

BOISI CENTER REPORT



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FROM THE DIRECTOR



A successful university-wide conference on Laudato Si' and the environment set the stage for an excellent semester. Charles Marsh addressed the prophetic nature of American Christianity on Bonhoeffer. The use of the Bible in Colonial America and teaching world religions also captured our attention.

The major event of our fall semester was our participation in a university-wide conference

on the implications of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. The conference, "Our Common Home: An Ethical Summons on Climate Change," was held September 28-October 1. The lectures and panels included presentations from numerous disciplines, including theology, politics, economics, business, biology, geology and journalism, about the dangers of climate change and the significance of the encyclical.

A few of the particularly notable speakers from a really amazing line-up included BC alumnus Sen. Edward Markey (Democrat, Massachusetts), John Holdren (Assistant to the President of the United States for Science and Technology), Graciela Chichilnisky (professor of economics and of mathematical statistics, Columbia University) and Edouard Tétreau (French essayist, columnist and political and economic consultant). Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, one of the architects behind *Laudato Si'*, delivered a keynote to a packed Robsham Theater. Turkson called on Catholics to find resources in scripture and tradition for addressing climate change and emphasized that social justice demands that change occur.

A big thank you to all the departments at Boston College who worked together to make "Our Common Home" the

huge success it was. May the inter-disciplinary cooperation of our university for this conference be a microcosm of the human effort to address the needs of the environment.

Our other events proceeded apace. Charles Marsh's talk on Bonhoeffer, canceled to a snowstorm last year, drew a crowd and continued our commitment to furthering religion's prophetic voice. Mark Noll explored the use of the Bible in early America, and Linda K. Wertheimer discussed teaching religions in schools. The continuing series of violent attacks in this country was explored by another BC alum, Firmin DeBrabander, who offered a fascinating account of the roots of gun violence in the US. Ellen Messer addressed hunger, Philip Gorski examined American civil religion and James Bernauer, SJ, spoke about *Nostra Aetate*.

Erik Owens has been missed at the center this semester, but is having a productive and well-deserved sabbatical. Suzanne Hevelone is enjoying her return to the Boisi Center and has filled in for Erik with admirable enthusiasm and competence. Thanks so much, Suzanne. We also have an excellent group of students working for us this semester.

This report would not be complete without a mention of the astonishingly controversial political situation taking place in our country this fall. The attacks on Muslims led by Donald Trump speak to all the values the Boisi Center

was established to address. No one at this point can know whether Trump is tapping into a sentiment that will change the way Americans have long addressed questions of religious tolerance and inclusion. But it is clear that demons have been unleashed and that all those who admire the United States for the way it has dealt with the problem of religious conflict face new challenges. For better or worse, depending on your perspective, the work we do here at the Boisi Center seems to have continued relevance for America's future.

IN THIS ISSUE

- *Charles Marsh on Bonhoeffer's prophetic encounters in America*
- *"Our Common Home" Conference on Laudato Si' and the environment*
- *Linda K. Wertheimer on world religions in public schools*
- *Philip Gorski on civil religion*
- *James Bernauer on Nostra Aetate's 50th anniversary*
- *Firmin DeBrabander on the threat of guns to democracy*
- *Ellen Messer on the human right to food*
- *Mark Noll on the Bible in early America*

THE 14TH ANNUAL PROPHETIC VOICES LECTURE

At a Boisi Center event in October, Charles Marsh, the Commonwealth Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia, spoke about Dietrich Bonhoeffer's transformative encounters with the American prophetic tradition.

Charles Marsh, Commonwealth Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia, delivered the Boisi Center's 14th Annual Prophetic Voices Lecture on October 8 to the Boston College community. Marsh is also the director of the Project on Lived Theology, which has the mission to connect theology with lived experience.

Marsh began his lecture with passionate remarks about the relevance of theology in a time of social crisis. Marsh spoke of his own childhood in the segregated South and the thinkers who inspired him to make sense of theological questions related to his experience. German Lutheran pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one such thinker.

Marsh began his discussion of the life of Bonhoeffer by describing a 1944 letter he wrote to his friend Eberhard Bethge from Tegel prison in Germany, where he was imprisoned for his role in a conspiracy to assassinate Hitler. Bonhoeffer wrote that there had been two times in his life when he observed his own personal growth and transformation. The first was under the strong personality of his father. The second was during his first journeys abroad, specifically his time in America. Marsh emphasized that before this trip, Bonhoeffer's writing was more technical



Boisi Center program coordinator, Suzanne Hevelone, introduces Charles Marsh.



