

# “Visiting Scholars on Islam”

Three Evenings this Spring

5:30 in Lane's Center for Meeting and Learning

**Stephen Shoemaker** Date: April 7, 2011

**Title:** *“Reading the Qur’ān with Albert Schweitzer, or Jesus, Muhammad, and the End of the World,”*

## **Abstract:**

For much of the past century, scholarship on the beginnings of Islam, particularly in English, has portrayed Muhammad primarily as a prophet of social justice and economic reform, often to the effect of marginalizing the powerful eschatological voice of the Qur’ān. While many of the earliest western scholars of Islamic origins saw the impending judgment of the Hour as the heart of Muhammad’s religious message, more recent scholarship has favored an understanding of Muhammad as interested more in reforming the world than heralding its imminent destruction. While this image of Muhammad may fit well with the much later traditions of the early Islamic biographies of Muhammad, it does not do justice to the forceful eschatological message of the Qur’ān.

## **Bio:**

Stephen Shoemaker (Ph.D. ’97, Duke University) teaches courses on the Christian traditions. His primary interests lie in the ancient and early medieval Christian traditions, and more specifically in early Byzantine and Near Eastern Christianity. His research focuses on early devotion to the Virgin Mary, Christian apocryphal literature, and the relations between Near Eastern Christianity and formative Islam. Prof. Shoemaker is the author of *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad’s Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), a study of the “historical Muhammad” that focuses on traditions about the end of his life. He has also published numerous studies on early Christian traditions about Mary (especially in apocrypha), including *The Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary’s Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford University Press, 2002), a study of the earliest traditions of the end of Mary’s life that combines archaeological, liturgical, and literary evidence. This volume also includes critical translations of many of the earliest narratives of Mary’s Dormition and Assumption, made from Ethiopic, Syriac, Georgian, Coptic, and Greek. Prof. Shoemaker has published a series of articles on the earliest Life of the Virgin, a pivotal if overlooked late ancient text that survives only in a Georgian translation. He has recently completed an English translation of this first Marian biography from Old Georgian (with substantial corrections to the edition) that will be published by Yale University Press. In addition, he is preparing a new critical edition of the early Syriac Dormition narratives. Prof. Shoemaker has been awarded research fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

