

CHALLENGE & RESPONSE

CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ACADEMIC YEAR 2023-2024



MESSIAH

In Abrahamic religions, a messiah or messias is a saviour or liberator of a group of people. The concepts of mashiach, messianism, and of a Messianic Age originated in Judaism, and in the Hebrew Bible, in which a mashiach is



A rabbi is a spiritual leader or religious teacher in Judaism. One becomes a rabbi by being ordained by another rabbi—known as a semikhah—following a course of study of Jewish law and texts such as the Talmud.



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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear CTS Family,

As our students, faculty, and staff gather anew within the hallowed halls, both physical and virtual, of our beloved institution, I am reflecting on the beautiful tapestry of diverse people who comprise our complex world. In an era of rapid globalization, interconnectedness, and the ever-expanding reach of technology, we have a moral imperative to positively engage with people whose religious, spiritual, and ethical frameworks differ from our own. CTS is striving to be a beacon of enlightenment and social transformation, driven by the unwavering belief that the pursuit of knowledge is amplified by a genuine respect for diversity.

The audacious embrace of difference is integral to CTS's mission. We are fostering an environment where rigorous scholarship, compassionate inquiry, and a profound appreciation for the intricacies of belief systems converge to facilitate learning and prophetic

social engagement. We are called to transcend the boundaries of our perspectives and engage with those whose paths diverge from ours. In these inspiring—and often challenging—encounters, we discover new avenues of thought, refine our convictions, and cultivate a robust empathy that equips us to be more responsible community builders.

This edition of Challenge and Response is replete with fascinating stories of the very human experience of encountering different religious, spiritual, and ethical traditions. You will read about how one recent CTS MDiv graduate practices Neo-Paganism; what it means for a Christian minister to fruitfully dialogue with a secular humanist on major social issues; a discussion on what “interfaith” really means; and a reflection on the life and work of distinguished CTS alumnus, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr. These narratives, marked by courage and curiosity, inspire us to explore the uncharted territories of our beliefs, to bridge the barriers that separate us, and to forge connections that elevate the human experience.

I invite you to delight in the rich tapestry of perspectives our contributors have woven. May this magazine serve as a testament



to the power of dialogue and the enduring importance of engaging with those whose narratives enrich and challenge our own. As I suggested in Challenge and Response last year, compassionate and active listening to the perspectives of others is an effective technique for building relationships and communities that are less contentious and more careful. Surely, our world could use a lot more care.

Care-Fully,

Brad R. Braxton

BRAD R. BRAXTON

PRESIDENT AND PROFESSOR
OF PUBLIC THEOLOGY
(AND CHIEF LISTENING OFFICER)
CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



WHAT A YEAR IT HAS BEEN!

IN THE WORDS OF HIP HOP
THEOLOGIAN, REMY MA
AND FAT JO,

"I'M ALL THE WAY UP,

ALL THE WAY UP,

WE'RE ALL THE WAY UP—

NOTHING CAN STOP
US NOW."

From tri-term triage to administrative transitioning, we pause to affirm and applaud much that has happened in the life of CTS during the 2022-23 academic year.

CTS moved from semesters to a tri-term academic calendar. Fall and spring terms are comprised of fourteen weeks followed by a twelve-week summer term. January and May hold two weeks of intensive courses. This design allows incoming students to take courses early and returning students to enroll in courses sooner and perhaps finish degrees early.

THERE WERE A NUMBER
OF STUDENTS ACHIEVEMENTS:

Jamal Garrett, a PhD student, received the Rabbi Herman E. Schaalman InterReligious Leadership Award.

Olivia Tate, an MDiv student, was the winner of the G. Campbell Morgan Preaching Award.

Dorothy Parrish-Harris, an MDiv student, was this year's C. Shelby Rooks Student Award recipient.

The Sanderson Award for Women in Leadership was given to PhD student, **Jaime Fluker**. Jamie and **Rebecca Blackburn**, another PhD student, gave this year's Obenhaus Lectures.

ATS approved CTS's petition for an online DMin in Public Ministry to commence Fall 2023. A cohort of CTS and Bayan students will inaugurate this degree. CTS looks forward to welcoming Dr. Kamilah Hall Sharp – Director of the Doctor of Ministry in Public Ministry Program and Assistant Professor of Hebrew Bible and Public Ministry. Speaking of Bayan, CTS and Bayan held its second joint Commencement ceremony.

Additional staff and faculty appointments this year included: CTS alum, Dr. Dawnn Pirani Brumfield, returned to CTS as Director of Theological Field Education. Dr. John Dechant was hired as Writing Center Coordinator. Dr. Kameelah Rashad began a two-year term as Visiting Assisting Professor of Psychology and Muslim Studies. Dr. Alex Jean-Charles, Director of Online Learning, became Affiliated Asst. Professor of Online Pedagogy and Curriculum Development. Dr. JoAnne Marie Terrell

was invested as the Kenneth B. Smith Professor of Public Ministry and Associate Professor of Theology, Ethics, and the Arts. An online investiture service honored Dr. Ken Stone as Distinguished Service Professor and Professor of Hebrew Bible and Culture.

WHILE TEACHING, ADVISING,
AND SERVING THE COMMUNITY,
FACULTY DID NOT RELENT IN THEIR
RESEARCH AND WRITING.

Dr. Rachel Mikva published a book, *Interreligious Studies: An Introduction*.

Dr. Christophe Ringer co-edited a volume, *Moved by the Spirit: Religion and Movement for Black Lives Matter*. CTS alum, Dr. Teresa Smallwood, is a co-editor as well.

Dr. José Morales Torres has an article in the Ringer co-edited volume and published a book, *Wonder as a New Starting Point for Theological Anthropology*.

President Brad Braxton authored two books, *A Master Class on Being Human (co-authored with Dr. Anthony Pinn)* and *Open: Unorthodox Thoughts on God and Community*.

Dr. Scott Haldeman published two articles, *"Contemplating Queer Futures for Liturgical Studies: A Conversation"* in Liturgy, and *"Sacraments and Queer Theory,"* in the T&T Clark Handbook of Sacraments and Sacramentality.

Dean Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder authored another book, *Are You for Real?: Imposter Syndrome, Society, and the Bible*. It is due out this fall.

Shout out to four faculty members whose service at CTS exceeds 100 years. Dr. Terrell (28 years), Dr. Stone (27 years), Dr. Haldeman (23 years), and Dr. Bo-Myung Seo (25 years)! Congratulations on this century of teaching at CTS.

Grant work and funding from various resources this year expanded institutional conversations and activity. The Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning awarded CTS a Walking the Talk grant last year, and Dr. Hwang, Dr. Ringer, and Rev. Lisa Zook led sessions in Board meetings this year addressing race, culture, and theology. Yasmine Abou-El-Kheir, Director of the Learning Commons, secured a \$10,000 National Endowment for the Humanities grant to attend to the identification and organization of archived materials on Anton Boisen, CTS social activism, and the G. Campbell Morgan Collection.

Of note Affiliated Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care,

Dr. Cody Sanders has been appointed as Assistant Professor of Congregation Care at Luther Seminary. After four years, CTS bids farewell to Dr. Heesung Hwang. Dr. Hwang began her tenure as a Louisville Institute Postdoctoral Fellow and later as Visiting Asst. Professor of Religious Education and Public Ministry. She will join St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas as Asst. Professor of Christian Education in the fall.

Dean Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder is returning to the classroom as Professor of New Testament Studies and Culture after serving as Vice President of Academic Affairs and Academic Dean since 2018. Five years as Dean, four faculty searches, three Presidents, two MOUs, and one pandemic have shaped Dean Crowder's term. Associate Dean, Dr. Emily Vogt will become Interim Dean effective July 1, 2023.

Well done and thank you, Dean Crowder.

MY FAITH:

PAGANISM

BY CHRISTOPHER ALLAUN

My name is Christopher Allaun, and I am a practicing queer pagan minister.

My faith background is rooted in Christianity: I was baptized Catholic and raised Presbyterian. My family is extremely religious; my father took us to church and taught Sunday School. Every Sunday my head was filled with images of light, angels, Jesus, and miracles. But I felt a pull elsewhere, too. We lived in the Texas country near Houston, and after church, we would often play in the woods near our house. I remember many days walking

in those woods and feeling the divine presence in the trees, plants, and animals.

One day, when I was 16, my friends and I found an article in a magazine about Paganism and witchcraft, and my heart immediately resonated with the ideas of nature, ancestors, and the ability to choose how you worship the divine.

I studied Paganism for many years, until I was formally



trained and ordained with The Fellowship of the Phoenix, a Queer pagan church in Chicago. I sat on the board of directors for The Fellowship from 2004-2007 and have led Queer pagan rituals and ceremonies for almost 20 years. “Queer Paganism” might sound a little odd to people who have never heard those two terms together. The truth is, religious traditions oftentimes are heavily hetero privileged. You can find many stories about hetero relationships such as Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sara, and Isaac and Rebekah. Even in Paganism we find myths such as Zeus and Hera, Osiris and Isis, and Hades and Persephone. Queer people are looking to be represented in religious stories as well. In Paganism there are many LGBTQ found in mythology. Stories such as Apollo and Hyacinthus, Horus and Set, and Zeus and Ganymede are but a few of the same sex stories found in pagan myth. Queer Paganism seeks to embrace the experience of the LGBTQ and create rituals and cosmology that resonates with our Queer experiences. There



are a lot of misconceptions of what a “pagan” is. There are times it has been used as an insult to sinners. Other times it was a term that was used to say that someone has not found the Christian God. Pagan comes from the Latin word pagano which means “people of the country” or “people of nature”. The Romans used it to mean anyone who still practiced the old-country religious ways. For those following the “old” religions today, we sometimes use the term Neo-Pagan. Pagans see all of nature as an expression of the divine. Many of us are animists, which means that we believe that everything is alive and has its own spirit. We believe that trees, plants, flowers, rivers,

rocks, clouds, and all things natural have a spirit.

