

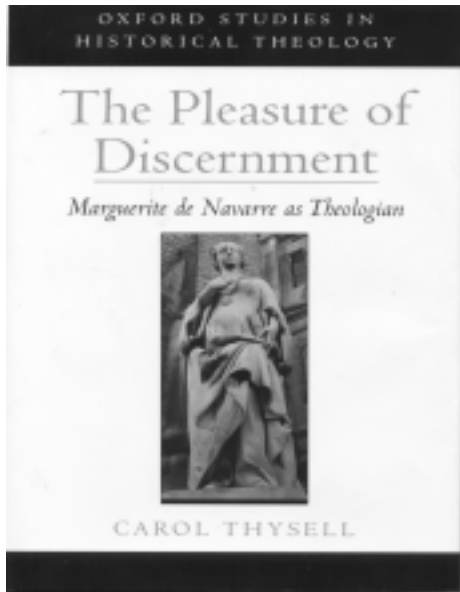


NEWSLETTER OF THE  
Department of  
Philosophy & Religion

University of North Carolina at Wilmington

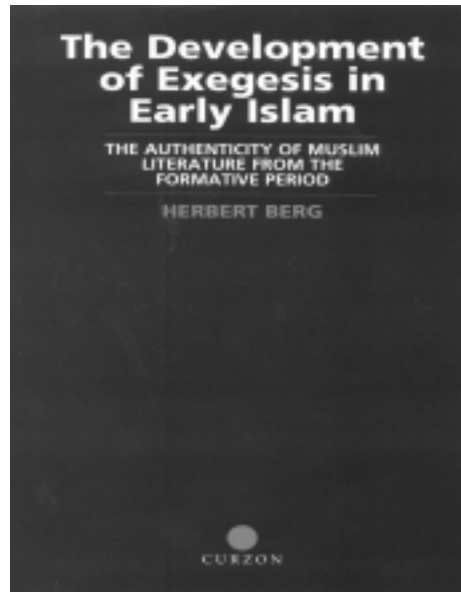
Spring 2001

## Three New Books



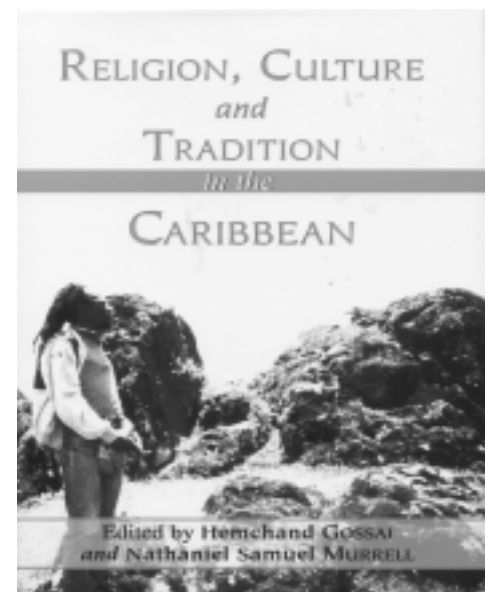
**Drs. Carol Thysell, N. Samuel Murrell, and Herbert Berg** have each published a book this year, demonstrating once again the department's impressive scholarly output.

Thysell's book, *The Pleasure of Discernment*, has been published by Oxford University Press. In it she explores the life of Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549), the sister of King Francois I of France. Marguerite de Navarre was recognized by her contemporaries as an advocate of reformation ideas, but modern historical theologians have underestimated her own theological contribution, largely because of the fictional genre in which she wrote. Thysell argues that Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron* should be understood as a profoundly theological work, dedicated to reformist ideas coming both from within and from



outside France yet providing its own constructive theological vision. Rather than encouraging the "ostentatious debates" she so abhorred, Marguerite de Navarre modeled for her readers the pleasurable experience of discerning the role of the Spirit in their everyday lives and beliefs. An advocate of both justification by faith and the priesthood of all believers, Marguerite de Navarre distinguished her position from that of Calvin, the spiritual libertines, and the neoplatonist humanists. She encouraged all to join her in a conversation that ultimately might draw them into union with each other and with God.

