

BOISI CENTER REPORT



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FROM THE DIRECTOR



The Boisi Center was buzzing this spring. On February 6th, Dr. Stephen Schneck, appointed by President Biden to oversee the United States Commission

on International Religious Freedom, spoke to a capacity crowd at this year's 5th Annual Wolfe Lecture on Religion and American Politics. His lecture entitled, "Religious Nationalism and the Dimming of Religious Freedom," set off a lively and well-informed conversation with a very engaged audience. The Reverend Nancy S. Taylor, one of Boston's most respected preachers and Senior Minister Emerita of one of Boston's oldest congregations (Old South Church), spoke to an audience of fans (many from her home congregation) on April 3 as this year's 21st Annual Prophetic Voices Lecturer on "Prophetically Provocative: Jesus as Mime, Mirror, and Muse." On April 10th, James Martin, S.J. (personally invited by Pope Francis to attend the October Synod in Rome) drew an audience from as far away as Albany, NY and Providence, RI to hear him talk about "What Happened at the Synod?" His hand was sore from signing so many books after the event.

On April 8th, Boisi hosted four panelists for an event in the Heights Room entitled "Can We Talk About Israel/Palestine?" Limited to members of the Boston College community, almost all of the 280 seats set up were taken by BC students, faculty, and staff. The panelists (all BC professors) – Marsin Alshamary, Daniel

Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, Peter Krause, and Jonathan Laurence – addressed the situation in Israel and Gaza after the events of October 7th. Each panelist offered a different "take" on the reasons for and probable outcome of the six-months-old conflict. As moderator of the event, I announced at the outset that we would only take questions from the students present: more than a dozen students did address questions to the panelists from the standing mic we had set up in the main aisle of the room. The event itself was exciting, pluralistic in terms of viewpoints, and extremely respectful of all the speakers. As one of my Jewish colleagues in the Lynch School of Education wrote to me afterwards, "given everything that has been happening in academia lately, after attending yesterday's event, I felt very proud of being a member of the BC community."

Boisi, in cooperation with the Center for Catholic Studies at Sacred Heart University, the Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage at Loyola University Chicago, and Fordham University's Center on Religion and Culture, hosted a two-day event at the University of San Diego on February 22nd and 23rd. The third meeting of a series we've been calling "The Way Forward Gatherings," this year's event was titled "*Laudato Si'*: Protecting Our Common Home, Building Our Common Church." Focused on Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, the gathering drew together 27 cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, and 49 theologians, journalists, and environmental activists to engage in panels ranging from diocesan officials addressing concrete ef-

forts at the parish level to demographers from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate reporting on "The View from the Pews." Cardinal Robert McElroy presided at the eucharist on the first day, and Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, presided on the second. Evaluations from both the bishops and from the other participants were overwhelmingly positive. We're already planning next year's event in New York City.

We hosted a series of compelling and well-attended lunch seminars during which faculty shared about their research with a lunch crowd made up of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty members, and neighbors. Marsin Alshamary of BC's political science department opened the semester on January 31st with a presentation called "A Century of Iraqi Hawza," in which she explained how Muslim clerics have shaped protests and politics in contemporary Iraq. R. Ward Holder of St. Anselm College, a life-long student of Reinhold Niebuhr, led a lunch seminar on March 20th entitled, "Donald Trump, Child of Darkness: Niebuhr and the Christian Realist Defense of Democracy." On March 21st, Kathleen Sprows Cummings, a visiting scholar from Notre Dame, reported on her research on U.S. nuns managing the clergy sex abuse crisis. Her riveting talk, "*Spotlight* on U.S. Catholic History: Reinterpreting the Past After Clerical Sex Abuse," generated much lively conversation over lunch that day. Finally, Matthew Vale, one of BC's theology department's newest hires, addressed his ongoing

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CLERICAL INFLUENCE IN IRAQ

A lunch conversation explored religious leaders' political influence in modern-day Iraq.