Charles Marsh, professor of religious studies and director of the Project on Lived Theology at University of Virginia, speaking about the life and theology of German philosopher Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

and abstract, while after the trip his writing became much more concrete.

Marsh maintained that when the young Bonhoeffer first arrived in New York in 1930 to serve as a visiting student and post doctoral fellow at Union Theological Seminary, he was not impressed by what he saw as the state of American theology. Marsh noted that Bonhoeffer thought American Christianity was pragmatic and unsophisticated. However, through three prophetic encounters during this year, his preconception of American Christianity was challenged and transformed, as was Bonhoeffer himself.

First, he encountered American social theology in the classroom. Reinhold Niebuhr pushed Bonhoeffer to recognize the need for a concrete ethical component in his abstract theological thinking. Second, he engaged with the African-American church and black culture. Bonhoeffer first experienced a true sense of prophetic religion in the United States while visiting Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem with a young black seminarian named Franklin

Fisher. Marsh also noted that Bonhoeffer loved the spirituals he heard at the church. Bonhoeffer took both sheet music and recordings of spirituals with him when he returned to Germany. There he played and sang them with the other members of the Confessing Church. The third and final prophetic encounter was with the American organizing tradition. Marsh said that Bonhoeffer took a class with Charles Webber, a Methodist minister and radical socialist, who took the students out into New York City to work with various social groups. Bonhoeffer also encountered the Women's Trade Union and the Worker's Educational Bureau of America. From these groups he learned about the labor movement, poverty, homelessness, crime and the social missions of the churches.

All of these interactions brought Bonhoeffer from "the phraseological to the real," Marsh argued. It was in America that Bonhoeffer found theology grounded in action. He returned to Germany transformed by this sense of lived theology.

➔ www.bc.edu/boisi-marsh

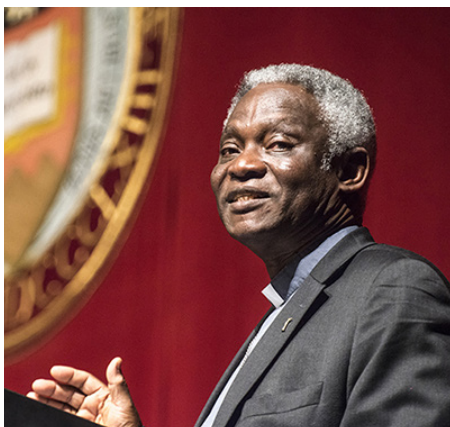
UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE ‘OUR COMMON HOME’

Groups from across Boston College came together for a conference to explore the ethical, theological and political ramifications of Pope Francis’ recent encyclical, *Laudato Si’*.

Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato Si’*, published last May, addressed human impact on the climate, and particularly focused on how climate change will affect the world’s most vulnerable populations. The Boston College conference followed Pope Francis’ travels in the United States in September where he took his message to the United Nations and Congress.

The strongest current of thought running through the encyclical and the pope’s recent speeches is that the culture of greed and exclusion has led to the degradation of our environment and portends the destruction of our common home. Francis has also reshaped the ethics of growth and development by framing it in terms of human rights: “Economic and social exclusion is a complete denial of human fraternity and a grave offense against human rights and the environment.” The pope’s message is intended to foster a global dialogue at all levels of society.

The BC conference, “Our Common Home: An Ethical Summons for Climate Change,” was held September 28-October 1. Over the four days, Francis’ encyclical was subjected to the scrutiny of academics from numerous disciplines, as well as journalists and policy makers, with the intent of inspiring action to address climate change.



Cardinal Peter Turkson spoke at the conference.



Designed by artist Xavier Cortada, this artwork was created to welcome Pope Francis’ climate change message and visit to the United States in September.

Senator Edward Markey of Massachusetts opened the conference with a stirring speech on governmental efforts to mitigate the impending effects of climate change.

Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, a chief advisor to Pope Francis, who participated in the writing of the encyclical, spoke to a packed and attentive audience at Robsham Theater. Turkson called upon Catholics across the globe to respond to climate change from a scriptural perspective, and described *Laudato Si’* as a path to an agreement at the upcoming COP21 Paris talks.

Another keynote speaker, the economist Graciela Chichilnisky, shared her work on carbon negative technology. A carbon negative plant she designed and built with Stanford engineers takes CO₂ emissions out of the air.

Also at the conference, John Holdren, Assistant to the President of the United States for Science and Technology, asserted that while the encyclical’s account of climate science was sound, it was lacking in aspects of policy. Holdren argued that mitigation and adaptation to climate change are essential components of any plausible plan to salvage the world from extreme degradation. According to Holdren, the encyclical did not address

the useful role technology can play in mitigating the effects of climate change.

