



Newsletter

Fall 2012

Center for the Study of World Religions

Harvard Divinity School



Director's Message



Frank Clooney and new CSWR associate director, Corey O'Brien

When I became director in the summer of 2010, I thought the best way for me to do the needful and build on the good work of my predecessor,

Donald K. Swearer, would be to shape the programming of the Center not primarily by a master plan for the future, but, more importantly, by drawing upon the energies of the Center, Harvard Divinity School, and the University, to foster conversations across disciplinary, cultural, religious, and personal boundaries. In this way, I thought, we could better live up to the ideal of "community and colloquy" well captured in the 2005 Center history by John Carman and Kit Dodgson. Now that I am halfway through the third year of my term as director, I believe that my instincts were right, and that we are heading in the right direction. Let me illustrate this.

This fall we continued to celebrate the wealth of scholarship in our midst by more discussions of new faculty books: Charles Stang's *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite* (Oxford University Press, 2012), and the two commentaries of Harvey Cox and Stephanie Paulsell under the single cover of *Lamentations*

and the *Song of Songs* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2012). Such books are extraordinary resources for theology, the study of religions, and interdisciplinary work today, and our conversations around them have been informative, and even inspiring, events. We will have at least two more book events in the spring.

Our four current colloquia and reading groups are scholarly conversations that bring together faculty, with some students and staff as well, to inquire together into diverse topics: Michel Foucault (Anne Monius), Giorgio Agamben (Charles Stang), Ecology and the Curriculum (Dan McKanan), and Translating Sacred Texts (Giovanni Bazzana and myself). These groups welcome participants from around the University, as we cultivate many small connections across the campus. Some initiatives this semester draw on the talents and interests of visitors. Our visiting fellow Dennis Hirota, a longtime friend of the Center, collaborated at the end of November with Charles Hallisey of our faculty (and visitor Bret Davis, Loyola University, Baltimore) in a panel on Japanese Buddhism and continental philosophy; we continue also to have a lively biweekly Fellows Breakfast series.

Student-initiated events too remain key to the Center's intellectual life. The well-attended biweekly MTS-MDiv lunches have covered topics from meditation and the contemplative life to the interfaith dimensions of diversity on campus to civil and uncivil disagreements in the classroom. Plans are under way to revive, in a new format, the doctoral student discussions

– mixing the academic and the casual – which we have hosted since the fall of 2010. Students regularly use our Meditation Room, as individuals and occasionally gathering in small groups. Morgan Howard (MDiv '14) is this year's field education placement at the Center, our "ambassador" to the undergraduate community, interfaith activities in the Yard, as well as to the Memorial Church, the Harvard chaplains, and other groups around the University.

The Center's residential community meets most Wednesday evenings to take turns in presenting work in progress or their ideas on themes of interest, while residents can schedule other events as the occasion arises. As noted elsewhere in this newsletter, we are benefiting in particular from the programming arranged by the three Center residents who are junior fellows.

Even as we cultivate local possibilities we do of course continue to welcome distinguished guests. Thomas Coburn (Emeritus, Naropa University) and the visiting monk Bhikkhu Bodhi gave lectures in our "Intellectual Worlds of Meditation" series; Amy-Jill Levine (Vanderbilt) gave the annual

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Eboo Patel, Diana Eck, David Hempton, and Frank Clooney at the annual Greeley Lecture

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News and Notes

Director's Message *continued...*

Comparative Theology lecture, "From Donation to Diatribe: How Anti-Jewish Interpretation Cashes Out," showing how a familiar and seemingly simple Gospel story – the widow's mite – has also been heavily laden with social and political import; Sung-bae Park (SUNY Stony Brook) gave the annual Korean Buddhism lecture, on the practice of Korean Zen; Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, gave this year's



Randall Balmer

Greeley Lecture for Peace and Social Justice, "New Rooms in the House of Religious Pluralism: Evangelicals and the Interfaith Movement."

Concerned also to engage key issues in the news, in October we hosted two events related to the election year:

Randall Balmer (Dartmouth) presented "Religion and the Presidency Since John F. Kennedy," while a panel of local experts (Bryan Hehir [Kennedy School], Jonathan Walton, Ruth Langer [Boston College], and PhD candidate Max Mueller) discussed "Religion and the Election: Does It Matter?" Our spring 2013 conference, "The *Song of Songs*: Translation, Reception, Reconfiguration," will bring to campus a small group of scholars from around the United States and from abroad.