In the first luncheon colloquium of the semester, Dr. Marsin Alshamary offered a presentation titled, "A Century of the Iraqi Hawza: How Clerics Shaped Protests and Politics in Modern Day Iraq." Alshamary shared background information for guests less familiar with the topic and her fieldwork: Hawza refers to the institutions where Shi'a Muslims religious leaders are trained. She described the way in which these institutions have influenced the social and political fabric of Iraqi society.

During her fieldwork, Alshamary spoke with political protesters, civilians in Iraq, and the Shi'a religious hierarchies. She described the Hawza as a space of informal learning that influenced politics, as it formed religious leaders who often have both direct and indirect forms of political influence over their communities. Alshamary emphasized that the sermons given by Shi'a religious leaders often acted as engines of political movement, although leaders were not intending to speak in support of political protests. Shi'a clerics view their role as, first and foremost, protectors of religious establishments and embodiments of institutional responsibility. Alshamary's presentation was met with a fruitful discussion that looked at American journalism's (often-incorrect) perception of Shi'a clerics, Iraqi public opinion, the ethnic makeup of the Hawza, and the influence and reach of Hawza teachings outside of Iraq. Alshamary's insightful presentation shed light on the complex dynamics of the Iraqi Hawza, underscoring their frequently misconstrued role in shaping protests and politics.

BUDDHIST SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Vale complexified how we conceptualize the "self."



During the last luncheon colloquium of the school year, Dr. Matthew Vale of the theology department presented a lecture entitled, "Buddhist Practices for Widening the 'I': Taking Other Beings as One's Body." Vale began his presentation by inviting us to reconsider how we think about our "self," noting that our conceptions of selfhood are less firm than we realize. To make this point, he argued that our concept of self is built purely on habit. He uses everyday examples such as phantom limbs, phantom phone

vibrations, and the rubber hand illusion to show how complex our conception of what is included in our body/self truly is. He also referenced rarer examples of somatic experiences wherein an individual reports feeling an unexplained pain or sensation and later realizes their sensation corresponded to the injury/harm of a loved one. He used these examples to suggest that our sense of "self" is much more expansive than just our own physical bodies.

After complexifying the idea of the self, Vale examined why this matters to Buddhism and the world on a larger scale. He argued that developing a more profound sense of our connectedness to others can play an important role in recognizing and alleviating others' suffering. Vale connected this to Jesus' pronouncement in Matthew's Gospel about recognizing his presence in others and working to alleviate their suffering: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). Vale noted how St. Maximilian Kolbe, who gave up his life for a fellow concentration camp prisoner during World War II, profoundly embraced Jesus' message in this action. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer session about how expanding the self can benefit one's conception of the Christian faith and how the call to expand our "self" is an ongoing process.

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CAN WE TALK ABOUT ISRAEL/PALESTINE?

An interesting and insightful conversation among scholars about the political, historical, and religious dimensions of the conflict in the Middle East.

On Monday, April 8, 2024, six months after Hamas' terrorist attack on Israel, the Boisi Center hosted an internal conversation for the BC community entitled, "Can We Talk About Israel/Palestine?" The event consisted of a panel moderated by Mark Massa, S.J. and included four Boston College professors: Marsin Alshamary of the political science department, Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski of the theology department and director of the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning, Peter Krause of the political science department, and Jonathan Laurence of the political science department and director of the Clough Center for the Study of Constitutional Democracy. The event was very well-attended with over 275 registrants. Panelists offered viewpoints from diverse academic perspectives to help shed light on the political, religious, and historical dimensions of this tragic conflict.

