

Religious Studies Notebook

Newsletter of the Department of Religious Studies at Missouri State University

Fall, 2009

Welcome to the Religious Studies Fall, 2009 Newsletter!

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A Word from the Department Head, Jack Llewellyn

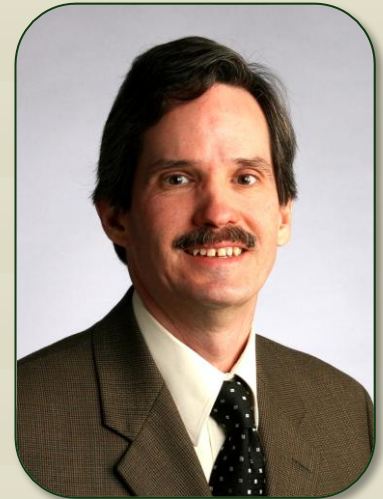
It is a pleasure to say hello to our old friends through this newsletter. Since the last edition, there have been three big changes in the department's full-time personnel. In spring 2009, Dr. Victor Matthews was appointed dean of the College of Humanities and Public Affairs. Victor is a Missouri State undergrad alum (B.A. 1972). After obtaining his



*Dr. Victor Matthews,
Dean of the College of
Humanities and Public
Affairs*

M.A. and Ph.D. from Brandeis University, he returned to Missouri

State as an associate professor in the Department of Religious Studies in 1984. Though Victor has insisted he'll show no favoritism to his old department, Religious Studies and the college are bound to thrive under his experienced leadership.



Dr. J. E. Llewellyn

A second big change is that Dr. Julia Watts Belser joined the department in the fall of 2008 as an assistant professor (cf. the interview with Dr. Watts Belser in this issue of the newsletter). Just completing her Ph.D. at the University of California Berkeley and the Graduate Theological Union, Julia is a specialist in Rabbinic Judaism. We are particularly excited because this is first time the department has had a full-time faculty member in Post-Biblical Judaism, and Julia has already distinguished herself by her fine work in the classroom. The department's third personnel change is adding Jane Terry as our administrative secretary this past summer. After serving you for three years, Carolyn Mayer has moved on to a job in Carrington Hall. Jane came back to Religious Studies after working for a year as the administrative secretary in the Department of Military Science at Missouri State. I say that Jane "came back" because she was an undergrad Religious Studies minor and completed her M.A. in our department in spring 2009. Though we miss Carolyn, Jane has already made a great contribution to the life of the department.

If you read the *News-Leader*, then you know that Missouri State has been trying to cut back because of the downturn in the economy. One of the reasons why we are doing an electronic newsletter this year is to save on printing and mailing costs. But even if there has to be some belt tightening, the Department of Religious Studies will continue to offer a great education to our students—two of whom are featured in this newsletter. Though we won't be mailing you a newsletter, you may soon be receiving a postcard inviting you to join us for our Annual Student and Alumni Homecoming Potluck Dinner on Saturday, 31 October, from 5 to 8 p. m. My wife, Eileen, and I will be hosting this at our home, 946 South Pickwick Avenue, which is just east of the Missouri State campus. This card also asks you to update us about your e-mail address, by calling Jane Terry at 417-836-5514 or by e-mailing JaneTerry@MissouriState.edu. We look forward to seeing you at the dinner!

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Welcome to Dr. Julia Watts Belser

By Dr. Austra Reinis

For a long time it has been the plan of the Department to hire a specialist in Judaism. Finally, in the fall of 2008, the Department welcomed Dr. Julia Watts Belser! Indeed, the entire Springfield community welcomed her, with articles in the News-Leader and several public panels—the works!

In this interview, conducted and written by Dr. Austra Reinis, we introduce—and welcome again—Dr. Watts Belser to the Department.



By way of background, Dr. Watts Belser holds a Ph.D. from University of California, Berkeley and the Graduate Theological Union and has joined the department as Assistant Professor of Judaism.

Dr. Reinis: Tell us about your background – what did you do in life before you decided to do a Ph.D. in Jewish Studies?

