



Religious Studies in Kansas

Department of Religious Studies ❖ The University of Kansas ❖ Vol. 2, No. 2, Spring 1994

Myth in the Biblical and Jewish Traditions

The Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas and the Kansas School of Religion, with additional funding from the Dorothy Stein Ernest Bequest for Jewish Studies held a conference gathering scholars from across the United States, on Sunday and Monday March 6 and 7. Nearly twenty scholars presented academic papers at public lectures, seminars, and a banquet. The focus of discussion, "Myth in the Biblical and Jewish Traditions," began as Professor S. Daniel Breslauer of the University of Kansas, author of *Martin Buber on Myth*, set the tone of the conference by explaining that common usage often understands the term myth in a negative or pejorative way. Myth, used that way, refers to a false story, a fiction, an untruth. In contrast, the academic study of myth uses the term for any narrative that conveys an important message about the nature of human existence or experience. The discussion that followed proved that this open definition did not dispel controversy. Scholars debated whether the discovery of myth in the Jewish and biblical traditions required a revisioning of the entire field, a warning against its seductiveness, or a celebration of its reappropriation.

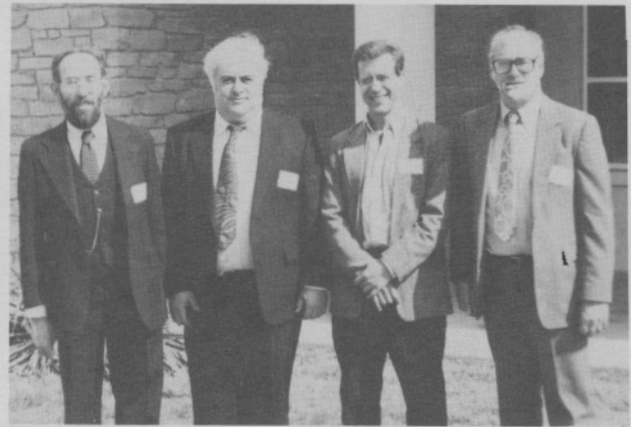
The three keynote speakers illustrated each of these approaches. The afternoon keynote speaker, Professor Howard Eilberg-Schwartz of Stanford University and author of *The Savage in Judaism: An Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism* (Winner of a 1990 American Academy Award for Academic Excellence), investigated "Myth, Masculinity and Monotheism." Combining a male divinity with a worshipping community of males, he argued, leads to problems of sexual identity. He traced the way the Hebrew Bible struggles to resolve the dilemma created by its theology and claimed that viewing the myth of masculinity in its context requires an entirely new reading of biblical texts previously considered unproblematic.

In a slightly different way, the keynote speaker at the evening banquet, Professor Howard Schwartz of the University of Missouri at Saint Louis, a renowned poet, storyteller, and author of the recent *Gabriel's Palace; Jewish Mystical Tales*, also suggested a rethinking of traditional views. He frankly celebrated the presence of myth in Judaism as he analyzed the ten basic themes that reappear throughout Jewish mythology. Using one tale focused on sin and atonement as his illustration, he pointed out each theme as it occurred. He advocated a reappropriation of Jewish myth as an essential element for

modern Judaism.

The final keynote speaker, Professor David Halperin of the University of North Carolina, author of *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision*, spoke on Monday morning. He warned that myth provides an unrealistic solution to real problems. He examined the mythic elements in an eighteenth century Jewish messianic movement, that of Sabbatai Zevi. He identified a real problem: Jews were caught between their old identity in the Ghetto and the new freedoms offered them in modernity. He suggested that Zevi used the myth found in Genesis 5 of a human being transformed into a divine being to solve that dilemma. While offering immediate relief, however, that myth eventually led to disaster; the mythic solution was worse than no solution at all.

Other speakers responded to issues raised by the keynote addresses and extended the investigation into diverse aspects of biblical and Jewish myth. The conference concluded without deciding how best to understand myth in these traditions but with a good sense of the directions modern scholarship has traveled in order to advance such understanding.



Professor S. Daniel Breslauer (right) with the three keynote speakers (left to right): Dr. David Halperin, Dr. Howard Schwartz, Dr. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, at the conference "Myth in the Biblical and Jewish Traditions," March 1994.

