

INSTITUTE *of* ADVANCED THEOLOGY NEWSLETTER SPRING 2001



*Collaborative scholarship,
bringing together religious leaders,
believers, and those who are
simply curious, in a shared
enterprise of enlightened learning*

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear members,

The completion of a year's activity seems a good time to report on the doings of the Institute of Advanced Theology. Professor Nancy Leonard from our Academic Council has agreed to edit this newsletter; I am very grateful for her willingness to offer the kind of perspective which I know will bring the significance of what we do home to our readers.

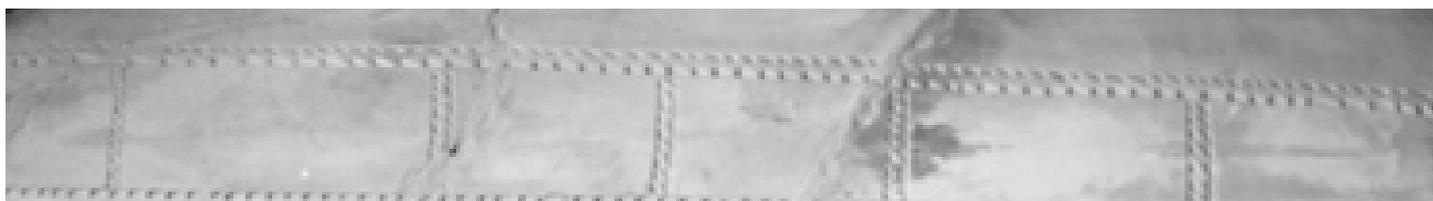
Details of what we have done and have agreed to do will follow in these pages. But perhaps it will be useful to point out that, within one year of our foundation, the Institute has fulfilled two of its three principal goals. First, public occasions at Bard College have put our participants in direct contact with scholars whose expertise is recognized. Second, the Consultation on James has once again drawn an international team of scholars together to make a unique and lasting contribution to the critical study of religion.

What remains, of course, is to make real progress towards our third goal, which is in-service graduate education, especially for active clergy (but not only for them), on a fully ecumenical basis.

Over the next few months, I hope to be able to report encouraging news in this area, as well.

Time inevitably brings change, and I have to announce that Michelle Syverson, my associate during the first year of our operation, has finished her contract with the College. We all remain grateful for her work. Theresa Desmond, whom many of you know already, has agreed to function as the Institute's administrator, but I urge those of you who have offered to help in the past to be in touch with her about the sort of contributions you might make.

One of Nancy's first ideas as editor was to suggest that, in future, members of the Institute might like to share their thoughts and feelings in this newsletter. That strikes me as an excellent idea, and – as you will see on the calendar – I also plan to convene a meeting of members of the Institute, so that your ideas can be expressed fully. Membership is vitally important to our success, so I also take this opportunity to ask you to consider renewing your association with the Institute, or—if you are not already a member—to consider joining us. ■



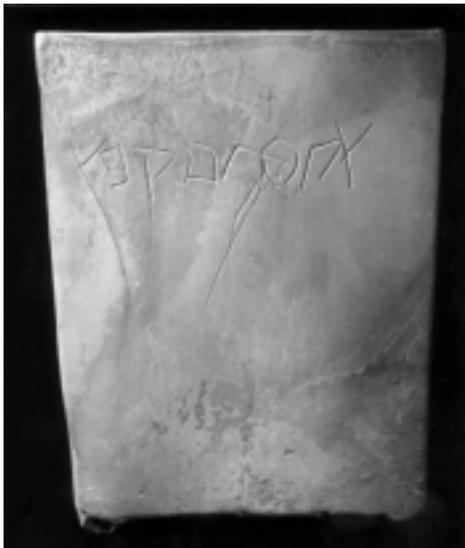
Detail of the lid of the ossuary of Caiaphas, courtesy of the Israeli Antiquities Authority

