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## Staff Notes

**Alan Wolfe** Alan Wolfe serves as the director of the Boisi Center and is a professor of political science at Boston



College. He is the author or editor of more than 12 books. His most recent books include *Return to Greatness: How America Lost Its Sense of Purpose and What it Needs to Do to Recover It*,

(2005) *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Practice our Faith*, (2003) and *An Intellectual in Public*, (2003). Professor Wolfe is a contributing editor of *The New Republic* and *The Wilson Quarterly*. He also writes frequently for *Commonweal*, *The New York Times*,

*Harper's*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Washington Post*, and other magazines and newspapers. Professor Wolfe will be teaching his seminar on Religion and Politics (PO 351) in the fall and the Seminar: American Culture War (PO 358) in the spring.

**Patricia M.Y. Chang** Patricia M.Y. Chang serves as the assistant director

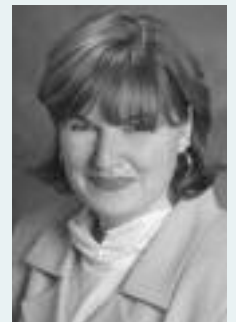
for the Boisi Center and is an associate research professor in the sociology department at Boston College. She specializes in research that examines the organizational aspects of religion. Professor Chang has been



on medical leave for the last half of this semester. In addition to her work at the Boisi Center, she will be teaching the Sociology of Organizations (SC 301) in the fall and Religion and Global Conflict (SC 593) in the spring.

**Susan Richard**

Returning from maternity leave, Susan Richard has been busy resuming her role as the Boisi Center's administrative assistant. In addition, she has been working with Alan preparing for his NEH Summer Seminar on "Religious Diversity and the Common Good" which will begin in June.



# The BOISI CENTER Report

VOL. 4 NO. 2

THE BOISI CENTER FOR RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

MAY 2005

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

No sooner did I return from a wonderful fall spent in Berlin than I hopped on a plane for Grand Rapids, Michigan. A long time ago – September 2001, that is – Calvin College had invited me to speak, but even though the airlines had resumed flying by the agreed-upon date, I was not ready to get on one. In January 2005, I could at long last make good on my promise to go to Calvin, one of the most interesting institutions of higher education in America. There are only a handful of institutions of higher education in evangelical America that stand out for their serious engagement with the mind, and Calvin is one of them.

On the actual day of September 11, 2001, I had been scheduled to give an afternoon talk at the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs in New York. As is my habit, I checked the news before leaving for the airport and knew immediately that no one was going to New York that day. This promise, too, I could

fulfill in the spring of 2005. I was invited again by the Carnegie people to talk about my new book *Return to Greatness*, and I accepted with pleasure.

The book itself was based on the Spencer Trask Lectures given at Princeton in the fall of 2004. The honor of following in the footsteps of T. S. Eliot, Louis Kahn, or Erich Leinsdorf is not one I am likely to forget.

Back here at the Boisi Center, we continued our lunch programs that Patty Chang did so much to organize. Our annual “Prophetic Voices of the Church” lecture was a huge success; Sister Prejean filled one of Boston College’s largest venues. That will be a hard act to follow next year, although we will do our best to continue the high level of this series of talks.

The subject of religion and politics never seems to go away. There has been much to discuss around the Terri Schiavo situation, the ambitions of conservative Protestants in the wake of the 2004 election, the effort by Jim Wallis to develop a religious politics on the left, and the death of one pope and the choice of another. Our work, it seems, is never done.

## Local Islam Gone Global

On February 8th, the Boisi Center hosted Professor Jim Toth of Northeastern University who presented his paper, “Local Islam Gone Global: The Roots of Religious Militancy in Egypt and its Transnational Transformation.” Based on his fieldwork in southern Egypt, Toth described the social processes that facilitate the recruitment of relatively privileged university students into religious militant groups. He noted the positive relationship these students begin to develop with these groups who provide important social services such as medicine and tutoring in their rural hometowns. Because education is seen as the primary path to mobility in Egyptian society, the best and brightest of these students go on to university at large urban settings but feel socially alienated and displaced when they arrive. In this context, the religious militant groups offer a familiar home and gathering place for community and support. Fundamentalism offers a worldview that helps them respond to the strangeness that they experience in the contrast between the rural and urban setting.

Professor Toth is a professor of sociology and anthropology who has spent two years as a field office director for Save The Children and a number of years teaching at the University of Cairo and the University of Alexandria in Egypt. He has written on rural labor movements and Islamic religious movements in Egypt.