BOOK REVIEWS

***Myths of Masculinity.* By William G. Doty. New York: Crossroad, 1993. 243 pages.**

In the growing literature of masculinity and men's studies, this work is not merely an analysis of the myths of masculinity of the past and present but a "revisioning" of classical Near Eastern and Greek images of masculinity as paradigms for modern men. Like the work of scholars such as Christine Downing for women who value Jungian theories, Doty is convinced that these past images reflect archetypes which have a powerful contemporary relevance. "The 'gods' are still 'alive,' still providing ways to learn to recognize aspects of our societies and parts of ourselves" (p. 4). His goal is to aid in the resymbolization and reinterpretation of mythical figures for men in the present.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Herakles, Narcissus, Hermes and Ares, Apollo and Dionysos -- the list is impressive and Doty has taken on some of the most difficult possibilities. His approach is, at times, personal, including discussions of his dreams of Hermes or his personal invocation of the deities. Though he builds upon Kenneth Clatterbaugh's typology of the variety of approaches of "the Men's Movement" as if he were separate from any type, *Myths of Masculinity* fits in the tradition of Aaron Kipnis' *Knights Without Armor* (1991). Thus, he does not challenge the idea or reality of Jungian or other archetypes, but assumes that what men need for their growth and liberation is a mythology that has some common tradition or memory behind it; and the resulting revisioning should be pagan, not Jewish or Christian. Those portions of the men's movement involved in these activities are usually white, upper middle to upper class men, and the evoking of Greek and Roman mythology is, of course, the evoking of the mythology of the gods which comes to us from the upper class of Greek society as well. Doty's work is not written for the average man but for one who has the leisure, literary skills, and style of life and culture to delve into past mythology.

Robert N. Minor,
Professor of Religious Studies
University of Kansas

***Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century: A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan.* By Mel Scult. American Jewish Civilization Series. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993. 433 pages.**

This careful and meticulously researched biography of arguably the most important American Jewish theologian, should interest theologians, students of American religious thought generally, and all interested in the academic life. Scult focuses on Kaplan's development from his birth through his mid-fifties, that is until his publication of *Judaism as a Civilization*, and while he brings the reader up-to-date with Kaplan's life after that period, he does

so in a cursory fashion, claiming that "the younger Kaplan may be much more a man for our time than the well-known Kaplan of his later years" (p.14). For those interested in philosophy and religious thought, Scult places Kaplan's changing ideas in the context of his time—he explores the atmosphere at the City College of New York before World War II, compares Kaplan to his teachers such as Felix Adler, his contemporaries such as Morris Raphael Cohen, and his students such as Milton Steinberg and Max Kadushin. Scholars of American Jewry and its history will find the information about the New York Kehillah, American Zionism, and luminaries such as Stephen S. Wise enlightening and enriching. Comparisons of Kaplan's Society for the Advancement of Judaism with more contemporary movements such as that of the . Havurah, or Jewish fellowship groups, adds to an understanding of the dynamics of American Judaism and its development.

Perhaps most fascinating for both professional scholars and laity alike, however, is Scult's portrait of Kaplan as a compulsive teacher. Kaplan continually gathered students around him, organized study groups, and devoted himself to teaching. Scult traces this fanatic dedication to Kaplan's temperament—one more oriented to words than to things. Kaplan, Scult claims, recognized his own nature and accepted it. Scult describes Kaplan's literary obsession graphically. The theologian was driven to reformulation after reformulation of his ideas. The right word would, he thought, produce the right result. "The words themselves," Scult comments, become constitutive, "become the totality" (p. 237). Kaplan's effort to reconstruct Judaism (a terminology which Scult shows Kaplan did not derive from John Dewey) was an effort to reconstruct Jewish words, to rewrite the Jewish tradition. Theology for Kaplan, then, was primarily hermeneutical and interpretive rather than substantive. It involved articulating the meanings of Jewish texts, not creating new Jewish institutions or establishing new Jewish structures. The true builder of Judaism is not the organizational leader but the teacher, the rabbi whose words form the personality and mind of students who participate with him in common study.

