
The Boisi Center Report

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

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From the Director



Of all the recognition the Boisi Center has received since it first started out more than twelve years ago, the most important was the decision by Boston College to allow us to organize two different events honoring its 150th birthday. I will have more to say later about the second of those events, on religious diversity and the common good, that will take place next year. In this letter, I just want to mention the first: a two day conference in November 2012 on religion and the liberal aims of higher education, organized by Boisi Center associate director Erik Owens and the Boisi Professor of Education and Public Policy, Henry Braun.

Six college presidents, faculty and students from BC, and visitors from other universities in the Boston area joined us to hear a persuasive keynote address from Nathan Hatch, president of Wake Forest University, as well as a series of panel discussions created to follow up on his comments. Rather than presenting formal papers, we asked the panelists to join in a conversation about the history, leadership, and major issues that confront colleges and universities as they think about how to teach religion and respond to the spiritual, and secular, perspectives of their students. I

cannot go into any important contributions they made (see inside for details), other than to note how pleased we were that the sesquicentennial of our institution was celebrated by the benefits of having smart and experienced people from such different perspectives engage with each other.

Aside from our luncheons, which covered topics ranging from Jews on Broadway to creating effective Catholic schools, we held a panel discussion on Latinos and the 2012 presidential election just days before citizens cast their votes. Our experts correctly predicted that the outcome would be shaped by the Latino vote. The consequences of that development are playing out, as the party that lost the Latino vote struggles to find a way to gain more of it. Our second major panel discussion focused on the role nuns can and should play in American public life. Sisters from different orders described their religious and social callings in a civilized and respectful discussion that this topic needs. One of the tasks facing the Pope Francis will involve how to deal with American sisters in particular, many of whom are active in social justice movements.

As for me, I spent the semester teaching undergraduates about the American culture war and making substantial progress on a book I am writing. This will be the first book of mine focusing on Jews and their role in public life. I will be arguing that the diaspora, far from being a punishment that God imposed on the Jews for their disobedience, offers an opportunity for Jews to keep alive the universalistic aspects of their religious tradition. I hope to finish the book by the end of this summer. Also, after a long association with *The New Republic*, I am no longer a contributing editor and will in all likelihood no longer be writing for them. It has long been one of my favorite magazines and I wish it well in the new direction it is taking.

— Alan Wolfe

Religion and the Aims of Liberal Education

On November 8-9, 2012, the Boisi Center helped to organize a major academic symposium on “Religion and the Liberal Aims of Higher Education,” in honor of Boston College’s Sesquicentennial. Co-organized by Boisi Center Associate Director Erik Owens and Boisi Professor of Education and Public Policy Henry Braun, the conference gathered fifteen influential scholars for rigorous reflection on the nature of the academy, the place of religion, and the future of liberal education.

Nathan Hatch, president of Wake Forest University, set the conference tone with an opening keynote that argued for a space for religious institutions in the middle ground of higher education. Both prescriptive and descriptive, his talk challenged conference participants and the whole BC community to recommit to the liberal arts.

The first panel discussion, moderated by author and *Vanity Fair* editor Cullen Murphy, offered an historical overview of the shifts away from religion and liberal education in the academy. Historians Andrew Delbanco (Columbia University), Mark Noll (University of Notre Dame) and Julie Reuben (Harvard Graduate School of Education) contributed expertise in different periods of American history and provided their own visions of a fruitful future for religious reflection on college campuses.

Mark Massa, S.J., Dean of Boston College’s School of Theology and Ministry, moderated the second panel, which brought together three current college presidents, John Jenkins, C.S.C. (University of Notre Dame), Jane McAuliffe (Bryn Mawr), and Philip Ryken (Wheaton College). All three reflected on the distinct ways in which their institutions’ religious communities contributed essential resources to the project of liberal education, often at the most fundamental levels. Each also spoke about the unique challenges of attending to religious diversity within a context of religious commitment.



