Prof. Newby Compares Three Major Religions

By Elizabeth Bruml
Contributing Writer

The Michael C. Carlos Museum’s exhibition “Islamic Calligraphy and the Qur’an” kicked off with a lecture on Tuesday that analyzed the overlaps among Islam, Judaism and Christianity and the dialogue among the three religious communities.

Gordon Newby, professor and chair of the Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies department, delivered the lecture, which was titled “Scriptural Conversations: The Qur’an and Jewish and Christian Scripture.”

In his lecture, Newby explained the Quran provides a direct response to the often-conflicting scriptures in Judaism and Christianity.

Newby cited the Quran’s versions of classical religious stories, such as that of Adam and Eve, as examples of Islam joining in other religions’ discussions of God.

“The fact that Adam and Eve are portrayed as equally guilty in temptation demonstrates how the concept of individualistic responsibility is a hallmark feature of the Quran,” Newby said.

He went on to express the importance of religious stories in Islam, Judaism and Christianity in guiding human actions. Biblical stories “transform into explicitly signs, exhorting moral behavior,” he said.

Newby discussed the differences among key figures in Islam, Judaism and Christianity. He said, Muhammad is considered a messenger and a prophet, not the son of God, as Jesus is in Christianity.

During a brief question-and-answer session after the lecture, members of the audience inquired about such topics as how the Quran was composed.

Kevin Corrigan, chair of the Institute of Liberal Arts, praised the speech for the many perspectives it offered.

“Anyone who can bring together the traditions, from a religious point of view, trade point of view, imperial point of view and philosophical point of view, is brilliant,” Corrigan said.

David Blumenthal, the Jay and Leslie Cohen professor of Judaic studies, said he thought Newby’s presentation of manuscripts during the lecture effectively helped the audience understand the complexity of overlaps among the three religions — an area that is little understood by the public in general.

“In a lecture on Judaism and Christianity, it is fair to say that 90 percent of the audience would be relatively well-informed,” Blumenthal said. “Here, 90 percent of the audience knows nothing. The lecture provided a bridge from ignorance to getting bearings on a foreign topic.”

The Carlos Museum exhibition will run through Dec. 5.

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