

jots & tittles

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Welcome Back



Jots & Tittles went on hiatus during the spring-semester interruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, so it's good to be back! Even though an adjusted academic calendar means the semester is nearly over, we're thrilled to be back on campus (and on Zoom) connecting with our students and colleagues under new conditions.

Dr. Paul Thomas, Professor of Religious Studies, is the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies chairperson. If you have questions about PHRE curriculum, the major and minor, or about the department, feel free to contact him at pthomas15@radford.edu.

Alumni Spotlight

As part of Radford University's Virtual Homecoming events and the Fall Virtual Open House, PHRE alumna Katelyn Dobbins '18 (Philosophy and Religious Studies major, minors in English and Music) [recorded some of her thoughts](#) on how the disciplines of philosophy and religious studies change the world.

Katelyn explains that both philosophy and religion "ask us to change, as people" and to "examine how we make sense of the world, and how we can make different or better sense of the world."

Useful for refining her worldview, Katelyn's time concentrating in religious studies at Radford University made a personal impact: "It makes the world a little smaller...I walk into a room and I feel like I have a room full of acquaintances, if not

friends, because I recognize that philosophy and the ideas behind religious studies make us who we are and make us better."

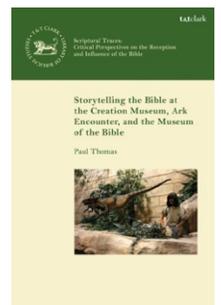
Overall, Katelyn shared that PHRE "has helped me position myself in such a way that the world doesn't seem quite so abstract or esoteric."



PHRE thanks Katelyn for reflecting on her experiences in the department and sharing them with the Highlander family. If you have stories or insights about the ways that PHRE has impacted your life, reach out to Dr. Paul Thomas and let us know! pthomas15@radford.edu.

Faculty Spotlight on Research

In April 2020, T&T Clark published Dr. Paul Thomas's book *Storytelling the Bible at the Creation Museum, Ark Encounter, and Museum of the Bible*. We caught up with Dr. Thomas to learn more about the book's project and his broader research agenda.



You've recently published a book about uses of the Bible in three modern cultural institutions. Can you tell us about the project and what drew your interest to this topic?

I have been researching the use and influence of the Bible in popular culture for some years now. Additionally, I am fascinated by young-earth creationism—the idea that the earth is only about 5,000 years old and that the Genesis creation account is scientifically accurate. Both the Kentucky Creation Museum and the Ark Encounter promote this form of creationism. So, I thought it would be interesting to see how these attractions deploy the Bible to service their position.

In the book's preface, you mention that a focus on reception of texts helps to make studies of ancient writings seem relevant to the present. Can you tell us about your approach to interpreting these ancient textual artifacts as they're encountered by people today?

Traditional biblical studies has been grounded in the study of ancient languages and the cultures of the ancient Near East. That approach, and its methods, can come across as esoteric and distant ancient history. I argue that if we shift our attention from the linguistic and historical analysis of the Bible in its ancient context to a focus on reception—an examination of how people use and make sense of the Bible—then we can consider the relevance the text has for people today. My approach isn't about parsing more verbs and it is not about determining what interpretation of the text is right or wrong. Instead, I am always looking for the creative, and surprising, ways people make meaning of the text.

Does a focus on reception history in your research help you teach these texts to Radford University students? Tell us about how your research projects relate to your teaching.

It certainly does. I always want students to know how and why this text is relevant in their lives today. In America it doesn't matter if the student is religiously invested in the Bible or not, its cultural influence still impacts their lives. In *Storytelling the Bible* I described how the Creation Museum, the Ark Encounter, and the Museum of the Bible

actually represents a power structure promoting a particular interpretation of the Bible. It is important for students to know about the social and political influence of the people behind these attractions.

What's next on your research agenda?

I have two things going on right now. I am writing a short piece on the QAnon conspiracy and how the conspiracy deploys the language of the monstrous and of evil. On the lighter side, I am looking at how the Bible is represented in modern board games.

Paul Thomas, *Storytelling the Bible at the Creation Museum, Ark Encounter, and the Museum of the Bible* (T&T Clark, 2020). ISBN 9780567687135, \$115 Hardcover, 208 pages.

