
The Boisi Center Report

THE BOISI CENTER FOR RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE AT BOSTON COLLEGE

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From the Director



*One of the major events to take place in the Fall of 2009 at the Boisi Center is the publication by Baylor University Press of *Gambling: Mapping the American Moral Landscape*, which Erik Owens and I edited. This was the product of our 2007 conference on the moral and religious implications of the American gambling boom. I believed then, and continue to believe now, that conferences of this sort are exactly the kind of thing the Boisi Center should be doing. We want to examine current issues in American religious and moral life by bringing together academic experts to shed light on them. Gambling is understudied given its importance and we hope that our book will continue to provoke serious discussion about its implications.*

*My book *The Future of Liberalism*, published in February 2009, continued to receive attention during the fall term and I await the publication of the paperback version in February 2010 with great anticipation.*

In the summer of 2009 I was able to host one more summer seminar for college teachers funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. It was a lively group composed of teachers from many fields but

primarily history. Of all the people who have helped me with these seminars, Suzanne Hevelone deserves a special pat on the back. She is both exceptionally intelligent and diligent with her duties. The participants all recognized her contribution. Soon to finish her thesis, she no longer works formally with us but her spirit endures here.

The book on liberalism is to be followed by one dealing with the subject of political evil, and I spend whatever moments I can immersing myself in arguments about genocide, terrorism, and ethnic cleansing. It is hard to find a more depressing subject but these are matters that must be engaged seriously. I hope I will have something original to say about them when the book is done. In the short term, I will be teaching a course starting in January on the subject, once again with the support of the NEH.

We are approaching the ten year anniversary of Boisi Center programming, and will mark the occasion at several points this Spring and Fall. This semester, in addition to an already exciting list of events, we are pleased to announce that Geoffrey T. Boisi will deliver a public lecture on February 4 about Wall Street and the current economic crisis. Mr. Boisi and his wife Rene (Isacco) Boisi, both 1969 BC graduates, provided the generous endowment in 1999 that created the center that bears their name. Mr. Boisi has had a storied career on Wall Street, and we look forward to hearing his reflections. More on this and other events marking our anniversary in a future letter from the director.

— Alan Wolfe

ISRAEL AND PALESTINE: THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

On October 27 a packed lecture hall engaged three experts in a lively discussion of the state of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and possible ways forward in the peace process. Raymond Cohen, Augustus Richard Norton and Desmond Travers brought their unique experience and insight to bear upon the complex issue just weeks after the controversial Goldstone Report had implicated soldiers from both sides in possible war crimes during Israel's late 2008 incursion into Gaza.

Recently retired from his chair in international relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Raymond Cohen is now the Corcoran visiting professor in the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College. He began the panel with a brief overview of the current deadlock, then presented three recommendations if negotiations are to move forward. First, the Palestinian Authority must re-emerge as a unified government for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza alike. This would require some form of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, but if achieved it could provide the domestic stability crucial to sustained peace talks. Second, Israel must freeze construction on new settlements in occupied territories. And third, President Obama should leverage diplomatic and personal relationships to see that the settlement freeze actually take place, even if it means delivering a televised speech directly to the Israeli people.

Augustus Richard Norton, a professor of international relations and anthropology at Boston University, signaled his agreement with much of Cohen's remarks. He added that Israel must act quickly to change its policy on West Bank settlements if it is to reverse what appear to be strong shifts in Turkish and American public opinion against Israel. Norton argued that Israeli actions in Gaza have hardened regional support for radical organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas, as well as extremist groups in other parts of the world. This, in turn, has undermined American relations with the Muslim world more broadly. Without substantial progress in the region, President Obama's promises in Cairo earlier this year will appear empty gestures.



Left to right: Alan Wolfe, Raymond Cohen, Augustus Richard Norton and Desmond Travers

The final speaker was Desmond Travers, recently retired colonel in the Irish Defense Forces who spent much of his career as a commander of UN missions in Lebanon, Cyprus and the former Yugoslavia. Travers was also one of the four authors of the Goldstone Report, upon which he focused his remarks. He vigorously defended the integrity of the commission's data collection, saying that no factual errors had yet been found in the report. He also defended its key assertion that war crimes committed by both Israeli and Hamas soldiers should be punished—if not by internal authorities, then by the international community—if any movement toward reconciliation can be made in the region.