Perhaps that hermeneutical approach rather than the social or psychological factors Scult mentions, underlies Kaplan's reluctance to create a new religious movement of his own. From this perspective, a new Judaism is built out of new words, not out of new organizations. This commitment to words also explains Kaplan's personality as a teacher. Scult claims that one would expect a rationalist to be a calm and detached teacher. Instead, Kaplan is characterized as "impatient and irascible" (p. 303). Someone who sees words as constitutive of Judaism, who considers hermeneutic analysis as the test of Jewish competency, can hardly be expected to tolerate sloppy thinking, sentimental imprecision, and incoherent presentation of ideas. If words and interpretation are of ultimate value, then how students use words, how they organize ideas, how they interpret texts, is the test of their Jewish authenticity. Kaplan, and Scult, identify this rigorous academic approach with Judaism. Scult claims that both Kaplan and the ancient

rabbis considered "their primary spiritual activity as learning and formulating" (p. 239). Whether true of Judaism or not, academic scholarship does take such activity as its primary task and does judge competency on the ability to apply hermeneutics accurately to the texts studied.

This concern with texts and interpretation, this identification of Judaism with hermeneutics should modify Scult's claim that Kaplan's theology "is the quintessence of modernism" (p. 27). Kaplan, instead, may be thought of as a Post-Modernist whose ultimate interest lies in textuality and its meanings rather than in things and their structures. His theological innovation, ahead of his time, was to identify that approach with "Judaism." Scult notes that celebrating Kaplan's ninetieth birthday the theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel noted the older thinker's passion for the Jewish people and commented: I have a suspicion that just as the mystics of old used to stay up at midnight worrying about the *Shekhina*, he stays up at midnight doing *Tikkun Hatzos* (midnight prayers of repairing cosmic damage), and worrying about the Jewish people (p. 15). Both Heschel and Kaplan knew the mystical tradition well and realized that in the Kabbalah another name for *Shekhina* is *Knesset Israel*, the Jewish people. Kaplan's reconstruction of the Jewish people, Heschel was claiming, is identical with the mystical attempt to repair the world. Scult's book points in a different direction. For Kaplan the teacher, a modern academic rigor is identical with the hermeneutic tradition that he calls Judaism. Whether modern Jews can agree with Kaplan's judgment or not, they owe a debt of gratitude for Scult's clear presentation of it.

S. Daniel Breslauer,
Professor of Religious Studies
University of Kansas

***Guide to the Perplexing: A Survival Manual For Women in Religious Studies.* Members of the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession of the American Academy of Religion. Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1992. 106 pp.**

Written by members of the Committee on the Status of Women in the Profession of the American Academy of Religion, this book is an invaluable guide for women entering the field of religious studies. Containing detailed and practical information, the manual is written in an engaging, often humorous no-nonsense style.

The book is printed in outline form with each topic heading concluded by a brief summary of main ideas. The first chapter leaves no doubt as to the practical nature of the book. The authors provide useful guidelines for constructing effective cover letters and curriculum vitae, even commenting on appropriate varieties and colors of paper.

The second chapter is an exhaustive source of information on the interviewing process. Placement interviews and on-site interviews at both the American Academy of

Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature annual meetings are discussed. For placement interviews, the authors stress that women should be aware of AAR/SBL policies. For example, no interviews are to be conducted in sleeping rooms during the conference. This policy was adopted in order to minimize the possibility of sexual harassment in the interviewing process, and the authors strongly recommend that women adhere to this policy even when prospective interviewers do not.

The section on "Handling Tough Questions" offers advice on how to field questions of a personal nature, such as one's marital status, religion, or sexual orientation. Other topics include: negotiating an offer, first-year faculty, maternity and child care, special issues for women and women of color, and the promotion and tenure period. The authors focus on many issues specific to women; however, much of the information provided is applicable to men as well, making this manual a "must read" for all newcomers to the field of religion.

Amara Simons,
B.A. Candidate in Religious Studies
University of Kansas



Professors Marc Epstein (left) and David Halperin (right) share a collegial moment during the conference "Myth in the Biblical and Jewish Traditions," March 1994.