There is much to be done, then, even as the Center is flourishing, to convene the conversations central to the study of religions today. Of course, with greater resources we could do more. We are still at the early stages of putting in place a serious development plan. Key projects remain the restoration of our third-floor Meditation Room, endowing our thirteen apartments and the residential community it signifies, and regaining the wherewithal to invite visiting scholars

to campus for a year or two at a time. I welcome your ideas and contributions on how we can enhance the Center's financial resources.

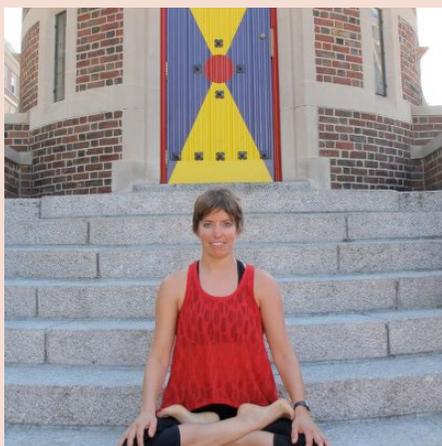
I close by noting some changes in the Center staff. We have just hired Corey O'Brien (MDiv '05) to be the Center's full-time associate director. See the notice elsewhere in this newsletter. I am also sad to note that Alicia Clemente, our coordinator of residential life and fellowship programs and member of the Center staff since 2005, has just left us for a new, challenging position at Boston University. We wish Alicia well and thank her for her years of service! We will be hiring her replacement early in the new year.

In this festive season, I wish you and your families best wishes of peace and joy.



Francis X. Clooney, SJ

Resident Profile: Leslie Hubbard



This is Leslie's first year in residency at the Center and as an MTS student at Harvard Divinity School majoring in Buddhist studies. Leslie was drawn to the Center's unique interreligious community, a natural continuation of her eight-year residency as a fully ordained Buddhist nun in the tradition of the Vietnamese Buddhist Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh. As a Buddhist nun, Leslie was fortunate to have an abundance of opportunities, not only to live in a variety of international

communities across Asia, Europe, and the US, but also on many occasions to accompany Thich Nhat Hanh and the monastic community on international teaching tours interacting, for example, with Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu communities and participating in interreligious dialogue and engaging together in silent meditation.

With her experience engaging in meditation practices across religious traditions, as well as her earlier career as a professional dancer, Leslie continues to explore the vital role meditation and art play in the religious experience in her Junior Fellow project for the Center titled "Beyond Words: Intersections of Meditation, Visual Art, and Sacred Music and Dance across Religious and Cultural Boundaries." As both a dancer and Buddhist nun, Leslie has been continuously in awe of meditation, dance, music, and visual art's capacity to serve as places of refuge for experiencing commonalities among varying religions and cultural traditions and, consequently, to serve as a catalyst

to explore interreligious dialogue.

In addition to her studies, Leslie teaches yoga, meditation, and dance for Harvard University and Harvard Business School and serves as a co-leader of Thich Nhat Hanh's international Wake Up movement, which is an engaged meditation group composed of young adults aspiring to integrate the Buddhist teachings of mindfulness and community building into every aspect of daily life. Leslie considers herself fortunate to have the opportunity to live at the Center and to continue to build community in a variety of creative ways.



We Are the Center: CSWR Scholars Then and Now

With this issue of the newsletter, we inaugurate a new series, “We Are the Center: CSWR Scholars Then and Now.” The idea is to recollect concretely the Center’s extraordinary history of over five decades and its diverse community from all over North America and the wider world by inviting reflections from individual affiliates on their association with the Center and how it has made a difference in their lives and careers. Each issue of the newsletter will feature one such remembrance, and we are very pleased this time to hear from Thomas B. Coburn, who completed his doctoral degree here in 1977 and went on to a long and distinguished career at St. Lawrence University and Naropa University. If you were a resident or affiliate of the Center in past decades and are interested in writing for a future edition of the newsletter, please contact us.



The Center 45 Years Downstream

by Thomas B. Coburn



Photo courtesy of Naropa University

I was first introduced to the Center in 1967, when I enrolled in a master’s degree program in the Divinity School. I was advised that there was a “wickedly difficult” survey course on world

religions, and I should take it “to get it out of the way.” I had just returned from a year teaching in the Arab world, which had opened me to the richness, the joys, and the challenges of religious and cultural difference, so this recommendation made sense. I enrolled in HR 101-102, taught by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and I knew by Thanksgiving that I had found my life’s work.