Massa began the event by asking each of the panelists what approaches we might consider when engaging in conversation about the conflict. They noted that engaging with this topic effectively requires employing an empathetic view focused on promoting shared humanity,



(L-R) Marsin Alshamary, Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, Peter Krause, and Jonathan Laurence engaged in an informative discussion moderated by Mark Massa, S.J.

surveying a diversity of perspectives from various disciplines, and considering the impacts of nationalism and rivalry. In response to another question about the worst way to understand the conflict, the panelists discouraged adopting a zero-sum view, embracing a strictly religious framework, and focusing too strongly on ancient hatreds. The panelists also offered advice for engaging with media sources, encouraging students to consult a diversity of sources, examine indigenous Middle Eastern sources, and limit the quantity of news received from social media. Finally, the panelists hypothesized about the event's lasting effects on geopolitical dynamics, noting how the violence has contributed to anti-U.S. sentiments amongst younger generations.

At the end of the event, the panelists received questions from undergraduate students in the audience. Students asked insightful questions about topics like the appropriate language to use when describing the conflict, how the normalization efforts between Saudi Arabia and Israel contributed to Hamas' decision to launch their attack on October 7, and how the November 2024 U.S. election may impact foreign policy in the conflict area. With these thought-provoking questions and the panelists' astute responses, the event offered a fruitful opportunity for the BC community to engage in deeper learning around the issue.

The Gavel of Boston College wrote an article about the event titled, "Openness and Empathy: Boisi Center Talks Israel-Palestine." Find it [here](#).



RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY

The Boisi Center hosted two conversations related to contemporary dangers to democracy.



Dr. Stephen Schneck

On Thursday, February 6th, 2024, the Boisi Center hosted its 5th Annual Wolfe Lecture on Religion and American Politics, titled “Religious Nationalism and the Dimming of Religious Freedom.” Dr. Stephen Schneck, who was appointed by President Biden to serve on the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), led the event.

Schneck began by articulating the danger of religious nationalism. He shared his experiences serving on USCIRF, where he has witnessed extreme suffering, spoken with victims of religious violence, and been blacklisted from certain countries for advocating for religious liberty. He recounted a trip to Myanmar where he met with Christian refugees living in horrific, heartbreaking conditions after Buddhist nationalists executed a genocide against them. These experiences have contributed to Schneck’s view that we are facing a “global epidemic” of religious nationalism. Throughout the world, there has been an escalation of violence and persecution for individuals and groups believing – and not believing – in certain dogmas. Schneck fears that the proliferation of this violence poses a serious threat to contemporary societies and democracy. He believes that religious freedom is vital to the foundation of liberalism and the existence of human rights.

Schneck then transitioned to an in-depth discussion of the escalation of religious nationalism in India and Hungary. He mentioned how earlier in the month, India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi

dedicated a new Hindu shrine that was built where a mosque used to stand prior to being torn down by Hindu nationalists in the 1990s. Schneck described how Modi’s political party has promoted Hindu nationalism across India, which has led to religious violence towards minority groups. Local and federal Indian government leaders are actively outlawing the traditions and practices of religious minorities, such as banning the wearing of hijabs and interfaith relationships. Schneck noted that a similar crackdown on religious freedom has also been occurring in Hungary. In 2010, Viktor Orbán, a right-wing nationalist, became Hungary’s Prime Minister. Drawing on anti-immigration sentiments, Orbán has employed rhetoric and implemented policies discouraging religious freedom. Although Hungary has had consistently low church attendance rates, Orbán’s leadership has redefined Hungary as a strictly Christian nation, leading many Hungarians to embrace a nominally Christian identity and jeopardizing the security of religious minorities. Schneck contrasted the rise of religious nationalism in India and Hungary, showing the different uses of the tool by right-wing politicians. In India, Hindu nationalism was inherent to the rise of Modi’s party, while in Hungary, it has been a tool used to consolidate political power. Both examples of religious nationalism have resulted in unsafe conditions for religious minorities.

Before transitioning to an engaging question-and-answer portion of the event, Schneck concluded his lecture by urging audience members to join him in the fight to save religious liberty. Given the recent rise of religious nationalism around the world and the grave threat it poses to democracy and human rights, the defense of religious liberty is vital. However, Schneck noted that extreme polarization and the “recent association of religion with the political-right” has prevented “liberal defenders of human rights” from joining this cause. Schneck concluded that we urgently need this to

change, as the preservation of religious liberty is vital for the preservation of human rights.



