

'Best-selling Scholar' to Deliver Annual Russell Lecture at AU

1/21/99

Alfred, NY -- Thomas Cahill, author of the best-sellers *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (1995) and *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (1998), will give the annual Russell Lecture at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 2, in Alfred University's Harder Hall. His talk, "Bringing the Dead to Life," will focus on the process he uses to reconstruct the past. The lecture is free and open to all. The two books, appreciated by both scholars and the reading public, are part of Cahill's "Hinges of History" series. In future volumes, he plans to "retell the story of the western world as the story of the great gift-givers, those who entrusted to our keeping one or another of the singular treasures that make up the patrimony of the West." But saying he likes surprises, he declines to name the theme of his next book. Surprise is a core value inherited from the Jews, he says. "In the ancient world, everything was cyclical and people felt they could not escape their fate because it was part of a grand master plan. With the coming of Abraham, all this began to change. Reality became a journey into the unknown, where people had faith in a voice that predicted that things would work out well." Cahill maintains that the early Jews irrevocably changed the world. For instance, the story of David and Goliath left the legacy of rooting for the underdog, and the Jewish sabbath gave us the gift of weekends. Born of Irish-American parents and raised in the Bronx, Cahill earned degrees from Fordham and Columbia universities, Union Theological Seminary, and the Jewish Theological Seminary. He and his wife Susan, an author and anthropologist, live in New York. Cahill gave the commencement speech at AU last May, when his son Joseph got his diploma. The Russell Lecture features prominent historians speaking in honor of the late Dr. Willis Russell, who was professor of history at AU for 32 years.