



CSWR Newsletter § May 2011

In this Issue:

- [Our Building](#)
- [Programming](#)
- [Faculty and Student Grants](#)
- [The Residential Community](#)
- [2011-12: A preview](#)
- [Comings and goings](#)
- [Staff Spotlight](#)
- [Facebook; keeping in touch](#)



In April Professor Clooney visited the Zen Master Subul Sunim at the Anguk Zen Center in Seoul. Subul Sunim is a leading teacher of Zen in Korea, and friend of CSWR.

Dear Friends of CSWR,

As the academic year ends and spring finally seems here to stay in New England, it is time for another update on the life and activities of the Center.

Francis X. Clooney, S.J.

Our building

First, under Charles Anderson's able stewardship, our building is looking better than ever. Our modest renovation of the Director's Conference Room (in front, where the Director's apartment had been many years ago) is now complete. We have hung some fine reproductions of 20th century art (including Joan Miro and Pablo Picasso, in harmony with the interests of the original architect, Josep Sert) and, at either end of the room, photos from the early history of the Center, most notably two pictures featuring Wilfred Cantwell Smith, one with Muriel, and the other with John Carman, George Rupp, George Hartshorne Williams and V. L. Mehta. The photos will change now and then, so if you have rare photos you think we should display, let us know.

As mentioned in the previous newsletter, the hallway leading to the Common Room is also a more attractive space now, enhanced by a lovely Hebrew calligraphic version of the opening of the Song of Songs, a Muslim prayer rug along with a tasbih (prayer beads) and prayer tile donated by Mr. Shiraz

Hajiani (MTS '05) and Dr. Nimira Samji. Of particular note is the newly installed Ethiopian Icon of the Theotokos, Mary Mother of God, painted specially for us by Christopher Gosey. When he came to give us the icon on February 26, a Deacon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was present to explain the icon and chant some verses to sanctify the occasion.



The icon of Theotokos, painted by Christopher Gosey.

On a more practical level, thanks to Joe Cook's good work, we have cleared our basement and the 2nd floor research bay of many boxes of files going back to Lawrence Sullivan's term as Center Director. Most of these files are now safely with the University Archives for future



CSWR Newsletter § May 2011

study by scholars. Clearing the space also means that we can turn it into an office. Our newest HDS colleague, Ahmed Ragab — physician, historian, scholar of the medieval and modern Middle East, and now the Richard T. Watson Assistant Professor of Science and Religion — will have his office with us and be a great addition to the Center.



Ahmed Ragab, the Richard T. Watson Assistant Professor of Science and Religion at HDS.

Programming

What is becoming the “ordinary” life of the Center is flourishing, particularly with respect to conversations around meals. The monthly faculty lunches continue as ever, now complemented by MTS/MDiv lunches and HDS Staff lunches. Academic Casual, the monthly gathering of doctoral

students in all areas of religion, continues to flourish as an entirely student-guided initiative. The two faculty colloquia, “Comparative Studies” and “The In/visible God/s,” have continued meeting, and these or other colloquia will pick up again in the fall.

As for lectures, our [events page](#) indicates how busy we have been this semester. Several events merit special mention. In February, the 3rd annual Comparative Theology lecture, [“The Spirit of Contradiction in Buddhism and Christianity: Comparative Reflections on the Shaping of Religious Doctrine.”](#) was given by Hugh Nicholson



Professor Hugh Nicholson delivers the third annual Comparative Theology lecture at CSWR.

(Loyola University, Chicago), opening a wonderful conversation on creed, dialogue, and apologetics across religious

boundaries. It was particularly encouraging to see great interest in this lecture, and so too in the student-initiated Society for Comparative Theology that meets regularly at the Center.

I also recommend that you watch online this year’s [Annual Greeley Lecture for Peace and Social Justice](#), made possible by the Dana McLean Greeley Lecture for Peace and Social Justice Endowment Fund, a gift of The Dana McLean Greeley Foundation for Peace and Justice. This year’s lecture, “Beyond Distinction, Beyond Difference: Transforming Lives in Delhi’s Slum Communities,” was delivered on April 13 by Dr. Kiran Martin, founding director of *Asha*, which works for urban health and development and women’s empowerment and education in fifty slum colonies of Delhi, India.