Murrell has edited and contributed to an anthology that explores the influence of the Bible in the Caribbean. The Bible has been used to name, claim, oppress, and exploit natives and the diaspora populations



of the Caribbean, and it continues to define Caribbean reality and morality in the twenty-first century. In this anthology, Caribbean scholars and scholars of Caribbean studies analyze the most fundamental assumptions and practices derived from different readings of the Bible at different epochs in Caribbean history: from the doleful slave narratives and missionary misreading of biblical text in the 1700s to the modern militant chant of Rastafari; from the Jamaica Maroon uprising to the Le Grenada Revolution; from Indo-Guyanese women's reality to Rastafarian 'Sistren' spirituality; from the quiet waters of Anglo-Barbadian cultural experience to the high seas of Latino-American relations.

Berg's book explores the authenticity of the early Muslim exegesis of their scripture, the Qur'an.

*Continued on page 5.*

## Greetings Alumni and Friends



Joe Wilson, Chair

Greetings to friends, alumni, and students. We had a busy year, as did the entire university, with our “self study,” a report we write every ten years that sums up all we have done and all that we plan to do. **Drs. Carol Thysell and Samuel Murrell** received

tenure and promotion to associate professor, one of the really significant milestones in an academic career. (An article on their new books is on page 1.)

**Dr. Jim Megivern**, chair of the department from 1975 to 1992, “retires” in June from a faculty he joined in 1974. (See the article on pages 3-4.) The department will not have much time to miss him, however, as he will be back in the fall, teaching a graduate seminar on “The Search for the Historical Jesus.”

We will, however, miss **Carol**

**Thysell**, who will not be with us in the coming academic year. Carol recently succumbed to the cancer she had been battling for more than two years. She remained active in her teaching and research until nearly the end, and successfully won tenure just before her death. She will be missed, not only within the department and by her students, but by the entire UNCW community.

We’re delighted to have heard from more of you since the last newsletter. Keep those cards, letters, and e-mail messages coming in.

---

## Getting to Know Us: N. Samuel Murrell

P&R is pleased to announce that **Dr. Samuel Murrell** has received tenure at UNCW and been promoted to Associate Professor. His research interests include Caribbean Religions, African American Religions, African Religions, and the Hebrew Bible. (See the article on page one for his most recent book which touches on most of these subjects).

Murrell came to UNCW in 1995

with a Ph.D. from Drew University. Prior to that, he taught at Wooster College in Ohio. In addition to his P&R courses, he offers several courses for the African American Studies minor and continues to be actively involved in several universities in the Caribbean. For example, he serves as a thesis reader and external examiner at the University of the West Indies at Cave Hill, Barbados.



---

## Celebrating the Life of Carol Thysell

**Dr. Carol Thysell** passed away on May 19, 2001 after a courageous and determined two and half year fight against cancer.

Carol Thysell came to UNCW in 1995 with a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. She was actively involved in the Women Studies Minor and also contributed courses to the Middle East Studies Minor and graduate program in Liberal Studies. Her success in teaching stemmed from her desire to make students as comfortable as possible. She saw her role as: “provider of information, coach for student interest and participation, midwife for students nurturing new

ideas and approaches to topics.”

The P&R department is pleased to announce that Carol Thysell received tenure and been promoted to Associate Professor before she passed away. Her main area of research was women and religion in the early modern period, particularly 16th century France. (See the article on the front page on her new book). She also explored women and religion in contemporary world literature.

Her colleagues and students will miss her and the joy in teaching she brought to the department. She was our teacher, our colleague, and our friend.



*A scholarship has been established in Carol Thysell’s name. Those who wish may send contributions using the form on page 5.*



# Jim Megivern Retires

*The following is an abridged version of a biography written by Dr. Tom Schmid.*

**Dr. Jim Megivern**, who came to UNCW in 1974 and served as our chair from 1975 to 1992, retires this year. For over a quarter of a century he has distinguished himself as a teacher and as a scholar.

