
**Years of Education**

# ALUMNI UPDATES

## TEACHING ENGLISH WITH THE CORPS IN CHINA



**By Alexis 'Lexi' Gelperin '05**

I am the Princeton University campus organizer for New Jersey Community Water Watch, a project of NJPIRG and

Americorps. I work with students to organize environmental education in elementary schools, weekly chemical water monitoring at local waterways, regular river cleanups, and a number of community outreach programs to educate people about New Jersey's water quality issues and empower them to make positive change happen. It's wonderful!

My studies of American religion have equipped me to think critically about humanity's relationship with the natural world and my role in our frequently short-sighted consumer culture. I've also realized how important it is for college students to have a positive vision for the future and supportive mentors who will guide them to fulfill those dreams and not get overwhelmed or sidetracked. ■



**By Allison Lince-Bentley '02**

After graduating from Carleton in 2002, my religion degree proudly in hand,

I knew just what to do. First, I would seek out the meaning of life in the Himalayas, like any self-respecting student of Roger Jackson would. I spent the better part of my senior year planning, saving money and researching various locations in northern India or Nepal where I could volunteer for an indefinite period of time. The place I eventually selected was called Nangi, a village in the mid-western hills of Nepal that had its own website, <http://www.himanchal.org>, and offered free room and board to anyone willing to come teach in the village high school. I packed an enormous backpack, apologized to

*Continued on page 4*

**By Nick Kasperek '05**

My Peace Corps experience is not what most people would imagine. I don't live in a mud hut, wash my clothes in the river, shower out of a bucket, learn an obscure tribal language and get my hands dirty. Instead, I have an air-conditioned and heated apartment, a laptop computer with high-speed Internet and can listen to an NPR podcast. I have a washing machine and a shower with its own electric water heater; it's only laziness or a global sense of conservation that causes me to do laundry infrequently and test the limits of my care package-imported deodorant. I'm studying the most spoken language in the world, and the extent of my manual labor is running around campus to get to class on time, working out at a fitness club and playing soccer with my students.



NICK TEACHING AN ORAL ENGLISH CLASS FALL 2005

This is Peace Corps China, or US-China Friendship Volunteers, to be politically correct. I teach language and culture at a large teachers' university in the southwestern province of Guizhou. While nobody is taking my picture for a romanticized poster of a great-looking American wearing exotic clothing, holding a rake, and surrounded by a rugged environment

and grateful-looking indigenous people, I've found the challenges and rewards of my experience to be just as intense as those of the poster boy fantasy.

Next term, I will teach advanced writing to about 200 undergraduate English majors. I will also teach integrated English to young university teachers, and American culture to five Linguistics postgraduates. Additionally, I will coach at least one soccer team and hopefully work with a campus radio show. Preparing lessons (usually without textbooks), trying to teach critical thinking skills and inspire creativity and

**“I feel constant pressure to be a ‘good American’”**

giving feedback to students has given me a new respect for my former teachers.

While my work keeps me very busy, it is only part of

my overall mission in China. I feel constant pressure to be a “good American,” though I myself am still attempting to define what that means as I resist the definitions that many well-meaning Chinese project onto me, and to do what I can to integrate myself into my community and remain a good member of my faraway host family. I find both relief and more stress in the extra things that friendly people invite me to do: visiting sites like our city's monkey park, sharing a meal, giving lectures, doing choreographed sports day routines, singing karaoke, drinking various sorts of alcoholic beverages or starring in a television commercial for a hotel restaurant.

Nonetheless, while I sometimes struggle to play the part of “American” in China and stay on top of my teaching and studying, I always feel lucky to be where I am. I have to marvel at the tangible changes in my city, my students, and myself. ■

*Nick Kasperek '05 teaches at Guizhou Normal University in Guiyang, Guizhou, China and he welcomes email at [kasperek@126.com](mailto:kasperek@126.com).*

# The Story BEHIND THE QUOTE

## The 2005 Religion Dept. T-Shirt

By Andrew Navratil

If you study or work on the Carleton campus, perhaps you've seen the display of shirts in the Religion Department lounge. As part of the festivities surrounding the 50th anniversary of the founding of the department, a selection of the t-shirts chosen by each class of majors is on display. It has been a steady tradition in the department for several years that the senior majors create a shirt. Last year's class kept up the tradition, creating a blue shirt with a particularly striking quote from Jon Stewart as the focal point.