Dr. Watts Belser: I worked as a freelance writer, writing fiction, poetry, and articles on a number of different topics – often related to religion, health, and social justice issues. For several years, I worked with the Hesperian Foundation, a non-profit international health publisher, to write a

health book for women with disabilities. It's designed to help give women the tools to care for their own health, particularly in places with limited access to medical care, and challenge social barriers such as negative attitudes about women and disabilities that are prevalent in many communities. Through that project, I had the opportunity to work with disabled women around the world – hearing their stories and learning their methods for community activism. We finally finished *A Health Book for Women with Disabilities* while I was already in my Ph.D. program. It's a thrill for me to hear from women who talk about how the book inspired them to become agents of change in their own communities.

Dr. Reinis: How did you become interested in pursuing a doctorate in religious studies?

Dr. Watts Belser: As a storyteller and a writer, I've been drawn to sacred stories for as long as I can remember. I particularly wanted to understand the complexities of these stories and to explore the interaction between religion, culture, and social change. Religious narrative and practice are such vital sites for negotiating identity: the ways in which people understand themselves, their communities, and their world. I wanted to better understand how communities grapple with questions of deep meaning, especially in times of profound social transformation. I also found myself drawn to the interdisciplinary nature of the field. Religious studies is a great way to bring together my passion for history, folklore, cultural anthropology, and literature.

Dr. Reinis: I'm curious about your study program in Berkeley. Who did you study with and what were some of your most important learning experiences?

Dr. Watts Belser: One of the things I most loved about my experience at Berkeley was the encouragement to do close readings of Hebrew literature and late antique Jewish texts. Joshua Holo, my mentor in the program, particularly focused on medieval Hebrew literature. I found myself spending hours working out the intricacies of these old stories, poems, chronicles, and court cases. They're an incredible window back in time, into the lives and dreams of ordinary and extraordinary people who were often caught up in momentous events. My particular field of study is Talmud, a genre of late antique Jewish literature that brings together complex discussions of Jewish law, ritual practice, imaginative stories, and biblical interpretation. Daniel Boyarin, my advisor, is a brilliant scholar who has led the way in cultural readings of these talmudic texts – in drawing forth the ways in which rabbinic literature sheds light upon the complexity of rabbinic Jewish society in the multicultural and multi-religious milieu of the Roman and Babylonian empires.

Dr. Reinis: What courses are you teaching at Missouri State, and what kinds of courses do you anticipate offering in the near future?

Dr. Watts Belser: I began in the fall of 2008, teaching Paths of World Religions and Judaism, an upper-level course on Jewish history, culture, and religious practice. In the spring of 2008, I taught Religion and the Environment, examining how different religious communities have grappled with environmental crises in late antiquity and over the course of history, as well as contemporary intersections between ecology, spirituality, environmental activism, and religious thought in Jewish, Christian, and neo-Pagan traditions. This academic year, 2009, I will be

offering a course for advanced undergraduates and graduate students on rabbinic literature – Midrash, Talmud, and the Jewish Bible.



Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, copied in Spain, 14th century;
Illuminated Perugia, Italy, c. 1400.

Source: www.library.yale.edu/judaica/site/conferences/maimonides/mishnehtorah.html

Dr. Reinis: What are your impressions after your year at Missouri State?

Dr. Watts Belser: I love the dynamism of the department and have felt warmly welcomed to Springfield. The classroom has been energizing. It's exciting to be in a place where so many people are passionate about religion and religious studies. I've already had some wonderful interactions with students and I'm looking forward to more.

Dr. Reinis: What do you do for fun and recreation?

Dr. Watts Belser: I love music and I sing whenever I have the opportunity. I enjoy curling up with a good fantasy or science fiction novel, and I love to write them as well. I also have great passion for the outdoors, so my partner Josh and I are looking forward to exploring the beautiful Ozarks.

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No More Stop Signs on the Road from Gezer

By Sarah Hodge

In the 1990s, under the direction of Dr. Victor Matthews, Dr. Charles Hedrick, and Dr. LaMoine DeVries, Missouri State students actively excavated at Baniyas (ancient Caesarea Philippi). Since 2000, however, the Department has not been able to lead students back to Israel for this life-enriching experience. Finally, this past summer, 2009, Dr. John Strong was able to lead three Missouri State students (Ms. Sara Hodge, Mr. Jared Chatfield, Mr. Jacob Herd), back to Israel to excavate at Tel Gezer, located midway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. One of these students, Ms. Sara Hodge, writes about her experience this past summer.