## Early Education

Jim Megivern was born in Johnson City, New York, on July 2, 1931. It was the depression era, and Megivern's parents—his father a common laborer in a shoe factory—had to struggle to raise and educate him and his three brothers and two sisters. But as World War II came to an end, the brilliant young student won a scholarship to study Greek, Latin and Hebrew at St. Joseph's Prep in Princeton.

His academic career would then take Jim to several of the most distinguished institutions of higher education in the Catholic scholarly world: Mary Immaculate College and Seminary in Northampton, Pennsylvania (B.A. in Philosophy, M.A. in Theology), the University of Fribourg in Switzerland (Doctor of Theology), and advanced work at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, where he graduated with a coveted *Sacrae Scripturae Licentiatu*s in 1966. "I was shifted to the Biblical program because another priest had died. We had a saying we laughed about in the seminary: 'There is faith, hope, and charity; and the greatest of these is obedience.'" "I gave myself to service to God and humanity. I was very idealistic, and a little naive."

## Career in the Church

Fast forward two years. Megivern is on the fast track in his career in the Church: Chair of the Department of Theology at St. John's University, recognized expert on Eucharistic liturgy and Incarnational theology, already honored, for his leadership in Catholic-Protestant dialogue, with a Doctor of Divinity from the Moravian Church. Vatican II has promised an opening in the Church toward greater dialogue and engagement with modern society. But now, in 1968, there comes a sequence that hit Megivern like hammer blows: the assassination of Martin Luther King in April; of Robert Kennedy in June; and in July, the Pope's Encyclical on Birth Control.

Jim Megivern, like many conscientious Churchmen, is troubled by the Encyclical.

He decides, with 87 others, to make a public appeal to the Church hierarchy to reconsider the stand. It is the beginning of the end of his career as a priest. "I was one of eighty-seven who protested, but I was the fourth name listed in the cover story on the front page of the New York Times. There are some priests who still won't speak to me. I have to admit the reaction shocked me. We had always been a fraternity. Now I learned how harshly the institution—and many of my 'brethren'—dealt with dissent."

Forward again two years. Megivern, after long and searching prayer, has chosen to leave the priesthood. "I try to make that clear. I did not leave the Church. It was more of a lateral shift."

Jim is now head of a War on Poverty program in the South Bronx, training paraprofessional teachers for the New York City Board of Education. He will serve in this capacity for four years, teaching part-time, trying to keep up his language and scholarly skills.

"This was very satisfying work, with a double effect: it enabled disadvantaged adults to work toward their degrees—tickets out of poverty—and at the same time helped bridge a cultural gap for the poor black and Puerto Rican children who were entering school."

It was also a profound learning experience for Megivern personally: "I was made aware of the great chasm between the black and white world. I also learned a great deal in the South Bronx about the perspective of marginalized people. The Vincentians emphasized the Christian teaching to raise one's consciousness about the plight of the poor. But seeing those men and women and children, those streets, those tenements, I understood that teaching anew, and it entered into my feelings."

## Career at UNCW

In 1974 Megivern decided to return to the academic world, and accepted a position as Associate Professor of philosophy and religion in Wilmington, North Carolina. "It was the best move of my life."

When he came to Wilmington in 1974, the city had just come out from under the violent upheaval associated with the integration of the public schools, and the trial and conviction of the Wilmington 10. The next year, Megivern became chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion, and two years after that, married

Marjorie Smith. "Marjorie and I have shared a commitment to civic affairs, a love of the theater—and our lives."

In those years, Jim wrote a column on Religion for the *Wilmington Star-News*. It was in this role that he attended the hearings on the Wilmington 10. Megivern's columns offered virtually the only public voice in North Carolina at the time critical of the justice of those hearings. Once again, the heat was turned up, and eventually Jim was forced from his position with the paper—but not before his impassioned reporting brought reason to the decision of what to do to the imprisoned young people.

Jim Megivern has continued to speak for racial dialogue and understanding, helping to organize and develop programs for Human Relations month, and to begin a longer process of racial reconciliation in Wilmington through the efforts of the 1898 Centennial Foundation, of which he is a founding member. More recently, he organized the ten part Wilmington in Black and White series, which involved several hundred people and has served as a catalyst for the 1898 Foundation's City-Wide Dialogue on Race Relations that began in February of 1998. Megivern was one of the architects of those dialogue sessions.