What I found so compelling was, in part, Wilfred’s extraordinarily erudite understanding of religious life, as articulated in his then-recently published *The Meaning and End of Religion*. Particularly captivating was his personalist understanding of religious life, which places human beings at the center of our study, not some

abstraction called “religion.” It embodies a profound respect for each individual’s deep subjectivity, as well as for the objective facts of religious history. As I came to know and eventually to live in the Center, I came to see how its vision fit so well with Smith’s understanding of religious life: one learns what it means to be a Hindu by living with Hindus, as well as by studying their languages, books, art, and music. Likewise for those from other traditions. This learning was cultivated not just by formal activities – the Wednesday-evening seminar, visiting lectures, and holiday celebrations – but by the informal daily interactions with kindred spirits from around the globe – folding laundry in the basement, sharing a simple lunch, balancing competition and collegiality on the volleyball court. The youth culture in which I was embedded fell in love with Asia during those years, and the Center’s role, I believed, was to develop the intellectual foundation for this love. This also meant participating in the larger aspiration to create a more just world, with a deeper appreciation for diversity in all of its forms.

I am today struck by how my experience 45 years ago has had ramifications in the various twists and turns in my life. I

have always loved working with students and think of myself as a teacher/scholar, which is why I chose to teach at a liberal arts college, St. Lawrence University, for 29 years. This eventually entailed wanting students to have the experience of India, so I launched and twice led a semester-in-India program – which became my all-time favorite teaching semesters. I have long found my own inner life nurtured by the subject matter I was studying and teaching, a major result of which, I discovered, was an abiding personal equanimity. This, in turn, led to invitations to provide leadership in situations not known for their equanimity – as academic vice president at St. Lawrence and as president of Naropa University.

Founded in 1974, Naropa sits at the confluence of two historical rivers: the liberal arts tradition of the West and the contemplative traditions of Asia. It cultivates both traditional academics and the disciplined inwardness of meditation. Its respect for the inner life recalls for me a similar respect that was prophetically woven into the fabric of the Center those many years ago, that prompts it today to rethink the role of a meditation room, and that animates the emerging field of contemplative studies.

Greeley International Internship Recipient Report: Melissa Nozell

Reflections on a Greeley International Internship in Jordan



Melissa Nozell and Jordan's Prince Feisal

Abouna's black robes and tall, rounded cap, the typical uniform of a Melkite Catholic priest, attract attention from blocks away. His successful activism in promoting peaceful coexistence in the famously volatile Middle East attracts attention from half the world away. All elements of his personality and person command the respect that his dedicated career has earned him. The Very Reverend Father Nabil Haddad, or Abouna (lit., "Our Father") as he is known in the community, is, in addition to a parish priest, the founder and executive director of the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center (JICRC). It was under that organizational umbrella that I had the privilege of spending the summer in Jordan, engaging directly in the region's unique interfaith movement by working with Fr. Haddad on research and writing projects, as well as participating in international policy conferences and community outreach.

As a leader of Jordan's minority Christian community, much of Abouna's work deals not only with daily encounters between ordinary people, but, importantly, with individuals in a variety of sectors so as to promote peace and tolerance within the region, and between the Middle East and the West. Fr. Haddad is an adviser, educator, and activist. Far from looking for temporary outlets in which to connect Christians and Muslims, he seeks a more permanent agenda that guarantees the rights of and respect toward all people, cultivating a mindset of coexistence

through informed understanding. His work requires that he engage in policy and grassroots initiatives, gaining him a well-regarded voice in Jordan and beyond.

In the JICRC office, where my colleagues included a Palestinian Muslim, an Egyptian Coptic Christian, and a Palestinian Catholic, I was directly involved in many of the JICRC's current initiatives. In a surprisingly fast-paced environment, no two days were alike.

I interviewed Sheikh Hotheifa, an imam in charge of five mosques outside of Amman, when he spontaneously paid Abouna a visit to rearticulate to the priest his gratitude for a trip to America five years ago, on which Fr. Haddad had led a delegation of Arab imams to observe religious diversity in the U.S. Sheikh Hotheifa has given several sermons over the years since then, in which he has provided hundreds, maybe thousands, of Jordanian Muslims with a glowing report about the beauty of American religious pluralism. The imam's enthusiasm is one of many examples that proved to me the effectiveness of the kind of interfaith engagement to

which Abouna has dedicated his career.