Sarah Hodge, as she begins to excavate what turned out to be a Hellenistic kiln.

I am currently a junior at Missouri State University and am majoring in Anthropology and Antiquities with minors in History and Religious Studies. I want to pursue a career as a professor teaching Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology. As such, when one of my religious studies professors, Dr. John Strong, provided me with the opportunity to participate in an excavation in Israel, I jumped on it. I hit a

small snag when it came to paying for the trip, but I was shocked when I found there were several scholarships for students in my field [*Sara received two scholarships, one, a national award, from the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR), and a second, a Departmental award, the Schyler Elizabeth Strong Scholarship for Biblical Archaeology—editor's note*]. I was able to get the trip completely paid for, which greatly added to my experience since I didn't have to stress about money.

This was my first archaeological excavation and I was terrified. I spent several months reviewing my school textbooks, trying to recall terms I had learned in a class three semesters beforehand. At the same time I couldn't have been more ecstatic to be able to spend my first dig on the largest excavation in Israel this summer. I found the experience most gratifying and educational. We excavated at Tel Gezer, Israel, during the weekdays and attended guest lectures during the weeknights. On weekends we toured the country, visiting sites we had learned about through our readings and lectures. It was a truly unique experience not only to learn about the site and then actually go there, but also to understand the excavation processes at these sites through my own hands-on experience at Tel Gezer. I now have so many memorable experiences that I will always cherish. I was able to swim in the Dead Sea, explore the twisting streets of Jerusalem, single-handedly excavate a Hellenistic kiln, sail in a boat across the Sea of Galilee, climb the siege ramps at Masada, and so much more.

I am deeply indebted to this program for the invaluable experience it has provided me and for its affirmation of my future career path. Any uncertainty I had about my future in Archaeology has completely dissipated and I could not be more excited with the choices I have made. The Tel Gezer Excavation and Study Program in Israel was a truly once-in-a-lifetime experience and I encourage everyone to get out there and pursue their dreams. Money didn't stop me, and I now know that nothing can.

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Fruitful Journeys in the Desert: One Graduate's Travel Diary

By Erin Darby

Erin Darby graduated from Missouri State's M.A. program in 2002, after completing her thesis, "Death Cult in Ancient Israel and Modern Scholarship: Practical and Theoretical Issues in Old Testament Studies." From Missouri State, she moved on to work on her Ph.D. at Duke University, which she is now in the process of completing. But the "process" has been an exciting one, as can be easily seen in this page from her traveler's notebook.

When taking my first archaeology classes at Missouri State, I could not have imagined that the next few years would lead me into a fledgling career in Near Eastern Archaeology. I began working on a dig in Israel when I started my Ph.D. at Duke University, but excavating in the rolling hills of Israel's western farm land was only the beginning of what has become a major component of both my academic research and personal life.

After completing my doctoral exams I was honored to receive a year-long fellowship at the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in East Jerusalem. During my residency I pursued my dissertation topic: female terracotta figurines from the eighth-sixth centuries in Judah. I met countless excavators, visited Israel's archaeological sites, studied in museums, examined my own corpus of artifacts, and catalogued approximately 1000 figurines.

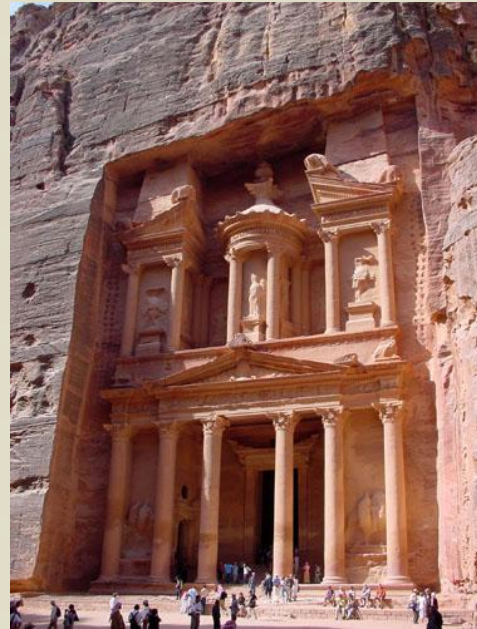
In addition to dissertation research, I co-directed my first archaeological excavation along with Dr. Tali Erickson-Gini, of the Israel Antiquities Authority. We worked for two weeks at Mizpe Ramon, in the central Negev desert of southern Israel. Unlike volunteer excavations, our excavation was manned entirely by Bedouine men. It remains unclear to me whether our workers appreciated being bossed around by two Caucasian women, but spending time with them broadened my experience of the Middle East.