Just as there are many types of Christians, there are also a variety of pagans. Many have looked to the old pagan gods of Europe and Africa to find a divine being that speaks to them. Some of the more common pantheons come from Greece, England, Ireland, Egypt, and Northern Europe, but there are many more. We believe that the divine is something personal, and we should choose a god and goddess that resonates with us. It’s common to choose a divine spirit that has attributes you carry as well, or you would like to carry. For example, if you perform justice work then you might choose Thor, the god thunder and justice, or Ma’at, the Egyptian goddess of Truth. I personally follow Diana, the goddess of the moon, and Asclepius, the god of healing.

Some pagans have reclaimed

the word witch. It’s easy to find Christians throughout history, and even some Christians today, who believe that any pagan ceremony is witchcraft. But the truth is, pagans by nature are rebellious; we like going against the status quo and religious

**PAGAN COMES FROM THE
LATIN WORD PAGANO
WHICH MEANS “PEOPLE
OF THE COUNTRY” OR
“PEOPLE OF NATURE”.**

authorities that tell us how to worship the divine. In the last century, there was a resurgence of Paganism that incorporated folk magic, pagan mythology and ceremonies, and mysticism. Knowing that many clerics called these practices witchcraft, these pagans rebelliously embraced

the term witch as a badge of honor. (Keep in mind, though, that not every pagan calls themselves a witch and not every witch is a pagan. Rather, the word witch was reclaimed to honor those pagans who were branded heretics and witches.) As with

Paganism generally, there are many types of witches; some claim the word Wicca while others do not.

Many of us honor our ancestors as well, believing that our beloved dead may enjoy the afterlife for many years. With this, many honor our ancestors with prayers, incense, food, and drink, offerings that show that we love them and are welcome

in our daily lives.

In terms of an afterlife, I personally do not believe in heaven or hell, as such. Instead, I believe that there is an afterlife in which people learn from spirit teachers of their mistakes they made in life. I also believe in reincarnation. I don’t think

a person can learn all there is to learn in one lifetime; instead, I believe that people must come back life after life to learn here on earth so that we can spiritually evolve. But this may not happen immediately. These are some of my personal beliefs rooted in Paganism. But as the



saying goes, “Ask 10 pagans what they believe, and you will get 10 different answers.”

Many of us honor the full moon with devotions and offerings to the Great Mother Goddess or the Moon Goddess. This is a wonderful time to pray for the things you need. It is also a time to meditate and do energy healing on yourself or others. We also have eight Sabbats (this comes from the word Sabbath) that correlate with the agricultural cycle of the year. We honor nature after all! We honor the Winter Solstice, The Longer Days of Winter, Spring Equinox, May Day, Summer Solstice, The Harvest, Fall Equinox, and Halloween. Our most sacred day is Halloween, which we call Samhain (pronounced Sow-win). This is the day we honor our ancestors with ceremonies, food, parties, and drink.

My experience at CTS was wonderful. When I first told my colleagues I was going to seminary, I was advised to keep my head down and keep my mouth shut so as not to make waves. As one can easily imagine, pagans are often persecuted in religious spaces, particularly overtly Christian places. To my surprise, both students and professors embraced me and my pagan beliefs. They asked me thoughtful and compassionate questions and often invited me to speak in class from a pagan perspective. This warmed my heart and allowed me to feel welcome in every space at CTS.

Through seminary training I learned to understand and open my heart to all religions and see the love, compassion, and value that each spiritual tradition offers. One of the

most important things I learned from CTS is how to have a dialogue with other faiths that fosters understanding and a sense of welcoming community.

CTS has helped me to deepen my understanding of the importance of community and to be open to theological differences and experiences. I think oftentimes as spiritual leaders we get wrapped up in how “it’s always been done,” and we forget the value of fresh and different perspectives in our own communities. CTS has also taught me to keep going deeper in my own experiences of Paganism and never stop being curious to how we can help each person in my faith find their own path.



WALKING THE TALK OF

COOPERATION INTERFAITH

INTERFAITH COOPERATION

BY BRENDAN DIAMOND

When Rabbi Dr. Rachel Mikva came to Chicago Theological Seminary, the field of interreligious studies hadn't truly been born yet. There were interfaith organizations doing work in the field, and there were professors in the academy who cared about multiple traditions and the relationships between and among them. But it wasn't a deeply held institutional conviction here at CTS. Then, in the early 2010s, the American Academy of Religion engaged CTS about utilizing space in the building to determine whether there should be an academic study of interreligious engagement (and what they would call such a group).

Slowly, many of the people who had been trying to do interreligious work on their own realized there was a community of people with whom they could do it. Publications followed, as well as critical thinking about best practices in doing the work.

Enter Dr. Mikva. A longtime advocate of interreligious engagement who, during her days as a congregational rabbi, pushed very hard to facilitate interreligious engagement and dialogue in the weeks and months after September 11, 2001, Dr. Mikva came to CTS in 2009 as its first Herman E.

Schaalman Chair in Jewish Studies.

"One of the reasons I came to CTS was for the multiplicity of diversities that I would be able to encounter and engage in my work," Dr. Mikva recalls. "I felt

before the partnership with Bayan Islamic Graduate School began, CTS was already moving towards becoming a place where a student could get a theological education even if they didn't fit neatly into a

"I felt that being a rabbi in what was then a predominantly Christian seminary, I could do a lot more for an understanding of Judaism than I could being a congregational rabbi or teaching in the Rabbinical seminary."

that being a rabbi in what was then a predominantly Christian seminary, I could do a lot more for an understanding of Judaism than I could being a congregational rabbi or teaching in the Rabbinical seminary. I also felt that my presence and involvement here could have far-reaching impact on the community."

The growth of interreligious study at CTS was to some degree organic, but there was also a conscious effort to make sure that interreligious studies was not exclusively the domain of Dr. Mikva and her work. Rather, the goal was to make interreligious engagement a focal point of CTS's educational commitments. Even

tradition. But it was still primarily Christian, and while there was always some amount of religious diversity, religious minorities had to a large extent seen their particular traditions, paths, and lifespaces made invisible, and they were expected to adapt to the norms dictated in Christianity.

To combat this and attract a truly interreligious student body, Dr. Mikva began working with students to promote interfaith cooperation. "One of the most quietly impactful projects we did was our eco community project," she explained. "We got a cohort of students doing this work and talking to each other, people who don't necessarily only identify as Christian (although

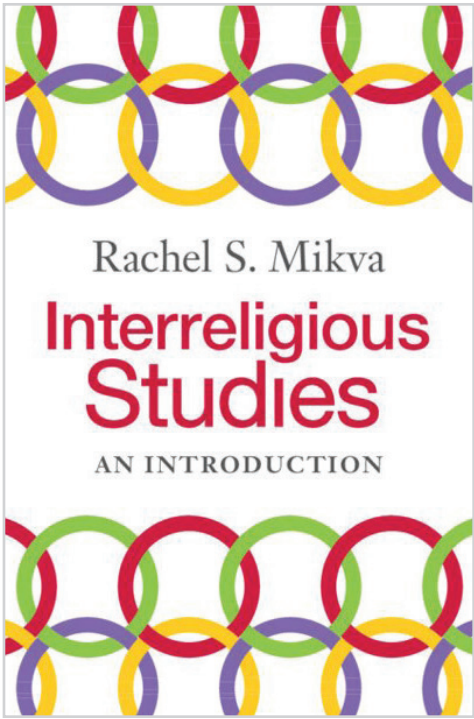
there were some Christians in the group as well), who are committed to thinking about what it means to do theological education in a religiously diverse context and have them make an impact on the institution. It became more of a two-way street, and their voice was very significant in helping move the seminary to think about ways that we could do multifaith theological education well.”

Now, Dr. Mikva has literally written the book on interreligious cooperation and education in the academy. In *Interreligious Studies: An Introduction*, Dr. Mikva has collected her long history with interfaith engagement as a primer for how to teach Interreligious Studies. Using case summaries – real-world

examples that show how Interreligious Studies is far more complicated than simply having everyone come into the public square (or even the classroom setting) with goodwill – Dr. Mikva provides an overview of how to navigate the murky waters of difference between religious groups with respect for all, rather than for the norms of Christianity both in the academy and in the real world.

The book is divided into three sections. The first attempts to unpack what the field of Interreligious Studies is, what terms should be used, and what the issues are surrounding the field. It also looks at history. “We’re not the first generation to have noticed religious differences,” Dr. Mikva explains. “There is a history – a long one – of thinking about the ways

people have navigated religious difference.” The section also challenges readers to think critically about what they believe as they come into an interfaith space, and what the implications of that belief are (for example, if you believe that the only way to salvation is through belief in your particular



tradition, how can you be conscious of and sympathetic towards others’ beliefs and life-stances?)