Other highlights from the summer include an introduction to HRH Prince Feisal, brother of King Abdullah II, at a conference at the Jordan Institute of Diplomacy, and a formal visit to Zaatari Refugee Camp for Syrians, where I was the American accompanying the decorated Jordanian priest and a robed Syrian imam. The pomp and circumstance of events like those aside, my summer with the JICRC was truly influential in guiding my academic and professional path, as it helped me to realize the necessary potential in promoting peace as a political objective through the language of religious coexistence.

In Jordan, I experienced an interfaith movement that was unlike anything I had experienced elsewhere, in which a discourse between Christianity and Islam is both living and politically significant on local and global scales. The work of Fr. Haddad and the JICRC spearhead that dialogue, and it is evermore apparent to me that such engagement is critical for coexistence to truly develop in the region.



The Very Reverend Father Nabil Haddad visits a UN refugee camp

Greeley International Internship Recipient Report: Zach Kerzee

Reflections on a Greeley International Internship in India



Zach Kerzee and the Taj Mahal

It was about six o'clock in the evening and I didn't have much time left before the sun set on my first and only day in Agra – home of the Taj Mahal. I decided it best to walk into town and see what I could see, so I wandered around aimlessly for the better part of an hour. A hostel/restaurant with a yellow sign boasting a "Taj" view caught my eye, so I walked up the narrow stairs to the third floor to ask for a menu. The place was deserted. And dusty. And it looked like no one had been inside for years, so I made for a quick retreat. Before I could get down the stairs, though, a man with a fantastic mustache and a sweaty undershirt ran up to me and asked, out of breath, "Sir, would you like to eat at the restaurant?" I reluctantly said yes, and he walked me back up the stairs to the roof. He guided me up to the top of a yellow concrete water tower, and I asked for a menu.

"Sorry, sir, but no menu," he said.

Instead he grabbed a chair and a big stick. "Sit, sit," he said, and then he handed me the stick.

"What's the stick for?" I asked.

And he replied offhandedly, "Oh, to fight the monkey."

The potential for monkey battle conveyed, my host left me to a beautiful view of the Taj Mahal as a gentle rain began to fall and the sun began to set behind my back.

Most travelers that I met in my summer in India have at least one monkey story, so I thought I would begin my small contribution with mine. I came to India not as a tourist, however, but on the



The monkeys of Jaipur

Greeley International Internship grant, a summer program designed for HDS students who want to do international interfaith work. I worked primarily with an organization called the Daya Center for Peace in Hyderabad, India, an organization which trains children, youth, and adults in the art of peaceful conflict resolution and peace building practices.

Aside from being exposed to monkeys for the first time, my summer in India afforded me an opportunity to do real, substantive, interfaith work for the first

time in my life. I had been nodding my head in fervent agreement with my fellow progressives who stress the need for interfaith dialogue and interfaith social action since college, but never before had I had the opportunity to be immersed in a truly interfaith culture.

India has felt the sting of interfaith conflict for countless decades, but Daya (which means compassion in Sanskrit) believes that a world without violent conflict is possible. Daya doesn't preach the antiquated interfaith credo that "all religions are the same," because they're not. Instead, the organization works to educate children about how to exist fruitfully and compassionately amid vast differences. This summer I was fortunate enough to be able to provide my skills to help Daya in its important work – to help create a world free from interfaith conflict.

If you'd like more information about the Daya Center for Peace, or would like to know how you can help them create a world free from violent conflict, please visit friendsofdaya.org.



Children at the Daya Center for Peace, Hyderabad

About the Greeley International Internship

The Greeley International Internship honors the Rev. Dana McLean Greeley, AB '31, STB '33, who believed that people of all backgrounds and faiths are deeply connected to one another and should work together for positive social change. The internship is intended to encourage interreligious understanding. The award supports HDS students who wish to intern with an organization outside of the United States that is dedicated to the promotion of interreligious understanding, peace, and social justice. It is this same fund that enables the Center to host its annual Greeley Lecture for Peace and Social Justice.