Graduate Teaching Assistants 1993-1994

Barbara Dixon, graduate student pursuing the M.A. in Religious Studies, received a B.A. in Fine Arts with specialization in painting and print-making from Baker University in 1982, and a B.A. in Art History and Psychology from the University of Kansas in 1989. Barbara is currently the Graduate Teaching Assistant for Professor Paul Mirecki's "Understanding the Bible". Her area of specialization is East Asian Religions with a concentration in Chinese Buddhism.

Will Ingram, graduate student pursuing the M.A. in American Studies, received a B.S. in Economics at Southwest Missouri State University in 1989. Since 1991, he has been a Graduate Teaching Assistant for Professor Robert Shelton's courses "Loving Relationships" and "Human Conflict and Peace". Will's academic interests focus on American millennial movements. Will has written the article "God and Race: British Israelism and Christian Identity" for Professor Timothy Miller's forthcoming book *America's Alternative Religions*.

Patrick Prohaska, currently pursuing a M.A. degree in Religious Studies, received a B.A. in History and Philosophy of Science from the University of Kansas in 1990. Patrick is currently the Graduate Teaching Assistant for Professor Robert Minor's "Living Religions of the East". Patrick's area of academic interest is ethics in South Asian religions, and he focuses mainly on gender issues and environmental ethics in Hinduism and Buddhism.

Shawn Michael Trimble, M.A. candidate in Religious Studies, received a B.A. in both Religious Studies and English from the University of Kansas in 1992. He has been a Teaching Assistant for Professor Minor's "Living Religions of the East", Professor Miller's "Religion in American Society", and Professor Mirecki's "Understanding the Bible". Shawn also has interests in the arts, working as a satirist in socio-religious issues, and has authored the full-length play *The Abyss Gazes Also*. His academic fields of study are New Testament Christianity and the Latter Day Saints movement, with focus on extant and historical schisms. Shawn has written the chapter on Spiritualism for Professor Miller's forthcoming book *America's Alternative Religions*.

New Courses

The following courses were offered by the Department of Religious Studies for the first time at the University of Kansas during the Spring 1994 semester. Included is a brief course description provided by the instructor.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 580

RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON ILLNESS, HEALTH AND HEALING

Professor Sandra Zimdars-Swartz

This course phenomenologically examines a variety of religious perspectives on illness, health, and healing. It is concerned with elucidating the worldviews of a number of religious traditions as they shape concepts such as birth, death, mind, body, the nature of person, disease, health, healing, and healers. Specific traditions covered in the course include Native American traditional healing, Buddhism and Christianity. The aim of the course is to understand the place that illness and health have in each of these religious traditions and in American society today.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES 602

HISTORY OF RELIGION IN KANSAS

Professor Timothy Miller

Decidedly experimental, this course is a seminar aiming to produce a published book. No general history of religion in Kansas has ever been published; the book will contain about 15 chapters, each written by a KU graduate or undergraduate student, surveying that previously unspaded ground. The goal is to produce a work of such scholarship and clarity that it merits publication and will become the standard work on the subject.

In Memoriam

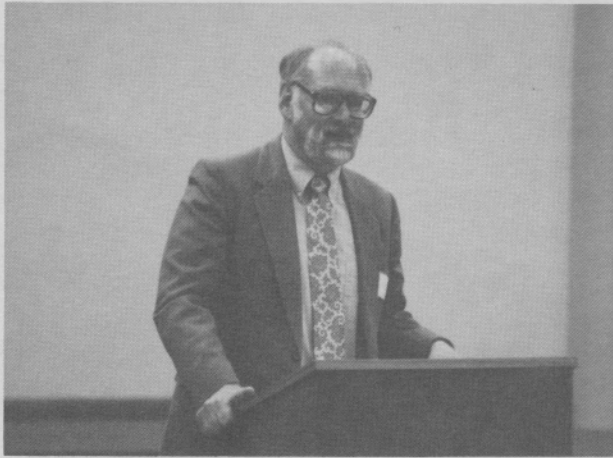
A memorial service was held January 29, 1994 at the First Christian Church in Eugene, Oregon for Dr. William J. Moore (Ph.D., University of Chicago).