EVENTS IN THE YEAR 2000 AT THE INSTITUTE *of* ADVANCED THEOLOGY

The Institute year began with Director Chilton's five Lenten lectures from March 16 through April 13, 2000. The essence of the personal Jesus was the focus of the lectures—the forces that shaped him as a child and as a man—as clarified by new insights into the historical and archeological records of Jesus' time. The earlier lectures provided rich and often surprising views into such questions as the nature of Jesus' birth, miraculous to some and shameful to others, the kind of cul-

tural environment that helped shape his personality; and his relations with John the Baptist in the time of his first emergence as a public figure. The last two lectures took up the topics of "Jesus in Jerusalem" and "Jesus and Pontius Pilate," providing intriguing suggestions on questions such as how much Jesus saw of the dangers awaiting him in Jerusalem, and what he understood his last shared meal to be. The whole effort placed Jesus as a historical figure squarely in the context of first-century Judaism, and thus whetted appetites for the whole story in Dr. Chilton's *Rabbi Jesus* which was published

later in the autumn. Meanwhile, participants shared the informal atmosphere of lunch and responses were typically very lively. "The talks shattered my prejudices," said one; "I totally enjoyed every session!" said another. "I'm especially interested in developing the topic of religion and economic behavior," said an economics professor from St. Petersburg, Russia. Another respondent felt that the lecture "made me want to run home and read my Roman history and more." With the participation of the Red Hook Ministerium and other members of the community, the Director's Lenten lectures have become a spring event to which all look forward. ■



Inscription of Caiaphas' name in the side of his ossuary.

On June 14, 2000, a special lecture and luncheon event followed up on the Lenten talks. The Institute of Advanced Theology welcomed Markus Bockmuehl, Lecturer in New Testament and Ancient Judaism of the University of Cambridge, England. Dr. Bockmuehl's talk, "Jewish and Christian Public Ethics in the Roman Empire," took as its starting point a simple but striking fact: for all their important differences, Christians and Jews in the pre-Constantinian period shared in the Bible a common heritage of theological morality, and faced in public

life the same dominant Graeco-Roman culture over against whose pagan assumptions and frequent hostility their own daily existence had to be defended. Moreover, Dr. Bockmuehl went on to say, "it was precisely the Jewish tradition of moral teaching for Gentiles, rooted ultimately in the Torah, which consistently explained the substance of ethics in the mainstream of emerging Christian Orthodoxy." His paper took issue with the tendency in some commentators to deny the compatibility of Christian theology with binding moral norms. It was a very enjoyable luncheon and talk with Dr. Bockmuehl, the author of several books, a member of the Institute's Academic Council and of its consultative group on James. The event was supported by The Crohn Family Trust and the Tisch Family Foundation, as well as grants from the Jerome Levy Economics Institute of Bard College, Pew Charitable Trusts, the American Council of Learned Societies, and Bard College.

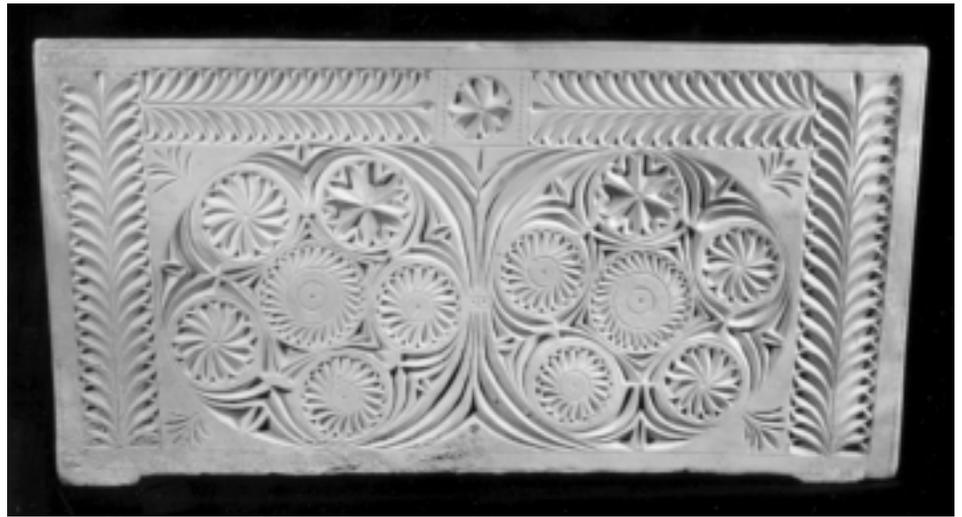
The evening before Dr. Bockmuehl's lecture, an Institute dinner party was held at the Rhinecliff home of Frank T. Crohn, Chairman of the Board of the Institute, and his wife Helene. It was a festive event, with diners seated in several rooms and lively conversation among Institute members, Bard faculty and administration, and friends of the Institute. Dr. Bockmuehl was welcomed warmly and many friends of the Institute were visible, from board member John Whitworth, Jr. and Director Dr. Chilton to Bard administrators Deborah Pemstein and Susan Gillespie, Institute member Marguerite Hayes, Fred Cartier from the Red Hook Ministerium, and Cameron Afzal from Sarah Lawrence College. As an inaugural social event of the Institute, the evening had a special character marked by the easy mingling of scholars of theology, local-area clergy, and interested members of the community from a range of ages and standpoints. ■