Undergraduate Summer Research Grant Recipient Report: Sara Lytle

Buddhist Spiritual Care at the End of Life: A Cross-Cultural Study of Contemporary Buddhism and Palliative Care



Sara Lytle with the hospice founder and a patient

This summer, I went to Penang, Malaysia, and San Francisco, California, to study how Buddhism intersects with the experience of hospice caregivers and the relationship between spirituality and the end of life. Through watching, traveling, and listening, I learned that suffering and loneliness are fundamental parts of existence. Learning how to be with that of others and our own is crucial to providing care. This requires being truly present with whatever pain is at hand. It is about learning to sit with whatever is there, whether pain, discomfort, or joy. I did fieldwork at two Buddhist-inspired hospices (what this actually means I am still discovering), shadowing caregivers and participating alongside them. I spent the first part of my summer in Penang at a hospice

founded by a Buddhist nun who wanted to create a place where “the poor are not denied care and the dying are provided comfort and peace of mind.” I spent my days with patients and with nurses, absorbing the liveliness of the open ward. I sat with patients as they watched TV, ate their meals, or slept. I participated in the patients’ morning circumambulations around the statue of Amitabha Buddha and went to weekly prayer sessions led by the nun.

I then flew to San Francisco to continue my fieldwork with a hospice founded in the late 1980s in connection with a local Buddhist group. Each day, I shadowed volunteers, either at the organization’s six-bed guest house or at a palliative care ward in a local hospital where they ran an end-of-life care program. While direct references to Buddhism were often absent from everyday experience, for many of the people with whom I spoke, their caregiving was their spiritual practice. Several people described the volunteer community as a church or a sangha. During my short time there, I was included in this community and encouraged to participate in the daily meditations and reflection meetings. After one of our meditation

sessions, one hospice volunteer told me, “Sometimes healing doesn’t mean extending your life.” This man’s statement reiterated that the giving of care does not necessarily mean fixing, and that something else characterizes the encounter between caregiver and patient. A cure is no longer possible, but physical, emotional, and spiritual care are essential. As I examine how Buddhist worlds are created through the end-of-life care context, I have come to explore how spiritual practice is involved with the identity and experience of caregivers. While our attitudes around dying and practices of caregiving are highly embedded in a context of history, culture, and politics, the human encounter with death is at once deeply personal and uniquely universal.



Patients circumambulating the Amitabha Buddha statue

Faculty Grant Reports

The Center continues its longstanding practice of offering a limited number of grants to Harvard University faculty to support research, publication, and conversation related to the study of religions and theology in a pluralistic environment, and related cross-cultural, interdisciplinary, and interreligious issues. As an international academic community engaged in the study of the religions of the world, the Center is particularly interested in supporting projects that encourage the exchange of ideas from many scholarly perspectives; complement the Center’s global focus on religions in their traditional and

contemporary forms as lived, practiced, and studied; foster collaboration among faculty and doctoral students at the University; and enable scholars outside the University, in the Cambridge/Boston area and beyond, to work collaboratively with faculty here.

This year, a CSWR grant enabled **Michael Jackson** to complete his fieldwork for a book project on ethics, well-being, and migration. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and extensive recorded conversations with three African migrants – from Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, and Uganda – in three European cities (London, Amsterdam, and Copenhagen), Michael Jackson’s new book shows that migrant narratives

are, in many ways, allegories of human existence, in which the hope that our lives may be made more abundant, for ourselves and those we love, constantly comes up against the limits of what we may achieve and the despair into which we may be plunged when we find ourselves unable to achieve that state of well-being and flourishing that Aristotle called *eudaimonia*. *The Wherewithal of Life: Ethics, Migration and the Question of Well-Being* is scheduled for publication with the University of California Press in 2013.

In addition, four events were made possible this fall by a CSWR grant awarded to **Andrew Teeter**, supporting

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Undergraduate Summer Research Grant Recipient Report: Marjorie Gullick

Barriers to the Safe Delivery of African Mothers: On the Relationship between Religion and Maternal Health in Kenya



Marjorie Gullick with a mother and community health worker near Kisumu, Kenya

Every year, nearly half a million women die from pregnancy-related complications, with 99 percent of those deaths occurring in developing countries, making maternal mortality the greatest discrepancy of our time. Research has been done on the effect of socioeconomic status, education of the mother, and location of the home on maternal mortality, but little investigation has gone into the cultural and social factors that can contribute to its overwhelming ratio. I was interested particularly in exploring the relationship

between religion and maternal health, how religious beliefs and practices can affect or alter the health-seeking behaviors of mothers before, during, and after pregnancy.

