Upcoming Event with Souleymane Bachir Diagne

On April 26, the Religion Department is co-sponsoring (in conjunction with Philosophy, French, AF/AFAAM, and the Dean of the College) a talk by noted scholar in the history of philosophy and Islamic thought Souleymane Bachir Diagne. Diagne (Professor of French, Columbia University) will deliver a lecture entitled: "What is African Philosophy? The Discussion of Orality and Islamic Thought in Francophone Africa." Diagne’s visit coincides with the introduction of a new religion department course entitled “Islamic Africa” in which students will have the opportunity to engage this scholar on his cutting-edge research in the literatures and cultures of the Muslim Sahel. In addition to being the author of numerous critically acclaimed works on topics ranging from the writings of Leopold Senghor to the Arabic manuscripts of Timbuktu, Diagne is also the parent of a member of Carleton’s class of 2012.

Welcome Back Asuka!
Professor Asuka Sango’s sabbatical

Nembutsu Gathering at Ichiya, Kyoto, from the biography of Monk Ippen, 14th century

NumeNews: Where did you spend your time researching and what is the subject of your research?
Asuka Sango: During my sabbatical, I was researching temple records of the oral debates of Buddhist monks from the 13th and 14th centuries. I spent most of my time researching in the Historiographical Institute at Tokyo University, one of the best universities in Japan. The HI has an incredible collection of historical documents dating back to the 6th century. I was focused primarily on these monastic debates or oral exams.

NN: What was the most challenging aspect of this research project for you?
AS: The most challenging part of the research is the documents themselves. They are very old, mostly unpublished, and written in cursive Japanese (actually an older classical version of Chinese). This made them very difficult to read. (continued page 4)
Why I Study Religion
Jennifer P. Nelson ’95

I can attribute my study of religion to three things: snow, colorful marginalia and elephants. The fall of my freshman year brought a snowstorm of religious proportions: the Halloween Blizzard of 1991. The snow was too much for this Californian; I began plotting my transfer back home to warmer climes.

Winter term loomed large and cold and I knew I needed to distract myself with something completely different. Chinese Religious Thought with Bardwell Smith filled the bill. Though the snow was high, I was soon transported to the balmy banks of the Yangtze. The class struck an impeccable balance of academic study and personal reflection. Bardwell’s wisdom and warmth, his intellect and spirituality and his colorful commentaries in the margins of our weekly reflection papers made me think twice about transferring. In purple, green and blue marker, Bardwell raised as many questions as answers. It was my first (and – to date- most colorful) experience of genuine intellectual exchange. It got me through the winter.

Bardwell’s influence spread into my spring and I found myself plotting to avoid the coming fall by studying abroad. Chinese Religious Thought had piqued my interest in Buddhism and, coupled with my abiding love of elephants, Sri Lanka was a clear choice for my sophomore fall semester. In Sri Lanka, I saw religion in action. Along the balmy banks of the Mahaweli, I witnessed ceremonies for home deities, saffron-clad monks circumambulating stupas, and parades of festooned elephants in honor of the Buddha’s tooth. I also became aware of decades-long atrocities of a civil war that overlapped ethnicity and religion. At the very core of religion lies an interest in traversing and connecting cultures through communication; communication of values, interests, and traditions. For me, it is this fundamentally global aspect of religion that holds the appeal. It is the affirmation of difference, this celebration of diversity which compels me to study the ways in which people are imbued with a faith so profoundly that they are moved to shed tears, blood, and sweat.

I study religion to learn how dreams and history become intertwined. The line that separates my sense of reason from my imagination begins to dissolve as I trace the one that has empirically connected myth to reality. Call me an optimist, a communist, a naive believer of utopias, but I study religion to pull on the threads that join people across time and space. I study religion in the hopes that I will find a whispered harmony in the throat of this roaring cacophony of difference and embrace it with the raw of my being, with the zeal I could have learned from no one but the religious.

For more information, or to contribute to NumeNews, call or email Sandy Saari at (507) 222-4232, ssaari@carleton.edu

Why I Study Religion
Djallal Yahia ’13

Self-knowledge, in my humble opinion, constitutes the single most important form of education. This is why I go to a liberal arts college instead of a huge state university. I am not only looking to develop a practical skill set and knowledge base that will prepare me for a specific occupation, I am looking for something more... I am attempting to learn how to live the most enjoyable and rewarding life possible. In short, I study religion for a variety of reasons, most of which are closely tied to the reason I study at all.

A major, to some degree, can be understood as nothing more than a way for the student to coherently structure the development of his thought. So, choosing a major is akin to finding the frame that will best complement the canvas. To extend this metaphor further, we paint the world with our behavior; every college experience is simply the first time we ask ourselves what it is we want to paint. Religion offers a venue to think about the mindsets and motivations around which people structure their lives. At the very core of religion lies an interest in traversing and connecting cultures through communication; communication of values, interests, and traditions. For me, it is this fundamentally global aspect of religion that holds the appeal. It is the affirmation of difference, this celebration of diversity which compels me to study the ways in which people are imbued with a faith so profoundly that they are moved to shed tears, blood, and sweat.