The second section of the book considers what happens when encounters with differing beliefs and lifestances are unplanned. As Dr. Mikva explains, “The vast majority of encounters with people who orient around religion differently aren’t planned. It’s not a program that we’re doing; it’s not an interreligious dialogue project or a study project.” Rather, she says, we encounter these issues in the public square – in public schools, or the workplace, or the media. The section looks at and encourages readers to think about the challenges and possibilities of the ways we encounter each other out in the world.

The final part of the book discusses specific projects of interreligious



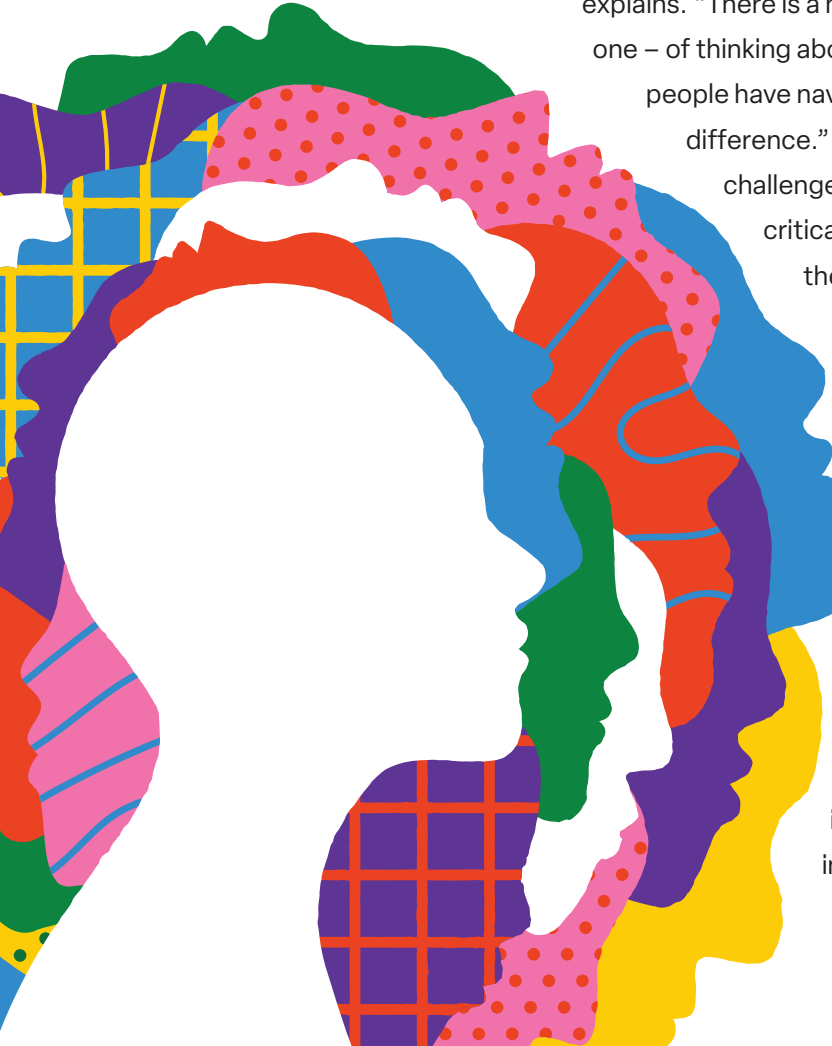
Pictured: Rabbi Dr. Rachel S. Mikva speaks at a CTS | Community Chapel in 2019

engagement and some best practices around dialogue, study, and spiritual encounters. She suggests using multiple methods of engagement, such as using the arts and conflict transformation.

The irony of writing a book for the academy about real-world encounters is not lost on Dr. Mikva. But she says

that the academy really is a proving ground for what external encounters can be like. “In the academy, we talk about interreligious appreciation in theoretical and abstract ways, but we’re also doing the work. We’re doing it in the classroom, and we’re sending our students out to be doing this in the world. The hope is that they then go

out into the world and do this themselves.” The genesis of *Interreligious Studies: An Introduction* was Dr. Mikva’s desire to have a concrete, single textbook for her course. But she also wanted to collect the last decade’s worth of scholarship and make it available to the public.



The way she sees it, *Interreligious Studies: An Introduction* isn't simply for students in the academy; it's for anyone who wants to think more clearly and critically about the role of religious diversity in their work, in their lives, and in their world. It's for medical professionals, police officers, teachers – anyone who encounters religious difference on a regular basis but hasn't necessarily been taught how to navigate it well.

The field of Interreligious Studies is one that has become increasingly important to Dr. Mikva's interests and scholarship. "I'm trained in Medieval Jewish Studies, which I still do teach," she says. "But interreligious studies has become an increasingly important part of the work that I do because it's an increasingly important part of the work of the institution."

And the work continues. Even



naming the field ("interfaith" versus "interreligious") can be difficult. "The fact that we use these words somewhat interchangeably," Dr. Mikva posits, "accurately reflects the problems we're having finding and selecting our language. When that group that I talked about in 2012 met, one of the most fiery debates was what to call the program unit. And they ended up with this somewhat cumbersome 'Interreligious/Interfaith Studies.'" Dr. Mikva cites Dr.

Jennifer Howe Peace, an early leader in the development of the academic field of Interreligious Studies, who defines the difference between the two as academic versus activist: "Interreligious Studies"

for the academy, "interfaith" for the activist class. "That distinction, while not universally

embraced in terms of the language, tends to be common," Dr. Mikva says.

Of course, even these words are fraught with issues. For example, "interfaith" has multiple meanings – it's used to describe a family of multiple faiths, but such a use isn't quite what is meant by "interfaith engagement," let alone "interfaith studies." In addition, both "interfaith" and "interreligious" leave out those who are praxis-based, rather than faith-based. "'Interfaith' privileges a Christian orientation around religion, which is very faith-based," Dr. Mikva explains. "But, for example, while some of my beliefs as a Jew are shaped by my faith, some rabbis argue that you can't actually control what you think; only God can command what you do. So it's a very praxis-oriented religion." The terms also leave out people whose lifestances primarily orient around the human, such as secular humanists, as well as all those who don't fit neatly into a tradition such as interspiritual people or spiritual traditions that have historically gone unrecognized

What does it mean to bring them
inside the doors and not be proselytizing,

BUT BE LEARNING FROM AND WITH THEM?

as religious (such as indigenous traditions).

Dr. Mikva suggests several alternatives. "Interlifestance doesn't roll off the tongue very well, so I haven't tried to proffer it," she says with a grin. "Interpath is catching on, but the problem is that people don't know what you're talking about until you explain it." When discussing these differences, Dr. Mikva encourages use of the word *lifestance*, which she borrowed from Harry Stopes-Roe, who introduced it in Europe, where secular humanism is a much more prominent perspective in interreligious conversations. But that still leaves the unanswered question of what to call the field.

Of course, naming the field isn't the only obstacle. Encounters can be fraught with peril. This is why part of the work, according to Dr. Mikva, involves ending gatekeeping at seminaries and theological schools. Christians aren't the only ones pining for theological education. Dr. Mikva wonders, "What does it mean to bring them inside the doors and not be proselytizing, but be learning from and with them?"

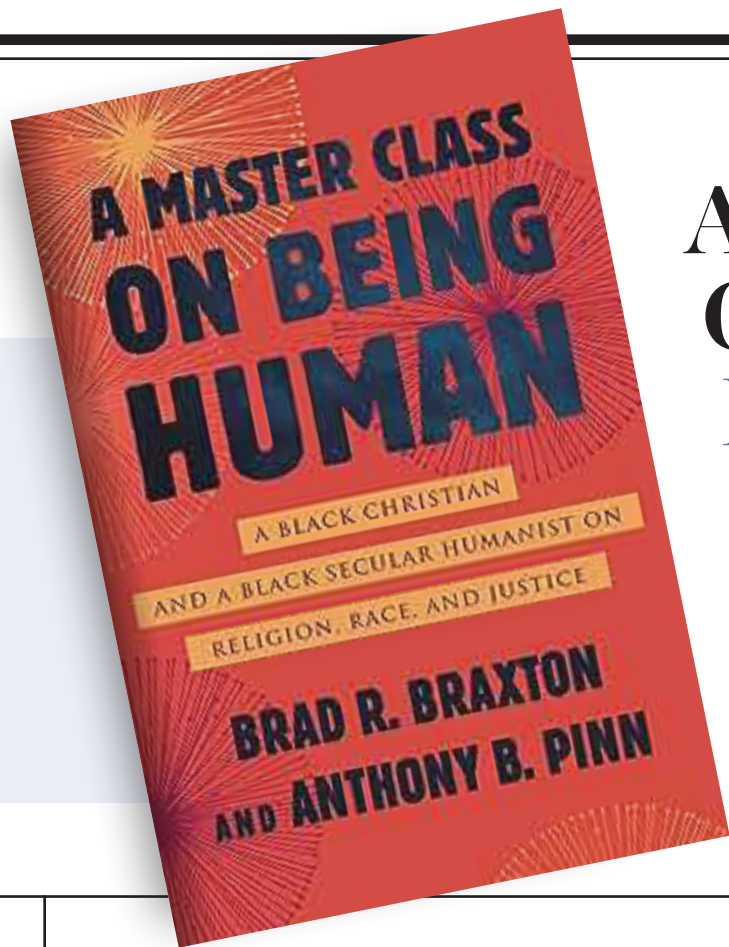
And this work, Dr. Mikva says, is

not for those who aren't looking to be challenged. "In Kate McCarthy's book *Interfaith Encounters in America*," she tells us, "the author interviewed a Christian pastor, a theological exclusivist. He talked about how it would be wonderful to learn from religious leaders of other faiths, but he refused to go to the interfaith group because he had issues with anyone who disagreed with his interpretation of one religious group's sacred text. So, there are plenty of folks who feel like they come into the shared space with goodwill for whom it's still a very challenging kind of work."

