



# INITIATIVE REPORT

CATHOLIC COMMON GROUND INITIATIVE

December 2014



Fr. Donald Senior, CP, receives his award from Ms. Sheila McLaughlin, Director of the Bernardin Center

## 2014 Bernardin Award

The 2014 Bernardin Award was presented to Rev. Donald Senior, C.P., by Sheila McLaughlin at the Murnion Lecture held on June 20, 2014.

The citation read in part: "Donald Senior is a Passionist priest; an internationally renowned biblical scholar, specializing in the Gospel of Matthew; a former member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, appointed by Pope John Paul II; a frequent lecturer on a variety of topics; and a widely read author of numerous books. He is a member of several professional associations and has served as the President of the Association of Theological Schools of the US and Canada.

"He served with great distinction as the President of Catholic Theological Union from 1987 to 1994, and again from 1997 to 2013. During his tenure, Catholic Theological Union expanded and flourished. It was Fr. Don Senior's vision that made the establishment of the Bernardin Center here at Catholic Theological Union a reality. It was Fr. Don Senior's leadership that brought to life the many programs and initiatives of the Center, including the Bernardin Scholarship

Program, the Peacebuilders Initiative, Catholics on Call, and comprehensive interreligious dialogue. And it was Fr. Don Senior's generosity, openness and love of the church that made it possible for the Catholic Common Ground Initiative to find a supportive home here in the Bernardin Center.

"With deep appreciation for his extraordinary contribution to sustaining the Initiative and building Common Ground among colleagues, faculty, students, and church ministers, the Catholic Common Ground is proud to present the 2014 Cardinal Joseph Bernardin Award to Rev. Donald P. Senior, C.P."



(left to right) CTU faculty members C. Vanessa White and Eileen Crowley

## 2014 Murnion Lecture

The 2014 Murnion Lecture was presented by Regina Wentzel Wolfe, Acting Dean and Associate Professor of Catholic Theological Ethics at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago. The title of her presentation was *Finding Common Ground in Catholic Moral Theology*.

Professor Wolfe challenged the audience to consider how the next generation of moral theologians encourages us to see beyond the polarities that have existed in contemporary moral theology. Excerpts from her presentation are on the following pages.



Professor Gina Wolfe delivering the 2014 Murnion Lecture

continued on page 2

Excerpts from the 2014 Murnion Lecture:

*“I believe that the work of this next generation of moral theologians pushes us beyond the divide that for many years has existed in contemporary moral theology.*

*“In 2002, a group of young theologians, mostly graduate students, joined together to form an organization that ‘seeks to create an atmosphere of friendship, mutual respect, dialogue, academic enrichment, and charity in which Catholic moral theologians in the early stages of their careers may gather for a common formation experience where participants are invited to explore the vocation of the moral theologian as committed to the common good of the Church, the academy, and the societies in which we live and work.’*

*“I’d like to turn to three theologians and present an example from each of their work. ... It’s not just an issue of overcoming the divide but also of responding to the call for renewal and integration of other disciplines — scripture, spirituality, and systematic theology, for example....”*

Dr. Wolfe then examined the work of David Cloutier, one of the founders of New Wine, New Wineskins.

*“Cloutier’s starting point is the call for renewal of moral theology referenced earlier with particular emphasis on what, as the Decree states, shedding*

*‘light on the loftiness of the calling of the faithful in Christ and the obligation that is theirs of bearing fruit in charity for the life of the world’ (OT16) might mean for a renewed understanding of marriage. His title, ‘Composing Love Songs,’ refers to the New Testa-*

*ment’s lack of an equivalent to the Song of Songs of the Old Testament. ...*

*“Cloutier moves on to consider the question of eschatology and how it might be related to marriage. ...*

*“The eschatological possibilities of Christian marriage, rather than any ethical theory about norms, then fuel how these ethicists talk about normative issues. ...*

*“His interest, however, isn’t, as he puts it, ‘to take a stand on normative issues in sexual ethics; it is to illustrate what might be involved in making and contesting those arguments.’ For him, the ‘arguments will come to hang ... on how Christian action now relates to the “lofty call” of the eschaton.’ ... In terms of marriage and sexuality, Cloutier believes that ‘it is becoming more and more apparent that Christians in our culture will have to start recognizing ... the fact that what Christians are doing when they get married means something different — or at least something more than — what everybody else is doing.’”*

The second theologian considered was Julie Rubio.