Panelists then fielded questions from the audience that centered on the peace process ahead. Norton explained that the Palestinian people already feel they have made a huge concession, given that any modern Palestinian state would only comprise 22% of the its pre-1967 territory. Cohen argued that the Palestinians' best move would be to create an impeccable democracy. All panelists agreed that the window of opportunity for a peaceful resolution is coming to a close, and that action is urgently needed. We know what the blueprint of the two-state solution looks like, Norton said, since it has been determined in previous rounds of negotiation; it's simply a matter of finding the capacity on the Palestinian side, and the will on the Israeli side, to implement it. ■

STUDENT ASSOCIATION FOR RELIGION & POLITICS

This semester the Boisi Center's Student Advisory Panel was re-launched as the undergraduate and graduate Student Association for Religion & Politics (SARP). Both new and returning members expressed a commitment to create an ongoing forum for conversations about religion and public life that are interesting and accessible to students. To this end the SARP held two lunchtime student discussions at the Boisi Center during the Fall: one on the recent papal encyclical and on the Israel/Palestine situation. Spring semester discussions (topics TBA) will take place on the Fridays noted below. Students from across the university are welcome. Learn more on the Boisi Center's website.

SARP discussion group dates: January 29, February 12, February 26, March 12, March 26, April 9, April 23.

TURKISH DEMOCRACY: MEANS OR END?

Turkish society is in a precarious condition, argues Murat Somer, because its major constituencies see democracy as a means to their own diverse political ends rather than a dynamic process that is an end in itself. Somer, an associate professor of international relations at Koç University in Istanbul, made his case at a lunch colloquium on September 22, just days before returning to Turkey after a fellowship at Harvard.

Somer came to his conclusion through a study of the Turkish media, which plays a crucial role in shaping Turkey's politics and the tone and content of its public deliberation. He and his research team conducted a methodical content analysis of secular and religious newspapers published from 1996 to 2004, which was supplemented by numerous interviews with the editors and publishers of those newspapers.

Somer's presentation (based on a forthcoming academic paper entitled "Democracy (for Me): Religious and Secular Beliefs in Turkey and Liberal Democracy") focused on three core questions: Does Turkish democratization require the existence of moderates both within and outside of religious communities? Does this process require *a priori* democratic actors, or can democratic values and actors develop through democratization? And can Islamist political actors in Turkey fully embrace liberal democratic values? The answers are interconnected but still uncertain, Somer noted. Still, his research suggests that Turks seeking a robust democracy cannot rely on free elections alone, but must also focus on building a liberal democratic ethos — one that fully respects minority rights, among other things — among citizens of all religious commitments and political persuasions. ■

JFK AND OBAMA: RELIGION IN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS

Shaun Casey, a professor of Christian ethics at the Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, spoke at the Boisi Center on October 21 about the parallels between the 1960 and 2008 presidential campaigns, particularly with regard to the so-called "religion question." As the author of a recent book on John F. Kennedy's election, *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960*, and a director of religious outreach for the 2008 Obama presidential campaign, Casey offered a wealth of insight into how—and how deeply—religion influences and mobilizes American voters.

Religion was a critical issue in both the 1960 and 2008 campaigns. Kennedy's Irish Catholic identity created great fear and suspicion about his ultimate loyalty—would he bow to the Pope's wishes on matters of American policy?—while Obama faced criticism for his affiliation with black

liberationist pastor Jeremiah Wright and suspicion of his Muslim family heritage and middle name.

Both candidates took the challenge seriously and employed remarkably similar political strategies, Casey argued. First, they sought to educate themselves about the contours of American religion in their day. Second, they were both eager to talk about matters of faith with leaders across the religious and political spectrum. Third, they both used speeches at crucial points in the campaign to assert their principles and address their critics head-on. And fourth, they hired dedicated staff members to reach out to specific religious communities.