Edouard Tétreau, French essayist, columnist and political and economic consultant, called for a new Bretton Woods to address climate change.

Other panels during the conference addressed the role of media in stemming climate change, the ramifications of climate change on vulnerable communities, the theological underpinnings of the encyclical and the document’s implications and the importance of Catholics in the developed world to recognize and readjust their lifestyles according to an environmentally conscious ethic.

Students also had the opportunity to learn about climate change advocacy, service and jobs opportunities at a fair called “What Can I Do?”

In the final keynote lecture of the conference, Julian Agyeman of Tufts University underscored the importance of combating inequality in any plan to halt or mitigate the effects of climate change. This concluding point emphasized the critical role and ethical responsibility of affluent nations for their large contribution to pollution and carbon emissions.

➔ www.bc.edu/boisi-ourcommonhome

RELIGION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

At a Boisi Center event in November, journalist and author Linda K. Wertheimer argued that public schools should teach students about world religions.

The question of whether religion should play a role in the curriculum of public schools is a topic fraught with disagreement. Some Americans think the First Amendment means that religion has no place in public schools. Others have stressed the need to educate children about diverse faith traditions as a critical component of creating a society that understands and respects those diverse beliefs.

In a November 10 talk at Boston College, education journalist and author Linda K. Wertheimer supported comparative religious education in public schools that exposes students to conceptual ideas about religion. She said that a critical question is when that education should begin.

Co-sponsored by the Lynch School of Education, Wertheimer's talk, "How Young Is Too Young? Teaching About Religion in Public Schools," was centered on the major themes of her newly released book, *Faith Ed.: Teaching About Religion in an Age of Intolerance*.

Wertheimer's research into the intersection of religious education and public schools began in 2011 when she authored a cover story for *Boston Globe*



Journalist and author Linda K. Wertheimer argues for teaching about world religions in public schools and discusses at what age and how children can be introduced to them appropriately.

Magazine chronicling the controversy surrounding a Wellesley, Massachusetts middle school's trip to a Boston mosque.

Citing models of three school districts teaching about world religions, she argued in her talk that the sooner students are educated about religions the better. Even kindergarteners

can be introduced thoughtfully and responsibly to world religions through children's books. According to Wertheimer, teaching about religions in the classroom will lead to a more educated and tolerant population.

In teaching about religions, it is crucial for the fine line between teaching and preaching to be managed, in keeping with the US Constitution, something Wertheimer thinks teachers can do with proper support from their districts. She argued for an educational system in which teachers receive robust training about how to introduce religious ideas into the classroom and on managing questions or comments from students about the material.

Drawing on her own experience as a journalist, Wertheimer said the media has an obligation to report about comparative religious education fairly and comprehensively. Doing so, she thinks, would help avoid controversy that often surrounds news stories about religions in public schools.



Wertheimer speaks to attendees at her lecture, including Boisi Center director, Alan Wolfe.



www.bc.edu/boisi-wertheimer

CIVIL RELIGION AND THE CULTURE WARS

Philip Gorski, professor of sociology and religious studies at Yale University, spoke about America's centuries-old civil religious tradition and how it compares with other secular and religious traditions.

Philip Gorski, professor of sociology and religious studies at Yale University, spoke at the Boisi Center on September 16 about the nation's civil religious tradition. This American synthesis of prophetic religion and civil republicanism bridges the cultural



Yale professor Philip Gorski at a Boisi Center lunch on September 16.

divide between religious nationalists and radical secularists.

His talk was based on his forthcoming book from Princeton, *A Republic of Prophets: Civil Religion and Culture Wars from Winthrop to Obama*.

Gorski, also co-director of Yale's Center for Comparative Research and co-director of the MacMillan Center's Initiative on Religion, Politics and Society, began his talk by exploring the rhetoric of President Obama in his 2008 presidential campaign and in his recent eulogy for slain Charleston pastor Clementa Pinckney. By using a sermon style, Obama's eulogy, in particular, demonstrated that the prophetic side of the civil religious tradition is still strong.

Gorski traced the rise and fall of civil religion in the United States and compared it to rival traditions. These

include religious nationalism, which is manifested today in certain apocalyptic evangelical circles, on one extreme, and radical secularism, with its emphasis on stark individualism, on the other. The civil religious tradition has an important place in American politics and society, according to Gorski. He concluded his talk arguing for a distinction between religious nationalism and the civil religion.