I study religion to learn how dreams and history become intertwined. The line that separates my sense of reason from my imagination begins to dissolve as I trace the one that has empirically connected myth to reality. Call me an optimist, a communist, a naive believer of utopias, but I study religion to pull on the threads that join people across time and space. I study religion in the hopes that I will find a whispered harmony in the throat of this roaring cacophony of difference and embrace it with the raw of my being, with the zeal I could have learned from no one but the religious.
David Maitland, 89
CARLETON COLLEGE CHAPLAIN
AND PROFESSOR OF RELIGION

David Maitland, age 89, of Northfield, a longtime chaplain at Carleton College, passed away Wednesday, Feb. 22, 2012, at Three Links Care Center in Northfield.

Carolyn Fure-Slocum remembers David Maitland: “David was the Carleton College Chaplain for 30 years, beginning in 1956. He was also a member of the (then) newly founded Religion Department and taught a wide range of courses on religion and faith for many years. David had a profound influence on generations of Carleton students, as well as faculty, staff, and Northfield community members. Indeed, frequently alumni mention life-changing conversations that they had with David. It has been a distinct honor to follow David in the chaplaincy and to build upon the firm foundation that he helped to lay here.”

Carleton College Archives describes some of the important work David did while serving as Carleton Chaplain: The FCRA, of which Maitland was chair, was charged with analyzing the status of religion at Carleton, making recommendations about the proper role of religion, and, more specifically, studying the chapel attendance requirement. Maitland also headed the SFTF, 1970-75. The task force studied the issues of a job placement service at Carleton, the role of a liberal arts education in preparing students for careers, and other issues relating to the employment of Carleton students. In the early 1980s, Maitland began the chapel "experiment," in which morning chapel services were abandoned in favor of evening vespers and various forums held in the mornings.

David is survived by his daughter, Margaret Todd Maitland-Bachhuber of St. Paul; son, Jim Maitland of Reading, Mass.; and three grandchildren.

By Brenda Ward, Northfield News (condensed) 12/27/11

Remembering Deane Barbour, 86

Deane Kern Barbour, of Northfield, died Friday, Dec. 23, 2011, at Three Links Hospice Center, surrounded by her children and grandchildren who were able to express their gratitude for her life. She had been losing strength from pulmonary fibrosis; the last of her family arrived for Christmas four hours earlier.

Deane was the daughter of Everett Deane Kern, a seventh-generation resident of Washington, D.C., and Lena Winn (Dolly) Kern, who came from Tidewater, Va., and later married Milton Pettit after the death of Deane’s father. They lived in Georgetown near Christ Church (Episcopal) and Washington Cathedral, both of which had a lasting influence on her. During her teens Deane was a counselor in summer camps in the mountains, which led her later to spend countless hours enabling others to have similar opportunities. At Duke University she fell in love with Ian Barbour. They were married in Christ Church, Georgetown, and had their first home near the University of Chicago, where she pursued a degree in Religious Education while Ian completed a degree in Nuclear Physics.

Her love of literature was evident in reading to the family, giving books to friends and neighbors, and participating in the Margaret Evans literary club. She always had a word of encouragement and help for people experiencing hard times, whether old friends or people she had never met.

Deane is survived by her husband, Ian; brother, Charles (Montague) Kern of Washington, D.C.; four children, John (Meg Ojala) of Dundas, Blair of Oak Park, Ill., David of Minneapolis, and Heather (Tom Eberhart) of Arlington, Va.; and three grandchildren in their 20s, Graham and Reed of Dundas, and Alexandra of Oak Park.
AS (cont): The debates were often concerning very minute and nuanced details of Buddhist doctrine. Since the debaters were creating arguments on the spot in front of a group of examiners, they often misquoted doctrine or made mistakes, which were very difficult for me to catch.

NN: How is your academic life different when on sabbatical? How are the intellectual exercises of pure research scholarship different from the day-to-day of undergraduate teaching?

AS: I was in my head a lot and I totally enjoyed it. I am more social here at Carleton. My sabbatical allowed me to lead a seclusive, academic life. I was taking graduate-level courses at Tokyo U to learn more about reading these very old texts. I spent a lot of time working at cafés; I had a chance to reconnect with some of my friends from high school. I felt like I needed to unlearn the educational/academic style of the U.S. Simultaneously, I was re-learning the very rigorous traditional Japanese style of education and it was having a significant positive impact on my research. I was able to reflect on what I had done in the U.S. and reconnect with my past.

NN: What understanding have you brought back from your sabbatical to Carleton? How has the sabbatical affected your viewpoint/scholarship/academic pursuits?

AS: I left Japan when I was 20 and I have lived the past 13 years in the U.S. This sabbatical was my first chance to fully engage in Japanese life as an adult. I was learning about both Japanese and American culture through my experience of returning home to Japan after spending a considerable amount of time immersed in American culture. The earthquake that hit Japan in early March was an interesting experience for me; I reacted to the disaster with typical American hysteria and obsession while the Japanese people around me reacted with a calm and patience that I had not experienced or understood before in Japanese culture. I am overall very satisfied with my sabbatical experience. I had time to think about the future and I learned a lot about myself.