Despite these important structural similarities, however, both the political context and the content of the candidate's responses differed in crucial ways from 1960 to 2008. Kennedy answered questions about the role of religion in his political life by saying, in his famous September 1960 speech to a gathering of Protestant ministers in Houston, that his religious beliefs were his "own private affair," "important only to me," and would not prevent his support for strict separation of church and state. Obama, like most candidates in the 2008 campaign, took the opposite approach; in several key speeches (most notably his 2006 "Call to Renewal" speech and his 2008 "More Perfect Union" address) he carefully articulated the impact of his Christian faith on his views on race, social policy, war, and many other issues.

Casey closed his presentation by reflecting on the pioneering campaigns both presidents successfully employed, and speculated that future candidates would do well to learn from their efforts. ■



Shaun Casey

CATHOLIC AND EVANGELICAL RAPPROCHEMENT



Tal Howard

In a recent visit to the Boisi Center, Thomas Albert (Tal) Howard, associate professor of history at Gordon College, spoke with authority and conviction on increasing cooperation between Catholics and evangelicals, and its implication for the future of Christian education.

Historic examples of hostility between the two groups can be traced to early American history, but today there is a thawing in these relations. This rapprochement Howard attributed to several factors: Vatican II and Pope John XXIII's work were watershed moments. Furthermore, the general social issues and trends of the 1960s led to an "ecumenism of the trenches." The election of Catholic President John F. Kennedy and the open-armed papacy of John Paul II also augmented Protestants' esteem of Catholics. The "Evangelical and Catholics Together" initiative of the early 1990s and philanthropic endowments by the Lilly and Pew foundations are also responsible for "cross-pollination" between the two communities.

Howard noted that evangelicals are increasingly open to learning from aspects of the Catholic tradition that can enrich their own faith. Catholicism's long intellectual and spiritual heritage, for example, provides evangelicals resources for theological reflection on important contemporary issues, just as Catholics can learn from evangelical traditions.

He pointed out that divisions within traditions are becoming more pronounced than those between them. Politics are also uniting different groups to form coalitions on important social issues. Howard ended on a note of hope, indicating that his book, *The Future of Christian Learning*, seems to form part of an increasing dialogue between Catholic and evangelicals which is bringing both communities closer in understanding and cooperation. ■

ATHLETIC AND ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AT BC

In an era when low graduation rates are the norm among student athletes at competitive NCAA Division I schools, Boston College has consistently managed to combine athletic and academic success. The key, said athletic director Gene DeFilippo at a November 5 talk, lies in careful recruiting, constant academic support, and attention to the university's Jesuit values.

Since DeFilippo began as athletic director in 1997, the Eagles have enjoyed unprecedented success on the field, rink, and court. The football team recently played its 11th consecutive bowl game; the men's hockey team has won two national championships and six conference titles; and women's and men's teams frequently play in NCAA basketball and soccer championships.

BC student-athletes continue to meet remarkable academic standards as well. In 2006 the NCAA publicly recognized the university for an extraordinary accomplishment: 14 of its teams' graduation rates ranked in the top 10 percent nationally, tying BC with Notre Dame for the highest total of any Division I university.

So what's the secret? DeFilippo gave primary credit for the academic successes of student-athletes to careful selection at the outset. "Most of the problems get taken care of in the recruiting process," he said, when coaches and admissions officers seek athletes who can handle a

full academic load and who demonstrate strong moral character. Once at BC, the staff of Learning Resources for Student-Athletes provides crucial academic advising and tutoring.

But the Jesuit call to service also plays an important role in student-athletes' development, DeFilippo noted. He expressed pride that varsity athletes are such active participants in community service, regularly volunteering at local schools, hospitals, and shelters. Whatever the religious background of incoming players, they—like all BC students—are strongly encouraged to "buy into the mission of being 'men and women for others.'" It is a primary goal of Jesuit education, and one that fits perfectly into an ethic of teamwork that also wins games. ■



Gene DeFilippo

THE ECONOMY, THE CHURCH, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

As parts of the world began to recover last summer from the global economic crisis, Pope Benedict XVI released an important encyclical, or teaching document, on human economic development. *Caritas in Veritate* (“Charity in Truth”) brings Catholic social thought to bear upon global economic life in ways that have inspired, and confounded, readers across the political and theological spectrum. To gain some purchase on the implications and importance of this document, the Boisi Center hosted a conversation on October 8 (in front of a standing-room-only crowd in the Fulton Debate Room) with three Catholic scholars who are expert in economics, ethics and systematic theology.

