From the Center

Ursula Goodenough to give 2009 Cookson Lecture

Ursula Goodenough, Ph.D., an internationally recognized cell biologist and religious naturalist, will present the Cookson Religious Freedom Lecture at Virginia Wesleyan College on Wednesday, November 18, 2009, at 7:30 p.m., in the Boyd Dining Center. Her talk is entitled “The Humpty Dumpty Project: Putting Evolution and Religion Together Again.”

Goodenough is Professor of Biology at Washington University in St. Louis, where she also co-teaches a course on The Epic of Evolution. She is author of three editions of the widely used textbook Genetics, but is perhaps best known for her best-selling book on the relationship of science and religion, The Sacred Depths of Nature. For the past twenty years, she has served on the governing council of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science (IRAS), including four years as president. Her many professional and public service roles include review panels for the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation, presidency of the American Society for Cell Biology, the Mind and Life Institute seminar on Western science for His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and editorial boards for several professional journals, including Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science.

Science & Spirit magazine describes Goodenough as “a warm, brilliant and embracing woman, [whose] contradictions make up a harmonious whole – sort of like nature itself,” and calls her book The Sacred Depths of Nature “a poetic and accessible bestseller.”

The Cookson Religious Freedom Lecture series is named for the Center’s founding director, Dr. Catharine Cookson. Previous speakers include Dr. Martin Marty (2006) and Dr. Diana Eck (2008).

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Reflections from the Director

Marriage and Religious Freedom

Guest Columnist: K. Hollyn Hollman

The increasingly frequent and intense claims linking gay rights and religious liberty require attention. Charges that one’s adversaries violate religious freedom or the separation of church and state do little to advance the debate over marriage rights. Instead, they often cause confusion about the constitutional protection of religious freedom in America.

Promoting religious liberty for all means protecting the rights of individuals and faith communities to believe and practice their religion as they see fit and keeping the government from advancing or inhibiting religion. It is a fundamental value that deserves and enjoys broad support.

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The University of Virginia Press will publish a book based on the Center’s fall 2007 symposium exploring the emergence of religious freedom in colonial Virginia. The volume, to be titled From Jamestown to Jefferson: The Evolution of Religious Freedom in Virginia, will be edited by Center Director Dr. Paul Rasor and Dr. Rich Bond, Assistant Professor of History at Virginia Wesleyan. It will contain chapters by each of the six symposium presenters, all of whom are leading scholars in the field.

The book examines the deep background of Jefferson’s famous Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. It expands existing scholarship on the role and diversity of religious practices in early Virginia, showing how the changing political, social and religious conditions of the colonial period gradually created the space within which the Statute could emerge. It also discusses the many ways in which the Virginia experience continues to influence our understanding of religious freedom today.

Enthusiasm for the book has been high. One reviewer commented that this volume “has the potential to become the best synthesis yet written” on the subject, noting that “for the first time, essays on the religious history of Virginia will appear side by side with chapters by leading church-state scholars.” Dean Timothy O’Rourke called the book’s publication “truly splendid” news, emphasizing “the model it establishes for Center programs” and congratulating the Center “on an outstanding achievement, intellectual and programmatic.” The book is scheduled to appear in the spring of 2011.
same-sex marriage claim that the separation of church and state should preclude the government from recognizing only traditional marriage. They reject laws defining marriage as between a man and a woman because they see them as based on religious teachings that they reject. But, just because a law – like the prohibition on theft – happens to conform to the religious opinions of the majority does not mean that it violates the Establishment Clause.

Instead of making such broad and misleading claims, advocates for religious liberty on all sides of the marriage debate would be better served by trying to specify the interests at issue, the conflicts between competing rights, and possible ways of minimizing harm. Where and how are gay rights and religious liberty rights likely to clash?

First, there are concerns about the autonomy of houses of worship. Predictions about forced marriages and jailed clergy are misguided. The First Amendment ensures that faith traditions will continue to make their own decisions about the marriages they will perform regardless of the legal status of same-sex couples. Already, the government approves many marriages that churches do not, and churches impose requirements on marriage that the law does not. Likewise, freedom of speech ensures that pastors from across the theological spectrum will continue to speak freely in the pulpit on the basis of religious teachings, not legal prohibitions.

Second, and more difficult, there are concerns about the liberty of other institutions – such as schools and hospitals – organized by religious entities that oppose same-sex marriage. There have long been conflicts between legal protections based on sexual orientation and those based on religion, particularly in the employment for religion to thrive, but it is being challenged in many different ways.

“Among some Muslims, there is a disturbing tendency to measure one’s own faith by the rejection of another’s. The richness of religious diversity must be upheld – whether it is for Maronites in Lebanon or the Copts in Egypt. And fault lines must be closed among Muslims as well, as the divisions between Sunni and Shia have led to tragic violence, particularly in Iraq.