Still, Dr. Mikva says it's worth the challenge, and we need to include people like that Christian pastor in the conversation. "Most interreligious projects are dominated by theologically progressive folks, at least from the Christian and Jewish side," Dr. Mikva notes. "With those groups, theological exclusivism is seen as bad. But we actually need conservative religionists as key partners in this work if we're going to be able to have the impact that we need to have. Adjusting the culture so that we figure out how to include the exclusivists is an interesting kind of challenge."

This is part of what Dr. Mikva believes makes CTS such a special place. "Gender and sexuality come into interreligious issues all the time, including at CTS," she says. "Students come into our Living Into Our Commitments course, for example, who may understand a matrix of power, privilege, and oppression when it comes to race or class or religion, but they still have religious views about same sex love, and they don't see that within the same matrix of power, privilege, and oppression. Rather, they feel justified by their religious teachings or perspective. What's great about the course, and CTS in general, is that those people then have to meet and be accountable to people who identify as LGBTQ+ or their allies. A lot of the work that we do at CTS exists in those intersections of navigating difference."





A MASTER CLASS ON BEING HUMAN

is the new book from CTS President Dr. Brad R. Braxton and Dr. Anthony B. Pinn, Agnes Cullen Arnold Professor of Humanities at Rice university. In it, Dr. Braxton and Dr. Pinn discuss religion, race, and justice from the standpoint of Dr. Braxton's Christianity and Dr. Pinn's Secular Humanism.

Written amid the Covid-19 pandemic, threats to our democracy, and national protests for racial justice, *A Master Class on Being Human* shows us that constructive dialogue can help us pursue the common good without sacrificing our distinctive identities. In conversations that are frank, personal, and deeply informed by scholarship, Dr. Braxton and Dr. Pinn discuss topics that are urgent and immediate, such as the ongoing violence against Black communities, the rise of religiously unaffiliated

communities, and the Black Lives Matter movement. They also ponder those broader philosophical and theological questions that inform our politics and sense of what it means to be human: the meaning of religion, the stubborn dilemma of moral evil, and the power and problems of hope.

Dr. Braxton was kind enough to sit down with CTS Director of Communications Brendan Diamond to discuss this important book.

This book was born from email conversations between you and Dr. Anthony Pinn beginning in 2020.

- **How did that come about?**
- **Who reached out to whom?**
- **And when did you realize, Hey, we're really having an important conversation here?**

Several touchstone moments brought the book to life. Dr. Pinn and I are longtime colleagues, and we have had brief conversations during conferences, but we had never engaged in deeper dialogue. So, prior to writing the book, we knew of one another and had respect for one another. Our mutual respect was the backdrop for key events that brought us closer together.

The first event was in January of 2020. Dr. Pinn and I served as "village elders" for a national conversation facilitated by the Smithsonian Institution. When I was the Supervisory Curator of Religion and Director of the Smithsonian's Center for the Study of African American Religious Life, my Smithsonian colleague, Dr. Teddy Reeves, curated a brilliant project called the "gOD- Talk" Conversation. The initiative creatively explored the diverse ways that Black millennials think about religion, spirituality, and ethical traditions.

We launched the initiative in August of 2018 in Los Angeles. We then had subsequent gatherings in Atlanta and Chicago in 2019. When "gOD-Talk" came to Dallas in 2020, Tony and I were village elders. Our presence was designed to foster intergenerational conversations with Black leaders from the Millennial generation. The initiative in Dallas was an all-day event with sophisticated dialogue and high-level television filming and social media engagement.

Between filming segments of the program in Dallas, there were occasions for the participants to engage one another in casual conversation. Tony and I seized those moments to discuss what it looks like if a theist and a secular humanist really

talk unfettered. The conversation was delightful. Rather than being "repulsed by" our differences, we "leaned into" our differences. January 2020 in Dallas was the first moment.

Fast-forward a few months to June of 2020. The world is now cracking open. Little did we know, in January of 2020, that in a few weeks the Covid-19 pandemic would be foisted upon us. As various tragedies in 2020 were unfolding, for example the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd and the pandemic, I—as the Senior Program Advisor for the 2023 Smithsonian Folklife Festival on religious diversity—invited Tony to have an online public conversation with me in June of 2020 about the concept of hope. The program was titled "Reconstructing Hope: Black Religions in the Age of Black Lives Matter." The fundamental question we pursued was: Does it make sense to talk about hope in the midst of historic and ongoing suffering and injustice? Although we had significant disagreement about whether hope is still viable, the online conversation was generative and lively. We felt the energy of the dialogue, and from the reports that we received from viewers, they did, too.

The online conversation in June of 2020, which was the second moment, led to the third moment two weeks later. On Sunday, July 12, 2020, I invited Tony to speak on Black secular humanism for the Zoom worship service at The Open Church of Maryland, where I serve as Founding Senior Pastor. Brendan, you have not had church on a Sunday morning until you have one of the world's most erudite Black secular humanists talking to wise and

elegant 80-year-old, hat-wearing church mothers!

The experience was enlightening, positively explosive, and warm. Tony was who he is. We were who we are. During the conversation on that Sunday morning, we were not trying to convert one another or coerce. We were opening ourselves up. It was marvelous for a congregation consisting primarily of Christians to recognize that they were being morally edified by someone who doesn't believe in God.

The moment flipped the script. Frequently, Christians and other theists feel as if we must "evangelize" and impart our moral wisdom to those who don't believe in God. It was the exact opposite that day at The *Open Church*. A secular humanist—who holds no theistic conceptions whatsoever and who is profoundly concerned about the flourishing of humanity and our planet—was edifying us.

So, the book's evolution was on a trajectory: Tony and I knew one another. We had respect for one another but had never shared in-depth dialogue. There were two Smithsonian events, one in person and one online. Then there was the online moment at The *Open Church*.

At the conclusion of these episodes, Tony and I reached out to one another, realizing that we were not done yet with this conversation. We clearly had more work to do. I was getting ready to craft an email to Tony to say, "Brother, we need to write a book." And before I could send the email, Tony had already sent me an email saying the same thing. Apparently, something

was moving in the cosmos urging us to spend more time together.

So it evolved naturally.

Absolutely! The seven-month email dialogue that resulted in the book was organic and rooted in mutual respect. Tony is one of the most prolific scholars of religion in our generation, having written and edited more than forty books. I have a profound appreciation for his scholarship. Tony felt comfortable with me because he knew of my progressive leanings and my unashamed embrace of religious pluralism. In other words, I am not your typical, “orthodox” Christian theologian and minister. I sensed that Tony had wanted to have this conversation for years with someone, but he wondered whether he could find a Christian who would not come with all the evangelical hubbub and try to “convert” him. Tony knew that I would be an honest broker.

I also knew that Tony would be an honest broker. While I was keenly aware of his deep-seated convictions about secular humanism, I also knew that in his earlier days he was a Christian minister. He previously held significant insider perspectives on Christianity, although he abandoned those perspectives long ago. During our weekly email exchanges, we held each other accountable. There was respect, no coercion about conversion, and just probing, vulnerable dialogue about moral and philosophical topics concerning being better humans.

Non-theists are often left out of conversations on faith and religion because they speak a wholly different language. This reminds me of what

Arthur C. Clark believes would eventually happen to all religion. The world would devolve into those who believe there is no more than one God and those who believe there is no less than one. It seems like a subtle difference, but unless you can agree on the basic tenets of the universe, that there likely is or isn't a higher power, you're left talking past each other rather than talking with each other. How do you build a vocabulary to begin having that conversation?

We built it pragmatically. In our preliminary email conversations, we affirmed our mutual respect for one another and for our respective religious and ethical traditions. We agreed to not dodge controversial topics, but we also had no interest in unnecessary and unhealthy friction. In other words, we said to one another, “Let’s dig deeply into our differences and do it in a way that neither denigrates nor dehumanizes.”

From the beginning, we not only collaborated on the topics that would eventually become the chapters in the book, but we also mutually consented to a set of ground rules. For example, we agreed that this project was not about “winning points” or “gotcha moments.” Instead, we wanted to plumb the depths of our respective traditions with the hope that we might catalyze more productive conversations between Christianity and secular humanism, two traditions that have warred for a long time. Interestingly, one of the earlier working titles of the book was From Combat to Conversation.

Therefore, in our ground rules, we

sought to avoid “combat.” Earnest, serious conversation. Yes! Petty, destructive fighting. No! In addition to humane discourse, we also decided to limit scholarly documentation as much as possible. Scholars are good at using documentation to engage in obfuscation, thereby avoiding the key issues of what happens when people with vastly different worldviews honestly encounter each other.