Jane McAuliffe



Nathan Hatch

Richard Morrill, former president of the University of Richmond and current president of the Teagle Foundation, delivered a lunchtime keynote address that focused on defining the value of the liberal arts in more than just economic terms. He called for a greater attention to life’s “big questions” at colleges and universities, rejecting as incomplete any tendency to dismiss the potential answers found in religious traditions.

The final panel, moderated by *New York Times* columnist Mark Oppenheimer, explored the ongoing tensions inherent in pursuing the aims of liberal education alongside religious commitments. Author Susan Jacoby joined Interfaith Youth Core founder Eboo Patel and Yale philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff to consider ways to balance the particularity of faith convictions amid the diversity of a pluralized academy and world, outlining opportunities for religious institutions to contribute to the common good.

Boston College president William P. Leahy, S.J. delivered the closing remarks. Emphasizing the crucial need for vision, mission and leadership at religious universities, his comments laid the foundation for a continuing implementation of the conference’s insights at Boston College.

For a more thorough recap of this conference, along with audio, video, transcripts and more, visit bc.edu/boisi and click on the conference link at the bottom right of our home page. ■

Individuals, Institutions and Religious Freedom

Should our laws aim to protect the religious practices and beliefs of individuals or groups, or both? Are these ends at odds with one another? What sustains the free exercise of religion in the United States? On November 29 the Boisi Center hosted legal scholars Richard Garnett and Gregory Kalscheur, S.J. to address these questions in a lively forum on religious freedom. Garnett, a prolific scholar and legal commentator, is professor of law and associate dean for faculty research at the University of Notre Dame School of Law. He began by noting that “religious freedom is a human right, grounded in human dignity, essential for human flourishing.” The special protection the Constitution gives to religion is a recognition that religious freedom is “part of the very structure of a free society, not merely a grudging concession made by a tolerant sovereign.” Religious freedom protections aren’t accidents or anachronisms; they are “features, not bugs” in our laws.

Garnett argued that religious freedom is properly protected in this country by a secular government and its secular laws—not to marginalize religion but rather “to protect religious freedom in private, in public, in civil society and in politics.” Still, these stout legal protections are insufficient without a robust cultural commitment to religious freedom. Quoting Archbishop Charles Chaput, Garnett said that the Constitution is “just another elegant scrap of paper unless people keep it alive with their convictions and lived witness,” something Garnett said was under threat today.

Religious freedom is equally essential to individuals as it is to institutions, Garnett argued, and institutions have inherent rights to religious freedom that are not merely derivative of individual rights. Indeed, individual and institutional religious freedoms are complementary, not conflicting. If we reduce religious freedom to the individuals exercising it, we overlook the institutional contexts that shape individuals in society



Richard Garnett

as well as the communal aspect of religious experience.

Boston College law professor and associate dean of arts & sciences Gregory Kalscheur, S.J. offered a response. Kalscheur agreed with Garnett’s account of religious freedom as intrinsic to both individuals and institutions, and strongly endorsed the Supreme Court’s recent decision in *Hosanna Tabor*, which maintained the rights of religious communities to hire and fire (without concern for employment discrimination laws) employees who perform religious functions.

What, then, are the limits of the church’s freedom from government interference? All human activity has an inherently religious dimension, Kalscheur argued, citing Jesuit Michael Buckley’s claim that “There is a religious density to all things.” But this does not mean all church activity should fall outside the realm of regulation. Kalscheur proposed that while “uniquely religious” activities should be exempt from scrutiny, “when the church embodies its religious mission through temporal education and social services activities that are not uniquely religious (though they *are* inherently religious), they are engaged in activity that the civil authority may have the jurisdiction to regulate.” When religious activity violates public order to a degree that intervention is required, the state should still honor the privileged character of religious freedom by interfering in the most minimal way possible, and thus upholding a culture of respect and tolerance. ■



Greg Kalscheur, S.J.

Latinos, Religion and the American Electorate

With a burgeoning population and increasing national political participation and prominence, Latino voters promised to be a decisive factor in the 2012 elections. On November 1, the Boisi Center hosted a panel featuring Alan Wolfe, Susan Eckstein, and Luis Lugo to discuss various dimensions of the Latino vote in the 2012 elections.