Not that East Jerusalem is lacking in experiences for the eager traveler. Unlike kibbutz life, Jerusalem offered limitless opportunities to experience both sides of Israel/Palestine's political and cultural divide. I fostered relationships with both Israelis and Palestinians that I expect will last the rest of my life. Further, I learned to cherish the magical moments when both sides coexist peacefully and was saddened when confronted with the countless, seemingly insurmountable differences that divide them.

At the end of my research year I had visited locations all over Israel, the Sinai, the island of Cyprus, and many parts of Jordan. Although these trips were research-related, little did I expect that my personal life would change drastically. My husband, whom I met in Jerusalem, proposed on Cyprus, and only nine months later I found myself on a plane to meet him in Amman, Jordan where Robert and I would be working on dissertation research for the summer.

As residents of the American Center of Oriental Research, we met colleagues from around the world. We visited countless sites throughout Jordan and appreciated the country's impressive natural resources. Hiking into Petra is truly unforgettable. We also benefitted from accommodating directors willing to lead us through archaeological sites, including Missouri State's own, Dr. Bethany Walker of the History Department.

One of the most touching surprises was the sense of hospitality in every greeting of "Ahlan wasahlan," the typical Arabic welcome to foreigners. The occasional unscrupulous cab driver notwithstanding, we were treated with such courtesy that we could not help but adore our hosts, whether sitting on a carpeted floor over a plate of home-cooked mansaf, or walking down a busy Amman street.



"The Treasury" (Al Khazneh), Petra, in Jordan
Source: <http://bikyamasr.wordpress.com/2009/06/30/bm-travel-petra-the-mystery-of-the-desert/>

This kindness and respect was not limited to Jordan. Robert and I were granted a visa to travel into Syria, where we found the people caring, friendly, and helpful beyond the call of duty. Our experiences with the culture further solidified an amazing tour of Syria's rich past. With visits to the Damascus and Aleppo museums, the ancient sea port of Ugarit, the Bronze Age palaces and temples of Ebla and Mari, not to mention the crusader castle "Krak de Chevalier," and the dramatically-situated cities of Apamea, Zenobia, Dura Europas, and Palmyra, Syria did not fail to impress.

To end our most recent adventure, Robert and I returned to Jordan to co-direct our own project in the southern Arabah Valley. 'Ayn Gharandal, a Nabatean-Byzantine period site, contains a large fort, an aqueduct, and a bathhouse. At the beginning of August we headed into the desert to spend a week mapping the structures on the site and collecting every scrap of material that we could find on the surface! Despite a few automotive failures, which necessitated twenty Jordanian soldiers and the inhabitants of a nearby Bedouine village, we completed our first season of work and look forward to many seasons to come.

But alas, first we must complete the greatest of all research feats—dissertations, graduations, and the procurement of paid academic positions! So, in that vein, I will close to go edit another dissertation chapter. That's all for now from this graduate student turned world traveler.

4th Annual Religious Studies Student and Alumni

Homecoming Potluck Dinner



& Costume Contest!

Come dressed as your favorite religious figure!

- When:** Saturday, 31 October 2009, 5:00-8:00 p.m.
- Where:** Home of Jack and Eileen Llewellyn
946 S. Pickwick, Springfield
- Who:** Alumni, current/future Religious Studies students, faculty, staff, guests
- What:** This is a potluck dinner. You are welcome to bring a dish to share, but please don't feel obligated to do so. **Costumes are optional.**
- More Info:** Jane Terry, 417.836.5514 or e-mail: JaneTerry@missouristate.edu

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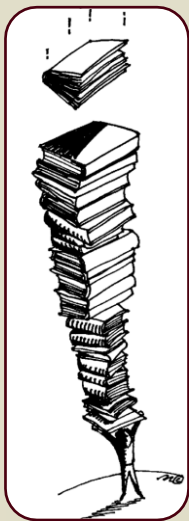
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Productions!