We wrote the book as if we were two brothers just “chopping it up” at a coffee shop. There was no egomaniacal agenda about proving who is smarter or which tradition is better. For seven months, we opened our heads and hearts at that proverbial coffee shop table, trusting that ruggedly honest discourse might make the world a little better, or at least us a little better. Ground rules like these enabled us to be vulnerable with one another.

Vulnerability is not often a characteristic of scholarly conversation. Yet we felt comfortable enough to be vulnerable. Since we were using the disembodied medium of email without the privilege of seeing one another in person, a higher level of trust and vulnerability was required. We began the project during the height of the pandemic before vaccines were available. Thus, travel was severely restricted.

Ideally, we would have met and talked in New York (where I was living at the time) or Houston (where Tony lives) over a series of months and transcribed the conversations. Since in-person meetings were not possible, we disciplined ourselves to use email. But in email, you don’t have the benefit of body language.



Pictured: Dr. Brad R. Braxton at a speaking engagement.

So, as we wrote about serious subjects, we had to say internally, “Okay, I wrote that line hoping that Tony would hear it as a joke,” or “I wrote that line hoping Brad would hear the tongue in cheek tone of that thought.” We really had to trust one another.

Let's talk about the role religion plays and should play in public life. On the one hand, are we just asking for false displays of piety from our leaders if we demand that they show their faith publicly? But on the other side, shouldn't we celebrate the diversity of belief or indeed non-belief widely and publicly? And how do you balance those two issues?

In a healthy democracy, people from different religious, spiritual, and ethical traditions have the right to bring those traditions into the public square. They do not, however, have the right, based upon the US Constitution, to dominate the public square or expect that their vocabulary and practices will govern the public square.

The question is: What does it look like when we allow different religious, spiritual and ethical traditions to engage one another and have healthy contestation? A public square that does not make room for diverse religious voices is another kind of autocracy. We don't want a theocracy where religious groups rule over secular

communities, and we don't want a secularized autocracy, where religious communities are banned from public engagement.

I am interested in the role of healthy, non-coercive persuasion in public life. The public square ultimately is a space of persuasion, where your group has to make the case for why the public should pay attention to it. And this happens in coffee shops and barber shops, in opinion editorials and social media, in public protests and city council meetings; all these moments and spaces constitute the public square, and in these moments and spaces, there is earnest contestation, but it should be non-coercive and nonviolent.

We need safe and brave democratic spaces where we seek to persuade each other about why our perspectives should be taken seriously. But no particular position is the default position. As a progressive Christian in the public square, I realize that my position is simply one of many. We Christians need to make a case as to why anybody right now should pay attention to us, in light of how badly Christians periodically have behaved in public recently and across the ages. I am arguing for a democratic public sphere where irrespective of your religious, spiritual, and ethical frameworks, you are invited to both listen to others and make your case to others.

I was struck by your discussion of the Black Lives Matter movement and religion. It made me think of Barack Obama's 2008 campaign and also the whole Trump thing, unfortunately. They have rituals, their key phrases, their devoted adherents. But with the Obama and Trump movements, there's an almost religious zeal to how their leaders are venerated.

But Black Lives Matter isn't like that; there's no central figure to rally around. Rather it rallies around a specific cause. So what is religious about Black Lives Matter? And is the fact that it's nominally secular an invitation to Secular Humanists and other non-theists to adopt a kind of religion of their own?

The Black Lives Matter movement is compelling because it is a “leader-full” movement. Rather than highlighting the leadership of one person or a small group of people, it promotes the agency of all of

us as leaders who can affect change. This populist ethos is powerful because each person, in our sphere of influence, has agency to advance the agenda of Black people being treated as if we, too, are sacred.

The sanctity of this movement is its profound commitment to the beauty and complexity of Black lives. Many people in Black Lives Matter are secular. Many

NOW,
MORE
THAN EVER,
WE NEED
THICK
HOPE.

are religious. This movement is elastic and makes space for the diverse and sometimes competing identities and commitments of its adherents. This is an advancement beyond some of the challenges, for example, of the civil rights movement, which did not make room for the full-throated leadership of women and LGBTQ+ people.

In the book, we appreciate the success of a historic liberation project like the civil

rights movement, while also critiquing its inability to be radically inclusive. The religious ethos of Black Lives Matter, for me, emerges from principles and practices that insist that Black people are beautiful, complex humans made in God’s image. Thus, we are worthy of dignity.

You mentioned that the word hope has religious connotations, while resistance appears to be more secular. I want to tease that out a bit because I think the difference between those two words really defines how the country, particularly those in more progressive circles, have changed in the last 15 years or so. If you think back to 2008, that was the year of hope. That's what I remember from 2008. And I was in Wales for part of that. And even in Wales, everybody was obsessed with Barack Obama. It was hope, hope, hope everywhere. But all that hope, to a certain extent, led to where we are now, having to do everything we can to resist actual fascism. So is it naive to continue having hope in the face of seemingly everything going wrong since that hopeful time?

It’s not naive to continue having hope. In the events leading to, and following after, the 2008 presidential election, many conceptions of hope were paltry. It wasn't that hope was problematic. The problem was too many conceptions of hope were pollyannish.

Now more than ever, we need thick hope. Hope has several dimensions to it. For example, hope has an internal dimension—those internal truths and aspirations that inspire in us a “stick-to-itness” and the

ability, as the spiritual elders used to say to me in Virginia, “to keep on keeping on.”

Hope, in my estimation, also has an eternal dimension. As a theist, I believe that we have divine accompaniment from the Spirit, the ancestors, and other spiritual forces who are willing to partner with us if we are open to their partnership. The Sunday before President Obama’s first inauguration in January 2009, I preached a sermon at The Riverside Church in New York from Psalm 146 where the psalmist cautions us about putting our trust in “princes.”

With the election of President Obama, many people were duped into believing that one election and one moment in history could undo centuries of disregard and hate. Hope and hard work had brought us to a moment in 2008 with great possibility. Nevertheless, authentic hope recognized that our ultimate liberation is tethered to realities greater than one presidential administration. Thus, thick hope urges us to provide checks and balances to political power to ensure that we do not become satisfied with fleeting success.

Paltry understandings of hope caused many people to prematurely relax. Within days of Obama’s election, some people were making the ridiculous claim that we were now living in a “post racial society.” Paltry hope failed to offer the necessary critiques and continue the necessary community organizing to ensure that power is appropriately accountable to the diverse members of the human community.

Hope—our profound yearnings for something better and our intense belief

that what “may be” can surpass “what is”—brought us to a pivotal moment in 2008. These yearnings can continue to move us to better manifestations of who we are. But we cannot relax because evil never relaxes. So hope is a positive force that keeps us constantly yearning for what may be and for that which is better, and it refuses to allow us to settle. Hope per se is not the problem. Paltry hope is the problem. We need thick hope.

Where can theists and secular humanists and other non-theists find common ground? What commonalities do we have that can help us bridge the gap between those who believe in a divine presence and those who don't?

We can find common ground in celebrating the dignity of the human experience and the necessity to secure the wellbeing of our ailing planet. Theists and non-theists should have spirited debates and disagreements about moral, philosophical, and social issues. We, however, can agree about the importance of valuing human life and the inexcusability of beliefs and practices that dehumanize. Human flourishing is connected to planetary flourishing. Therefore, if we can agree on little else, let’s also partner to save our planet. As Tony and I insist throughout the book, difference is not a problem to be solved; it is a moral opportunity to be embraced.

What did you learn in writing this book?

I learned the importance of tenaciously following the promptings of vision. More than a decade ago, I had promptings in my spirit about exploring more fully

the insights of secular humanism. The universe orchestrated an incredible opportunity for me to do so in partnership with Tony.

In addition to *A Master Class on Being Human*, my other new book was also recently published: *Open: Unorthodox Thoughts on God and Community*. This book is a collection of my essays and sermons examining religion from a progressive perspective. In *Open*, I explore controversial topics including Jesus’ identity, reparations for slavery, LGBTQ+ equality, and interreligious collaboration. *Open* also contains the sermon that I preached at Westminster Abbey in 2007 as part of the bicentennial commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade in the British empire. A few years ago, I also had visionary promptings that it was time to collect some of my writings in a cohesive volume. *Open*, which resulted from that vision, is a tangible manifestation of my name. “Brad” in Old English literally means “broad meadow.”

I am very pleased that both books are now published. The “broad meadow” who I am trying to be made space for me to receive life-changing edification from Dr. Pinn. Writing a book with someone who does not believe in God wonderfully expanded the contours of my definition of the sacred. The titles of my two new books—*A Master Class on Being Human* and *Open*—are themes for my life. I am constantly in the classroom trying to be a better human, and one of the ways to be a better human is to be intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually open. Marvelous things can happen when we are open.



BUILDING THE
BELOVED COMMUNITY:

The Legacy of Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr.

BY REV. BRIAN E. SMITH

Editor's Note: Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., retired from his longtime post as President of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition in July 2023.

During the past five years, I have worked closely with the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr., his family, and members of the inner circle who were with him at the origins of his career. Not only have I witnessed his genius and magnificence, but I also have come to appreciate the brilliance of those who have collaborated with him.

No great movement occurs without a cadre of competent, faithful individuals who share the leader's passion and commitments. Rev. Jackson's entire team has been as magnificent as he has been. The team is familial and community-oriented. Team members are also diverse in terms of their racial, gender, and religious identities.