*“The title of her 2005 article, ‘Beyond the Liberal/Conservative Divide on Contraception: The Wisdom of Practitioners of Natural Family Planning and Artificial Birth Control,’ is indicative of approaches being taken by the next generation of moral theologians. ... As she states it, her ‘hope is that bringing the distinctive experiential wisdom of both groups into relief and exploring the common ground that both sides share will make room both for respectful agreement and mutual correction ...’*

*“... she finds that the two groups have much in common. ... From her perspective, the most important of these [commonalities] ‘is the shared focus on the transcendent dimensions of sexuality. ... for*



Fr. Michael Place, STD, giving the Murnion Lecture response

*NFP users, [this is found] in the language of total self-giving, and for contraception advocates, in the language of passionate human desire connected to divine love.’ Finally, she challenges theologians ‘to listen rightly to experience in all its diversity, not so they can prove one side right or wrong, but so that they might raise up for married Christians values worth pursuing in sexual relationships. If couples can then ask good questions ... theologians will have made a valuable contribution.’”*

Finally, Dr. Wolfe discussed the work of Kristin E. Heyer.

*“Heyer undertakes a careful examination of the theological foundations of both Hehir and Baxter and each one’s understanding of the role of government and points to the risks inherent in each position. For the public theology approach it is being coopted by secular society and compromising what is authentically Christian. For the radicalist approach the risk is presenting a narrow sectarianism and ‘exclusivity challenged by Catholic universalism.’ The radicalist approach also risks being unable to respond adequately to the wide range of social problems found in contemporary society.*

*“She concludes that ‘Baxter too starkly separates discipleship and citizenship and that Hehir does not allow discipleship to be sufficiently normative.’ She believes a ‘methodology that is more theological than Hehir’s approach and more public than Baxter’s may serve to critique and round out each stance.’ Such a methodology would ‘avoid a false opposition between charity and structural justice ... [and] utilize liturgical resources for formation and discernment as well as education for justice and social outreach.’ It would also ‘allow for a move away from rigid typologies and toward prophetic, critical engagement that models gospel values and engages the wider world on issues that touch*

*human life and dignity.’ For Heyer, such ‘mutual clarification will better ensure that Catholic social ethics remains at once faithful to the fullness of the tradition and responsible to the signs of the times.’*

*“I hope that this brief introduction to the work of these three theologians provides you with a sense of how they are working to bridge the divide they’ve inherited and find common ground. I think Rubio gave voice to the way many feel in a 2012 article in America magazine: ‘Too much time and energy are spent by the Catholic right and left arguing about issues that divide us. It would be far better to seek common ground.’”*



Members of the CCGI Advisory Committee and guests

## Builder of Bridges Pope Francis Reflects on Dialogue

The concept of dialogue is one that has appeared on several occasions in the allocutions and writings of Pope Francis. One of the first times the Bishop of Rome spoke of dialogue was in his remarks to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See on March 22, 2013 shortly after his installation.

“One of the titles of the Bishop of Rome is Pontiff, that is, a builder of bridges with God and between people. My wish is that the dialogue between us should help to build bridges connecting all people, in such a way that everyone can see in the other not an enemy, not a rival, but a brother or sister to

*continued on back*

be welcomed and embraced! My own origins impel me to work for the building of bridges. As you know, my family is of Italian origin; and so this dialogue between places and cultures a great distance apart matters greatly to me, this dialogue between one end of the world and the other, which today are growing ever closer, more interdependent, more in need of opportunities to meet and to create real spaces of authentic fraternity.

"In this work, the role of religion is fundamental. It is not possible to build bridges between people while forgetting God. But the converse is also true: it is not possible to establish true links with God, while ignoring other people. Hence it is important to intensify dialogue among the various religions, and I am thinking particularly of dialogue with Islam. At the Mass marking the beginning of my ministry, I greatly appreciated the presence of so many civil and religious leaders from the Islamic world. And it is also important to intensify outreach to non-believers, so that the differences which divide and hurt us may never prevail, but rather the desire to build true links of friendship between all peoples, despite their diversity.

"Fighting poverty, both material and spiritual, building peace and constructing bridges: these, as it were, are the reference points for a journey that I want to invite each of the countries here represented to take up. But it is a difficult journey, if we do not learn to grow in love for this world of ours. Here too, it helps me to think of the name of Francis, who teaches us profound respect for the whole of creation and the protection of our environment, which all too often, instead of using for the good, we exploit greedily, to one another's detriment."

*Find a link to the full manuscript on the Catholic Common Ground Initiative website: [www.catholiccommonground.org](http://www.catholiccommonground.org)*

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