



## CSWR Newsletter § January 2011

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Francis X. Clooney

January 1, 2011 marked six months since I became Director of the Center and January is fortunately a quiet month, as we all recover from the holidays but also from a very busy semester and start-up period for me, the staff of the Center, and all our friends around HDS and Religion.

I took the opportunity on October 20<sup>th</sup> to give an [inaugural lecture](#) in the Sperry Room, to spell out **my vision for the Center**, such as will be operative during the four years of my term. I am grateful also to Susan Abraham, Assistant Professor of Ministry Studies and Managing Director of the Center, for her response. Both are available in now in the form of a small booklet, and may also be found as a file at our website. The original video version is also available at the website. I welcome your ideas on our developing vision of the Center.

*Francis X. Clooney, S. J.*



*Susan Abraham, CSWR Managing Director, speaking at the inaugural lecture. Her research and teaching centers on religion and politics, political theory and theology, feminist theory and theology, and Christianity between colonialism and postcolonialism.*

Although I envisioned 2010-11 to be a contemplative and reflective year, we have been quite busy at the Center. **Among our activities:** as in past years, faculty breakfasts and lunches to discuss current research and topical issues; Academic Casual, a regular gathering of doctoral students across the disciplines represented in the ThD and PhD programs; lunch discussions for MTS and MDiv students; a new series of discussions of faculty books as they appear. The first dealt with the new book by our Dean, Bill Graham, *Islamic and Comparative Religious Studies*. In February, we will have a discussion of Jonathan Schofer's *Confronting Vulnerability: The Body and the Divine in Rabbinic Ethics*, and later in the spring we hope to have a similar discussion of Leigh Schmidt's *Heaven's Bride: The Unprintable Life of Ida C. Craddock, American Mystic, Scholar, Sexologist, Martyr, and Madwoman*.

For a complete list of spring 2011 events, click [here](#).

# Center for the Study of World Religions

Harvard Divinity School



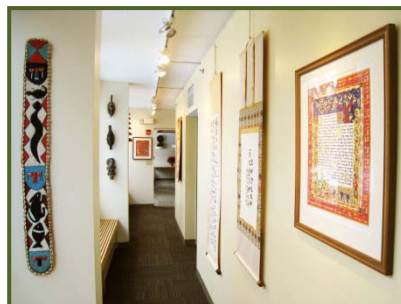
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*CSWR courtyard in snow*

**The Center building** has been well maintained over the years and is in excellent condition, but this fall was an opportunity to freshen it up: new carpets in the hallways and Common Room, repainting of the Common Room and plans for new artwork on the walls in that room. We have also **enhanced our art collection**, with a Muslim Prayer Rug, some icons, and a lovely piece of calligraphy of the opening verses of the Song of Songs in Hebrew. The Madonna that originally graced the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Meditation Room is now aptly at home in the Common Room. We have also been organizing Center files, and the university Archives have received as many as sixty of our boxes for proper long-term storage in a way that remains accessible to

scholars. I am very grateful to our staff for making all these activities come off so smoothly.



*CSWR gallery*

I am particularly happy to mention too the opening of our **Meditation Room** (on the front left end of the building), where in recent decades the Directors have had their office. We are still learning how to make best use of the space at our busy university and school, but I think it has already done us good, making a statement about ourselves and our values.



*CSWR Meditation Room*

I'd like also to remind you that a new and distinctive feature of our small library is the Fellows Shelf, reserved for **books by former residents and fellows of the Center**. So, if you have a spare copy of your latest book when it comes out – particularly but not only if you worked on it while at the Center - please send us a copy - autographed if you will!



*New artwork hanging in the CSWR gallery, by Hebrew calligrapher Josh Baum, depicting the Song of Songs.*

You know from our last newsletter that the large public celebration of the **Center's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary** took place in the spring, and that surely was a grand event. But the actual 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Center

# Center for the Study of World Religions

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occurred on November 21<sup>st</sup>. On that evening, a Sunday, many of the residents and I marked the occasion by listening to part of Dr. Radhakrishnan's 1960 address, and then celebrated with some champagne and cake. On November 23<sup>rd</sup>, we hosted a formal Tea to mark the occasion, and "old-timers" with long Center connections (including Deans William Graham and Jane Smith, former Director John Carman, and Professors David Eckel and Diana Eck) came by to celebrate with us.



*CSWR directors past and present. From left: Francis X. Clooney (beginning 2010), Lawrence Sullivan (1990-2003), John Carman (1973-89), and Donald Swearer (2004-10).*

Lastly, while from its inception the Center has been generously endowed, our resources today are limited, and there are some good initiatives currently beyond our reach. I wish then to draw your attention to the

new **Giving Section of our website:**

<<http://www.hds.harvard.edu/cswr/giving/index.html>>

We will be grateful for your generosity, if possible, in support of the kinds of projects mentioned at our website. Please be in touch if you have questions or ideas in this regard too.