No, not the famous philosopher John Stuart Mill. This is the 21st century. In the age of television sitcoms, who better to quote than the host of *The Daily Show* himself? Though he is no moral philosopher, Jon Stewart certainly helps shape public opinion and is a very quotable personality. His words "Religion: It's a powerful healing force in a world torn apart by...religion" are both funny and profoundly serious.

As one of two student departmental advisors, Sarah Gettie '05 was instrumental in designing and printing the shirts. According to Sarah, it was Lexi Gelperin '05 who first spotted the quote. "Some of my fellow majors found it pasted on Professor Jackson's door, liked it, and decided to go with it," she says. "We decided on the shirt in our last meeting of the senior seminar; [Lexi] suggested the quote and we all agreed to it."

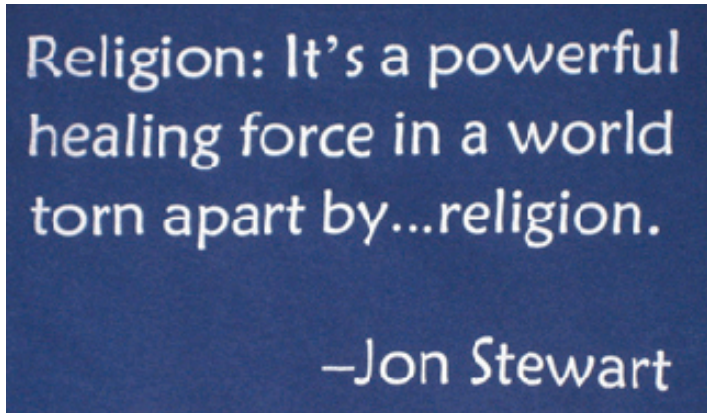
So why did the majors of the class of 2005 choose this Jon Stewart quote? Sarah Gettie knows exactly why she supported it. "[It] sums up exactly why

I have been engaged with the further study of religion since my youth," she explains. "Religion—at the ideological and ritualistic levels—is such a powerful force, one that many people turn to in times of trouble for healing and comfort. But perhaps, at least to some extent, it is this very reliance upon religion...that allows leaders to rationalize political divisions based on religious discrepancies." Lexi Gelperin had similar reasons. "It does seem like religious fanaticism is at the heart of most deeply-seated cultural conflicts around the world," she says. "Also, it's a great reminder of the relationship between creation and destruction - you can't have one without the other!"

Jon Stewart's quote is funny because it brings to light the irony of using religion as a force to heal wounds created by that same force. But it is even more than that. It is a profound observation about human nature. It sheds insight into the fundamental contradictions present in a

force important to the lives of billions of people around the world. It's no surprise, then, that those words would find their way onto a shirt designed by those seeking to understand and explain that fundamental part of cultures around the world we call religion. ■

*Andrew Navratil '07 is a Student Office Assistant in the Religion Department.*



## RAINING MILK RICE FROM HEAVEN

By Peter Wieben

Every so often in Sri Lanka I was reminded of why I am a religion major. Once, while my family and I were praying at a temple, it started to rain milk rice. We were standing under a Bodhi tree offering fruit and food in

order to bless the family. Suddenly, just as the mumbled chanting was mingling with the richly textured mixture of incense, lamp oil and sweat, milk rice began to fall from the sky. The rice balls exploded on impact, spreading out like sticky white fireworks on the ancient red bricks beneath our feet.

I looked to my little brother and cultural interpreter, Ruwanga, for an explanation; he, however, was unimpressed. Incidents of that nature happened at the temple all the time. Despite my later realization that monkeys had been throwing our offerings down from the upper branches of the tree, I never turned in another paper without bringing it to be blessed

at the local shrines.

I did not necessarily become more religious in Sri Lanka. However, I realized that behind all the books and articles I read for class lies a truly fascinating and beautiful world. When you spend your time behind a stack of books it's easy to forget that you are studying things that are real. There really are holy mountains. I know. I climbed them. And at times, it really does rain milk rice from heaven.

Experiencing the culture and religion of Sri Lanka allowed me to peak over my stack of books and see the wide and excitingly real world that inspired the scholarship I spend so many hours struggling with. Religion is a confusingly

colorful, dirty, noisy, dignified, peaceful and profound thing. Living in a world where it was a constant source

of wonder, joy and celebration made me proud of my decision to major in religion. ■

*Peter Wieben '07 is a Religion Major and studied abroad in Sri Lanka Fall Term 2005.*

**“There really are holy mountains. I know. I climbed them.”**

# PEARSON TO PUBLISH BOOK

*Lince-Bentley, continued from page 2*  
my mother, and headed for Nepal.

