

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM

Charles Henderson

The month-long research colloquium has, in addition to the journal, been at the very center of the mission of ARIL. The following, short history highlights the origins of the colloquium in Boston and traces its evolution in the early years as it moved first to Yale University, then Columbia University, and most recently to Auburn Seminary in New York where it currently resides. Each year ARIL brings scholars from around the world to work on research projects of their own design around a common theme.

The idea of a colloquium, a month-long opportunity for scholars from varying back-grounds and disciplines to come together for research and writing in an atmosphere of critical thinking and supportive relationships, evolved from the Faculty Forum. The Faculty Forum was part of the work of the Episcopal Church Society for College Work and later the National Institute for Campus Ministry.

The Colloquium was funded by William Coolidge and began in 1984, the first summer following the organization that then called itself the Associates for Religion and Intellectual Life (ARIL). Among its early leaders were Myron Bloy, and Episcopal priest and executive director of ARIL, Nancy Malone, a Roman Catholic religious, and Johnny Crocker who was at the time chaplain at MIT. These folks worked hand in hand with Mary Sargent, Mr. Coolidge's personal secretary in shaping the program. Coolidge, an Episcopalian and sometime member of the Board of Trustees of the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was eager to support the work of integrating religious conviction with academic and intellectual activity.

The first Colloquium was held June 11 to July 7, 1984, at the Episcopal Divinity School. The director was Tony Stoneburner, then Professor of English Literature at Dennison University, Granville, Ohio. Tony was ably assisted by Chaplain-Theologians from Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant traditions. In the first year, these consisted of Joseph Holland, Richard Levy, and Stanley Hauerwas.

Twenty four Fellows comprised the 1985 Coolidge Research Colloquium, held at Andover-Newton Theological School, June 9 to July 5. Tony Stoneburner continued as Director for this second year. His report illustrates both similarity to the first year and dramatic difference: "Last year there was only one Jewish Fellow, this year half-a-dozen; last year no Fellow from Eastern Orthodoxy, this year one; last year no blacks, this year two. Last year a third of the Fellows were campus ministers; this year over three-quarters were academics." (*Ibid.*, p. 57)

"There was a difference of emphasis between academics and campus ministers: the former re-grounded themselves within their own religious traditions; the latter re-grounded themselves in study, scholarship, research. All engaged in deep ecumenical dialogue (not least during ecumenical midrash-study)." (*Ibid.*) Richard Levy returned as a Resource Person or Theologian-in-Residence. He was joined by Ian Barbour.

The 1986 Colloquium was again held at the Episcopal Divinity School. Elizabeth and Melvin Keiser, respectively, professors of English and Religious Studies at Guilford College, were the directors. EDS as a site was thought to be ideal because of its resources and the availability of both the EDS and the Harvard libraries.

The Keisers returned in 1987 to direct the Colloquium for another year. "Like last year's, [it] was an extraordinarily rich experience, interweaving the spiritual, intellectual, and personal, which can perhaps only be best described in theological language: it is a time of grace." (*Religion & Intellectual Life*, Fall 1987, Vol V, No. 1, p.137). Mary Luke Tobin was the Catholic Resource Theologian for a second year; Richard Levy, the Jewish Resource Theologian, returned for his fourth year. The journal report on this year includes comments from several of the Fellows. The directors concluded that the Colloquium "can make a significant contribution from its unique strength of the experience of genuine community among Jews and Christians." (*Ibid.*, p. 138).

The 1998 Colloquium saw an increased emphasis on Jewish-Christian dialogue over that of the previous year. This was due to the fact that

Fellows "came with this explicitly on their agenda." This year also saw the addition of three new resource leaders.

"What's valuable is that the essential focus here is academic and intellectual; that religious questions and perspectives are admissible and intrinsic; that all this takes place in an interfaith, pluralistic context. The thing just works - it's a fantastic, unique concept in all ways - spiritually, intellectually, socially." (*Religion & Intellectual Life*, Fall 1988, Vol. VI, No. 1, p. 125). It is noteworthy that this issue of the Journal includes a tribute to William A. Coolidge, the benefactor of the Colloquium that bears his name. When Mr. Coolidge died in the mid-nineties, he left an endowment gift to assure the future of the Colloquium.

June 4 - 30, 1989 were the days of this year's Coolidge Research Colloquium. The Journal lists only the names of the Fellows and their projects. The directors were again the Keisers with resource leaders that included Jonathan Omer-Man, from the Los Angeles Hillel Council; Nancy Malone, O.S.U., from ARIL; and Jack Boozer, Professor of Religion, Emeritus, Emory University. Jack Boozer died in Amsterdam on July 19, 1989. My recollection is that the ARIL Newsletter was published this year and the Directors' Report was included in that publication.

The seventh annual Coolidge Research Colloquium was again held at EDS from June 10-July 9, 1990. It was a year of change both for the Colloquium and for the ARIL Journal. Our Journal merged with *Cross Currents*. It was a year of leveraged buy-outs, and we were not to be left out. Although the Colloquium was still held on the EDS campus, the directors changed: Elizabeth Kirk, Professor of English, Brown University, and Joan Lescinski, C.S.J., College of St. Rose, Albany, NY, served as co-directors. Jonathan Omer-Man and Nancy Malone returned as resource leaders. Also new this year was Henry F. Knight, Jr., Chaplain, Baldwin-Wallace College, Berea, OH, as Protestant Resource Leader.

In the years that follow reports of the Colloquium are found in the minutes of the Board of Directors and/or in the ARIL Newsletter. The *CrossCurrents* Journal no longer carried reports, although essays and articles by several Fellows have been published over the years. In 1995, the locus of the Colloquium moved to Yale University, and a year later to Columbia University and Auburn Seminary where it currently resides.