After attending Markus Bockmuehl's lecture on June 14th, Meyer F. Lieberman wrote the Institute that he was "so impressed by the work you do that I want to donate an oil painting I painted of Philo of Alexandria to the Institute – for the enjoyment of its faculty and students." The painting—which can be viewed on the Institute's webpage, at www.bard.edu, is now an Institute holding. Mr. Lieberman, a painter for more than fifty years, lives in Woodstock and has shown at major galleries and museums; his work appears in private collections and museums all over the world. Philo of Alexandria (c. 15 B.C.E.-45 C. E.) was a Greek-speaking Jewish philosopher and the most important representative of Hellenistic Judaism. His writings provide the clearest view of the development of Judaism in the Diaspora, and his was the first attempt to synthesize revealed faith and philosophical reason. Because of this, he occupies a unique position in the history of philosophy; he is also regarded by Christians as a forerunner of Christian theology. The painting is currently housed in Rev. Dr. Chilton's office; readers of the newsletter may enjoy seeing it on the website and sharing our pleasure in this beautiful tribute to the Institute's work. ■

On September 11, 2000, an Inaugural Lecture marked the occasion of the inauguration of Jacob Neusner as the first Senior Fellow of the Institute of Advanced Theology at Bard; he also holds the position of Research Professor of Religion and Theology at the college. The lecture was entitled "Theology comes Home: The Role of Theology in the Academic Study of Religion and the Role of Theology of Judaism in the Academic Study of Judaism." The inaugural lecture is the lead article in *The British Journal, Religion*, 2001. Professor Neusner has published more than 800 books and unnumbered articles, both

scholarly and popular; he is the most published humanities scholar in the world, and has received numerous honorary degrees, academic prizes and awards. He is the pre-eminent scholar on Judaism. With a B.A. from Harvard University and a Ph.D. from Columbia University, as well as Master of Hebrew Letters from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Professor Neusner has taught at Dartmouth, Brown, the University of South Florida, the University of Frankfurt, and other institutions. His current research concerns the social teachings of Rabbinic Judaism and he is at work on a multi-volume study.

After a pre-lecture social hour and a stirring introduction by President Botstein of Bard, Professor Neusner outlined the long history of theology, the organized study of which long precedes the founding of universities in the West. Grounded in the philosophy of ancient Greece, theology found its subject matter in the revealed truths of Scripture, Torah, Bible, and Quran. Set aside by the academic study of religion which came to dominate in North America, by scholars who understood theology to involve inappropriate apologetics, theology was pursued in Europe, in German and British universities and their counterparts, in terms which excluded the study of religion. At Bard, with the new Institute of Advanced Study as well as the longstanding Department of Religion, innovation occurs by giving theology an "equal and separate" venue with Religion. As Professor Neusner put it, "In the academic study of religion, we describe, through the study of the texts of religions, the facts of the matter. In theology we aim at constructing the logic of those facts, seeing how, in appropriate contexts, the data of religion yield allegations as to the coherence, the cogency, the compelling logic, that inheres in what we think we know." Professor Neusner's remarks led to a lively discussion with members of the very full audience on hand for this event. ■



The ornamental face of Caiaphas' ossuary.

The Institute sponsored four public dialogues between Executive Director Rev. Dr. Chilton and Professor Neusner on September 11, 18 and 25, and October 2, 2000, which were based on the publication of their joint book, *Comparative Spiritualities: Formative Christianity and Judaism on Finding Life and Meeting Death* (Trinity Press). In attendance were Bard students enrolled in a parallel course taught by Professors Chilton and Neusner, as well as Institute members and other interested persons in the community. The dominant question asked was "What experiences are both distinctive to the spiritual life of Torah and Christ, respectively, and also accessible to our common humanity?" They examined "Birth in the faith, death in the faith, and bearing witness to the faith," seeking to exercise in the dialogues the method of the book, which Laurie Patton of Emory University has called "generative exegesis"—a "frank dialectic between detail and generality, the spiritual and the scholarly," leading to a "new vocabulary." The dialogue achieves its freshness when "each uses the other's vocabulary, and yet maintains its own boundaries," as Professor Patton observed. ■