Two other lectures, both given on April 26, inaugurated new series. Professor Nicolas Standert (Professor of Chinese Studies at Leuven and visiting Erasmus Professor at Harvard this semester) lectured on “Funeral Rites and Religious Identity: The Case of Christians in Seventeenth-century China.” This



CSWR Newsletter § May 2011

was the first in a series on “Religious Identity in (East) Asia,” which we will be cosponsoring with the Asia Center and the Korea Institute. Professor James Robson (EALC) lectured on “Born-Again Zen Again: Reflections on Different Styles of Chan/Zen Meditation,” the first of our occasional series on “Worlds of Meditation,” exploring the intellectual contexts in which various traditions propose practices of meditation,



CSWR resident Professor Max Deeg lectures in the Common Room.

prayer, contemplation. This series complements our Meditation Room, balancing the informal and organized sessions of meditation occurring there with more academic reflection on what those practices presume and promote.

Faculty and Student Grants

We have also been fortunate to share our resources with faculty and students. Due once again to

the generosity of the Greeley Foundation, we have been able to fund (in all or in part) two interfaith international projects for the summer, one in the UK and one in India, undertaken respectively by two of our MDiv students, Sierra Fleenor and Emily Clawson.

We are also happy to have been able to continue using part of our limited funding to offer grants to faculty for their research projects, with Aisha Beliso de Jesus, Matthew Boulton, Michael Jackson, Jacob Olupona, and Jane Smith receiving grants. See [elsewhere](#) in this newsletter the announcement of these grants.

And, for the first time in many years, we have awarded one undergraduate award for summer senior thesis-related research. The condition was simply this: “Eligible to apply are undergraduate religion concentrators in their junior year, whose proposed senior thesis has as its key focus an interreligious, cross-cultural, or comparative theme. The research may be ethnographic or archival.” This year’s winner, Aneliese Palmer (’12), will be doing very interesting work on comparative monasticism this summer, in

Ireland and India. We would like to be able to continue [offering this award](#), to help bright undergraduate religion concentrators, and likewise to build stronger connections to the Committee on the Study of Religion and FAS.

The Residential Community

The residential community has had a good year, continuing the series of very interesting Wednesday night Cafés, plus “director’s dinners” on Sunday evenings once a month, and occasional Saturday morning brunches. I am delighted that a number of residents will be staying on for next year. I know I speak also for Alicia Belair, Administrative and Residential Coordinator, and the whole staff, in saying that we will miss this year’s community, particularly the many who are moving on, having finished their studies or research leave, or opting for other housing in the area.

CSWR Proctor Rory Lindsay summarizes: “The 2010-2011 academic year was filled with memorable resident get-togethers. These ranged from academic gatherings such as the World Religions Cafés, where



CSWR Newsletter § May 2011



CSWR Residents relax at Professor Clooney's Cambridge home.

residents shared their research and facilitated group discussions, to sharing meals in the Common Room during Professor Frank Clooney's monthly Director's Dinners. Professor Dudley Rose also hosted his annual beer tasting event, and Professor Clooney hosted two end-of-term dinners at his nearby home. These and other meetings, all organized by our Residential Coordinator, Alicia Belair, greatly enriched resident life, as did the simple fact of living in a common space. Whether on the way to class or grabbing a coffee from the new coffee machine in the Fellows Study, one could count on running into fellow residents on a daily basis. This dynamic fostered friendship, dialogue, and even spontaneous gatherings. Recently, during an impromptu sendoff for two residents returning home to

Japan, one resident received a text message that Osama bin Laden had just been killed. We turned on the Common Room's projection television to collectively witness President Barack Obama deliver the news live, and we immediately began discussing the role of religion in his rhetoric, as well as the questions the event posed for religious studies scholars. Moments like these highlighted the value of the Center, and the unique opportunities that choosing to live here can bring.”

In a new program, for the first time we are offering “Junior Fellowships,” entailing reduced rent, to residents who have proposed excellent programming events — study groups, lectures, etc. — in line with the Center’s Mission Statement. Their fresh insights and energies will be a great boon to the work of the Center, and our way also of enhancing the mission of the residential community.

This reminds me to say that it is still one of our goals — see the [Giving](#) section of our website — to subsidize the housing, to ensure a diverse and energetic community every year. (Housing is much cheaper in Somerville!)

Several students each year already benefit from the Carman Fund, named in honor of John and Ineke Carman, and established at the time of John’s retirement. If you would like to consider sponsoring a resident each year, [please be in touch](#).



The CSWR Zen Garden.

Looking ahead: a preview of 2011-12 events

September 1: Faculty Panel for Orientation Week: *Study: How Different Religions Understand the Work We Do*

September 16, 17: *A Hindu-Christian Theological Conversation*. This event, in part open to the public, will be the first of several interreligious theological conversations the Center intends to sponsor.



CSWR Newsletter § May 2011

September 26: *Islam in Nigeria:* A panel discussion in preparation for the October 3 and 4 visit to Harvard by the Sultan of Sokoto, Nigeria.

