On October 7, the Religion Department sponsored a book talk by Professor Richard Crouter on his new and celebrated work, *Reinhold Niebuhr: On Politics, Religion, and Christian Faith*. Crouter, who is John M. and Elizabeth W. Musser Professor of Religious Studies, Emeritus, wrote the book to help interested readers make sense of the recent “Niebuhr revival” among political thinkers and other public intellectuals who have found Niebuhr's critique of American imperialism as well as his profound understanding of human sin particularly relevant for reflecting on post-9/11 American political culture. In his talk, Crouter spoke to Niebuhr’s incisive analyses of human nature and the human condition. Niebuhr pointed to the tendencies toward moral blindness at the individual and group levels, while also insisting that humans are capable of moral good and must be willing to use power to work for justice. Crouter also expressed his appreciation of Niebuhr’s sense of history as something that can deepen self-understanding while also chastening excessive optimism or overconfidence in contemporary ideals and goals. Crouter ended his talk by reflecting on the ways Niebuhr’s thought has been taken up by political figures such as President Barack Obama, and how it might continue to be relevant for contemporary challenges facing American society. Crouter’s book has captured the attention and admiration of journalists, scholars, church communities, and political analysts, and has been showcased in a number of news sources such as Krista Tippett's web-site for “Being” (formerly “Speaking of Faith”) and CNN’s newsblog.
**NumeNews: What interests you most about the study of religion?**

**Professor Wiley:** I can answer that question in multiple ways. I’m actually so fresh out of graduate school that the question of what interests me about religion poses all kinds of other questions, like what is religion? I was actually drawn to the study of religion because the people I found inspiring happened to be self-identified religionists, someone like Martin Kind or Dorothy Day. I was always interested in the sort of relationship between the various ethical commitments that people had and their participation with social movement, particularly social justice oriented movements. I was ultimately always drawn to the way that religious ideals animated chief actors in those movements.

**NumeNews: Do you have any projects you are currently working on?**

**Professor Wiley:** I have a few, most of the stuff I am working on right now is philosophical. I finished law school a couple of years ago and have several things that are waiting for a “period” at the end. One of the current things I am working on is a chapter that didn’t make it in to my dissertation. I am writing on whether being committed to civil disobedience, like Martin Luther King, actually implies rejection of the modern state. My dissertation is on the way that anarchism and pacifism have overlapped in the American context. The paper I am writing now asks the same question from a little bit of a different angle. It asks the question of whether there are more anarchists in our society than one might ordinarily think.

**NumeNews: What is your favorite topic to teach?**

**Professor Wiley:** I don’t know, it’s too soon to say. In the classroom setting I have the most fun teaching one novel in particular, Earnest Gaine’s *A Lesson Before Dying*. I taught it in a year-long course in Philadelphia and the students were just blown away by the novel. It illuminated an important historical period in question. It was kind of my “aha” moment in the classroom. I can’t say that it is a topic or subject in answer to your question, but as far as a book, it was one of my favorite things to teach so far.

**NumeNews: What interests you most about the study of religion?**

**Professor Bloomer:** I have always been interested in questions about agency within religion, particularly questions about people who may have been historically or contemporarily subjugated in some way. I wanted to investigate the question of whether religion can act as a source of liberation or empowerment to people who might otherwise be understood as oppressed. I don’t always have easy answers to that question or I guess I have discovered that there are no easy answers.

**NumeNews: Do you have any projects you are currently working on?**

**Professor Bloomer:** Yes, I am working on a book manuscript about three women in particular in South India who themselves believe and whose communities believe they are possessed by Mary. So the manuscript is coming out of my Ph.D. research. If and when it happens it will be my first book.

**NumeNews: What is your favorite topic to teach?**

**Professor Bloomer:** I don’t think that I do have a specific one. I have been surprised at certain courses that I didn’t think I would enjoy as much as I did. If I give the ones that I used to say, “These were my favorite,” it actually turned out that there were other classes that were equally enjoyable to teach.

**NumeNews: What is your first impression of Carleton students?**

**Professor Bloomer:** My first impression of Carleton students is that they are “real.” I don’t mean “Minnesota nice” (especially because not all students here are from Minnesota, or even the Midwest); I mean that they seem down-to-earth, friendly, very smart, and all-together but not uptight. I hope I can become more like them.

**NumeNews: If you could study anywhere in the world where would it be and why?**

**Professor Bloomer:** If I could study anywhere in the world? Wow. I’d be in heaven.
**Introducing…**

Professor Noah Salomon

*NumeNews*: Do you have any projects you are currently working on?

*Professor Salomon*: I’ve got a lot that I’m working on right now. One thing I’m continuing to work on is an analysis of the Islamic political solutions that are emerging in response to the continually developing political situation in Sudan. I am also trying to develop my work on the transformations of Sudanese Sufi poetry into new genres of Islamic pop music.

*NumeNews*: What interests you most about the study of religion?

*Professor Salomon*: What interests me the most about the study of religion is the way in which religion can intersect with such a diverse range of human activities. This means that as a scholar of religion I get to delve into a broad range of disciplinary literatures and fields of inquiry. I’m not a very decisive person. I tried my hand in anthropology for a couple years, for example, and I got a little restless because I wanted to read outside of its canon. The reason I went into religious studies was because it allowed me to study how individuals have made their lives meaningful across the full range of their experiences.

*NumeNews*: What is your favorite topic to teach and why?

*Professor Salomon*: How about I change your question to: what are my favorite contexts in which to teach? The reason the question as you phrase it is a difficult one is that, for me, the excitement of teaching doesn’t necessarily have to do with the topics at hand. Rather, what interests me is how the class is able to engage them. One thing I learned as an undergraduate, especially going to a small liberal arts school, is that you can make all kinds of texts meaningful and relevant to your interests in the right learning context... even the things that seem the most boring when reading them in your dorm room!

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**Calendar of Events 2010-2011**

September 30, 2010  
Boliou 104  
“Rethinking Islam and Democracy: A Perspective from Southeast Asia and Beyond”  
Robert W. Hefner  
October 7, 2010  
Gould Library Athanaeum  
Obama’s Theologian? A Book Talk by  
Richard Crouter  
May 18, 2011  
Carleton Chapel  
Ragamala Performance of Sthree

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**NumeNews Winter Issue 2011**

Look for more information on the upcoming  
Ragamala Performance of Sthree

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For more information, or to contribute to NumeNews, call or email Sandy Saari at (507) 222-4232, ssaari@carleton.edu
Jared Christensen: The Bardwell Smith Prize for Excellence in Study of Religion

Edmundo Garza: Maria Wiese Endowed Prize

Abigail Malis: Mortar Board

Caitlin McKimmy: Phi Beta Kappa

Samuel Ritter: Dana Award for Personal Achievement

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