## Ecclesial Ethics in the Early Church

On February 24th, Francine Cardman, theology professor from Weston Jesuit School of Theology, spoke to an audience of Boston College faculty and students on the topic “Ecclesial Ethics: What Can We Learn From the Early Church?” Cardman noted that within recent studies of the early church, there is an increasing awareness of how social, religious and political issues play out in the evolution of faith and doctrine. This same approach, she believes, makes the historical study of the early church informative of the ethical issues that the contemporary church faces today.

Her presentation centered on three texts from the second century of the early Christian Church and how they raised discussions about issues of money, ministry and community. In the early church, the

ministry was largely made up of itinerant preachers and prophets with a local ministry only beginning to emerge. Because these itinerant ministers depended for their support upon the local community, there was much discussion in these texts about guarding against those false preachers and prophets who might exploit the community for profit. The more general issue raised was how to guard against the abuse of the community’s resources by the ministry. Embedded in this discussion were also larger questions of how to allocate the community’s resources among its various obligations, which included supporting the ministry, widows, and the poor.

This historical perspective, Cardman argues, illustrates how conflicts between the ministry and the community over their mutual

obligations and responsibilities to one another are nothing new in the history of organized religion and the Catholic Church. Rather, these ethical questions and conflicts were the place and means by which emerging ethical norms were raised, debated, and institutionalized. Therefore, the lesson for today is that we should not be afraid of these conflicts for they act as a way of clarifying our mutual responsibilities to one another if discussed openly and communally. It helps us see that conflict between community and ministry is both an inherent part of the relationship and also a part of the process that creates morals and meanings for the Church. Conversely, if those conflicts are covered up and stifled, we lose the benefits of those important insights into our collective moral meaning.

## Findings from the Boston College Survey of Undergraduate Faith and Experience

Father James Fleming, from the Office of the University Mission and Ministry at Boston College, offered a presentation titled “Good and Faithful Service: Findings from the Boston College Survey of Undergraduate Experience and Implications for Religious Mission of Catholic Universities.” His March 15th, talk offered some preliminary findings from a recent survey of Boston College undergraduates. The survey, known commonly as BC-QUE, seeks to understand the kinds of activities that shape the



vocational and spiritual formation of undergraduates at Boston College. In particular, it tries to find out what experiences the students find most “meaningful” as they look back as seniors at the past four years. Among the many results that Fleming reports are findings that while a large proportion of students stop going to worship services once they enter college, reports on measures of spirituality increase dramatically, from 38% to 80%. Along with this, practices of prayer and medita-

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## American Protestants and the Doctrine of Original Sin

On April 13th, Andrew Finstuen, a graduate student in the History department at Boston College, presented work from his dissertation research in a talk titled "Hearts of Darkness: American Protestants and the Doctrine of Original Sin, 1945-1965." In his presentation, Finstuen discussed the intellectual discourse around the concept of human nature and sin as can be observed in the writings and speeches of Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich and Billy Graham and by examining the popular and specialized literature of that period. Although distinctive in their audiences, Finstuen argues that Niebuhr, Tillich and Graham are connected in their views of sinfulness. He believes that the doctrine of original sin played a larger role than previously thought among lay believers regardless of age, gender, denomination or education.



This argument offers a counterpoint to those who believe that the influence of theological worldviews, particularly among lay believers, declined among Protestants in the mid-twentieth century. Finstuen argues that these conversations about the role of sin in human nature helped ordinary lay Protestants to make sense of the cataclysmic events they were witnessing in their present lives including economic instability, depression, World War II and the beginning of the Cold War.

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## Political Scientist from Tajikistan is Visiting Scholar at the Boisi Center

This spring the Boisi Center hosted Abdullo Rahnamo Hakim, a political scientist specializing in Islam and Central Asia, as a visiting scholar at the Boisi Center. Hakim's funding and support was provided by the Contemporary Issues Fellowship Program sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State. During his stay in Boston from January through April, Hakim conducted independent research both on state-church relations in the United States and delivered a number of talks throughout the United States as an invited speaker at scholarly conferences at Columbia University on "Political Processes in Tajikistan," the University of Ohio (Columbus) on "Secular State and Political Islam in Tajikistan: From Neutral Radicalism to Peaceful Co-existence" and Georgia State University on "The Muslim Experience of Globalization." In addition, he participated in, and spoke to, classes by Professor Nasser Behnegar and Professor Kathleen Bailey at Boston College. He also visited churches and mosques, religious schools, and interviewed a number of scholars and religious laypersons. For the remainder of his US visit, he will be visiting the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy in Washington, DC and also giving talks at the US



Department of State. He has also been invited to deliver a presentation at the upcoming NATO Conference of Advanced Studies in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on the subject of Islamic militancy.