Megivern began the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) chapter at UNCW, and served to build the statewide AAUP organization. He has served the university as unofficial ombudsman, not only for professors at UNCW, but throughout the system. He worked to create the UNCW Faculty Senate, and encouraged the growth of faculty governance throughout the system. Today, all members of the UNC university community acknowledge the value and



*Dr. Jim McGowan shares some amusing anecdotes about long-time friend and colleague, Dr. Jim Megivern.*

contribution of faculty to the governance process: the university system we enjoy would not be possible without it. But it should be remembered that this is also the creation of men like Jim Megivern—men who, in the beginning, were often seen as dissidents.

Megivern is also, together with his wife Marjorie, a lover of the arts of drama and music. He muses at the roles he has played: “The two I remember best are that of Fra Ricardo in *Savonarola* and Captain Queeg in *The Caine Mutiny*. I guess it is the theme of institutional authority vs. dissent. I can’t get away from it!” He played Benjamin Franklin in the musical *1776*, which marked the re-opening of Thalian Hall, the year of the bicentennial. “A character more to my liking and a very good year.”

But it is as a tenor or baritone—he has sung both—that Megivern has found his greatest happiness in artistic expression, and for many years he has participated in the Cape Fear Chordsmen (an organization which, of course, he helped found). “I like all the arts. But there is something special about four guys getting together and being able to make a chord ring.”

“To believe in man does not imply you cannot believe in God. The greatest philosophers have also been men of faith.” Megivern brought this idea, and a truly prodigious depth of linguistic, biblical, historical, philosophical and theological learning to UNCW, where he has been a gifted and highly regarded teacher for twenty years. “My most wonderful discovery in Wilmington was the people—especially the students who were willing to grapple with ideas.”

Whether leading his students into the New Testament or bringing them to the philosophies of Aquinas and existentialism, he has taught them to “take responsibility for their lives” (as the existentialists demand), and yet also “contribute to the community” (as they sometimes neglect). He has been a persistent educational innovator and introduced the “New Thinking” on biblical criticism, on Christianity and ecology, on the peace movement, on debate within Christianity on issues relating to the ethics of life and death, on the political philosophies of oppressed people, and on all the themes that connect faith to human well-being.

On the mantle in his office is the saying, “Education is the process of

moving from dogmatic ignorance to reasoned uncertainty.”

Jim Megivern was recently selected as a Teaching Fellow of the Albert Schweitzer Institute for the Humanities. “My conviction is that the notion of humanism in Western thought is largely associated with the Christian faith.”

### **The Death Penalty**

It was in 1979 that Jim Megivern received a telephone call from Mary Anne Talley, the public defender of Malcolm Gardner, a man whom his attorney knew would be found guilty of murder. (Gardner today is the “dean of death row” in the North Carolina prison system.) The attorney wanted someone who could impress upon the jury the fact that the Bible does not, in fact, demand the death penalty for every form of murder.

“I was struck by how very little I could find in the scholarly literature on the involvement of the Christian churches with capital punishment.”

Within a few years, Megivern had begun what would be the unifying work of his career: a massive, epochal study of the theological and history of the death penalty, a study that would take him from a North Carolina courtroom and the fate of a single condemned man to the great libraries of Europe and the centuries-long debate on the fittingness of taking life in the name of Christ.

The finished product of Megivern’s study is the seminal work on the relation of the Christian Church to the death penalty. “It is a great work,” says Sister Helen Prejean, C.S.J., author of *Dead Man Walking*. “It is indispensable. It will be read and quoted by everyone involved in the struggle around the world about the death penalty,” writes Robert F. Drinnan, S.J. The significance of the work lies in the fact that it demonstrates—contrary to the very sentiment Megivern was first called on to rebut—that opposition to capital punishment is not a recent departure from traditional Christian norms, but a return to them.