While Rev. Jackson's ministry is multifaceted, there is an obvious dualism in his illustrious and fruitful career in civil rights and social activism. On the one hand, in the biblical sense, he can be viewed as a Joshua, a protégé to the venerable prophetic figure, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. On the other hand, in the political sense, Rev. Jackson is the precursor to President Barack Obama. Jackson and the inimitable Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, who preceded Jackson, were both courageous forerunners in the relay for the United States to have its first black president.

The scope of Rev. Jackson's influence and impact is broad and deep, as he has remained fiercely committed to the call and mission of building the beloved community. Dr. King, Jackson's mentor, believed that the beloved community involved full justice, especially for historically marginalized communities. Full justice entailed not only the right to equality and dignity but also the right to material equity and even prosperity. King understood

that the disinherited cannot be absolutely free when they are hungry, homeless, and impoverished.

In the later phases of his ministry, Dr. King pivoted to a more acute focus on the economic dimensions of social justice. Accordingly, he set his sights on northern cities in the United States to address systemic poverty. The City of Chicago proved to be fertile ground for sowing seeds in this new endeavor.

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Dr. King selected three seminary students from Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS). CTS had a longstanding reputation for supporting progressive social change. Nearly a decade earlier in 1957, CTS became the first seminary in the United States to award King an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree for his activism in the civil rights movement. Thus, the relationship between King and CTS was the predicate for why King believed that CTS would be a reliable resource for finding courageous, emerging leaders.

Two of the students whom King selected were young white men—Gary Massoni and David Wallace—and one was a young black man—Jesse Jackson, Sr. In this selection, we

witness King’s deliberate calculation to build the beloved community across racial boundaries. Jesse and his revolutionary compatriots Gary and David willingly accepted the assignment to fight specifically and deliberately for economic justice.

To fully comprehend Rev. Jackson’s impact on national and international politics, one must understand how deeply enmeshed he has always been in religion. He is a trained ministry professional. Jackson and his partners—Massoni and Wallace—formed a cohort of interracial brothers who were spirit-filled, and the esteemed faculty at CTS rigorously equipped them with global perspectives on ministry and service.

These three young students grappled at CTS with the intellectually demanding writings of the theological titans of the time, such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. These young revolutionaries were eager to make abstract theological ideas come alive in the flesh—and especially on behalf of the wounded flesh of black people who were being lynched by angry mobs, bitten by vicious attack dogs, and lacerated by the skin-piercing flow of fire hoses that enflamed racial bigotry instead of extinguishing it.

These three students clearly understood Niebuhr’s charge, “The sad duty of politics is to establish justice in a sinful world.” Consequently, Rev. Jackson and his colleagues had to submit themselves to uncomfortable and threatening

circumstances. Neither the pristine halls of the academy nor the stained-glass sanctuary of cathedrals could serve as the primary context for their revolutionary action. Instead, the pavement of city streets became their pulpit. And like Jesus, they ministered to the masses whom they met on the streets, and they encouraged the masses to join the revolution.

Their actions teach us that public ministry grows from the ground and does not descend from the clouds. Furthermore, public ministry, like shepherding, is often messy. Shepherds of the public square do not have the luxury of serving in pristine

messy world that existed in Chicago and many other northern locations. However, the messiness of racial injustice had remained hidden to many people in the United States until Dr. King’s presence in Chicago communities like Cicero revealed that racial bigotry was arguably even more intense and acute in the north than it was in the south.

When Jackson and his friends visited Selma, the theological concepts of the classroom, to quote from the Gospel of John, “became flesh and dwelt among us.” When injustice is embodied in tangible, death-dealing ways, intangible theories alone will not suffice. Jesse and his band

of social justice siblings were quintessential community organizers. Like Jesus, these revolutionaries served the community by organizing the community.

They were never afraid to be among the least, the lost, and the left behind. In short, shepherds of the public square are comfortable with the folk, know how to talk with the folk, learn from the folk, and keep it real with the folk. This template for vigorous community organizing provided the framework and laid the foundation for the emergence of Barack

Obama as a serious presidential possibility. The Obama campaign leaned upon the networks and expertise of many black, Chicago-based soldiers of the movement. Rev. Jackson was a primary trailblazer and prototype who demonstrated the possibility that President Obama would actualize throughout his historic presidency.

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; the Lord has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”

environments. They must lead and establish justice in messy spaces.

Rev. Jackson understood this, and when it came time to facilitate a movement for more economic justice, he left the sanitized realm of the academy and encouraged his classmates to venture into the messy world of Selma—the same

Undergirding Rev. Jackson’s venerable political activism is a profound measure of faith. Indeed, Rev. Jackson at his core is both an activist and a priest. In his priestly role, he has consistently embodied the tenets that Jesus claimed in his initial sermon while reading from the prophet Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; the Lord has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”

Rev. Jackson has served as a priest to countless people who are brokenhearted and bound by the shackles of economic vulnerability. For example, during the Christmas season, Reverend visits the incarcerated and food is dispersed to the community as well as goods for young mothers and their children. The headquarters of Operation Push remains a storehouse for those in need.

Furthermore, so many disenfranchised people heard the “good news” of democratic participation proclaimed by this priestly preacher. Consequently, the number of people who registered to vote, and who actually have voted in elections, increased in substantial ways through Rev. Jackson’s insistence on the sanctity not only of the Bible, but also of the ballot box. In stark contrast to past and present anti-democratic plots that have prevented people from voting, Rev. Jackson’s ministry has empowered people to vote.

Rev. Jackson also takes time to visit the sick and pray with those who are troubled



PICTURED: REV. JESSE JACKSON, SR., WAS INTERVIEWED BY CTS FOR THE JACKSON ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVE IN 2023.

and in need of a spiritual presence. When the media’s microphones and cameras are not on, I have witnessed Rev. Jackson praying in private, sharing precious moments with community leaders whose families are dealing with grief and pain. Rev. Jackson has always understood the power of prayer. As a prophet and a priest, he understands there is a time and season to fight for God’s people and to pray for God’s people. As Rev. Jackson has consistently declared across the years to “keep hope alive,” he is telling us to hold fast to the dynamics and form of justice even when it appears to be dead. Rev. Jackson’s mantra and leadership are a clarion call to actualize justice and make it tangible among us.

Both Dr. King and Rev. Jackson understood that social justice, apart from tangible and experiential reality, is superstition. Theoretical or abstract justice is an insult and mockery to those who experience injustice. Abstract justice is also a harmful placebo that further disempowers the disinherited.

When Rev. Jackson calls on the masses to keep hope alive, he is urging us to fight faithfully against the nihilism and grief that often accompany injustice. The refrain from the spiritual, “Keep Your Lamps” tells the listeners to be in a state of readiness, keeping the lamps trimmed and burning while encouraging them to continue the journey saying, “Children don’t get weary.” The slogan from Rev. Jackson’s campaign was “Run Jesse Run.” Like a powerful sprinter on a relay team, he ran and handed the figurative baton of opportunity to

Barack Obama, who ran successfully for the presidency.

Moreover, Rev. Jackson’s running has motivated many other courageous, competent leaders to run for the highest offices in the United States. This illustrious list includes, but is not limited to, Vice President Kamala Harris and United States Senator Rafael Warnock. We know that the race is not given to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but rather the winners are those who endure. Rev. Jackson’s running between the times of King and Obama reminds us of the importance of each of us running the race that is assigned to us. Because of this legacy, we all need to run a little while longer.



SECOND ANNUAL
CHICAGO INTERFAITH
TROLLEY TOUR AND IFTAR
**CELEBRATES
RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY**

BY KIM SCHULTZ

After a sell-out inaugural year, CTS, in partnership with Lutheran School of Theology, American Islamic College, and The Niagara Foundation sponsored the Second Annual Chicago Interfaith Trolley Tour and Iftar.

This past April, a number of religions' holy days (Ramadan, Passover, Easter, Wesak, Vaisakhi, Ridvan and more) once again overlapped, meaning that many Muslims, Jews, Christians, Baha'i, Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists, and others simultaneously observed their holy days. We saw this as an incredible opportunity to come together to educate our communities and shape the public narrative about what it means to live well together amidst our religious and cultural diversity and difference.

Riding onboard a trolley, over 60 guests, of all ages and faith backgrounds, explored

five sacred spaces in North Chicago, learning about their April holy days, as well as the collaborative interfaith work happening in the community. Trolley riders heard from and visited many different faith-based organizations including: the first Black church of Evanston, Second Baptist; a social justice and interfaith-centered synagogue, Sukkat Shalom; the beautiful Baha'i Temple of North America, a sweet, Bangladeshi Mosque, Dar-us-Sunnah Masjid and Northwestern University's Spiritual Life. The day ended with a delicious interfaith Iftar dinner at sunset at Northwestern University. Conversations were had, friendships were formed, knowledge was gained, and stereotypes were broken—all onboard a trolley. We are thankful for all our partners who made this special day happen.

LECTURES & AWARDS

C. SHELBY
ROOKS
Lecture & Award

C. SHELBY ROOKS LECTURE

For the 2022 C. Shelby Rooks Lecture, CTS was proud to welcome **Dr. Obery M. Hendricks, Jr.**, perhaps the most influential Biblical scholar writing today. Dr. Hendricks presented a lecture entitled "The Political Economy of the Kingdom of God."