While civil religion is rooted in Puritan beliefs, it has evolved greatly over time into an inclusive and adaptable tradition that includes far more than just Protestants. Catholics, Jews, women, African-Americans and social progressives have all drawn from and contributed to the tradition. Today the civil religious tradition is most visible in black churches and in the African-American community.

➔ www.bc.edu/boisi-gorski

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF NOSTRA AETATE

James Bernauer, SJ, Kraft Family Professor of philosophy at Boston College, explored the implications of the declaration Nostra Aetate on its 50th anniversary.

In honor of the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, Boston College professor of philosophy James Bernauer, SJ, spoke at the Boisi Center on October 14. This groundbreaking encyclical explores the Catholic Church's relationship with other faith traditions. In particular, it discusses the Church's relationship with members of the Jewish faith and rejects the charge that Jews are responsible for killing Christ. *Nostra Aetate* formalizes the growing solidarity between these two Abrahamic faiths and condemns anti-semitism.

Bernauer, also director of the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at BC, began the luncheon by describing Pope Francis' role in promoting interfaith dialogue. He highlighted Pope Francis' address to members of the International Council for Christians and Jews in

Rome in June. At the council, the pope acknowledged the importance of *Nostra Aetate* for the Church.

Bernauer then described the development of *Nostra Aetate*, from the International Conference of Christians and Jews that took place in Seelisberg, Switzerland in 1947 to its official promulgation in late 1965. He highlighted the landmark encounter between Rabbi Abraham Heschel and Cardinal Augustin Bea in 1963. In addition, Bernauer noted that a few of Bea's advisors were Jewish converts to Catholicism. These individuals, along with discussions with Jewish leaders, influenced Bea's formulation of the document. While the Holocaust is never mentioned in *Nostra Aetate*, Bernauer maintained that the text was written in part because of a growing recognition of the atrocity.

Bernauer emphasized that *Nostra Aetate* continues to provide a foundation for Jewish-Christian relations today, even 50 years after its release.

➔ www.bc.edu/boisi-bernauer



James Bernauer, SJ, professor of philosophy at BC, marks the 50th anniversary of Nostra Aetate at a Boisi Center event on October 14.

GUN RIGHTS AND THE THREAT TO DEMOCRACY

At a Boisi Center event in October, Maryland Institute College of Art professor Firmin DeBrabander argued that the prevalence of guns in America threatens our basic freedoms.

Firmin DeBrabander, professor of philosophy at the Maryland Institute College of Art, spoke about the importance of gun safety in the United States at the Boisi Center on October 22. Drawing on his recently published book, *Do Guns Make Us Free?: Democracy and the Armed Society*, DeBrabander addressed the National

Rifle Association's (NRA) claims that the Second Amendment safeguards all other American freedoms.

He argued that the prevalence of guns in American society undermines the freedoms of speech and assembly. For example, DeBrabander asked, what teacher

is going to bring up difficult and divisive topics in the classroom if one or more of their students is armed, as many proposed campus carry laws allow? Or if protestors were heavily armed, wouldn't the police be more likely to clamp down with force, limiting the freedom of assembly?

While clear in his rebuttal of the NRA's platform, DeBrabander sympathized with the legitimate concerns of many gun owners about personal security. He also contended that the root cause of many lower and lower-middle class white rural and suburban Americans' insecurity is their deeply felt loss of political power due to the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* Supreme Court decision, declining job security and economic stagnation. Addressing these issues, DeBrabander argued, is critical to reducing the vitriol of the gun rights debate in America and enacting sensible policies that can avert future mass shootings.



Firmin DeBrabander speaking about guns and freedom in America at the Boisi Center on October 22.



www.bc.edu/boisi-debrabander

THE HUMAN RIGHT TO FOOD

Anthropologist Ellen Messer explained that policymakers must assess the structural causes of global hunger in order to properly fight the problem.

Anthropologist Ellen Messer led a discussion on the "human right to food" at the Boisi Center on November 3. Messer, who holds faculty affiliations at Tufts University, Boston University and Brandeis University, addressed the causes of food insecurity around the globe and the role of the Catholic Church in addressing global hunger from a structural perspective.

Messer spoke about a broad spectrum of political and cultural variables that play into the issue of global hunger including immigration, Pope Francis' efforts to promote solidarity in action and the impact of climate change on food supplies.

Messer also spoke about the handling of statistical analysis related to food. Messer challenged whether current

statistics are calibrated accurately enough to fully capture the issues of global hunger and access to adequate nutrition. According to Messer, better analysis of the data might better inform policymakers and market participants when addressing the challenge of global hunger.