Dr. R. Ward Holder

R. Ward Holder, a historical and political theologian and professor of theology and politics at Saint Anselm College,

presented his expertise on Niebuhr and the current political environment at the luncheon entitled “Donald Trump, Child of Darkness: Niebuhr and the Christian Realist Defense of Democracy.” Holder noted how often Niebuhr’s models of the children of light and the children of darkness — which are two ways of being in the world — are misconstrued. He used his presentation to elucidate the proper characteristics and applied them to a contemporary figure, Donald Trump. Children of darkness understand the power of self-interest, and they use it to reject external boundaries, gather wealth, enact revenge and sexual gratification, and portray invulnerability. Children of light underestimate the power of human self-interest, and thus, they may overlook the dangerous claims to power made by the children of darkness. Holder explained that extreme self-delusion, a trait of children of darkness, means that these leaders do not recognize actions as evil before or after they do them. There is no true moral framework for these leaders; everything is about their self-interested power. Many questions were raised in response to Holder about issues like political lies, individualism, and the operation of children of darkness in America’s political system. These questions led to a fruitful discussion about how Niebuhr’s observations may be at work in our current political system.

REINTERPRETING THE PAST AFTER CLERICAL SEX ABUSE

Cummings' presentation explored the history of clerical sexual abuse in the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston using documents generated by and related to the Boston Globe's 2002 Spotlight investigation.

On Thursday, March 21st, 2024 the Boisi Center hosted Kathleen Sprows Cummings for a luncheon entitled, "Spotlight on U.S. Catholic History: Reinterpreting the Past after Clerical Sex Abuse." Cummings is a professor of American studies and history at the University of Notre Dame and the former associate director of Notre Dame's Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism. Cummings focused her presentation on the experience of women religious, offering greater insight into the spoken and unspoken dimensions of the clerical sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church.

Cummings explained how the scandal intersected with the lives and experiences of U.S. Catholic sisters in the late twentieth century. In particular, she centered the life and experience of Sister Catherine Mulkerrin, an activist nun who played a key role in uncovering clerical sex abuse. She was a Sister of Saint Joseph in Boston and was invited by Cardinal Bernard Law to serve in a leadership role at the

archdiocesan level after dozens of victims of James Porter came to light. Mulkerrin challenged sexist traditions in the Church, encouraged the Church to move beyond shame, and emphasized the importance of listening to the voices of the victims. During the luncheon, Cummings examined oral history accounts of Mulkerrin's work to highlight her critical role in supporting victims, including female victims. Cummings noted how the clerical sex abuse crisis was produced by a series of overlapping hierarchies: "adults over children,...hierarchy over clergy, clergy over laity, and of course, in the Catholic tradition, men over women." Amidst these challenging power dynamics, Cummings uplifted the brave leadership of Mulkerrin, who created spaces that allowed victim stories to be heard and encouraged transparency regarding the crisis. A number of the women Mulkerrin supported emphasized how important it was for them to be able to speak to a woman rather than a male authority

figure in the Church. Despite Mulkerrin's tireless advocacy, she left her role believing she had



personally. Dr. Kathleen Sprows Cummings failed to make a strong enough impact. Cummings explained how Mulkerrin's view of herself reflects a systemic failure and reflects the Church's retrograde, as the promise of autonomy for women in the Church has been obscured.

The luncheon concluded with a question and answer session that further examined the role of misogyny in the crisis, the fact the priests referenced in abuse documents continued to be assigned to work with children, and the names of other women religious who followed Mulkerrin's path in their support of victims.

21ST ANNUAL PROPHETIC VOICES LECTURE EXPLORES JESUS AS MIME, MIRROR, AND MUSE

The Rev. Nancy S. Taylor offered theological insight and practical suggestions about encountering Jesus in a complex world.

