

# Catholic Studies Newsletter

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Photo by Lauren Horn Griffin

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## Greetings from the Chair

*Ann Taves, Virgil Cordano OFM Professor of Catholic Studies*

Dear Friends of Catholic Studies at UCSB,

We are pleased to bring you the next issue of our Catholic Studies Newsletter to update you on some of the things that have been going on here at UCSB and generally showcase the flourishing state of Catholic Studies. In the pages that follow you can read about this year's highly successful student planned Catholic Studies conference – "Sanctity and Society: Devotions to Holy Figures in Multi-Cultural Contexts" – and the visit of Michele Dillon, this year's Tipton Distinguished Visitor in Catholic Studies, plus updates on activities of both faculty and students. In that regard, we are particularly proud to announce that Kerry San Chirico, our first Cordano Fellow, is graduating this June with a dissertation on a Hindu-Catholic new religious movement in India. The really great news in this tight job market is that Kerry has been offered (and accepted) a tenure-track position at the University of Hawaii in Asian Christianity!

-Ann Taves

# GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE 2012: SANCTITY AND SOCIETY



Sponsored by the Virgil Cordano, OFM,  
Endowment in Catholic Studies

On April 19 and 20 Catholic Studies hosted its annual graduate student conference at UCSB. This year's theme, *Sanctity and Society: Holy Figures in Multi-Cultural Contexts*, encouraged investigations of the legends and communities that surround significant holy figures, examining why figures from various religious traditions throughout the world have been promoted and the degree to which their veneration can serve as a window on cultural issues and tensions, especially in pluralistic contexts.

The conference featured Keynote Addresses by Professor Kathleen Sprows Cummings from the University of Notre Dame and Professor Bishnupriya Ghosh from UCSB's English Department. Professor Cummings's lecture, "U.S. Catholics and the Rise of the Nation Saint, 1884-1946," discussed the quest for an American "national" saint, demonstrating how certain figures can serve as vehicles for articulating religious, social and cultural ideals. Professor Ghosh put forth a materialist analysis of global icons as expressions of collective aspirations in her talk, "'The Saint of the Gutters': Mother Teresa as Corporeal Aperture."

Thirteen graduate students also presented their current research regarding holy figures, including students from Baylor, Chicago, Northwestern, Notre Dame, Toronto, Washington University in St. Louis, Yale, and more. From medieval Jainist hagiographies to the promotion of Catholic saints during the Civil Rights Movement in America, discussions involved saints from various parts of the world, different time periods, and multiple religions. The conference allowed students from various disciplines – including religious studies, history, anthropology, sociology, and literary studies – to participate in fruitful conversations across specialties and engage in discussions regarding how holiness is conceived across cultures.

The conference was a great success and would not have been possible without its graduate student organizers, Lauren Horn Griffin, Rafael Gamboa, and Vikas Malhotra, the help of Prof. Ann Taves, and the sponsorship of the Virgil Cordano Endowment in Catholic Studies in the Religious Studies Department.

# Catholic Studies Faculty Projects

## Ann Taves



Ann Taves recently gave a lecture in the Science, Theology and Religion Series at St. John's Seminary in Camarillo, CA, titled "Apparitions: Seeing Jesus and Mary in the World." Protestants and some Catholics view apparitions of the dead as a marginal topic, but not only are apparitions of Mary important to many Catholics, but the Christian claim that Jesus was the Messiah is based on the claim that he appeared to his followers after his crucifixion. Thinking about apparitions challenges us to consider how we relate perception and revelation or, more generally, how we relate perceptual processes, as they are understood in psychology and the social sciences, with the claim that some perceptions are revelatory. Taves has also given lectures on these and other "revelatory events" this year at Aarhus University (Denmark), Western Illinois University, Appalachian State University, Kalamazoo College, Dartmouth College, and the University of Chicago as part of her research on the role of unusual experiences in the emergence of new religious movements.

## Beth Digeser

In *A Threat to Public Piety: Christians, Platonists and the Great Persecution* (Cornell Univ. Press, 2012), Beth Digeser reexamines the origins of the Great Persecution (AD 303-313), the last eruption of pagan violence against Christians before Constantine enforced the toleration of Christianity. Challenging the widely accepted view that the persecution enacted by Emperor Diocletian was largely inevitable, she shows that in the forty years leading up to the Great Persecution, Christians lived largely in peace with their fellow Roman citizens. In her current project, Digeser wants to take a much wider view, exploring the responses over time that people in the city of Rome had to religious and philosophical practices and beliefs from the periphery that had migrated with immigrants into the capital.



## Stefania Tutino



Professor Tutino's work explores the political, intellectual, and cultural dimensions of early modern Catholicism. Her most recent monograph, *Empire of Souls: Robert Bellarmine and the Christian Commonwealth* (Oxford University Press, 2010), examines the transnational significance of Robert Bellarmine's political thought. It was awarded the 2011 Helen and Howard R. Marraro prize for the most distinguished book in Italian history by the American Catholic Historical Association. She is currently at work on her next project, which analyzes the ways in which early modern Catholic theologians and intellectuals grappled with the relationship between language and truth.