Messer highlighted that a central focus of the effort being led against global hunger is assessing the problem's structural causes, not merely its symptoms. Some of these causes have substantial correlation with issues of biodiversity, environmental sustainability and climate change.

Under the leadership of Pope Francis, the Vatican has begun playing a significant role in rallying the attention of communities towards these issues,

according to Messer. Its influence extends beyond the Catholics to other Christians and people of other faiths.



www.bc.edu/boisi-messer



Ellen Messer at the Boisi Center on November 3 speaking about the "human right to food."

THE BIBLE IN EARLY AMERICA

University of Notre Dame history professor Mark Noll spoke about the evolution of the Bible in early America, exploring how it was used as a guide from the era of Christopher Columbus through the American Revolution.



Mark Noll discusses the Bible and its use in early America at an October 29 event.

Mark Noll, Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame, spoke at Boston College on October 29 about the Bible's role in public life in the American colonies. Noll drew on his new book, *In the Beginning Was the Word*, which explores the historical trajectory of the Bible's political uses and cultural place in American civil society.

Noll's book demonstrates how the use of the Bible in America guided the development of politics and government. While Noll acknowledged the Catholic introduction of the Bible in the Americas, he said that Protestant readings of

the Bible deeply informed the emerging American identity.

Noll spoke about the importance of the Protestant Reformation in Europe to the colonial American experience. The British understanding of imperial Christendom, gave way to a message of personal Christianity in America that undermined the concept of Christendom.

Also significant to the development of American public identity, Noll explained, was the adoption of the Bible by the African-American slave community. Slave owners continued to invoke sections of the Bible that appeared to permit slavery, even after their slaves became Christians and found evidence in the Bible opposing slavery. This demonstrates how personal interpretations of scripture put Christians in opposition with one another.

Biblical authority was seen as coming from scripture itself, not through the medium of governmental authority. This difference in Biblical interpretation, Noll showed, was not an isolated incident in American social, political and economic contexts. This tradition of using the Bible as partisan weaponry, Noll claimed, is still alive today.

➔ www.bc.edu/boisi-noll

Announcing a Graduate Student Symposium on WOMEN IN RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

The Boisi Center announces a non-credit graduate symposium on women in religious leadership. In six sessions during the spring semester, the group will discuss the background and current realities of women's leadership in five major religions: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. Reading packets will include academic works and contemporary articles on the issue. Nothing is required but interest in the topic. Symposium participants will lead discussion each week. Food will be provided by the Boisi Center at each session. To apply, please submit a brief statement that describes your course of study, relevant experience and your interest in this year's symposium themes to Kyle Logan at kyle.logan@bc.edu.

Applications are due January 25, 2016.

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Boisi Center event photos by Christopher Soldt.

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SPRING 2016 EVENTS

RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE: THE CALLING OF A PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL

Thursday, April 14, 2016 | 8:45am - 2:00pm | Gasson 100

Featuring: Sanford Levinson, Richard Mouw, Ira Katznelson, Susan Shell, Susan Jacoby, William Galston, Joseph Quinn, Erik Owens, Howard Gardner and Alan Wolfe

University Ethics: How Colleges Can Build and Benefit from a Culture of Ethics

James Keenan, SJ, Boston College
Tuesday, February 2, 2016, 12:00-1:15 pm
Boisi Center, 24 Quincy Road
RSVP required.

The Social Function of Philanthropic Foundations

Ray Madoff, Boston College
Thursday, February 18, 2016, 12:00-1:15 pm
Boisi Center, 24 Quincy Road
RSVP required.

What the Islamic Veil Reveals

Pierre de Charentenay, SJ, Gasson Chair, Boston College
Thursday, February 25, 2016, 12:00-1:15 pm
Boisi Center, 24 Quincy Road
RSVP required.

Just War Theory and the Environmental Consequences of War

Laurie Johnston, Emmanuel College
Thursday, March 17, 2016, 12:00-1:15 pm
Boisi Center, 24 Quincy Road
RSVP required.

Immigration and Christian Ethics

Kristin Heyer, Boston College
Tuesday, April 5, 2016, 12:00-1:15 pm
Boisi Center, 24 Quincy Road
RSVP required.

Who gets to be a Prophet? Miracles, Privileges and the Discourse of Meritocracy

15th Prophetic Voices Lecture
Ayesha S. Chaudhry, University of British Columbia
Tuesday, April 12, 2016, 6:00-7:30 pm, Fulton Hall 511