The faculty of the Department of Religious Studies divide their time between teaching, research, and service to the University and the Academy at large. These three responsibilities are integrated and serve to enrich each other. We are listing the books, articles, and presentations by the faculty over the past two years since our last newsletter, as an illustration of how the faculty extend their instruction beyond the campus boundaries and to the greater scholarly community at large.

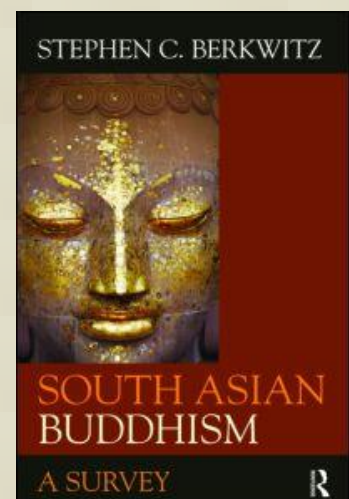


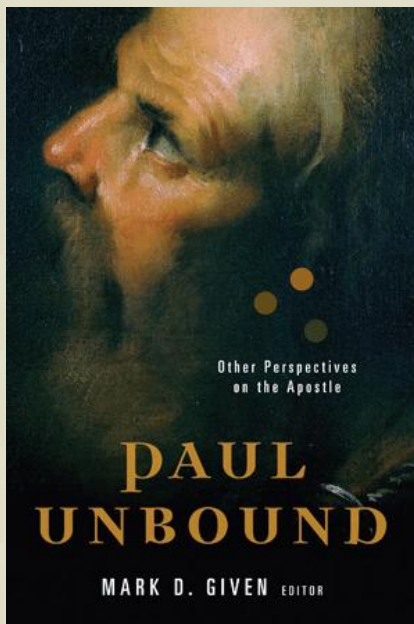
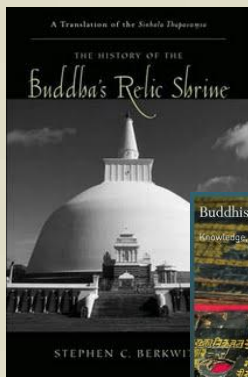
Books:

Steven Berkwitz, *The History of the Buddha's Relic Shrine: A Translation of the Sinhala Thupavamsa*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

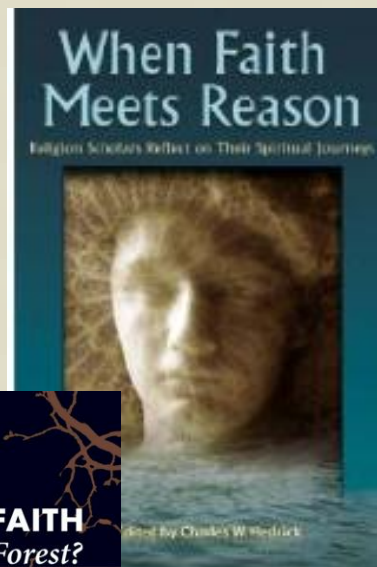
Steven Berkwitz, *Buddhist Manuscript Cultures: Knowledge, Ritual, and Art*. Stephen C. Berkwitz, Juliane Schober and Claudia Brown, eds. London: Routledge, 2009.

Steven Berkwitz, *South Asian Buddhism: A Survey*. London: Routledge, 2009.