“The first problem lies with the application of the death penalty. With the inevitable injustice of the system.” “Historically it has been the poor, who cannot afford good legal defense, who get executed. And it has been the black man, especially if his victim was white.” “The second problem has to do with what the death penalty does to us—and with what it might mean to us if we would end it.”

“The moral justification is always deterrence. But everyone admits the facts do not support deterrence. So that is in bad faith. The truth is, we want it as revenge. It is dishonest to claim otherwise.” “I can almost respect the person who admits he wants the death penalty as revenge. My deepest frustration and outrage is at this travesty of bringing in the teaching of Jesus to defend it.”

Megivern speculates on what it might mean to the human race if the death penalty were given up: “I think the greatest effect would not be at the level of social utility, but in the human heart. Think of what it might mean to really accept the principle that people are not for killing. Wouldn’t we be in a position then to do something more humane and realistic about the whole penal system? Don’t we finally have to come to a more Christian and compassionate vision—or sink ever deeper into violence and callousness?”

Here, then, is James Megivern, a remarkable man. His life has been one of dedication to learning, to serving humanity as a thinker and teacher, as a “quiet activist” for civil rights and positive social change, as a “reluctant dissident” against institutions he loves, as a skillful practitioner of the Confucian art of harmonious government and human relations, as an artist of music and laughter, and as a Christian theologian and scholar committed to caring even for the lowliest of the lowly. You may not find Jim Megivern on the cover of *Time* magazine. But there is no doubt that he has been a great humanitarian—that his life has been an exemplary model of moral courage and humanitarian contribution to the welfare of the human race.

*The Philosophy and Religion Scholarship has been renamed the James Joseph Megivern scholarship. Those who wish to may send contributions using the form on page 5.*



*Dr. Joe Wilson introduces Dr. Jim Megivern at a farewell party.*

### 3 Books . . .

This exegesis, since is thought to have been transmitted from the earliest Muslims, has always been treated as the most reliable and accurate understanding of what the Qur'an means. However, Western scholars have raised doubts about whether the exegesis is as old as is claimed. Although Muslim scholars and many Western scholars defend its authenticity, Berg argues that there is compelling evidence not to do so.

*Science and Religion in the Western World: An Encyclopedia*, edited by G. Ferngren (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000).

**Dr. Candace Gauthier** published a paper, "Moral Responsibility and Respect for Autonomy" in the *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*. She also presented a paper, "A Comparison of Medical Ethics" at the annual meeting of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics in Cincinnati.

**Drs. Don Habibi and Jim Megivern** engaged in a public debate at UNCW in April on the Pros and Cons of Capital Punishment.

**Dr. Jim Megivern** presented "Historical Reservations about Christian Use of Death as a Punishment" at a conference on *The Morality of the Death Penalty* at the Catholic University of America.

**Dr. Samuel Murrell** presented a paper entitled, "Teaching the Ten Commandments at a State University"

at the Annual Regional Meeting of the American Academy of Religion / Society for Biblical Literature and the American School for Oriental Research in Charlotte.

**Dr. Michael Shaffer** published an article entitled "Bayesian Confirmation of Theories that Incorporate Idealizations" in the March issue of *Philosophy of Science*. He also presented a paper entitled "Meaning and Liquidity" at the annual North Carolina Philosophical Society in Greensboro.

### Faculty News

**Dr. Walt Conser** published an essay on cultural images of the Cape Fear River in *Rivers and the American Experience*, edited by J. Durczak (Lublin, Poland: Maria Curie-Sklodowski University Press, 2000). He also published an article entitled "Baconianism" in *The History of*

### Alumni News

**Kathy L. Alstrin '95** opened an art school for children called School of Learning Art (SOLA). SOLA opened in the summer of 2000 and is located in Wilmington, N.C.