The keynote speaker was Daniel Finn, professor of theology and the Clemens Professor of Economics and the Liberal Arts at St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota. Professor Finn, author of several books on economics and Catholic social thought, discussed the “Bologna school” of economic thought that undergirds *Caritas in Veritate*, which highlights reciprocity rather than altruism as a means of fostering right relations in the economic realm. The end goal is a more civil—meaning both civilized and non-state directed—economy that encourages profit a means for achieving human and social ends. “Hybrid firms” which pursue both commercial and social ends are necessary to achieving this goal, as is an active civil society.

The next speaker, Boston College theology professor Stephen Pope, focused on the ethical dimensions of



Daniel Finn



An overflow crowd listens to the panel discussion of *Caritas in Veritate*

the encyclical’s call for an “authentic humanism” that seeks to reintegrate morality into public life, including economic activity. Social justice and charity are the keys to this effort, which must foster a global morality that can overcome the “enlightened egoism” inherent in current economic and social life. Professor Pope’s primary critique centered upon the encyclical’s breadth; in trying to cover too much ground, he said, it favored theological abstraction over concrete ethical analysis. A focus on the ethical challenges, Pope said, are crucial when contemplating the universal implications of love, charity, and social justice in a pluralist society that holds divergent views of such concepts.

The final panelist was Robert Imbelli, a Catholic priest and associate professor of theology at Boston College. A systematic theologian like Benedict XVI himself, Fr. Imbelli reminded the audience that theology properly forms the center of the pope’s encyclical, as evidenced by several themes in *Caritas in Veritate*. First, the encyclical roots Catholic social teaching in the Gospel rather than natural law reasoning, Imbelli argued, and any analysis of *Caritas* based only on de-contextualized natural law reasoning “risks reducing religion to ethics.” Second, Imbelli noted, the pope’s central argument for an “integral humanism” that embraces “the good of every man and of the whole man” is itself ultimately grounded in Christology, which explores the meaning of Christ’s incarnation. Fr. Imbelli concluded by reflecting on the limits of regulatory policy, for “structural change, however necessary, can never substitute for authentic conversion of hearts and minds,” which itself requires ongoing spiritual exercise. ■

IS TORTURE ALWAYS WRONG?

Kenneth Himes, O.F.M., chairman of the Boston College theology department, delivered a presentation provocatively titled “Torture: Is It Always Wrong?” to a packed room at the Boisi Center on November 11. There is no doubt, he said, that the United States government committed acts of torture during the Bush administration. The debate at this point should focus not on whether we tortured in the past, but how to think about it in the future.

Drawing upon extensive research and reflection on the question, Himes made the case that torture is morally impermissible, always and everywhere, because torture violates the dignity and integrity of the individual in ways that cannot be repaired. Torture also irrevocably changes the torturer, violating that person’s dignity as well.

Himes added that the scenarios often given in defense of torture are not realistic and don’t actually defend the use of torture. The most common of these is the ‘ticking time bomb’ scenario, in which a bomb is planted in a metropolitan area, a suspect is captured, and authorities torture him until he confesses to the location of the bomb. Himes argued that this scenario is more likely to appear on television than in reality, and also said that torture wouldn’t necessarily be useful – the suspect could spit out misleading information just to get the torture to stop.

Finally, Himes tackled the question of whether or not past abuses should be prosecuted. He said that while he sympathizes with President Obama’s desire to move forward, ignoring past abuses would fail to set an important precedent. This, he said, should not be permitted. Torture must never be allowed as a matter of U.S. policy, regardless of who is in office. ■



Kenneth Himes

FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES



Adam Strom

The final Boisi Center event of the fall semester was a lively lunch conversation on December 3 with Adam Strom, director of research and development for Facing History and Ourselves, a nonprofit organization that develops educational resources about morally challenging historical events and periods. The Massachusetts-based organization is best known for its

materials and programs on the Holocaust, which are used in schools across the country.

Strom’s remarks focused on the inadequacy with which religion is addressed in most high school history courses. Too often, he said, educators and curricular materials neglect or misunderstand the role that religion has played in world history. In his experience, he said, if religion is not actively ignored, it is mischaracterized as a set of unchanging beliefs and rituals rather than a way of life for billions of people, that has had and continues to have a crucial bearing on historical.