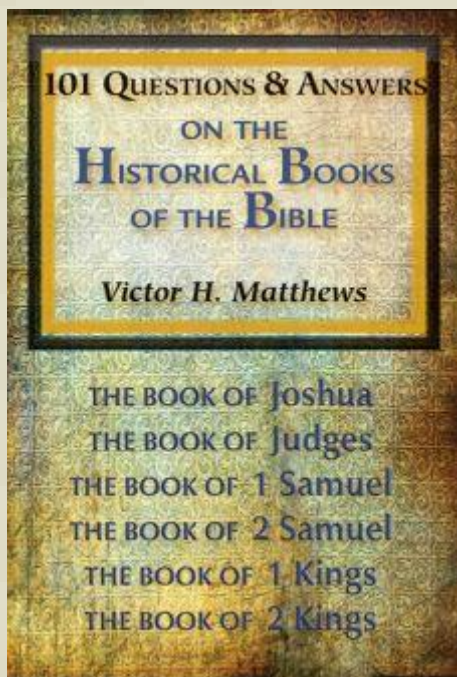
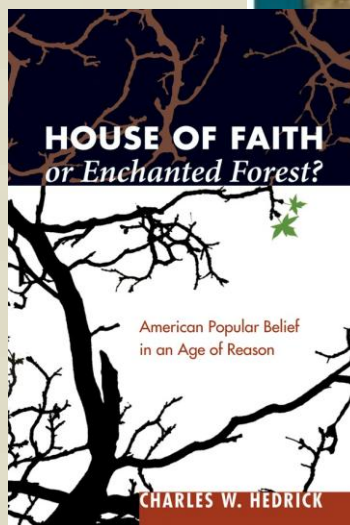


Given, Mark D. ed.
Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle. Peabody: Hendrickson, October 2009.



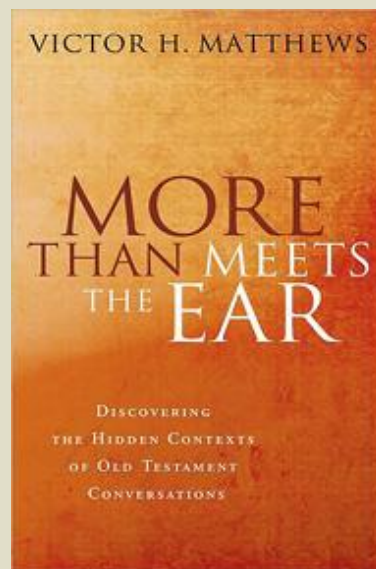
Charles Hedrick (editor and contributor), *When Faith Meets Reason. Religion Scholars Reflect on their Spiritual Journeys*. Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2008.

Charles Hedrick, *House of Faith or Enchanted Forest? American Popular Religion in an Age of Reason*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008.



Victor H. Matthews, *101 Questions and Answers on the Historical Books of the Bible* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009).

Victor H. Matthews, *More than Meets the Ear: Discovering the Hidden Contexts of Old Testament Conversations*. (forthcoming)



Articles:

- Steven Berkwitz, "Resisting the Global in Buddhist Nationalism: Venerable Soma's Discourse of Decline and Reform," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 67/1 (2008), 73-106.
- Steven Berkwitz, "Religious Conflict and the Politics of Conversion in Sri Lanka," in *Proselytization Revisited: Rights Talk, Free Markets and Culture Wars* (ed. Rosalind I.J. Hackett; London: Equinox, 2008), 199-229.
- Mark Given, "Paul and Rhetoric: A *Sophos* in the Kingdom of God." Pages in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle*. Edited by Mark D. Given. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009.
- Mark Given "Paul and Writing," in Christopher Stanley and Stanley Porter, eds. *As it is Written: Studying Paul's Use of Scripture* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 227-49.
- Charles Hedrick, "Mother Nature, God and Modern Religion," *The Fourth R* 21.5 (Sept-Oct, 2008):15, 26.
- Charles Hedrick, "The Problem with Symbols is . . .," *The Fourth R* 21.6 (Nov-Dec 2008): 22, 30.
- Charles Hedrick, "Misusing the Bible in Arguments Against Abortion," *The Fourth R* 22.3 (May-June 2009): 15.
- Charles Hedrick, "Bird Droppings and Religious Faith," *The Fourth R* 22.4 (July-August): 23, 28.
- Charles Hedrick, "Survivors of the Crucifixion. Searching for Profiles in the Parables," *Hermeneutic der Gleichnisse Jesu. Methodische Neuansätze zum Verstehen urchristlicher Parabeltexte*. Eds. Ruben Zimmerman and Gabi Kern. WUNT 231. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.
- J. E. Llewellyn, "'A Nation without a Soul': Religious Studies in the Indian University," *Religions of South Asia* 2/1 (2008), 7-22.
- Victor H. Matthews, "Jeremiah's Scroll and Linked Zones of Communication," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 39/3 (2009), 116-24.
- Victor H. Matthews, "Back to Bethel: Geographical Reiteration in Biblical Narrative," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128 (2009), 151-67.
- Victor H. Matthews, "Judges, Book of," in *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3. Katherine D. Sakenfeld, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 446-57.
- Victor H. Matthews, "Introduction," in *Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts*. Brad Kelle and Frank Ames, eds. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008: 1-15.
- Schmalzbauer, John and Kathleen Mahoney, "American Scholars Return to Studying Religion," *Contexts* (Winter 2008), 16-21.