One of the things that most impressed Hakim during his American visit was the role of women in the United States. He saw that the traditional relationship between men and women in Tajikistan is an oppressive one and that women are made to be very dependent on their husbands. He was also amazed by the freedom of religion in the United States, and felt that he became "more religious" during his visit here. He described the situation of political secularism in Tajikistan which results in the prohibition of some religious practices and where religion is looked down upon by the intellectual elite. In this country, he was surprised to learn that scholars, intellectuals and professional people openly identified with their religious identity and did not consider it to be anti-modern.

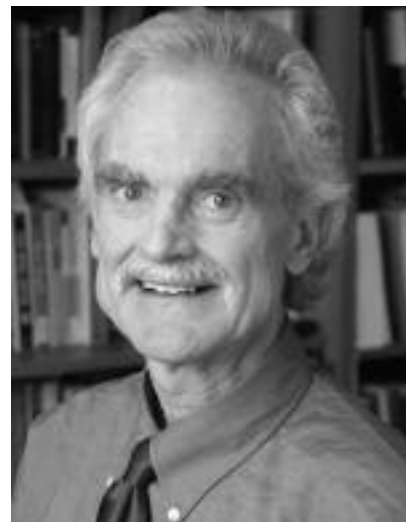
In addition to teaching at Tajik National University, and working as an assistant to the First Deputy to the Prime Minister of Tajikistan, Hakim is also the founder of Bunyodi Rahnamo, a licensed NGO devoted to promoting literacy among schoolchildren, and is a published poet.

## Boisi Center hosts Visiting Scholar from Australia

On study leave from La Trobe University in Melbourne, Professor Rowan Ireland is spending April and May as a Visiting Scholar at the Boisi Center. At La Trobe, he teaches in programs on Latin American Studies, sociology of religion and development.

He has two projects at the Boisi Center. One is to complete chapters on the role of religion in residential associations in the shantytowns of São Paulo. This is for a book he is writing on the so-called "popular urban movements" in Brazil. The book is based on live-in fieldwork research over the last twenty years.

The other project is to engage in library research on the implications of increasing religious diversity for civil society in America. This is part of a study comparing patterns and consequences of increasing religious diversity in Australia, Brazil and America. In the three countries there is debate about whether the consequences involve the fragmentation and weakening of civil society, or its thickening, and the deepening of civic democracy.



## Sister Helen Prejean Delivers the 4th Annual Prophetic Voices of the Church Lecture

In a rare moment in the cacophony of college life, over 600 students packed into Robsham Theatre on the evening of March 16th and sat in absolute silence. The only voice was that of Sister Helen Prejean, world famous anti-death penalty activist and author of *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States* and the recently released *Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions* (Random House, 2005). Sr. Helen, in a voice that moved her audience with its tones of weariness, sadness and struggle, narrated her witness to the last days and moments of Patrick Sonnier as he was put to death by electrocution in Angola State prison in Louisiana for the murder of two young teenagers. She spoke of how she was raised in a climate of upper middle class privilege and how she was eventually led through a series of small events and decisions to the role that she has today. She related in personal terms her prison ministry in the last months of Sonnier's life as well as the pain and agony of the murder victims and their families. Her themes included the ways that Jesus led her down the path that she walks today and has called her as a witness to the inequality of the justice system in the United States. This witness included the writing of *Dead Man Walking*, its subsequent transformation into a movie, and now its re-birth as a play that can be performed by high school and college aged groups free of copyright fees in order to raise consciousness among young people about the morality of the death penalty.

She also spoke at length about her new book *The*

*Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions* (2005, Random House) in which she relates the stories of two men who she believes were wrongfully executed by an unjust system. One inmate, Dobie Gillis, had an IQ of 65 and was, she believes, incompetently represented by a defense that did nothing to challenge a prosecution based on speculation and conjecture. The other inmate, Joseph O'Dell, was convicted on the testimony of a "jailhouse snitch" who later admitted to lying. The larger message of these accounts is that the poor do not get the same justice as



the wealthy which undermines the legitimacy of not just the death penalty but with the entire way that we view and treat "criminal acts" in this country.

The effort to bring Sr. Helen to this campus was coordinated and co-sponsored by the Community of Sant'Egidio in Boston which has an active group on the Boston College campus. The Sant'Egidio Community has had an ongoing involvement in raising consciousness about death penalty issues on campus and in the Boston area.

## James Weiss on The Conclave and the New Pope

On April 20th, the Boisi Center held a colloquium with The Rev. James Weiss of the Boston College Theology department, who spoke on “The Conclave and the New Pope: Precedents, Paradoxes, and Priorities.” Among other topics, Weiss gave an overview of the history of conclaves, and described the recent conclave’s most pressing issues.