I regret to inform you that, despite my religion degree and the spectacular mountain views, I did not find the meaning of life in Nepal. However, I did learn how to plaster a house with cow dung, cook over a dozen dishes using only potatoes and say a few Nepali swear words. I also found myself witnessing a region entering political turmoil. Before I went to Nepal, a few people had warned me about the Maoist insurgency, but how was I supposed to know what that meant? I never took a political science class at Carleton.

Those who were connected with Nangi assured me that the village was not in a Maoist-affected area, but that changed over the seven months that I lived there. A dysfunctional and uninvolved government left a void in the rural areas that Maoists quickly filled. They began levying taxes from schoolteachers in the village, abducting students and forced them to attend indoctrination sessions, destroying infrastructure and assassinating community leaders who defied them. By the time I left, I had learned that life in the Himalayas was nowhere near as peaceful as the mountain views suggested.

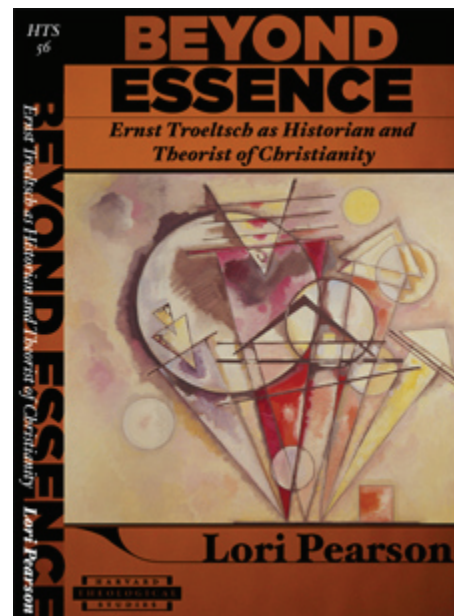
After I returned to the United States in 2003, I began working in the South Asia department of a nonprofit organization in Washington, DC called the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). NDI works in over 60 countries worldwide to build democratic political institutions, safeguard elections and support civic organizations that strengthen democracy. I never expected that my degree in religion would lead me to the world of politics, but clearly my expectations have not always been accurate. I currently share an office with another Carl, Ira Nichols-Barrer '03. Our director in Bangladesh, Owen Lippert '79, is also an alumnus. Like any good religion major, I swear this Carleton connection had more to do with divine intervention than nepotism. ■



LORI PEARSON

If traditions are always changing, how do we maintain a sense of their continuity? Does Christianity, for example, have a clear identity? Does it have a basic message or form that abides amidst the particularities of time and place? In her new book, Lori Pearson, Assistant Professor of Religion, explores the way German theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) tackled these questions at the end of the nineteenth century.

*Beyond Essence: Ernst Troeltsch as Historian and Theorist of Christianity* will appear this summer. In it, Pearson charts Troeltsch's efforts to define the essence of Christianity. Pearson looks particularly to Troeltsch's writings on the history of Christianity, where Troeltsch discovers the radical diversity of Christianity and the complexity of its relation to culture. These historical works reveal that Troeltsch was increasingly dubious about the fruitfulness of defining an essence of Christianity at all. Pearson shows that as he sought more sophisticated ways of defining Christian identity, Troeltsch also explored the possible shape Christianity might take in an increasingly pluralistic and fragmented society. ■



SARAH CALHOUN '01, PETER BERRY '07, AARON BAN '05 AND EMILY STAGG '07

## JOIN THE CELEBRATION!

Even if you were not able to attend our 50th anniversary celebration, you can still play a role in the festivities. We invite you to consider making a contribution to the special fund created to honor the Department's first half-century. Income from this endowment will be used to fund both the prize and the lecture described in the lead article. Contributions in the form of checks can be made out to "Carleton College" and sent to the Religion Department, c/o Jill Tollefson. Be sure to indicate that the check is for the department's anniversary celebration. Many alumni have chosen to make multi-year pledges. Pledge cards can be obtained by contacting Gayle McJunkin, Director of Development, at gmcjunki@carleton.edu or Louis Newman, Chair, Department of Religion, at lnewman@carleton.edu. We hope you will consider honoring your teachers and celebrating the Department's history in this way. We are very grateful for your support. ■