

# Illuminations



## Tuohy Lecturer: Dr. Scott Alexander

The Tuohy Chair lecturer for the first semester this year is the distinguished Islamic scholar Dr. Scott Alexander, who presented several lectures exploring Christian and Muslim relations. He agreed to share some insights into his interest in the study of Islam and some advice for current graduate students. His interest in Islam dates back to the 1980s when he was studying comparative religion as a Harvard undergraduate while Iran's Islamist revolution took place. He holds both a master's and doctorate degree from Columbia University in the history of religions, with a concentration in Islamic studies. Dr. Alexander has taught courses on Islam and religion at Columbia, Fordham, Princeton, and Indiana University. He is currently Associate Professor of Islam at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, where he is also Director of the school's Catholic-Muslim Studies Program. Dr. Alexander also consults on Catholic-Muslim relations for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and for the Centro Internazionale di Studie Ricerche Oasis in Venice, Italy.

**You've stated that the Iranian Revolution sparked your interest when you were studying comparative religions at Harvard. You then went on to study Medieval Islam. What connection between the two interested you?**

Great question! The Iranian Revolution did two things: 1) it put Islam and the Muslim world on the radar screen of most Americans; but 2) because the interest in the revolution centered around the climax of Iranian hostility over the US role in domestic Iranian politics in the form of a 444-day hostage crisis, the primary focus of this newfound interest in Islam and the Muslim world was on angry students and captive U.S. citizens. In other words, trying to understand the Muslim world in all its rich complexity through the lens of the Iranian hostage crisis (or 9-11, for that matter) is like trying to understand Roman Catholicism through the lens of the priestly sexual abuse scandal.

The connection, for me, between my study of medieval Islam and the U.S. reaction to the Iranian Revolution had to do with recognizing that, although the Iranian revolution was one important piece of the history of Muslim societies in the late 20th century, there are thirteen other centuries of Islamic history to learn about, not to mention all the other social and political contexts of late 20th-century Islam.

**Since 2001, there has been a much larger focus on studying Islam. Has this opened up the field, or narrowed it in focusing on militant Islam and its interactions with the West?**

You are absolutely correct that there has been much greater focus since 2001. However, I don't consider the cottage industry of popular Islamophobic books, articles, films, and other media to be a part of the "study of

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## Dr. Scott Alexander (Continued)

*Find your passion--those issues that set your mind ablaze with questions and insights.*

Islam." This is part of a propaganda machine that is motivated far more by an extremist "clash-of-civilizations" political agenda than it is by the highest values of critical academic inquiry. For me the *bona fide* study of Islam, as represented by professional organizations like the American Academy of Religion and the Middle East Studies Association of North America, has only been greatly broadened and deepened by the need for more knowledge about Islam and Muslims and the significant uptake in academic positions in Islamic studies on U.S. college and university campuses. The best part of all this has been the entrance of a number of highly talented young Muslim academics into the field of Islamic studies. This has enriched the field in countless ways.

### What sort of projects are you working on now?

I am working on a dictionary of Christian-Muslim relations for Cambridge University Press and a monograph on the problem of triumphalism in Christian-Muslim relations. I eagerly await my sabbatical when I hope, God willing, to bring the first to a close and to round the home stretch regarding the second.

### Do you have any advice for current graduate students?

Find your passion--those issues that set your mind ablaze with questions and insights. At the same time, find and use your voice as a critical thinker who has something to say about these issues. Never forget the privilege of being able to delve deeply into the life of the mind, and always remember that with this privilege comes the responsibility to place your work into the service of the human family and its common good.

## Introducing Our New Graduate Students

**Peter Bernardo** is certainly not new to John Carroll, having worked as the Senior Director of Philanthropic Relations since 2008 and having earned his Bachelor of Science in Chemistry as well as a Master of Science in Physics from the University. He also teaches adult religious education classes and confirmation classes for Sacred Heart Parish. Peter decided to gain a Masters in Theology and Religious Studies in order to be able to increase his teaching proficiency in the Church.



**Angela Battaglia** received a BS in Business Administration with a minor in Accounting in 1983 from Lake Erie College. She has since spent the better part of the last 30 years raising her three children. Although she was engaged in informal Bible study at her parish, she found this was not answering all her questions. Her oldest son convinced her to attend school and work towards a Masters in Theology and Religious Studies — and so here she is, enjoying it immensely.

**Maria Jukic** is Executive Director of Arts & Medicine at the Cleveland Clinic. She received a BA in American Studies from the University of Notre Dame in 1991 and a Juris Doctor from Cleveland-Marshall College of Law in 2007. She also has a Certificate in Nonprofit Management from the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University. Maria was a Fulbright Fellowship recipient to Croatia in 1992. She is pursuing a Master of Arts in Theology and Religious Studies for several reasons, both personal and professional. She is interested in the intersection of Religion and the Law, specifically Catholic Social Thought and Law, as well as the influence of religion on arts and culture. She would also like to gain a better understanding of her Catholic religion, and explore other faith traditions of the world.



**Alan Green** has been an instructor of Humanities at Tri-C for six years. His first M.A. is in the Humanities from JCU. He is the President of the Cleveland Buddhist Temple. Having been a Buddhist since the 1980's, he teaches Dharma school to adults on Sunday and is presently receiving Minister Assistant Training through the Buddhist Churches of America. Prior to teaching, he worked with children as a case worker and owned a construction business. A man of many talents!