C. SHELBY ROOKS AWARD

Dorothy Harris-Parrish

KENNETH B.
SMITH
Lecture

KENNETH B. SMITH LECTURE

The 2023 Kenneth B. Smith Lecture was delivered in-person by **Dr. JoAnne Marie Terrell**. The lecture doubled as the investiture of Dr. Terrell as the Kenneth B. Smith, Sr. Professor of Public Ministry and Associate Professor of Theology, Ethics, and the Arts.

**CASTAÑEDA
JENNINGS**
Lecture & Award

CASTAÑEDA-JENNINGS LECTURE

The Castañeda-Jennings Lecture is CTS's annual LGBTQ+ spirituality lecture. We were pleased this year to welcome alum **Dr. Teresa L. Smallwood** of United Lutheran Seminary to discuss the plight of trans persons under white Christian nationalism.

CASTAÑEDA-JENNINGS AWARDS

- Elizabeth "Ez" Pence
- Randall Tyson

ANDRÉ
LACOCQUE
LECTURE & SCHAALMAN AWARD

ANDRÉ LACOCQUE LECTURE

For the 2023 LaCocque Lecture, Chicago Theological Seminary was thrilled to welcome **Dr. Rima Vesely-Flad** to deliver a lecture entitled "Standing Against the Status Quo: Buddhism and Black Liberation Theology."

HERMAN E. SCHAALMAN INTERRELIGIOUS AWARD

Jamel M. Garrett

2023-2024

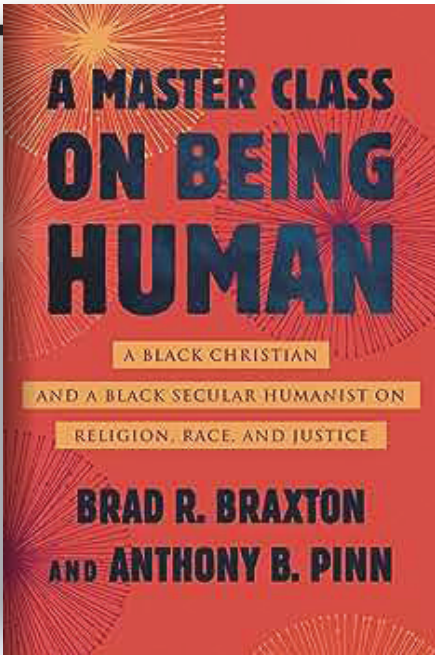
NEW FACULTY BOOKS



WONDER AS A NEW STARTING POINT FOR THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: OPENED BY THE WORLD
LEXINGTON BOOKS, 2023

BY DR. JOSÉ FRANCISCO MORALES TORRES

In *Wonder as a New Starting Point for Theological Anthropology: Opened by the World*, José Francisco Morales Torres constructs a new theological anthropology that begins with wonder. He contends that the visceral experience of wonder is an opening up of the human by an excess that saturates the world. This opened-by-ness points to a transforming receptivity as the basis of the person and to an extravagant Generosity that grounds all creation. Thus, wonder, which is grounded in generous Excess, is not only a gift but a demand: it calls for a liberative praxis that



A MASTER CLASS ON BEING HUMAN: A BLACK CHRISTIAN AND A BLACK SECULAR HUMANIST ON RELIGION, RACE, AND JUSTICE
BEACON PRESS, 2023

BY DR. BRAD R. BRAXTON AND DR. ANTHONY B. PINN

Brad Braxton and Anthony Pinn represent two traditions—Christianity and secular humanism respectively—that have for centuries existed in bitter opposition. For too long, people with different worldviews have disparaged and harmed one another. Instead of

resists the forces that flatten the fullness of life into what is ‘useful’ and profitable and that reduce the limitless worth of fellow humans to mere commodities to be exploited and exchanged at the altar of the idolatrous ‘Market’. *Wonder* reveals a primordial receptivity in the human person, which demands of us an ethic



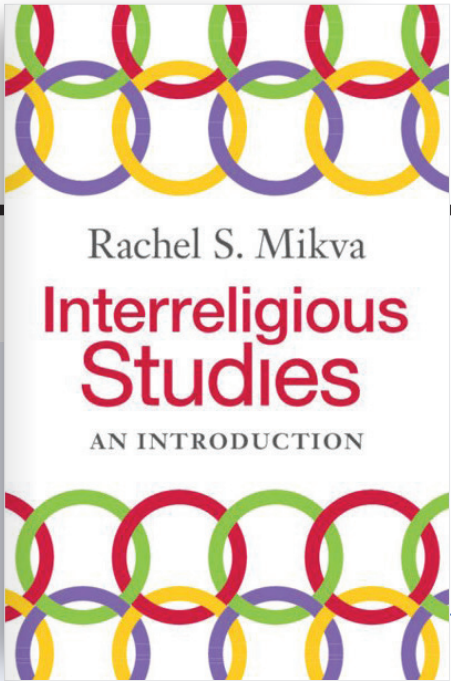
MOVED BY THE SPIRIT: RELIGION AND THE MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES
LEXINGTON BOOKS, 2023

EDITED BY DR. CHRISTOPHE D. RINGER, DR. TERESA L. SMALLWOOD, AND DR. EMILIE M. TOWNES

Moved by the Spirit: Religion and the Movement for Black Lives explores the religious and theological significance of the Black Lives Matter Movement. The volume argues for engaging the complex ways religion is present in the movement as well as how the movement is changing religion. The contributors analyze this relationship from a variety of religious and theological perspectives on public protest, the meaning of freedom, Black humanity, the arts and practices of Black religious culture, and the transformation of Black religious communities. The volume reveals that the Movement for Black Lives is changing our understanding of religious experience and communities.

fighting each other, Braxton and Pinn talk with, listen to, and learn from one another. Their wide-ranging conversation demonstrates the possibility of fruitful exchange that accounts for—rather than masks—their differences.

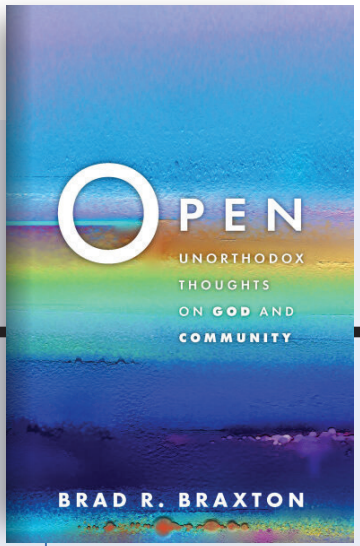
of sustainability that does not reduce the other to commodity, a vulnerability that risks being opened by the other, a commitment to solidarity and liberation that resist the forces of an insatiable, idolatrous Market that seeks “only to steal and kill and destroy.”



INTERRELIGIOUS STUDIES: AN INTRODUCTION
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2023

BY DR. RACHEL S. MIKVA

The field of interreligious studies is emerging as a response to critical issues within our religiously plural world. Religious conflicts, large and small, continue to plague our society, as the challenges of navigating religious difference emerge in daily encounters among people who would like to get along in the public square that they fashion together. These challenges unfold within families, congregations, college campuses, workplaces, communities, media, and online spaces. This volume offers a comprehensive introduction to interreligious studies. Providing an overview of the history, terms, and characteristics of the field, Rachel Mikva explores the ethical, philosophical, and theological foundations for pluralism. She also presents guidelines and case studies



OPEN: UNORTHODOX THOUGHTS ON GOD AND COMMUNITY
FORTRESS PRESS, 2023

BY DR. BRAD R. BRAXTON

In *Open*, Brad Braxton boldly articulates open theology—progressive approach that promote unorthodox theological reflection and the creation of inclusive communities. Despite attempts by many right-wing politicians and conservative Christians to curtail diverse religious and cultural expressions, an open embrace of pluralism enhances Christianity's capacity to foster healing, hope, and restorative justice. Thus, Christian communities should be audaciously open about being open.

that demonstrate how interreligious understanding and solidarity can be achieved. Designed for use in undergraduate and graduate courses, the volume also will be useful to medical doctors, social workers, police officers, corporate managers, and others whose work requires multi-cultural competence.

ABRAHAMIC TRANSFORMATION
STUDENT COHORT

CO-SPONSORED BY THE FIRST ANALYSIS INSTITUTE
OF INTEGRATIVE STUDIES

Fifteen students from CTS, Bayan Islamic Graduate School, and Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia applied and were selected to join a year-long cohort during the 2022-2023 academic year. Beginning with a 2-day retreat and supported by virtual monthly meetings, the transformational learning opportunity aimed to foster deep relationships across the three Abrahamic religious traditions and prepare them to influence public perception, change policy, and promote a religiously pluralistic society grounded in justice and love. The student cohort was facilitated by CTS Professor Dr. Kameelah Mu’Min Rashad, alumnus Dr. Shea Watts (PhD 2021, MA 2016), and Rabbi Dr. Nancy Fuchs Kreimer, Co-sponsorship by the First Analysis Institute of Integrative Studies has been renewed for a second year.