October 19: *Comparative Theology in the Vocative Mode: Moving Away from Ontology in John D. Caputo and Vasubandhu.* Given by Kristin Beise Kiblinger (Winthrop University), this is the CSWR Annual Comparative Theology Lecture for 2011-12.

November 7: *Class, Gender, and Culture: Complex Issues of Religious Identity in Contemporary Korea.* A joint lecture by Judith Berling, (Graduate Theological Union) and Sophia Park (Holy Names University).



CSWR hosted a picnic for HDS staff, faculty and students.

Comings and goings

Former Director Don Swearer and Nancy Swearer finished their much-deserved sabbatical in

Chiangmai, Thailand, and passed through the Center in mid-April, to pick up some stored items before moving on to their new home in California.

I am also happy that [Professor Diane Moore](#), a longtime HDS faculty member and Director of the Program in Religious Studies and Education (which is currently suspended), will be joining the Center as a Senior Fellow next year. Thanks to a generous donation from former CSWR resident and longtime Center friend Bruce McEver (MTS '11), Professor Moore will be initiating a new program, the Religious Literacy Project, which continues and enhances her work with teachers of religion in the schools. More on this program in a future newsletter, but for now suffice it to say that we are delighted both to have Diane with us, and in this way also to bring to the fore another dimension of the Center's core mission.

And, sad to say, Rebecca Kline Esterson is also moving on, after nine years as our Coordinator of Educational Programming (which followed upon her MTS studies at HDS.) See our "[Staff Spotlight](#)" section of this newsletter for more on Rebecca's

move to doctoral studies. Here we can only say how much she will be missed! We are also actively engaged at the moment in our search for her successor in this important position.

Thanks to Center affiliate Joseph Roccasalvo, for sending us a copy of his latest book, *As It Were: Life at a Slight Angle to the Universe: A Memoir.* (© Joseph Roccasalvo; 2010. Available from Xlibris.) We would be happy to add a copy of your new book to the library, if you can spare us a copy.

Faculty Grants

CSWR awarded five grants this year to support faculty in their ongoing research. Aisha Beliso de Jesus' research titled "Religious Videoscapes: Tourism, Media and the Production of Transnational Santeria" examines religious discursive landscapes in Cuba. The grant supports the Ford Foundation Award which de Jesus received this year. Matthew Boulton's proposal for an interdisciplinary and interreligious conference on religious aesthetics will be supported both by the grant as well as Center programming



CSWR Newsletter § May 2011

support since the proposal fits with overall CSWR goals and aims. Jacob Olupona will travel to Israel, Europe and parts of the US to investigate Nigerian Evangelicalism and the regional, global and political role played by Nigerian evangelicals. Jane Smith was awarded a grant to continue work with her longstanding colleague Yvonne Haddad (Georgetown University) on a project entitled “The Americanization of Islam.” Finally, Michael Jackson’s proposal to complete a book project begun with an earlier CSWR grant was approved. All five faculty members will also present their research in public fora at the end of the 2011-2012 academic year.

Staff Spotlight

Rebecca Kline Esterson began working at the CSWR the fall of 2002 after completing her MTS at Harvard Divinity School with a focus in World Religions. She will leave the CSWR this July after almost nine years of coordinating events at the Center; having worked for four different directors; and having acquired a husband and two children during this time. Rebecca will begin a PhD program at Boston



Rebecca Esterson, Coordinator of Educational Programming

University’s Division of Religious and Theological Studies, with a focus on Christian and Jewish biblical commentaries of early modernity. Her acceptance to Boston University came with a Dean’s Fellowship, and upon completion of her doctorate she will join the faculty of her church’s seminary, the Swedenborgian House of Studies, which is located at the Pacific School of Religion at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA. Having coordinated presentations at the CSWR all these years, it is fitting that Rebecca had a chance to give a presentation herself this May as part of the Center’s new series by and for HDS staff members. She led a conversation and text study on interfaith marriage titled

“Chaos and Order: On Living at the Threshold, With Another Person.” Rebecca writes of her time at here: “As a student, HDS opened me to the wonderful, complicated, world of religious studies, and as a staff member I gained perspective and confidence that will further serve my academic career in innumerable ways. This is a community of thinkers and doers I am proud to have been so fundamentally shaped by.”

§

Updating Our Mailing List — and Facebook!

The Center is now on Facebook! Please become a fan by visiting and clicking Like [on our page](#). Our Facebook page will be a great resource to keep in touch with the Center, as well as former residents and students. All event information will be available on the Facebook page. Support the Center by becoming a Fan! If you do not have a Facebook account, you can learn more at www.facebook.com.

And finally, a reminder that we are shifting to an all-electronic newsletter, so please make sure we have your updated [email address](#).