**Jenni Shelton** graduated with a BA in History from Grand Valley State University in 2006 and an MA in European History from Cleveland State University in 2010. Her research interests include the history and theology of Catholic women writers from the early

modern period to the present. She presented "From Town Pariah to Venerable Madre: The Remarkable Transformation of Isabel de Jesús" at the Ohio Academy of History Annual Meeting in 2011; this was published in 2013 as a book chapter in *Women Who Belong: Claiming a Female's Right Filled Place*, edited by Marsha Robinson. She is currently working on a research project involving female friendships in the convent. Jenni is an Adjunct Instructor of History for Bryant and Stratton College as well as a web content strategist and project manager for In Unison Integrated Systems, a graphic design and digital multimedia firm in Westlake, Ohio.



## New Graduate Assistants



**Matthew Michels** was born in Cleveland and has spent most of his life on the west side of town. His goal is eventually to do doctoral work. Last year, he worked with a local catering company as a server and implemented event management software. Prior to that, he was an undergraduate at Dartmouth College, majoring in both philosophy and Russian. While his initial interest in applying to the master's program at John Carroll was the history of early Christianity and biblical interpretation, systematic theology and particularly fundamental theology, have aroused his interest.



**Virginia Phillips** is new to the Cleveland area, having grown up in Northern Virginia just outside of Washington D.C. She graduated from Hillsdale College in 2011 with a double major in History and Religious Studies. The next year was spent teaching overseas in Iraq, and the year after that teaching at a Montessori school in Maryland. Virginia hopes to go on to earn a doctorate and teach at the collegiate level.



**Meagen Howe** is a proud resident of the Hough neighborhood of Cleveland where she lives with her husband and two boys. She has taught adult basic education for the past nine years, and developed training materials for adult educators. She is excited to be a GA in Theology & Religious Studies due to the department's high quality of teaching and writing. She is researching the development of women's ordination in the Church of Ireland for her thesis. Her interests lie in the intersection of education, religion and technology, especially increasing economic opportunities for marginalized people.

## Plan Your Courses for Next Semester

**But first:** Check in with your advisor! Your advisors would love to talk with you for about a half hour on how things are going for you. Make an appointment before you choose your courses for next semester. Wonderful advice and encouragement might come from such a meeting! Besides this can put a personal face on your educational journey at JCU.

## Upcoming Courses Spring '14

**TRS 405: Rejected Books of the Bible—Tu 6:30-9:15 (Drs. McGinn and Spencer):**

This course provides an introduction to the non-Biblical writings of formative Judaism and early Christianity by studying such texts as *1–3 Enoch*, *The Gospel of Judas*, *The Acts of Pilate*, *The Acts of Thecla*, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, *The Proto-Gospel of James*, *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*; the Mishnaic and later Talmudic literature; and the writings of early Christian authors (Barnabas, Clement, Justin Martyr, the Montanist Oracles).



*Fresco of Paul & Thecla (6th c.) Ephesus*

## The Department of Theology and Religious Studies at John Carroll University

The Department of Theology and Religious Studies, with roots in the Jesuit and Catholic tradition, shares the mission of John Carroll University to reflect the value system of the Gospels. In particular, the Jesuit spirit brings to education a rationality balanced by human affection, an esteem for the individual as a unique person, training in discerning choice, openness to change, and a quest for God's greater glory in the use of the world's goods. The department offers courses that span a wide range of theological and religious thought and provide a context for ecumenical dialogue and study.

## Dates to Remember

### Spring 2014 Registration:

- ◆ Begins **November 1, 2013**

### Due Dates for Winter Graduation

- ◆ **November 18, 2013:** Thesis, essay, or project due.
- ◆ **November 25, 2013:** Comps deadline

### Due Dates for Spring Graduation

- ◆ **April 7, 2014:** Thesis, essay, or project due
- ◆ **April 14, 2014:** Comps deadline

### Illuminations Committee:

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Graduate Committee  
**Virginia Phillips ('15),**  
Editor, *Illuminations*

**Kathy Merhar**  
Department Secretary  
216-397-4700  
*John Carroll University*  
1 John Carroll Boulevard  
University Heights, Ohio 44118

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### TRS 430: Intro to Systematic Theology—Th 6:30-9:15

(Dr. Hahnenberg): This course explores the meaning and interrelationship of important doctrines within the Catholic tradition, studying key concepts like revelation, faith, scripture, tradition, community, & method, and how these play out in a few significant theologians from the premodern (Thomas Aquinas), modern (Karl Rahner), and postmodern (Johann Baptist Metz and various theologians of liberation) periods. **NB: This is a required course for MA students, and ideally should be taken before any other systematic theology course.** *Picture: St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York City*



### TRS 451: Pilgrimage—W 6:30-9:15 (Dr. Nietupski):



This course presents the phenomenon of pilgrimage as a unifying theme in the study of world religions and as a key component of religious life. Some basic questions to be addressed include: Is there a theology of pilgrimage? What makes "holy" places holy? What kind of progress do pilgrims make? What types of persons make such trips? Do pilgrimages include transformative experiences, and are these personal or in community or both? Is pilgrimage an exterior or an interior journey, or both?

**NB: This course satisfies the world religions requirement in the MA program.**

### TRS 562: Religion, Ethics, & Public Policy—M 6:30-9:15

(Dr. Lauritzen): The course focuses on debates about the role religion should play in the formulation of public policy in the United States. John Rawls and his theological critics will be examined. **NB: This course satisfies the requirement for a course in religious ethics within the MA program.**



*US Supreme Court building*