Dr. William J. Moore

Dr. Moore was a New Testament scholar well-known throughout the world. A native of Australia, he served as a chaplain in New Guinea during World War II. He was director of the Kansas Bible Chair and Dean of the Kansas School of Religion from 1960 to 1970. He built support for the scholarly teaching of religion at the University of Kansas, organizing leaders from both the Jewish community and various Christian denominations. Dr. Moore also initiated the fund raising activity that financed the building of Smith Hall in 1967, the current home of the University of Kansas' Department of Religious Studies. The library in Smith Hall was dedicated in his name in November 1978. He is survived by his wife Audra, son Fred, and daughters Nancy White and Mary Weller.

The faculty, students, and staff at the Department of Religious Studies send their condolences to Dr. Moore's family and dedicate this issue of *Religious Studies in Kansas* in his memory.



Professor S. Daniel Breslauer welcomes participants at the conference "Myth in the Biblical and Jewish Traditions," March 1994

**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES
SCHEDULE OF CLASSES: FALL 1994**

REL 104 Introduction to Religion	P. Zimdars-Swartz
REL 105 Search for Meaning, Honors	S. Zimdars-Swartz
REL 106 Living Religions of the East	D. Stevenson
Living Religions of the East	R. Minor
REL 124 Understanding the Bible	P. A. Mirecki
REL 126 Introduction to Judaism	S. D. Breslauer
REL 171 Religion in American Society	T. Miller
REL 311 Hebrew Scriptures	S. D. Breslauer
REL 373 Supreme Court and Religious Issues	J. Macauley
REL 374 Religious Perspectives on Selfhood and Sexuality	R. Minor
REL 380 Philosophical Issues in Religion	J. Woelfel
REL 404 Undergraduate Seminar in Religion: Group Leadership	R. Shelton
REL 475 Loving Relationships	R. Shelton
REL 485 New Religious Movements (Western)	T. Miller
REL 509 Religion in Japan	D. Stevenson
REL 515 Early Christian Literature and History	P. A. Mirecki Staff
REL 535 History of Islam in Africa	
REL 601 Approaches to the Study of Religion	R. Minor
REL 771 Religious Movements and Social Change	T. Miller
REL 780 Theories of Religious Experience	S. Zimdars-Swartz
REL 786 Special Topics in Religion and Personality:	
Loving Relationships	R. Shelton
Religious Perspectives on Selfhood and Sexuality	R. Minor
REL 875 Seminar in Religion and Society:	
New Religious Movements (Western)	T. Miller
Supreme Court and Religious Issues	J. Macauley

Letters to the Editor

My warmest congratulations on *Religious Studies in Kansas*. I read each issue with great interest and I learn much. It is an excellent source of information on religious life in the United States and abroad. I often make a xerox copy of the article and share it with my contacts at the World Council of Churches and the Vatican.

Of special interest was the Fall 1993 issue. It is an excellent source of information about problems that we sporadically read about in the papers.

My department has been involved in interfaith dialogue for many years, and I will make sure that you will receive all of our future publications.

With best wishes,
Rabbi Leon Klenicki, Director
Department of Interfaith Affairs
Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith
New York City, NY

It was a stimulating opportunity to read the essay "Religious Conflict in Contemporary India" and Ms. Dixon's review of *The Philosophy of Gandhi* in the last issue of *Religious Studies in Kansas*. Your publication always covers interesting topics including, of special interest to me, high contemporary spiritual thoughts from Asia and elsewhere in the world.

Yours sincerely,
S.K. Mukherjee
Lawrence, KS

Religious Studies in Kansas

Religious Studies in Kansas is the Newsletter of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas, and continues the tradition of the former newsletter *Religion: The Journal of the Kansas School of Religion* which published its final issue in the Spring of 1992.

This newsletter is published twice annually in the Fall and Spring. Please send inquiries, change of address information, and notes for inclusion to:

Religious Studies in Kansas
Department of Religious Studies
Smith Hall 103
University of Kansas
Lawrence, Kansas 66045

Phone: 913-864-4663; FAX: 913-864-5205

1114



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Participants in the conference "Myth in the Biblical and Jewish Traditions," held at the Department of Religious Studies, University of Kansas, March 1994.

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