Strong, John, "Shattering the Image of God: A Response to Theodore Hiebert's Interpretation of the Story of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127/4 (2008), 625-34



The Department of Religious Studies Full-time Faculty and Staff

Presentations at National and International Conferences:

Leslie Baynes, "Rev 5:1 and Rev 10:2a, 8-10 in the Earliest Greek Tradition: A Response to Richard Bauckham," Society of Biblical Literature, Boston, November 2008.

Julia Watts Belser. "Crying Out for Rain: The Human, the Holy, and the Earth in the Ritual Fasts of Rabbinic Literature." *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 13:2, 2009 : 219-238.

Julia Watts Belser, "Confusing the Heavenly and Human Fathers: Rabbinic Constructions of Power and Powerlessness in Massekhet Ta'anit," *Association for Jewish Studies*, Washington, DC, December 21, 2008.

Steven Berkwitz, "The Expansion of Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia." Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe: Encounters, Notions, and Comparative Perspectives, a Conference of the International Consortium for Research in the Humanities held at Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany, October 16, 2008.

- Steven Berkwitz, "Buddhist Responses to Christian Missions in Sri Lanka from the 17th to the 21st Centuries." Christian Missions and National Identities: Comparative Studies of Cultural "Conversions" in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and East Asia, a national conference held at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, April 10, 2008.
- Mark Given, 2009 "Parenthesis and Peroration: The Rhetorical Function of Romans 12:1–15:13." International Society of Biblical Literature Meeting, Rome, Italy. July, 2009.
- Victor H. Matthews, Invited Speaker: University of Portland, "Analyzing Embedded Dialogue in Biblical Narrative: Gen 38 as a Case Study," November 12, 2008.
- Victor H. Matthews, "A Student Success Plan for Improving Performance in 'Obstacle Courses,'" Annual Meeting, Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Portland, OR, November 13, 2008.
- Victor H. Matthews, "Jeremiah, Baruch, and Linked Zones of Communication," Society of Biblical Literature, Boston, MA, November 22, 2008.
- Victor H. Matthews, "Linking Space and Dialogue to Enhance Interpretation," SBL Presidential Address; Southwest Commission on Religious Studies, Dallas, TX, March 8, 2009.
- Micki Pulleyking, "Civil Religion in America's Churches," Christian Scholar's Conference, Nashville TN, June 2008.
- Austra Reinis, "Give us this Day our Daily Bread: Aegidius Hunnius (1550-1603) on the Lord's Prayer," presented at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, Geneva, Switzerland, May 30, 2009.
- Austra Reinis, "Piety and Polemics: Aegidius Hunnius's Sermons on the Lord's Supper," presented at the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, St. Louis, MO, October 23, 2008.
- Austra Reinis, "The Doctrine of Ubiquity in Aegidius Hunnius's Sermons on the Creed," North American Forum for Luther Research in St. Louis, MO, April 19, 2008.
- John Schmalzbauer, "Religion and Knowledge in the Post-Secular Academy," at the Conference sponsored by Yale University, the Social Science Research Council in New York City and the CUNY Graduate Center, April 3, 2009.
- John Schmalzbauer and Betty DeBerg, "The Campus Minister Today: The State of the Profession," Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Louisville, Kentucky, October 17, 2008.
- John Strong, "A Shameful Death: Burying Egypt in Judah's Stead in Ezekiel 32:17–32," Society of Biblical Literature, Boston, November 2008.

And finally ...

Julia Watts Belser was selected to participate in a 2-year AAR/Luce Foundation seminar on Theologies of Religious Pluralism.