I traveled to Kisumu, Kenya, for six weeks this summer and interviewed three different subsets of the population to explore this relationship: mothers, public health workers, and religious figures. I traveled to different health clinics, rural villages, and religious sites to conduct my research, working with the local community health workers for translation. Thirty interviews by no means provide a final, conclusive answer to the relationship between religion and maternal health, but they did provide enough evidence that there is one, and it is worth exploring further.

Through my thesis, I will argue that there is a relationship between religion and maternal health and will focus my argument on two prominent religions in Kenya: Catholicism and Legio Maria, a hybrid of Catholicism and traditional practices. My thesis will also analyze the historical conception Christian women have on the ownership of their bodies and the role of their bodies in society

and religion. My thesis will conclude with a final statement of the relationship and also that religion can be an aid to maternal health and, more generally, global health, in the developing world.

My hope is that through my thesis and further work on the issue, maternal health can begin to improve, so that pregnancy, particularly in the developing world, does not lead to the loss of life.



Children near Kisumu, Kenya

Faculty Grant Reports *continued...*

research on the textualization of religion, intertextuality, and the composition of the Hebrew Bible.

Seth Sanders (Department of Religion, Trinity College, Hartford) gave a learned and thought-provoking lecture, "The Invention of Hebrew and an Invisible Scribal Culture," as part of the seminar course "Scribes and Scribalism in the Biblical World."

Three scholars whose work represents some of the best in recent research on the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible were brought in for a symposium on the topic "Textualization, Intertextuality and the Formation of Prophetic Literature."

The program included lectures from Jacob Stromberg (The Divinity School, Duke University), who presented "Isaiah's Interpretive Revolution: How the Formation of Isaiah Influenced Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation"; Michael A. Lyons (Department of Theology, Simpson University, Redding), who discussed "The Role and Techniques of Allusion in Ezekiel's Rhetoric"; and William A. Tooman (School of Divinity, University of St. Andrews, Scotland), who gave a talk titled "Allusion as Oracle: Evidence for a Nascent Scriptural Collection in Ezek 38-39." This event took place in conjunction with a seminar course, "Scriptural Interpretation in Ancient Israel: Inner-Biblical Exegesis."

William Tooman also presented his research, "The Hermeneutics of Scribal Rewriting in Targum Jonathan Ezekiel 1," to the Harvard Hebrew Bible workshop.

Finally, Karel van der Toorn (Professor of Religion and Society and former President of the University of Amsterdam) gave a stimulating lecture, "Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible."

All of these lectures presented rich opportunities for discussion and debate, and all contributed to the ongoing conversation this fall about the textualization of religion, scribal hermeneutics, and the Hebrew Bible.

Events

Annual Greeley Lecture: Eboo Patel



Eboo Patel delivers the Greeley Lecture

On October 25, the Center hosted Eboo Patel, founder and president of Interfaith Youth Core, as he delivered this year's Dana McLean Greeley Lecture for Peace and Social Justice. His lecture, titled "New Rooms in the House of Religious Pluralism: Evangelicals and the Interfaith Movement," detailed some of the common language and behaviors present in the interfaith community, and explained why many evangelicals

have historically felt unwelcome in that community. Patel cited three values of the interfaith community that often exclude evangelicals and other conservatives: liberal theology, progressive politics, and emphasis on spiritual enrichment. Though Patel admitted to sharing these values, he argued against considering them a litmus test for anyone interested in participating in the interfaith conversation; instead, the interfaith community should direct its efforts toward building relationships among religiously diverse people who likewise have diverse political, theological, and spiritual views. If the interfaith community can be open to this instead of barring entry to people who do not ascribe to the agreed-upon value

set, Patel believes the community can be even more effective at solving universally important issues. Eboo Patel's lecture was a special opportunity to hear from a great leader in the interfaith community and to consider how those of different religious backgrounds and convictions can make room for each other in the interfaith community in order to advance universal issues of social justice.