On April 3rd, Rev. Nancy S. Taylor, Senior Minister Emeritus of Old South Church in Boston, offered a lecture entitled, "Prophetically Provocative: Jesus as Mime, Mirror, and Muse," for our 21st Annual Prophetic Voices Lecture. She discussed approaching Jesus from three different hermeneutics: mime, mirror, and muse, and she offered rich practical applications for each area.



Rev. Nancy Taylor

Taylor began with exploring Jesus as a mime, describing how "Jesus' gestures are more important than his words." In her practical application, she discussed providing food to impoverished people

and the importance of accompaniment. When discussing Jesus as a mirror, Taylor noted profoundly that, "While looking at Jesus, we see ourselves more clearly." Here, she presented another practical application related to loving one's neighbor as oneself, particularly in controversial environments where doing so may seem difficult and unexpected. Taylor ended by describing Jesus as a muse, noting that "the beauty Jesus inspires is more than skin- or canvas-deep." Her practical application was Old South Church's "Ashes-to-Go" program, wherein ministers distributed ashes to any interested passers-by on Ash Wednesday. While some critiqued the program as a fast and cheap enactment of Ash Wednesday, Taylor emphasized the rich, moving, and meaningful interactions she was able to have with those who stopped by to participate.

Taylor's presentation evoked many questions as the audience began to reflect on the different images for envisioning Jesus in their lives today. Taylor concluded with remarks about how recognizing Jesus as mime, mirror, and muse is at work, particularly in the margins, and how it can offer new and inspiring visions of inclusion, unity, and love in the world.

4TH ANNUAL GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE

Graduate students presented insightful papers on artificial intelligence and religion.

On Saturday March 23, 2024, the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life hosted a graduate conference under the leadership of our graduate research assistant, Maddie Jarrett. The conference, entitled “Digital Humanity?: Artificial Intelligence, Spirituality, and the Art of Human Connection,” explored themes related to A.I. and theology. The conference consisted of three graduate student sessions, a faculty panel with Kristen Peterson and Michael Serazio, professors in BC’s department of communication, and Brian Smith, the Honorable David S. Nelson Professor and associate dean for research at the Lynch School of Education and Human Development. The conference culminated with the announcement of the best student paper, which was selected by a senior editor from *America Magazine* who attended the conference. It was an enriching day filled with insightful analyses about AI’s current and future effects on human relationships.

The first session was titled “Interrogating Machine Learning,” and it included papers from Sam Cole-Osborn of Boston University, Scott J. Molony of Boston College, and Shane Liesegang, S.J., of Boston College. Cole-Osborn articulated the challenges posed by A.I. that employs large language models and argued for a

need for a tailored cannon to guide A.I. development. Molony echoed Cole-Osborn’s concern with large language models. He explained how A.I. will become less accurate in the future, as it will produce outputs based on previously A.I.-generated information, thus highlighting a problem with the proliferation of A.I. Liesegang concluded the session by exploring the question, could A.I. be baptized? He argued that the technology does not have a soul, and thus, cannot receive the sacrament. This session provided a helpful basis for the remainder of the conference, as the three presenters offered accessible explanations of the mechanisms of A.I. developments and their output.

The conference then transitioned to the second session titled, “The Dangers and Possibilities of A.I. for Particular Communities.” Berit Reisenauer Guidotti of Boston College began by acknowledging the adverse consequences of A.I. She provided a case study of Amazon delivery workers to illustrate how A.I. can increase surveillance and suppress human autonomy. Charlie Buttrey of Boston University delivered the next presentation, where he argued for the potentially positive implications of A.I. He discussed how A.I.-generated child sex abuse material may minimize the actual harm done to minors. The session was concluded by Lauren Tassone of Harvard University. She described how nuns have embraced social media as a means of reaching broader audiences and teaching them about their faith and lifestyle. This thought-provoking session provided a diversity of topics and arguments, highlighting the breadth of technology’s social-ethical implications.