In November Rev. Dr. Bruce Chilton and Professor Neusner completed work on the second volume to

emerge from the Consultation on James, in consequence of the meeting of that group of scholars composing the Consultation in Nashville, Tennessee, from November 16-18, 2000. While the first work of the Consultation, published in 1999, was an academic volume entitled *James the Just and Christian Origin*, this new work was meant for a broader audience. Entitled *James, The Brother of Jesus*, this volume enables us to see how the memory of Jesus' brother James, who at his death in 62 seemed a figure whose influence could only increase, was subject to the decimation of Jews in Jerusalem and the desolation of the Sanctuary which was the center of his devotion. Hence the recovery of James, as set out in this volume, necessarily involves finding a part of Christian identity that has been lost to popular awareness. The study of James becomes a new way to understand the place of earliest Christianity within Judaism, which in turn helps us to understand Jesus' own brother as well as the true character of Christian theology. Frank T. Crohn, the Institute's Chairman of the Board of Trustees, has been an inspiration and a primary source of support for this Consultation, the Institute's most notable contribution at Bard. His deep engagement with the project promises to yield fresh initiatives in the future. ■

EVENTS IN THE YEAR 2001 AT THE
INSTITUTE *of* ADVANCED THEOLOGY

Faculty, friends and members of the Institute, students and persons in the community joined in the Campus Center at Bard on February 19, 2001, to celebrate the publication of *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* by Rev. Dr. Bruce Chilton. Slides of recent archeological discoveries which caught our attention led gracefully to Dr. Chilton's reassessment of the role of High Priest Caiaphas; we began to see the links between language, historical context, archeology and other kinds of evidence that have contributed to Dr. Chilton's reconstruction of Jesus' "intimate biography." Dr. Chilton started to seek answers to questions about Jesus' life even before he sought ordination, when at the age of 18 he was first confronted with a graphic frieze of the crucifixion at a medieval church in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia. This biography, published by Doubleday and available as a selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club, provides fascinating new evidence that contradicts long-held beliefs—for instance, regarding Jesus' birth in Bethlehem of Galilee, not the Bethlehem of Judaea, and the central role taken by Caiaphas, not Pontius Pilate, in Jesus' execution. By placing Jesus squarely in the context of first-century Judaism, Chilton reveals a powerful new Jesus for our own time.

March 20, 27, April 3, 2001, 12 noon, Bard Hall. Lenten lectures: These lectures engage members of the Red Hook Ministerium and others in discussions with Rev. Dr. Bruce Chilton on topics emerging from *Rabbi Jesus*. They continue the dialogues begun in earlier years between academic and practical theology, and between text and experience. They promise to be especially interesting this year as they follow so shortly upon the publication of *Rabbi Jesus*. Lunch will be provided. ■

COMING EVENTS: CALENDAR YEAR 2001

The Institute for Advanced Theology at Bard College will hold weekly Lenten lectures, titled "Rabbi Jesus: Death and Resurrection," on Tuesdays from March 20 to April 3 in Bard Hall. The lecture and discussion will follow lunch, which begins at noon.

In the series of three lectures the Reverend Dr. Bruce Chilton, Bernard Iddings Bell Professor of Religion and director of the Institute for Advanced Theology at Bard College, will conclude his three-year cycle of lectures on Jesus. New participants are welcome and can catch up on the previous narrative by reading Professor Chilton's recent book *Rabbi Jesus* (Doubleday, 2000). In this series he will examine Jesus' execution, burial, and resurrection. Recent research and archaeological discoveries have opened fresh possibilities for the understanding those events. The political situation of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' death will be explained, and the actual location of his burial (not the Church of the Holy Sepulcher) will be identified. This information will cast new light on what it meant when Jesus' followers experienced him as risen from the dead. The series of lectures and discussions will conclude with an assessment of the early Christian understanding of resurrection, in all its variety.

LOOK FOR AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE SPRING MEETING OF THE
MEMBERSHIP AND A VISITING GUEST LECTURER.

SEPTEMBER 6, OCT. 4, OCTOBER 25: A dialogue series between Rev. Dr. Chilton and Professor Neusner called "Trading Places," based on their book of the same name. The book (Pilgrim Press) turns on its head the usual scholarly consensus that early Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism run parallel. These great traditions, they argue, intersected and ultimately traded places during the first four centuries of the Common Era. The book is accompanied by a sourcebook, but come to the series to get a sense of history developed in a dialogue here and now. ■



Members of the consultation on James in Nashville, (from left to right) back row: Peter Davids, Frank Crohn, Craig Evans, John Painter; front row: Jacob Neusener, Bruce Chilton, Wiard Popkes