## Student Spotlight:

Brad Onishi

Last May, Catholic Studies at UCSB hosted Jean-Luc Marion from the Sorbonne and a former student of his, Emmanuel Falque, who is now the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at L'Institut Catholique de Paris. Professor Falque extended an invitation to me to spend this academic year at the Institut Catholique as a visiting scholar. Since September I have had the privilege of living at the Séminaire des Carmes on the grounds of the Institut Catholique with about 45 men who are priests, seminarists, or visiting scholars at the

university. I have also spent time attending lectures and seminars by Jean-Luc Marion, Emmanuel Falque, and other faculty. Needless to say, the year has been one of learning, in every sense of the word. It has been humbling to live in community with a group of Jesuit priests and seminarists who have welcomed me warmly. It has been enlightening to spend time discussing the intersection of philosophy and theology in contemporary French thought with scholars from all over Europe. And finally, it has been overwhelming to have the opportunity to think, read, write, and explore

for a whole academic year in Paris. I am grateful to Catholic Studies at UCSB for making this type of experience possible and to Emmanuel Falque and the Institut Catholique for their incredible hospitality.



**Institut Catholique  
de Paris**

## Exchange Program



**Professor Carlson**

Since Brad has had such wonderful experience with Professor Falque in Paris, Professor Tom Carlson has decided to extend this opportunity to more graduate students, both at UCSB and the Institut Catholique. He recently set up an exchange program which, in addition to providing graduate students with unique opportunities, hopes to further intellectual exchange between our Catholic Studies scholars and the students from one of the premier Catholic educational institutions in Europe.

# Catholic Saints

The Catholic Studies Associate's Course  
With Kristy Slominski



Catholic Studies provides opportunities for students who have advanced to candidacy to teach a course in Catholic Studies at the upper division level. This spring, Kristy Slominski is teaching RG ST 138: Catholic Saints. The following is her course description:

The study of Saints provides a window into official Catholicism and the vibrant spiritual lives of Catholics. As mediators, Saints are shaped at the crossroads of the mundane and the sacred, the public and the private, the bodily and the spiritual, and the past and the present. Their position as religious boundary figures makes them ideal for introducing multiple themes and approaches of Religious Studies, as well as illustrating the complexity of the Catholic religion over time and in various locations.

In addition to the weekly topics, several themes will run throughout the course. Attention will be given to analyses of local and global contexts, the roles of the body and gender in Catholic practice, the development of multidimensional Catholic identities, and the dynamics between various levels of authority.

## *Congratulations, Kerry*

Kerry San Chirico, the first recipient of UCSB's Virgil F. Cordano OFM Fellowship, will be starting his new job in the Department of Religion at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in Honolulu in the Fall 2012. He will be teaching Global Christianities and South Asian and world religions.

Kerry will graduate this quarter having completed his dissertation, titled "Between Christian and Hindu: Khrist Bhaktas, Catholics, Hindus and the Negotiation of Devotion in the Banaras Region." This project is an ethnographic study of a movement of low caste Hindus worshipping Jesus in Catholic spaces in the Banaras region of the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, set within the context of the history of Christian-Hindu encounter, Hindu nationalism, and the rise of Dalit (formerly "Untouchable") consciousness. Its aim is to demonstrate how a new hybrid community is developing through close attention to verbal discourse and ritual practice, all the while trying to show how the future of this community--its continued existence and its sense of identity--cannot be easily gainsaid due to the complexity of the religious, political, geographical, and legal spaces in which it dwells.



Michele Dillon is Professor and Chair of the Sociology Department at the University of New Hampshire. She is also the President of the Association for the Sociology of Religion.

## Tipton Visiting Professor: Michele Dillon

The J.E. & Lillian Byrne Tipton Distinguished Visiting Professorship in Catholic Studies enables the Department of Religious Studies to bring outstanding scholars and public figures to UCSB for a quarter or longer to teach, present public lectures, and conduct research. Professor Michele Dillon served as the Tipton Visiting Professor during the winter quarter. She is the author of *Catholic Identity: Balancing Reason, Faith and Power* (1999) and most recently *In the Course of a Lifetime: Tracing Religious Belief, Practice and Change* (2007). She taught two courses on the sociology of American Catholicism while she was at UCSB, one graduate one undergraduate, and gave the Annual Tipton Lecture, titled "American Catholics in the Twenty-First Century."



## Catholic Studies Section Now Available at AAR-WR

Thanks to a petition submitted by the Catholic Studies graduate students at UCSB, the American Academy of Religion's Western Regional Conference will now be hosting a section dedicated to Roman Catholic Studies. This section will provide a scholarly venue to study the Roman Catholic community, a forum that was previously missing in the AAR-WR program.

Our section will investigate

topics related to Catholicism as a global religious tradition and a way of life that has taken different cultural forms in various times and places, using the tools of academic research including critical studies, cultural, ethical, and historical perspectives. This panel will fill a lacuna in the AAR-WR's coverage of religious experience.

As the largest Christian denomination in the U.S., the largest Christian church in the

world, and a growing global religion, the Board of Directors has recognized that Roman Catholicism warrants its own section (like those devoted to Buddhism, Judaism, Islam) at a conference dedicated to the study of religions.

The next western regional meeting of the AAR and SBL/PCR will be held at Arizona State University March 9-11, 2013. This first Catholic Studies panel will be chaired by students from UCSB.