From the Renaissance to 1878, conclaves were heavily political in nature. As popes wielded considerable temporal power, the election of a new pontiff had a direct bearing on the balance of power in Europe, and so conclaves were rife with political machinations, intrigue, and even espionage. But, as Weiss explained, “1878 marks the turn to the modern conclave, due to the fall of the Papal States in 1870.” As the European monarchies declined and the papacy’s own temporal power withered away, conclaves became essentially religious affairs, all but irrelevant to the European balance of power.

The recent conclave faced several issues. Weiss highlighted the challenge of electing a pope when the modern papacy has become an office too large for any one person. The cardinals recognized that the next pope must have the patience of a good listener, the ability to react quickly to global crises, and the aptitude for supervising the Roman Curia. They also had to find someone who could stem the decline of Roman Catholicism in Europe, even as the faith is challenged by a growing evangelical Protestantism in Latin America.



## Stephen Burgard Speaks on Press Credibility and Faith-Based Politics



The Boisi Center held a lunchtime colloquium on April 27th with Stephen Burgard of the Northeastern University School of Journalism, whose topic was “The Press and Faith Based Politics.” Burgard’s talk explained why, notwithstanding increased coverage of religious topics, the press all-too-often overlooks the effect religious and moral values have on politics and public policy. There are two reasons for this paradox.

First, the media’s sharp focus on contemporary events discourages analysis of long-term trends and of the relationships between events. One example is the media’s treatment of the Bush Administration’s Office of Faith-Based Initiatives, which Burgard said should have emphasized the office’s origins in the “charitable choice” provisions of the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, signed by President Clinton. Press coverage should have shown that “religion-based initiatives have found support in both major parties for some time,” and that the long-term story regarding faith-based initiatives is really “mostly about differences in emphasis between the two parties.”

Second, the press has had difficulty understanding the “moral middle,” centrist voters of both parties whose faith informs their politics. Unlike the religious right, who link politics and religion in a high-profile way, the

“moral middle” is difficult to identify without looking at sociological data, something reporters have shown little inclination to do. However, Burgard concluded that understanding the religious center is crucial, if there is to be intelligent and thoroughgoing reporting about issues such as gay marriage and stem cell research.

## Religion and Aging: Findings from a 60 Year Longitudinal Study

On March 30th, Michele Dillon, a sociologist from the University of New Hampshire and author of numerous studies of American Catholicism, spoke on her most recent research on religious attitudes and practices as they develop over the life course. Unlike most studies on religion and spiritual practices that study a sample at one point in time and do not account for the effects of an evolving personality over time, Dillon's work is based on data from a sample of babies and children in the 1920's who were followed and interviewed at periodic intervals over 60 years of their lives. The continuity of the data over the respondents' lives gives us a fascinating insight into how religiosity and spirituality wax and wane as individuals age and mature.

Interestingly, Dillon and her co-author, the psychologist Paul Wink, find that although respondents' religiousness and spirituality tend to increase most sharply in the period between the ages of one's 50's and 70's, that people are actually quite stable suggesting that people do not tend to experience radical shifts in their religious and spiritual worldview, even after having negative life experiences. Further, their evidence suggests that the religious atmosphere in their family of origin is the single best predictor of religious involvement in late adulthood, reinforcing the important influence of religious formation in the family.

Dillon and Wink also examined the relationship of religion and spirituality to a concern for others, in order

to explore hypotheses that associate spirituality with self-centeredness and organized religion with fostering broader social commitments. In their sample they found that both highly religious and highly spiritual people

were likely to show a deep and genuine concern for others and were also more likely to be socially engaged with people, groups and activities. However, the religious and the spiritual show this concern and care in different ways. Highly religious people (defined by the routine exercise of religious practices) tend to connect in a communal, interpersonal way through relationships with family and friends. Their everyday routines showed time spent on social activities with family and friends and community service done within a group setting. Highly spiritual people (defined by the routine exercise of spiritual practices) on the other hand tend to express their connections through creative projects and in social activities that reach



beyond their own family and friends and might leave a legacy that "would outlive the self." These people tend to show a broader societal perspective and more inciviveness into the human condition. Dillon and Wink also look specifically at measures of spirituality and narcissism and find no link. This finding is significant in that it appears to counter the more popular association some cultural analysts have made between spirituality and a self-regarding individualism. This study provides important data to the contrary.

## Findings from the Boston College Survey Continued

*Continued from page 2*

tion increase as do conversations about spirituality. Fleming also finds that Boston College appears to have a very strong culture of volunteerism, even higher than might be expected at a Catholic university. Fleming argued the usefulness of separating concepts of religiosity and spirituality, and also to break down these measures further into indicators of worship attendance, frequency and practice of prayer, identification with religion, and spiritual practices. These separate indicators provide a more nuanced portrait of the religious and spiritual life of undergradu-