

JANUARY 20

FINDING THE SCARED IN
"THE LEAST OF THESE"

Sr. Margaret McKenna

Founder and Director of New Jerusalem Laura, a treatment and housing center for recovering drug and alcohol addicts Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

JANUARY 27

"INNOCENTS ABROAD: CHRISTIAN ETHICS,
AMERICAN IDENTITY AND THE DILEMMA
OF THE SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIP"

Letitia Campbell

Doctoral Candidate, Graduate Division of Religion, Ethics and Society Program Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia

FEBRUARY 3

"WHEN THE SACRED FINDS YOU:
AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY"

The Reverend Carrie Gerard

Executive Director of Eastern Area Community Ministries Louisville, Kentucky

FEBRUARY 10

"RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY MEANS WE'VE
GOT TO TALK, NOT JUST TOLERATE"

Gustav Niebuhr

Director of the Carnegie Religion and Media Program Syracuse University

FEBRUARY 17

"FAITH AND LABOR IN 2011"

Kim Bobo

Executive Director and Founder of Interfaith Workers Justice

FEBRUARY 24

ORTHOPRAXIS: "BY THEIR FRUITS YOU
SHALL KNOW THEM"

Dr. Charles Kammer

The James F. Lincoln Professor of Religious Studies The College of Wooster

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The Academy wishes to thank the Arthur J. Baird endowment, the Morris Speaker's Fund of the Religious Studies Department, and the Office of Interfaith Campus Ministries for financial and logistical help with the Academy.



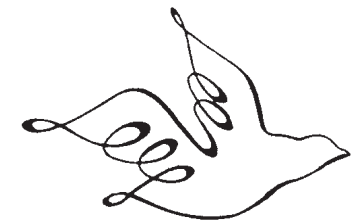
Location

Sessions on January 20 and 27 and February 3 and 24 will be held in the Lean Lecture Room on the lower level of Wishart Hall. The sessions on February 10 and 17 will be held in Gault Recital Hall in Scheide Music Center on The College of Wooster campus.

The lecture series is free to all. Donations will be accepted to help defray the costs.

*The 45th Wooster
Spring Academy
of Religion 2011
(formerly Clergy Academy)*

SEARCHING
FOR THE
SACRED



7:30 – 9:30 p.m. Thursdays
January 20 – February 24, 2011

A free lecture series,
open to persons of all backgrounds.

THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER

SEARCHING FOR THE SACRED

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;*

*William Butler Yeats
"The Second Coming"*

In the late 1950's, Will Herberg, a Jewish sociologist wrote, Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology. Herberg noted the pervasiveness of religion in American culture and observed that it was defined in terms of three major faith traditions: Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism. More importantly, he noted that they had moved past a history of conflict into a culturally shared faith that acknowledged the same God as the guide to human and national behavior. A President could thus offer a prayer to God and almost all Americans would feel included.

Twenty years later, a Protestant religious historian, Sidney Mead, wrote a book titled, The Nation With the Soul of a Church. In many ways he reinforced the claims made by Will Herberg that the United States had an internal unity based on a shared belief in a deity whose basic characteristics almost all Americans accepted. The 1970's and 1980's would see two Presidents (Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan) elected whose campaigns included direct appeals to their own personal religious beliefs. Their public affirmation of religion was credited as a factor in their election as much of the American electorate shared their beliefs.

Both Herberg and Meade, however, saw changes brewing. Herberg saw that American culture was stripping the traditional faiths of their moral content. Herberg wrote of a cultural transformation of Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism into a "common faith" that, "... encourages moral insensitivity and social irresponsibility, and cultivates an almost lascivious preoccupation with self." Mead would document a division in faith traditions as the young increasingly were walking away from their religious roots, no longer accepting their inherited traditions. Like Herberg,

he also lamented a loss of the deep moral dimension of these traditions. He reported that religious institutions worried about membership loss and restoring institutional growth at a time when the Cold War and the nuclear arms race raised questions about the survival of humanity, an issue that religious institutions treated as having little importance.

From this backdrop, we get a sense of the dramatic change in religiosity in the United States, a change that has many causes. The continued erosion of religious belief due to the impact of scientifically based education and rationality has generated skepticism about religion among the highly educated. The active politicization of religion has discredited religion in the eyes of many. The opposition to modern scientific education as well as aggressive forms of "fundamentalism", which generate violent attacks, leave many seeing religion as a destructive force of ignorance and intolerance. It is little surprise that many in our culture have become adherents of what has become described as "militant atheism", an active attempt to dismantle religious belief for the good of the world.

Additionally the migration to the United States of religions other than Christianity and Judaism have made the United States a much more pluralistic nation and have changed the religious landscape. Nevertheless, a new Pew study shows that among both new and old adherents of religious traditions, the vast majority of those who claim religious affiliation know little about the faith tradition to which they belong, often even having little understanding of the tradition's basic beliefs.

Nevertheless, despite what appears to be a diminishing religiosity, many are unable to let go of the core of the religious. Seeking some kind of meaning, some sort of reassurance in life, persons increasingly say, "I am spiritual, but not religious". This "spirituality" however, is far removed from the basic concerns of the historic faith traditions. At their best, the historic traditions proclaimed a sacred reality that encountered human beings with moral demands and required of them responsible

engagement with their communities. Persons were called by the Sacred to live lives of compassion and justice, to live for the social good, not just the personal good: to provide hospitality for the stranger; to love the neighbor; to honor justice through almsgiving as a pillar of faith; to live from a sense of interconnectedness, knowing that whatever harm or kindness we do to any other sentient being, we do to ourselves.

But contemporary spirituality has its primary focus on the self. Whether it is Buddhist meditation to achieve personal peace of mind or "the gospel of wealth" preached by many Christian evangelists, the message is the same. Similarly, if religion is primarily about reassurance that death is not the end of life or that we will be "raptured away" in the event of a global apocalypse, then it is spirituality centered on a sacred power whose purpose is to serve our ends. In the historic traditions, we are called to serve the ends of the Sacred. We have reversed the human/sacred relationship.

In this lecture series we will hear from persons whose search for the sacred has been a search to discover and respond to the Sacred Reality that confronts us with the demands of living justly and compassionately. These stories are often not part of the media based coverage of religion. It is not the popular form of religion in our culture. Through the stories of our presenters, we hope to expand our understanding of the Sacred and receive some guidance in our own search.

We hope the audience will engage the speakers and each other as we collectively engage in a search for the Sacred.

"The recovery of this experiential heart of living religion is essential if we are to allow our diverse commonwealth of living beings to dwell in harmony in the twenty-first century."

*Sam Keen
In the Absence of God: Dwelling
in the Presence of the Sacred*