The third and final student paper session was titled “Exploring Anthropological Features of A.I.” This session began with the awarded participant Eryn Reyes Leong of Loyola Marymount University, who presented a critique of A.I.-powered “grief tech.” This technology uses A.I.

to maintain a sense of “connection” to deceased loved ones by allowing users to engage in text and email exchanges with an A.I. bot who assumes the “identity” of the deceased loved one; the A.I. bot is trained to write in the unique communication style of the deceased. Using an example from a conversation with her own children about grief tech, she concluded that this tech is ultimately harmful, as it stunts the grief process and diminishes the ability of loved ones to cope with loss. Leong was followed by Yale University’s Morgan Conliffe, who presented her paper entitled, *Bots and Boundaries*. Conliffe began by elucidating the boundaries of human relationships through a discussion of causality, necessity, and lawfulness. She then applied these principles to the topic of involvement in romantic “relationships” with chat bots, highlighting the relational issues at stake. The paper presentations concluded with Theresa Gardner of Villanova University presenting on the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, transhumanism, and Christogenesis. She used insights from various fields, including quantum physics, theology, psychology, and cosmology, to explore Teilhard’s claim that humans move closer to God over the course of evolutionary history and through technological development.

After the graduate student presentations, a faculty panel concluded the conference. Each panelist offered summative comments, rich feedback, and shared their insights and questions about the themes of the graduate papers. Closing remarks were made and the conference award was presented to Eryn Reyes Leong. Leong’s paper has been recently published in *America Magazine*; check it out [here!](#) We are grateful to all the presenters, panelists, and attendees who helped make the 2024 Boisi Center Graduate Conference a tremendous success.



WHAT HAPPENED AT THE SYNOD?

The Boisi Center welcomed James Martin, S.J. to share his experience at the 2023 Synod gathering.



James Martin, S.J.

On Wednesday, April 10, 2024, the Boisi Center hosted James Martin, S.J. for a lecture entitled “What Happened at the Synod?” Martin was a delegate at the 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops, and his lecture shared about the purpose, technique, impact, and future of the Synod process.

Martin began his lecture by discussing the history and aims of the Synod. Led by Pope Francis, the Synod intends to gather diverse voices in the Church and listen to the Holy Spirit in each individual. Martin explained how the process relies heavily on the Jesuit idea of discernment. He then discussed how the delegates were chosen, noting that dioceses selected the majority of bishops and lay people to attend. Pope Francis also selected

70 delegates; Martin was one of his selectees. Ultimately, the Synod included 350 delegates, 75% of whom were bishops. This Synod was revolutionary insofar as it included lay people and women for the first time, with over 50 women attending and having full

voting rights. It was also revolutionary for the scale of its collaboration. The Synod produced a working document that represents the largest consultative gathering in history, meaning that the number of people consulted worldwide for the creation of the document represents the greatest of any writing in history.

After providing an overview of the Synod, Martin spent most of the evening engaging with commonly asked questions and questions from audience members. He shared how the delegates communicated at the Synod, explaining that they received a different topic to discuss each week and worked in small groups that were organized alphabetically, while also ensuring at least one woman was present in each group. He also shared that Pope

Francis was available to converse with the delegates throughout the entirety of the Synod. Martin expressed his excitement for the diverse conversations that would shape the future of the Church, marveling at the fact that the Synod allowed a 22 year-old college student from St. Joe’s to engage in discourse with a Cardinal from the other side of the world.

During the Q&A, one audience member asked how we as a church can move forward after the Synod. Martin responded by asking for prayers for the Church and urging everyone to become ambassadors of the Synod and to dispel the many falsehoods about the event. When asked about the lasting effects of the Synod, Martin answered, noting that, “affective collegiality precedes effective collegiality.” In other words, the delegates were able to know one another and become friends, which lays a crucial foundation to deliberate on challenging conversations in the future. At the next meeting in October, Martin believes the discourse will be able to progress, as the delegates are now familiar with one another and have fostered meaningful relationships.