WALKING THE TALK

THE WABASH CENTER

How can our anti-racist pedagogy better guide our institutional practices, and how can our ongoing institutional transformation deepen our pedagogy? To understand these questions, CTS brought together our students, staff, faculty, and Board of Trustees in study, conversation, and transformative action during the 2022-2023 academic year. Collectively, we examined our pedagogy and reflected on institutional policies, communication, and culture. These grant-funded initiatives allowed CTS to use itself more centrally as a learning laboratory to explore the real-world implications, barriers, and possibilities of our pedagogy. The program concluded with an upcoming retreat for faculty to analyze outcomes to advance our anti-racist pedagogy, align institutional praxis with the pedagogy, and assess the impact of our anti-racist pedagogy.

JACKSON ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

DONNELLEY FOUNDATION

The oral histories provide a more complete picture of the dynamic role faith leaders and their congregations have played during key junctures in Chicago’s civil rights history. The Jackson Oral History Project is an opportunity to make visible these untold histories.

In 1965, notable CTS alumnus Rev. Jackson launched Operation Breadbasket (which later became Operation PUSH), a movement to help formally organize Chicago ministers to promote more employment opportunities for local Black people. It held rousing weekly meetings at its Hyde Park headquarters to energize its supporters, which included both black and white Chicagoans. It pressured major companies to hire more Black individuals and to extend business ties with the Black community. To capture this rich history, CTS recorded the oral histories of Rev. Jackson, and six other pioneering individuals. The audio and video files will be made available to the public over the course of the coming year. Additionally, these interviews serve at the foundation for the third season of the Our 7 Neighbors podcast.

BLACK FAITH LEADER COLLECTIVE

CHICAGO SUNDAY EVENING CLUB,
NEHEMIAH GRANT

The Black Faith Leader Collective is a cooperative body of interfaith leaders convened by CTS in order to network for the common good. CTS held a series of interactive workshop led by Larry Love, an Integrated Wellness Coach. Conversation topics included diet, stress management, and wellness check-ins. Faith leaders were equipped with the skills for self-care as well as the tools to hold resource fairs and similar workshops for their congregations.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICES

LEADERSHIP EDUCATION AT
DUKE DIVINITY

This planning grant enabled CTS to spend intentional time listening and evaluating the current Thriving in Ministry program as we prepared the next step to build a sustainable program and receive renewed support from the Lilly Endowment Inc. to continue the program for an additional five years.

RELIGIONS IN CONTEXT: STUDY
TRIP TO SOUTH KOREA

THE CHICAGO TEMPLE FUND AT FIRST
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF CHICAGO

CTS students and community members travelled to South Korea for nine days in May 2023 to explore the cultural diversity and hybridity of religious traditions, namely Shamanism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity. The tour mostly stayed in Seoul and some satellite cities around Seoul to explore the old and new aspects—historically, culturally, and religiously—of the country.

PROCLAIMING RELEASE: A
PROGRAM FOR THEOLOGICAL
EDUCATION BEHIND BARS

MICHIGAN CONFERENCE UCC

With the support of pastors, congregations, the Michigan’s Covenant Association, and the Michigan Conference UCC—as well as tremendous effort by CTS in lobbying prison administrators—CTS is pleased to continue a pilot program to fund incarcerated individuals on a path to ministry in an unconventional setting.

VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT FOR STUDENT

VICKI GRANACKI

In August of 2023, the Parliament of the World’s Religions will attract participants from more than 200 diverse religious, indigenous, and secular beliefs and more than 80 nations. With students across the country, this generous support will allow CTS to offer stipends to students who wish to attend Parliament as part of a CTS student cohort. Traveling to Chicago, these students will spend valuable time immersed in the Parliament Conference, broadening their understanding of Inter-religiosity. At the conclusion of the conference, the cohort will share their experiences with the wider CTS community.

In addition to student stipend support, this gift supported the wider CTS community through continued education and reflection for Field Education supervisors as well as vocational discernment for our students. With twenty-two students and twenty-two supervisors, the 2022-2023 class of Field Education was one of the largest and most diverse cohorts at CTS.

UPCOMING
ACADEMIC YEAR

MOVING FORWARD IN MISSION

ASSOCIATION OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS

These resources will support the CTS’s strategic priority to develop new revenue streams to better situate the institution for long-term thriving. During the 2023-2024 academic year, CTS intends to contract with consultants specializing in fund development and board recruitment, to assess our institutional strengths and weaknesses. The intended outcomes will provide a road map for CTS on cultivating and growing revenue streams, engaging the Board of Trustees in individual donor solicitations, and guiding the Seminary in identifying new audiences and strategic partnerships.

2023-2024

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DONOR ROLL

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IN MEMORIAM

REV. DR. ANDRÉ LACOCQUE

(1927-2022)

Dr. André LaCocque, Emeritus Professor of Hebrew Bible at Chicago Theological Seminary died on January 28, 2022. He was 94. A revered teacher and a groundbreaking biblical scholar, he reconceived faithful study of a shared scripture, undergirded by interfaith dialogue and deep understanding

between Jews and Christians. He was the founding Director of Chicago Theological Seminary's Center of Jewish-Christian Studies, which has since become the InterReligious Institute (IRI).

LaCocque's calling arose at an early age. At the age of 12, André became perplexed by Germany's efforts to eradicate

the Jewish people. His family were friends with Jews and he knew them as kind, peaceful, beautiful people. He could not abide hatred that denied dignity to anyone. Having witnessed the tragedies that hatred inflicts, he dedicated his life to understanding how the Bible and its subsequent interpretation by Jews and

Christians can guide us to resist that path.

Dr. LaCocque's childhood home served as a safe haven for a Jewish family and a source of relief for many in the town. His father pastored a Reformed Church and his parents' active engagement to counter anti-Jewish beliefs while leading Bible studies in their home served as models for intellectual rigor and faith-filled service. Among the parish families were the Tournays, who also sheltered a Jewish family. Alfred Tournay was a local leader in the Resistance whose son, Jean, was arrested and sent to a concentration camp where he died. A daughter, Claire, became André's close friend. They grieved together, and healed together; they were married after the war in 1949 and remained life partners until her death in 2011.

Claire and André shared a common desire to relieve suffering. At the end of the war, they joined the CIMADE (Intermovement Committee for Aid of Evacuees) in Paris, where Claire taught French and he served as a chaplain; they were later assigned to Ludwigshafen am Rhein, where wartime raids had destroyed 75% of the city. In 1954, the Eglise Chrétienne Missionnaire Belge ordained him as a minister. He became Professor of Hebrew Scriptures at the Faculté Universitaire de Théologie Protestante of Brussels from 1957-1968.

In 1966, Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS) called Dr. LaCocque to teach Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, or what he called the "Prime Testament." He stayed for thirty years. He founded The Center of Jewish-Christian Studies, a research center for doctoral candidates that also served the greater good with public conferences furthering interfaith understanding and education. LaCocque subsequently expanded its vision to include Islamic scholars and lectures, organizing

the first national conference on women and Islam headlined by Muslima scholars. This reimagined Center for Jewish, Christian and Islamic Studies was one of the first centers dedicated to interreligious understanding among the Abrahamic traditions in the country. Subsequently named the InterReligious Institute, its mission includes scholarship, education, and activism to advance understanding

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THE BIBLICAL GOD
WANTS TO DEAL WITH
A FREE-THINKING
PARTNER.

among people of all spiritual life stances.

Dr. LaCocque also invited Rabbi Herman E. Schaalman to teach Jewish Studies at CTS and jointly teach courses with him. Through their shared work, CTS was able to endow the Herman E. Schaalman Chair in Jewish Studies, the first such chair at a free-standing Protestant Seminary. LaCocque lectured at universities and colleges throughout the world, and also frequently taught at synagogues, churches, and interfaith gatherings. In honor of his lifelong commitment to interreligious dialogue, CTS renamed its Spring Lecture in his honor. He received news of the "André LaCocque Interreligious Lecture" shortly before his death.

His scholarship reveals a scholar in dialogue with the Divine; for LaCocque, "the biblical God wants to deal with a free-thinking partner." The Prime Testament portrays flawed heroes, marginalized voices, and others, illuminating how covenant

necessitates dialogue, conversation, question and response—always in pursuit of the Deuteronomic imperative to choose life. LaCocque's book, *But As For Me, The Question of Election for God's People*, demonstrates that election of a people is not exceptionalism, but a call to witness to God's love in a world torn by hatred. *The Feminine Unconventional* (Susanna, Judith Esther, and Ruth) offers a compelling counter-narrative to the powerful. His collaboration with good friend Paul Ricoeur, *Thinking Biblically*, Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies, won the prestigious University of Chicago Gordon J. Lainge prize in 1999. Other books include studies of Genesis, Ruth, Daniel, Jonah, and Esther. At his retirement celebration, Chicago Theological Seminary affirmed that LaCocque "has given a contemporary hearing to those voices in the Bible that spoke against parochial visions and angry expressions in disregard of the will of the loving God."

Retirement from formal teaching did not diminish his intellectual creativity. Seeking to "re-root Christian thinking into its Jewish seed-bed," he authored *Jesus the Central Jew: His Times and His People*. It draws from biblical and ancient sources to explain Jesus' self-understanding as a Jew who explicated his faith through Jewish law and tradition to reveal God's love for all. LaCocque's last book, *Work and Creativity, A Philosophical Study from Creation to Postmodernity*, was written when he was in his 90s. It explores the Genesis story of God and human working together to address the enduring problem of hatred when we are called to love. When released from hatred's captivity through work, humans can pursue creativity and fulfillment.

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