

FOURTEEN NEW BOOKS AUTHORED BY YDS FACULTY

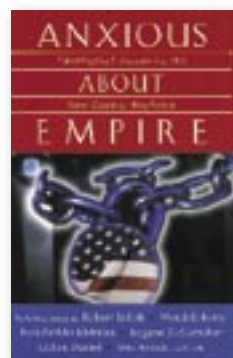
by Jeffrey Pierce '06 M.Div.

TO BE ON THE FACULTY OF Yale Divinity School is, at the very least, a dual vocation: teaching and writing—or, put another way, teaching and learning. As a rule, the best teachers are the best learners. In turn, the best learners are those who practice dialogue, those who surrender their ideas to the scrutiny of an audience capable of listening and responding. Of course, not all dialogue occurs face-to-face. Much, including some of the very best, occurs by way of publication.

Every spring the divinity school community comes together to celebrate these joint projects of teaching and learning in the annual faculty book party. At the end of the term, colleagues, students, and friends gather in the Common Room to applaud (and to toast) the accomplishments and contributions of its own. The Spring 2005 event recognized fourteen new publications.

HAROLD ATTRIDGE, dean of Yale Divinity School and Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament, and John Collins, Holmes Professor of Old Testament Criticism and Interpretation, contribute as editors to Harvard Press's *Religions of the Ancient World*, a monumental comparative examination of the religious beliefs and practices of ancient Mediterranean. Covering the span of the third millennium BCE through the fourth century CE, this book interprets and compares the religions of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Israel, Greece, Rome, early Christianity, and several other ancient Mediterranean societies. Particular attention is given to what transcends the cultural, temporal, and geographic boundaries of these civilizations, offering a thematic assessment of what is common to the traditions. Collins brings his vast knowledge of Ancient Near Eastern comparative cosmology, especially with regard to the role of myth, while Attridge contributes his careful reading of the way belief informed and controlled daily life in relation to the sacred, especially concerning notions of ritual, purity, and morality. More than 140 scholars contribute to this comprehensive work, including Yale Divinity's Adela Collins, Bryan Spinks, Robert Wilson '67 B.D., '72 Ph.D., and John Fitzgerald '75 M.Div., '84 Ph.D.

WESLEY AVRAM, Stephen Merrell Clement-E. William Muehl Assistant Professor of Communication Art, wrote *Anxious About Empire* as a response to the White House's 2002 *National Security Strategy* (NSS), which Robert Bellah



deemed a “blueprint for empire.” An “invited gathering of Christian voices expressing a certain anxiety [with] what is ruling the day,” this book examines how Christians might think about America’s role in the world. The NSS, a copy of which Avram sent to each of the book’s contributors, “lingers in the background” of these theological essays by

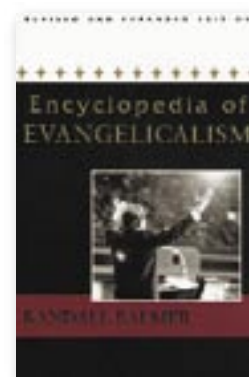
Robert Bellah, Wendell Berry, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Lillian Daniel '93 M.Div., and others. Not all the writers stand in agreement, though most are strongly critical toward the recent actions of the U.S. government. What is common to the writings, in an era when conversation about the relationship between religion and politics is reaching peak levels, is a shared desire to root our thinking in the church. Avram affirms the church as a gift for the whole world, and hopes that religion—through church, synagogue, mosque or temple—may provide the insights “to imagine a human future.”

In his second project, entitled *Where the Light Shines Through*, Avram plays on that tension where the otherness of God meets head on the everyday-ness of life. His thesis is epistemological: “The adventure of knowing God is given its texture by a full, divine sort of sensuality—God-sensed before God-known.” Avram wishes to awaken his readers to this precognitive knowing of God, arguing that our God-sense allows us to experience God in the most ordinary moments of life when we have refined our attentiveness, our “God-sensitivity.” Avram is also careful to note that our experiences of God are not themselves God. The book is divided into three sections, according to the three realms of God-sense: the soul, the world, and the church. Avram reflects on his own life and his ministry as a college chaplain and professor of preaching, grounding each of his reflections in Scripture.

From Abolitionism to Zion Evangelistic Fellowship, **RANDALL BALMER** offers this remarkably comprehensive *En-*



cyclopedia of Evangelicalism. Revised and expanded from the 2002 edition, this encyclopedia contains more than 3,000 entries on individuals, organizations, denominations, theological terms, and far more. Balmer considers evangelicalism to be America’s “dominant folk religion,” and is careful to define the term broadly in order



to provide a more “complex and textured portrait of evangelicalism in all its diversity.” Written in a clear and engaging style, this book is the result of a

more than decade-long project, “ever expanding in scope and interest.” Thorough and concise, the *Encyclopedia* is an invaluable resource for students, scholars, journalists, and laypeople.

BREVARD CHILDS, the Sterling Professor of Divinity emeritus and the pioneer of the canonical approach to textual criticism, offers *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* as a case study in church hermeneutics. Childs chose Isaiah because of the long and populous history of scholarly commentaries on the text and because “most of the difficult exegetical problems surrounding the relation of the Old and New Testaments have found a focus on Isaiah.” In each chapter, Childs focuses on a different Christian age, using the work of key figures to illustrate the church’s changing views on Isaiah. While he admits that it



is easier to identify the disagreements, Childs defends the notion that the interpreters display a certain “family resemblance” in their approaches to the text, a resemblance that negates the idea that there are “no rules” when it comes to interpreting Scripture. Childs concludes by highlighting the implications of his work for modern debates about the role of Scripture in church life.

Based on his presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, **JOHN COLLINS'S** *Does the Bible Justify Violence?* evaluates whether the Bible is really a Scripture “endowed with the power to kill.” He seeks, in a historical-critical examination of biblical texts, to distinguish between the purposes of their human authors and the purposes of God. Rejecting the strategy that we might relativize the more “problematic” viewpoints in the Bible by noting the diversity within the canon, Collins argues instead that the power of the Bible lies in its ability to reveal “an unvarnished picture of human nature.” He demonstrates his usual sensitivity to the interpretive task by pondering what might



be truly indicative of the wisdom and will of God, and thereby worthy of imitation. Collins concludes, alongside Oliver Wendell Holmes, that “certitude leads to violence.”

Yale University Press has published a fully revised edition of **VICTORIA HOFFER'S** *Biblical Hebrew* (2nd Edition): *Textbook, Supplement, and Audio Program*. Part of the Yale Language Series, this book is intended for use in a two-semester course aimed at teaching a new generation of students to read biblical Hebrew with fluency and competence. Hoffer, lecturer in Old Testament, built fifty-five lessons around a particular biblical passage, and the textbook includes a comprehensively descriptive glossary, a vocabulary of 310 roots and derivatives, and helpful verb and preposition charts. Of particular interest to the divinity school community are the three accompanying audio CDs: the first, which includes playfully original musical works by the author and recent alumni of the divinity school combines the didactic potential of the songs of Sesame Street with the satirical absurdity of those by Weird Al Yankovic. Dedicated to her students, this was a work of obvious joy for the author.

The new textbook for this fall's Systematic Theology course *Constructive Theology: a Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes* is the result of five years of discussion and collaboration among the members of the Work-