Whispers on the Wind

- In June 2020, Dr. Guy Axtell, Professor of Philosophy and former PHRE philosophy faculty, Amiel Bernal published a co-edited collection of essays, *Epistemic Paternalism: Conceptions, Justifications and Implications*, with Roman & Littlefield.
- This Fall, Dr. Paul Thomas, PHRE's illustrious department chairperson, was promoted to the rank of full professor. Congratulations, Paul!
- The College of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences recognized the extraordinary accomplishments of two PHRE colleagues in August 2020, awarding Dr. Glen Martin, Professor of Philosophy, the Distinguished Research Award and Dr. Paul Thomas the Distinguished Service Award.
- Dr. Geoffrey Pollick, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, delivered the Constitution Day address at Meredith College via video, in September 2020, titled "Ordination as Emancipation: Voting Rights Activism and Women's Religious Professions in the Early Twentieth-Century United States."
- This September and October, Dr. Glen Martin is helping to organize and run an international virtual summit, "Building the New World: From Personal to Global Transformation."

Faculty Spotlight on Teaching

This Fall semester, PHRE welcomes two new part-time instructors to the department, Nickolas Montgomery and Peter Geromel.



As a philosopher, Nick Montgomery studies language and uses game theory to investigate how stable communication systems are formed by linguistic agents. He also cultivates interest in metaphysics, Eastern philosophy, and biomedical ethics. Outside his research and teaching, Nick is a podcaster and an avid hiker, exploring Virginia's mountains with his wife, Colleen, and his dog, Luna.

Peter Geromel, also a philosopher, studies eclectic subjects, including Neo-Platonic thought, gothic horror, Zoroastrianism, and Eastern mysticism. As an Anglican minister and former hospice chaplain, he thinks a lot about medical ethics and end-of-life concerns. Peter is also a percussionist, playing the Scottish snare and bodhran, and, like Nick, enjoys hiking, with his wife, Kari, and their three sons.



Welcome to the department, Nick and Peter!

The Good Fruits of PHRE

The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies is pleased to announce a comprehensive redesign of all our degree programs.

In Fall 2020, PHRE is offering the first courses in our updated major concentrations and traditional minors, and in Spring 2021 we're launching two new minors, the Ethics Minor and the Religious-Cultural Literacy for Healthcare Professions Minor.

Visit the Programs pages at www.radford.edu/PHRE for details about an exciting collection of new and updated courses, and find out more about our new healthcare-related minor!

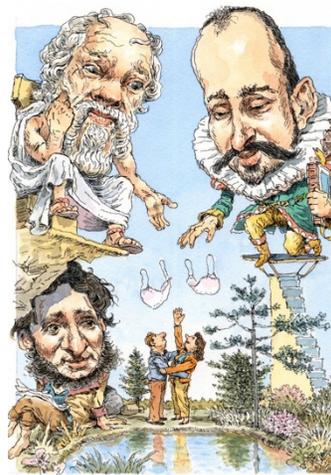
Philosophy & Religious Studies

...in the News



Kate Blanchard considers responses to the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of Appalachian Christianity in "[The Religious Reason Many Americans Refuse to Wear Masks.](#)" *Religion Dispatches* (October 13, 2020).

In "[The Book of Ruth: Justice Ginsburg on Religious Freedom.](#)" Ronit Y. Stahl looks back at the late Supreme Court justice's legacy of interpreting the role of free exercise of religion in U.S. society, in *Religion & Politics* (October 13, 2020).



"Philosophy helps us to untangle the knotty ethical questions raised by the pandemic," writes Eric Weiner, "but it can also help us to answer far more personal but equally urgent quandaries. How to endure the unendurable? How to find certainty in an uncertain universe?" in "[Philosophy for a Time of Crisis.](#)" *Wall Street Journal* (August 27, 2020)

About PHRE

Radford University's Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies produces students who are excellent critical thinkers and problem solvers ready to engage in a multicultural and global workforce. Visit us online or in CHBS 4202.

Box 6943, East Main Street, Radford, VA 24142