“Freedom of religion is central to the ability of peoples to live together. We must always examine the ways in which we protect it. For instance, in the United States, rules on charitable giving have made it harder for Muslims to fulfill their religious obligation. That is why I am committed to working with American Muslims to ensure that they can fulfill zakat.

“Likewise, it is important for Western countries to avoid impeding Muslim citizens from practicing religion as they see fit – for instance, by dictating what clothes a Muslim woman should wear. We cannot disguise hostility towards any religion behind the pretense of liberalism.

“Indeed, faith should bring us together. That is why we are forging service projects in America that bring together Christians, Muslims, and Jews. That is why we welcome efforts like Saudi Arabian King Abdullah’s Interfaith dialogue and Turkey’s leadership in the Alliance of Civilizations. Around the world, we can turn dialogue into Interfaith service, so bridges between peoples lead to action – whether it is combating malaria in Africa, or providing relief after a natural disaster.”

The full text of President Obama’s speech can be found at http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-at-Cairo-University-6-04-09/.
The posting of religious monuments on public grounds continues to generate controversy and litigation, as the following stories from Oklahoma illustrate.

**10th Circuit Holds Ten Commandments Monument Violates Establishment Clause**

On June 9, 2009, in *Green v. Haskell County Board of Commissioners*, the U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals held that a display of a Ten Commandments monument on the lawn of the county courthouse in Stigler, Oklahoma, violated the Establishment Clause. It concluded that the particular history of this monument—including the religious motivation of its backers—meant that a reasonable observer would view the Monument as having the impermissible primary effect of endorsing religion.

*An Associated Press story adds the following details:* “The privately funded stone monument was erected in 2004. It was proposed by a construction worker who is also a part-time minister. The court noted that commissioners knew of the monument’s religious nature when they approved of it and that they supported and defended its installation. The court also noted that at least two of the three commissioners were present at the monument’s unveiling on Nov. 7, 2004. One commissioner said after it was installed: ‘That’s what we’re trying to live by, that right there. ... The good Lord died for me.’ The court said that a reasonable observer would conclude the monument and the commissioners’ actions “reflect a government endorsement of religion.”

**Oklahoma Governor Signs TEN COMMANDMENTS Bill**

*The Tulsa World* reported on May 19, 2009, that Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry signed House Bill 1330 that authorizes placement of a Ten Commandments monument on the State Capitol grounds. The new law may well invite litigation. Anticipating that, the drafters specified that the Oklahoma monument—which will be paid for by private funds—should have the same text as the monument on the Texas State Capitol grounds that was upheld against an Establishment Clause attack in a 2005 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Van Orden v. Perry*, and that it was to be placed where there are numerous monuments.

*Comment: In the Van Orden case, it was not the specific text that saved the monument; it was the fact it had been erected 40 years ago, that it was situated among 17 other monuments and 21 historical markers, and that it had the basically secular purpose of illustrating the history of the state’s legal system. In a companion case decided the same day, McCreary County v. ACLU, the Court ruled that a Ten Commandments display in a Kentucky county courthouse violated the Establishment Clause because it had an obvious religious purpose.*

See Center Director Paul Raror’s comments on these Supreme Court decisions in the fall 2005 Newsletter. In the Green case, the Tenth Circuit noted that the monument was situated among other monuments, yet this was not enough to save it from an Establishment Clause challenge in face of its clear religious purpose.

K. Hollyn Hollman is the General Counsel of the Washington, D.C.,-based Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, which does not take a position on same-sex unions. She was part of the Center’s “Religious Freedom Roundtable” panel discussion on church-state issues at Virginia Wesleyan College in the fall of 2006.
The list of recommended books begins with *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, by our fall Cookson Lecturer, Dr. Ursula Goodenough. Beyond this, the Center’s library continues to expand its collection of materials relating to religious human rights in the international context. The importance of this issue is emphasized by President Obama in his June speech at Cairo University, excerpted on page 3.


**Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton, eds., Religious Tolerance in World Religions (2008)**

**Borrowing Policy**

All books in the CSRF collection are included in the college library’s online catalog, and most are available to VWC faculty, students, and other interested users. If you would like to borrow a book, simply come to the Center offices, located on the first floor of Clarke Hall, during normal college business hours. If you are unable to come to the Center during these hours, please call the office at 455-3129, and we can make other arrangements. Specific policies can be found on the Center’s web site, www.vwc.edu/academics/csrf/education/library.php.