Strom gave the example of the American civil rights movement, which was led by a number of Southern Christian ministers. Although Christianity played a central role in the beliefs and tactics of civil rights leaders, this role is often left out in classroom discussions about the period.

Ultimately, Strom emphasized the understanding of religion’s role as a critical part of civic literacy. The education students receive in this regard needs to improve. ■

IS FRANCE ACTUALLY RELIGIOUS?

Declining religious belief and changes in the relationships between church and state have dramatically altered the European religious landscape over the past two hundred years. On November 16 Danièle Hervieu-Léger, a renowned sociologist of religions at l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (the premier French graduate school of social science), explored the process of secularization and religious renewal in Europe.

Hervieu-Léger began her presentation with a brief historical overview of European secularization. The term, she explained, is originally a legal one that indicates emancipation from religious authority in the modern period. In the wake of the Enlightenment “secularization” denoted the weakening of the Church’s influence in the public sphere as well as the general loss of meaning of religion in a European society increasingly governed by scientific



Danièle Hervieu-Léger

reasoning. Hervieu-Léger pointed to two main European models of secularization: On the one hand, an Anglo-Saxon model originating in the Reformation has stressed the development of pluralistic societies accomodating various religious traditions. On the other hand, the French process of laïcité has emphasized the creation of a society void of religion, and finds its roots in the French Revolution. According to Hervieu-Léger, both movements have seen the excision of religion from the public sphere as a basic condition for modernity.

Hervieu-Léger surveyed three popular understandings of the relationship between belief and modernity. The first ignores any connections between religion and scientific thought and has been widely regarded as problematic. A second understanding looks to religions as interruptions and disruptions in the modernization process. That is, religion fills the gaps science has not or cannot explain. A third model is a variation on the second, and views the religious self as a pilgrim trying to construct a religious identity, or a convert that chooses religion as an autonomous expression of the self.

Given the large influx of Muslim immigrants in Europe in recent decades, the relationship between society and religion can’t be ignored, said Hervieu-Léger. Indeed, it still forms part of European political and social institutions albeit implicitly. Recent incidents in Western Europe suggest a need for better integration and a more nuanced account of religion in the public sphere. ■

The **BOISI CENTER** *for*
RELIGION *and* AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

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SPRING 2010 EVENTS

LECTURES

Geoffrey T. Boisi
Chairman and CEO,
Roundtable Investment Partners LLC
February 4, 2010, 5:00 pm
Cushing Hall, Room 001

Robert P. George
McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence,
Princeton University
9th Annual Prophetic Voices Lecture
March 25, 2010, 5:00 pm
Higgins Hall, Room 300

PANELS

**A Matter of Conscience: Religious Exemptions and
the Healthcare Debate**
Melissa Rogers, *Wake Forest University*
Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, *Harvard University*
March 18, 2010, 5:30 pm
Higgins Hall, Room 310

Humanitarian Intervention and the “Responsibility to Protect”
David Hollenbach, S.J., *Boston College*
Mahmood Mamdani, *Columbia University*
Alan Wolfe, *Boston College*
April 22, 2010, 5:30 pm
Higgins Hall, Room 300

LUNCH COLLOQUIA

Location: The Boisi Center, 24 Quincy Rd.
RSVP required; contact richarsh@bc.edu

Lisa Sowle Cahill
J. Donald Monan Professor of Theology,
Boston College
January 27, 2010, 12:00 pm

Ourida Mostefai
Professor and Chair of Romance Languages and Literatures, Boston College
February 10, 2010, 12:00 pm

John Dombrink
Professor of Sociology and Criminology, University of California, Irvine
February 17, 2010, 12:00 pm

Paul Schervish
Professor of Sociology and Director, Center on Wealth and Philanthropy,
Boston College
February 24, 2010, 12:00 pm

Martha Bayles
Author and Critic; Instructor in the Honors Program, Boston College
March 10, 2010, 12:00 pm

James Keenan, S.J.
Founders Professor of Theology, Boston College
April 8, 2010, 12:00 pm