Martin closed the lecture by offering three words that encapsulated his experience: exciting, exhausting, and intense. Martin stayed to sign copies of his recently published book, *Come Forth: The Promise of Jesus’s Greatest Miracle*, and to converse with students, professors, and community members.

FACULTY SEMINAR ENGAGES CONTEMPORARY ISSUES RELATED TO POLITICS, RELIGION, AND UNIVERSITY LIFE

Mark Massa, S.J., reflects on the interdisciplinary faculty seminar hosted by the Boisi Center:

This semester Boisi hosted an interdisciplinary faculty seminar, with colleagues from the philosophy, history, sociology, international studies, political science, and theology departments, as well as from Boston College’s Connell School of Nursing and the Clough School of Theology and Ministry. “Eat first, argue later” was our motto, and we did just that! After a delicious meal from our favorite Newton catering company (Baker’s Best), we divided up the semester: the first few sessions focused on A.I. and its effect on higher education. We ended the semester with a lively conversation about the student protests on college campuses and the role of such events in the life of a university community. Because we liked and trusted each other so completely, we could argue strongly (and listen intently as well). We had a great time.

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research on Buddhist meditation practices on April 17th in a talk entitled “Buddhist Practices for Widening the ‘I’: Taking Other Beings as One’s Body.” Conversation went on well over the 60-minute time spot we usually reserve for our lunch conversations.

Boisi’s wonderful grad assistant, Madeline Jarrett, planned and hosted an all-day graduate student conference titled, “Digital Humanity: Artificial Intelligence, Spirituality, and the Art of Human Connection,” on March 23rd. Thanks to an agreement with *America*, the winning essay (presented by a student from Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles) has been published as an article in [America Magazine](#). Maddie (investing many hours of preparation)

made the event run like a top. Maddie also looked after our two undergraduate student workers in the Center. God has blessed us in our grad assistants over the years.

God has also blessed us in our Undergraduate Research Fellows (URFs) working in the Center. Our URFs this year, both seniors graduating from the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences, Emily Caffrey and Fallon Jones, spent many hours every week helping to plan events and acting as “shepherds” for visiting speakers and guests. They were also invaluable as resources for suggesting ideas during our weekly staff meetings for events that would be of interest to undergrads. We wish them Godspeed as they begin the exciting but demanding

pilgrimage beyond the dreaming spires of Gasson Hall.

Last and by no means least, Boisi’s talented administrator, Susan Richard kept us all on track by doing the detailed work of planning and budgeting all of these events, as well as acting as something like the “den mother” to our 30 minors in Religion and Public Life. Suzie kept track of all of their appointments for course planning, summer internships, and recommendation requests.

It was an exhausting but wonderful semester, and we’re already planning for the fall.

~ Mark Massa, S.J.

WHAT’S NEXT FOR THE BOISI CENTER’S 2023-24 UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOWS?

Emily Caffrey graduated this spring from the Political Science Honors Program with a minor in Religion and Public Life. She looks forward to pursuing opportunities in government affairs this fall.



Fallon Jones graduated this spring from the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences, majoring in Theology with minors in Studio Art and Religion and Public Life through the Boisi Center. She will spend her summer with her grandma in Okoboji, Iowa. She is preparing to embark on a move to Los Angeles in August as part of the St. Joseph Worker Program where she will serve on the legal team at Homeboy Industries.



FALL 2024 EVENTS

The Boisi Center is committed to creating opportunities where scholars, policy makers, media, religious leaders, and the community can connect in conversation and scholarly reflection around issues at the intersection of religion and American public life. We at the Boisi Center are hard at work planning a fantastic fall 2024 schedule of events.

Please keep in touch with us and look for an announcement about the schedule in late summer/early fall.