**BOOKS RECEIVED**

A few of the new titles in the Center’s collection:

- Adeney, Frances S., and Arvind Sharma, eds., *Christianity and Human Rights: Influences and Issues* (State University of New York Press, 2007)
- Lane, Frederick S., *The Court and the Cross: The Religious Right’s Crusade to Reshape the Supreme Court* (Beacon, 2008)
- Neusner, Jacob, and Bruce Chilton, eds., *Religious Tolerance in World Religions* (Templeton Foundation, 2008)
- Nurser, John S., and David Little, *For All Peoples And All Nations: The Ecumenical Church And Human Rights* (Georgetown University Press, 2005)
RELIGION and SEX:
An Interfaith Exploration of Current Issues in Sexuality and Religion

Human sexuality has posed a range of difficult challenges for all religious traditions. The 2009-2010 Nexus Interfaith Dialogue Series will explore diverse responses to several current challenges facing religious institutions and individuals from a range of faith perspectives. Panelists from different faiths will be invited to reflect on questions such as the following as they consider these issues:

- Are there religious doctrines or teachings that speak directly to these matters? To what extent are these authoritative or binding on individuals?
- What guidance is available in scripture? What interpretive issues are involved in the relevant passages?
- How has your faith’s understanding of human sexuality changed or been reinterpreted over the years?
- Have sexuality issues caused division or controversy within your faith community?
- What is the relationship between religious teaching and social custom on issues of sexuality and gender?
- How has your personal experience affected your view of your faith’s response to these issues?

Specific program themes are as follows:

- Nov. 16: Sexual Identity and Religious Faith
- Feb. 8: Gender Roles in Religion
- March 8: Sexuality and Spirituality

Director’s Activities
Center Director Paul Rasor had several off-campus speaking engagements during the winter, spring and summer months. He also published a major peer-reviewed article and a book chapter.

Speaking Engagements
February 28: Gave a public address entitled “Peacemaking, Force, and Justice: Responding to the Needs of the World and the Demands of Conscience,” and led a workshop on the same subject, at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, Manhasset, NY.

March 1: Preached at Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Huntington, NY, and led congregational discussion on peacemaking.

March 29: Gave a talk on “Immigration and Religious Freedom” at the Jewish Museum and Cultural Center, Portsmouth, VA, as part of the Museum’s first year lecture series.

June 24: Delivered the Berry Street Essay, a major public address, to the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, entitled “Ironic Provincialism,” in Salt Lake City, UT.

Publications

LOOKING AHEAD

Programs for spring 2010 had not been finalized at the time this newsletter went to press. However, a symposium or series of lectures are being planned on the theme of religious freedom in the international context, including religious human rights. Events will be coordinated with course offerings at Virginia Wesleyan relating to international affairs, possibly including a course on human rights, but all events will continue to be scheduled at convenient times and open to the public.

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

- United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Information on specific events, including dates and times, will appear in the Spring 2010 Report from the Center and Calendar, and on the Center’s Web site.

FINANCIAL GIFT TO THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

☐ $1,000 ☐ $500 ☐ $250 ☐ $100 ☐ $50 Other $_______

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SUPPORT THE CENTER

The Center for the Study of Religious Freedom needs your support.

You can support the Center in many ways: by attending Center programs, by sharing news of the Center’s work with others, and by your financial contributions. Please share this newsletter with your family and friends, and encourage them to come to Center events.

If you would like to make a financial gift to support the Center, you may use the form below, or you may make a gift through our web site, www.vwc.edu/csf.

Your gifts allow us to improve our programs, strengthen our library and other resources, and continue our work of promoting religious freedom.
SEPTEMBER
Thursday, September 17, 2009
The Constitution Undressed: Recent Supreme Court Cases on Strip Searches and Affirmative Action
Dr. Timothy O’Rourke, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Kenneth R. Perry Dean of the College, and Dr. Paul Rasor, Center Director.
7:30 – 9 p.m.
Boyd Dining Center

OCTOBER
Monday, October 12, 2009
7:30 – 9 p.m.
Boyd Dining Center

Saturday, October 17, 2009
One Love Festival
An evening of music and the spoken word, demonstrating unity in diversity and fostering a closer interfaith community. Performers welcome; see events Web site: www.hamptonroadsnetworkfornonviolence.org
7 – 11 p.m., Boyd Dining Center

NOVEMBER
Monday, November 16, 2009
Nexus Interfaith Dialogue: Religion and Sex: Sexual Identity and Religious Faith
7:30 – 9 p.m., Boyd Dining Center

Wednesday, November 18, 2009
The Humpty Dumpty Project: Putting Evolution and Religion Together Again
Dr. Ursula Goodenough, Professor of Biology at Washington University in St. Louis.
Cookson Religious Freedom Lecture
7:30 – 9 p.m, Boyd Dining Center

All events are free and open to the public. Reservations are not required.
For more information, call 757.455.3129.