Eboo Patel's latest book

Faculty Book Discussions



David Brakke, Nicholas Watson, and Charles Stang

On October 2, the Center hosted a discussion of Charles Stang's *Apophysis and Pseudonymity in Dionysius the Areopagite: 'No Longer I'* (Oxford University Press). The discussants were David Brakke (Joe R. Engle Chair in the History of Christianity and Professor of History at Ohio State University) and Nicholas Watson (Professor of English at Harvard University). Stang's book is a subtle reading of the works of (Pseudo-)Dionysius and of the tradition of pseudonymity – and therefore also of true identity – in early Christianity. Matters scriptural and philosophical, literary and mystical, were in play throughout Stang's review of how he came to write the book, and in the responses by Brakke and Watson. Even those who had not read the book, or

much of the Dionysian corpus, came away with a deeper appreciation of the issues of identity and experience in scholarship and in the related religious and intellectual traditions.

On October 30, we discussed the commentaries of Harvey Cox and Stephanie Paulsell, respectively, on the Book of Lamentations and the Song of Songs, published together as *Lamentations and the Song of Songs* (Westminster John Knox Press). Quickly dispelled were any hesitations we had that the two biblical texts are so very different as to make improbable a common conversation around two unrelated commentaries, written in different styles. In talking about their projects, Paulsell and Cox showed their shared passion for the power

of scripture and the deep human sentiments of love and sorrow. The discussants, Elissa Johnk, senior pastor at the Old Meeting House in Vermont, and Greg Mobley, Professor of Christian Bible at Andover Newton Theological School, marvelously opened the commentaries to the audience, asking their own profound questions about how such texts illumines the hidden and dark places of our own experience. The conversation, concluded only because it was time to stop, allowed us to weave together scholarship, the study of scripture, the relations of scholars to diverse audiences and communities, and to reflect on how Harvard Divinity School and the Center play their part in a world marked by darkness and light, love and lamentation.



Harvey Cox, Stephanie Paulsell, Greg Mobley, and Elissa Johnk



Comparative Theology Lecture: Amy-Jill Levine

On October 17, Amy-Jill Levine, Professor of New Testament and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt Divinity School and editor of the recently released Jewish Annotated New Testament, delivered the CSWR's annual Comparative Theology Lecture. Levine examined four verses from Mark (12:41–44) that detail the story of a poor widow's donation to the Jerusalem Temple. Levine teased out the different ways academics interpret the story and highlighted how these different interpretations indicate various views toward Judaism and its role in early Christianity. She outlined ways that recent readings

have been problematic in their anti-Jewish implications. Rather than rely on two standard readings of the widow's story – seeing the widow as a Christ-like moral exemplar or instead as a victim exploited by temple leadership – Levine carved out her own interpretation, being sure to emphasize that the New Testament is, in fact, a Jewish text. As such, the story of the widow should be read through a Jewish lens, with an understanding of the Jewish values of the time. Levine was a delightful lecturer, interspersing lighthearted jokes with fascinating insights. Jon Levenson, Albert A. List Professor of Jewish Studies

at HDS, offered a thoughtful response to Levine's lecture.

After the lecture, Levine was joined by a small group of Harvard Divinity School professors and graduate students for an intimate dinner, and she was also kind enough to meet with doctoral students in biblical studies for breakfast the following day.



Amy-Jill Levine



Featured CSWR Junior Fellow Project: Axel Takács

This year's Junior Fellows have made significant contributions to Center life. Konchok Tsering's project, "Studying Religions in the Minority," and Leslie Hubbard's "Beyond Words: Intersections of Meditation, Visual Art, and Sacred Music and Dance Across Religious and Cultural Boundaries" have brought a rich diversity of programming to the Center and have highlighted questions and traditions that would otherwise be unrepresented in our programming. Second-time Junior Fellow Axel Takács's project, "Comparative Theology: Lectures and Conversations," is featured here.

This year, Axel is continuing his series of lectures and other events concerning the field of comparative theology, a field that sets itself apart from comparative religion on the one side and Christian theology on the other side. The Center has hosted three lectures this

semester. Joseph Lumbard of Brandeis University inaugurated the series this year with "Covenant and Covenants in the Qu'ran: The Inherent Pluralism of Islam's Sacred Scripture." His lecture created an engaging conversation on the multilevel understanding of covenants found in the Qu'ran, and how the more inclusive understanding of the tradition is not only found in its mystical interpretations, but also at the very core of Islam's sacred text. Marcel Saß, a visiting scholar from Germany, spoke on Foucault's theory of discourse as it relates to interreligious education. Jonathan Edelmann ended the fall semester's series with the lecture "By Grace Alone: Hindu Views of Divine Love and Salvation," which was a fascinating example of Hindu theology accessible to scholars of theology and comparative theology alike.