*CSWR Residents 2010-2011*

**And one final request: we are currently using the regular mail for our newsletters, etc., but will be increasingly shifting over to email for most notices and updates. So please send us your current email address, if you are not already receiving our e-announcements.**

Please send your email address to: [cswr@hds.harvard.edu](mailto:cswr@hds.harvard.edu)



### Staff Spotlight



Joe Cook, CSWR staff assistant

Joe has been at the CSWR front desk since April 2008, and has held a variety of administrative positions at Harvard since 1990. He grew up in Princeton NJ; went to Middlebury College; and is the proud father of two boys, 14 and 10. Joe has taught step aerobics at various local gyms, and he plays tennis and squash regularly, in an effort to counterbalance his penchant for creating and eating baked goods.



*CSWR residents performing at the Meditation Room dedication*



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An excerpt from Frank Clooney's inaugural lecture, speaking to his interpretation of the [CSWR mission statement](#). The video of the lecture itself is on line at this link [http://www.hds.harvard.edu/news/events\\_online/clooney.html](http://www.hds.harvard.edu/news/events_online/clooney.html)

"I propose six values and consequent themes for research, such as I wish to cultivate and am willing to argue for as we go forward. These are my opening contribution to what I expect to be our lively debate about the purpose and work of the Center in these next years. I will go through them very briefly."

*"Mindfulness of Tradition:* I am interested in highlighting the importance of tradition and traditions in our post-modern age. We need better to understand the power of religious traditions as spiritual and intellectual realities that have made and do still make claims on what we say about religions and how we study them. Here too, various questions arise: What does it mean to belong to a tradition? How, on what levels, should scholars of religions care about traditions? "

*"The Text — and Beyond the Text:* I am as you now know committed to the slow and close reading of particular texts, and I believe that this patient study is a portal into the realities of which such texts speak, and into seeing differently our own world today. Yet we need also to be mindful of how reading is contested and purified by the fact of other ways of learning — ethnographic studies, and also visual and oral media, the practice of rituals and meditation, and the study consequent upon practices: how do we cultivate this wider, richer, more complex intellectual and spiritual learning, without losing the patience actually to take the time to read classic texts? "

*"The Arts of Translation:* Translation can be conceived of as a narrow linguistic practice or a necessary feature of what we do all the time, as we communicate across the borders of our private and professional spaces. It is all about words, and about the meaningfulness of our action in the world. "Translation" indicates an art and also an array of techniques, and stands as a deeply human, acutely intellectual, and profoundly religious activity manifest all the way back to the earliest traces of our human history. So let us reflect together on how we have translated and should translate, and how this is a feature of all our intellectual practices, and central to our study of religions."

*"Renewing Comparative Studies:* Comparison has a long history at the Center, and each of the preceding Directors in his own way insured that the Center would contribute to the actual practice of comparison, and to our understanding of its intentional and implicit dynamics. My own work testifies to my commitment to comparison as a theological practice, but I am by no means the only comparativist in our midst. The Center will do well to recommit itself to the importance of comparative study and reflection on its meanings and foster conversations on comparison across our university community. "

*"Scholarship in a World of Suffering:* Like you, I also care about the responsibilities of the professor, the intellectual, in a world of suffering. What is the justification for being a scholar, when people are starving, homeless, deprived of basic human rights? Such questions ought to disturb our theology and our study of religions. We know that there is enormous suffering all around us. While our proximate duty may be to do well the things we are paid to do here at the Divinity School, we must keep finding ways to be vulnerable to the world of suffering around us, letting it usefully change how we think and teach and write. What is the responsibility of the Harvard Professor as an individual person? What is the public role of this Center? "

*"The Rediscovery of Theology:* Finally, on the ground prepared by the preceding points, as Director I want also to make the case that the retrieval of theology, understood constructively and interreligiously (for the category is useful in numerous religious contexts), is a key to the future of Harvard's thinking on religions. Theology — with its deeper commitments, with its concern for truth, sensitivity to the overflow from theory to practice, and even by its fidelity to boundaries that communities of faith care about — is absolutely necessary, even at Harvard, if we seek some comprehension of religious knowledge as a whole, and thus if the Divinity School and the Study of Religion are to flourish. The Center is not a theological think-tank, and mine is only one voice in the conversation, but I find it important to make clear that in my view studying religions requires a generously conceived theological context. "