We know that we have missed many of you in this update. We are eager to hear about your academic and career accomplishments. After all, you are

*Continued on page 6.*

#### Alumni! We want to hear from you!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr./Mr./Ms./Mrs.      First                      Middle                      (Maiden)                      Last                      Suffix

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street/PO Box    City                      State                      Zip

Phone: Home (    ) \_\_\_\_\_ Work (    ) \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street/PO Box    City                      State                      Zip

Matching Gift Company?  Yes  No                      Graduation Date: \_\_\_\_\_

News for the next newsletter: \_\_\_\_\_

You can also update your information or send us news for our next newsletter by emailing [alumnews@uncwil.edu](mailto:alumnews@uncwil.edu) or fill out the form at [www.uncwil.edu/alumni](http://www.uncwil.edu/alumni)

#### I want to support the UNCW Department of Philosophy & Religion

Please consider a donation in support of UNCW's P&R department. Your gift will help supply equipment for classrooms, support student services and extracurricular activities as well as provide needed scholarship support for students. Your help and generosity will allow us to continue to provide a meaningful education for Philosophy and Religion students.

Amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (Make check payable to UNCW)

James Joseph Megivern Scholarship     Carol Thysell Scholarship     P&R Trust Fund  
Credit Card Information

**Return to:** Advancement Services  
The University of North Carolina at Wilmington  
601 South College Road  
Wilmington, NC 28403-5905

<input type="checkbox"/> Visa <input type="checkbox"/> MC    exp. date _____
Card number _____
Name on Card _____
Signature _____



the best measure of our program, and the best examples for our current students of the benefits of being a Philosophy and Religion major. So please stay in touch and keep us up to date on your lives. A lifelong relationship with our alumni is vital to the success of the department. If you would like to regain contact with your fellow graduates, we would be happy to publish your email address.

## Majors

Fifteen majors joined the ranks of P&R alumni during the 2000-2001 academic year: **Kimberly Abbot, Casey Bazemore, Michael Cochran, Angela Cogswell, Stephanie Dixon, Christopher Duffy, Robin Gregg, Brett Hagman, Jeffrey Holleman, Kristopher Jacobs, Jeffery Lenz, Kelly Oaks, Steve Van Sluyter, Lisa Weingarten,** and **Benjamin Willis.** Congratulations graduates.

The P&R Society has been quite

active. In addition to organizing a roundtable discussion between two faculty members on the legalization of marijuana it has begun meeting to discuss specific religious and philosophical issues. These discussions are led by members of the society. All P&R majors, minors, faculty, alumni, and anyone else who is interested is welcome to attend all meetings. For more information please e-mail **Luke Richey** at [lmr2058@uncwil.edu](mailto:lmr2058@uncwil.edu).

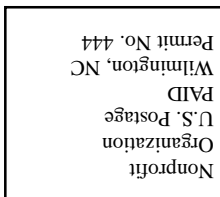
## The Web

If you would like to see what a particular faculty member is up to, one of the best ways is to check out our many web pages. Most of these pages contain course, professional, and often some personal information. Of course, our email addresses can also be found there. So, please check us out at the following URLs: <http://www.uncwil.edu/p&r> (for the

department)  
<http://www.uncwil.edu/people/bergh>  
(for Herb Berg)  
<http://www.uncwil.edu/people/gauthierc> (for Candace Gauthier)  
<http://www.uncwil.edu/people/murrells> (for Samuel Murrell)  
<http://www.uncwil.edu/people/schmidt>  
(for Tom Schmidt)  
<http://www.uncwil.edu/people/stanley>  
(for Maurice Stanley)  
<http://www.uncwil.edu/people/thysellc>  
(for Carol Thysell)  
<http://www.uncwil.edu/people/turrisip>  
(for Patricia Turrisi)  
<http://www.uncwil.edu/people/wilsonj>  
(for Joe Wilson)  
<http://www.uncwil.edu/people/zervosg>  
(for George Zervos)

By the way, the archive of the department's newsletters can be found at:  
<http://www.uncwil.edu/people/bergh/newsletters.htm>  
If for some reason you didn't get your newsletter, you can always get it there.

300 copies of this public document were printed at a cost of \$241.92 or \$0.81 per copy (G.S. 143-170.1).



Department of Philosophy & Religion  
University of North Carolina at Wilmington  
601 South College Road  
Wilmington, NC 28403-5601  
Change Service Requested