Axel is planning four lectures for the spring as part of the comparative theology series. On February 22, Kristin Bloomer, Visiting Assistant Professor of Women's Studies and South Asian Religions at Harvard, will give a lecture on her anthropological work in India as it relates to comparative theology, putting forth ethnography as a method for comparative theology, comparative religion, and Hindu-Christian studies. Also in February, Ulrich Winkler, a visiting scholar from Germany, will share his current research on the state of comparative theology in the European academy. On March 8, Luis Girón Negrón, Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard, will give a lecture about the use of the Islamic mystical trope (found in specifically Persian poetry) of the moth flying into the flame as encountered in Medieval European poetry. Finally, on April 12, Michelle Voss-Roberts of Wake Forest will lecture.

Spring 2013 Events

*All events will be held in the CSWR Common Room unless otherwise noted.
As event dates approach, please check our website for the most up-to-date information.*

Tuesday February 5 @ 5 pm , HDS Sperry Room: Book Event: <i>My Neighbor's Faith</i> with presentations by Professors Ali Asani, Frank Clooney, Diana Eck, Jennifer Peace, and Rabbi Or Rose
Friday February 8 @ 4:30 pm , Sever Hall, Rm. 113: "Remembering Swami Vivekananda at 150: Interfaith Then and Now"
Friday February 22 @ 4 pm : Comparative Theology Lecture by Kristin Bloomer
Tuesday February 26 @ 4:15 pm : "A Buddhist Tradition on the Edge: The Migration and Marginalization of the Jonangpa in Tibet" by Michael Sheehy
Thursday February 28 @ 12 pm : "Women and Peace Building in Bosnia and Herzegovina" by Zilka Siljak
Friday March 8 @ 4 pm : Comparative Theology Lecture by Luis Girón Negrón
Wednesday March 13 @ 5:15 pm : Intellectual Worlds of Meditation Lecture by Brother Geoffrey Tristram
Wednesday March 27 @ 5:15 pm : Book Event: <i>The Arts of Contemplative Care: Pioneering Voices in Buddhist Chaplaincy and Pastoral Work</i> by Cheryl Giles
Thursday April 4 @ 5:15 pm : "To Forgive Is Human: Jewish Reflections on the Meaning and Practice of Forgiveness" by Louis Newman
Monday April 8 @ 5:15 : Annual Stendahl Conference: "Conversations Across Religious Boundaries"
Friday April 12 @ 4 pm : Comparative Theology Lecture by Michelle Voss-Roberts
Monday, April 15 @ 4 pm : "Song of Songs: Translation, Reception, Reconfiguration" with presentations by Professors Cheryl Exum, Michael Fishbane, Paul Griffiths, and Stephanie Paulsell

Introducing Corey O'Brien

The Center is delighted to welcome its new associate director, Corey O'Brien, in January 2013. Corey graduated from Harvard Divinity School in 2005 and holds graduate degrees in musicology and conducting from the New England Conservatory in Boston. She has served as associate minister at North Prospect Union UCC in Medford, Massachusetts, since 2007. Corey was a member of an international task force for medical ethics in pastoral care and a contributing author to *Medical Ethics in Health Care Chaplaincy*. She has also worked as a music teacher and professional conductor in the Boston area since 1976, and worked for many years as a senior financial consultant in training and management at New England Financial.

Save the Date!

*Join us as we welcome Louis Newman of Carleton College to deliver this year's Albert and Vera List Fund for Jewish Studies on **Thursday April 4 @ 5:15 pm** at the CSWR.*

"To Forgive Is Human: Jewish Reflections on the Meaning and Practice of Forgiveness"

Forgiveness is one of life's most persistent and perplexing moral questions. What is the appropriate ethical response to someone who treats us unethically? Focusing on interpersonal relationships, this talk will explore the moral problems of offering forgiveness – and also of failing to offer it – from the perspective of classical and contemporary Jewish thinkers.

Give to CSWR

We've now made it easier to support the Center, with the "Give to the CSWR" button on our home page. We welcome donations of any amount to support our short-term and long-term projects and goals, in renewal of our building, support of our residential community, and more ambitious programming.

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