Alan Wolfe, director of the Boisi Center and professor of political science, illustrated the larger political context in which the discussion about the Latino vote takes place. In 1969 political scientist Kevin Phillips correctly predicted the rise of the conservative Republican movement in his book *The Emerging Republican Majority*. In 2002 as conservative Republicans continued to maintain a firm grasp on national electoral power, political scientists John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira predicted that the nation would soon experience a political realignment in favor of the Democratic party in their book, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*. This shift, they argued, would be driven by the increasing electoral influence of young people, women, professionals and Hispanics, who tend to favor the Democratic party. In 2008 these constituencies played a key role in the political coalition that elected Barack Obama, but in the week prior to the 2012 election it was still uncertain if the Obama coalition would rematerialize. Wolfe argued that heavy Latino turnout in favor of the Democrats could signal an important shift in national politics.

Boston University sociologist Susan Eckstein argued that while Latinos on average tend to favor the Democratic party, it remains difficult to speak of a pan-Latino vote. Cuban-Americans in Florida, for example, lean heavily for Republican candidates and in 2004 were integral to securing a second term for George W. Bush. The Cuban-American preference for the Republic party, Eckstein claimed, reflects the unique circumstances that shape their relationship to the United States, especially the



Luis Lugo

symbolic importance of resistance to the Castro regime in U.S. foreign policy and Cuban local political, social, and economic prominence in Florida. Cuban-Americans are thus more interested in maintaining anti-Castro policies and pro-business policies than other Latino groups. Additionally, immigration is a less significant issue among Cuban-Americans than other Latino communities, since Cubans have much higher rates of naturalization owing to the Cuban Refugee Adjustment Act of 1996. The Cuban-American anomaly indicates the importance of a nuanced view of Latino voters and communities in light of complex circumstances that influence voter behavior.

In light of these tensions, Luis Lugo, director of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, provided statistical analysis that is integral to understanding political dynamics among U.S. Latinos. Latinos comprise 17 percent of the U.S. population and thus promise to play an increasingly significant role in politics in future elections. Still, the size of the Latino community has not yet translated into political and electoral power. One major reason for this lag, in addition to low registration among eligible voters, is the relative youth of the Latino community: the median age for U.S. Latinos is 18 years old—20 years younger than the population at large. With 50,000 native born Latinos turning 18 every month, however, this bloc will play an even bigger role in determining the character of our national politics. The increase in the number of eligible, registered, and active Latino voters can have a major effect on both major political parties. As Lugo noted, Catholic and evangelical Latinos (who still constitute a majority of this population) combine social conservatism with support for a larger government that provides more services. This is presently an unusual set of political opinions to hold together, but as the Latino vote increases in size and influence, both major parties will need to carefully scrutinize their platforms if they hope to successfully reach out to these communities. ■



Erik Owens, Alan Wolfe, Susan Eckstein and Luis Lugo

Nuns in American Public Life

Among the important outcomes of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was a call for the world's nuns to adapt their ministries to better serve the modern world. Over time many sisters in the United States increased their participation in social justice movements and political activism. In recent years, however, Pope Benedict XVI and some members of the Curia grew increasingly concerned that the modern sisters had strayed too far from their original mandates. In 2011, after a two-year investigation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), an umbrella organization representing approximately eighty percent of America's Catholic nuns, a Vatican report raised serious doctrinal concerns. To better understand the controversy and the historical role sisters have played in the American Church and broader society, the Boisi Center hosted a panel discussion with two prominent nuns and an historian of women religious on October 18.

Syracuse University historian Margaret Susan Thomson noted that Catholic sisters have always responded to social problems within the larger society, so their work is controversial by nature. During the Civil War, for example, nuns worked as nurses, defying political boundaries by treating soldiers from both the North and the South. Catholic sisters also provided the earliest form of health insurance in America, selling inexpensive tickets to miners and loggers that guaranteed medical care. These examples indicate the significance of public action and advocacy for social justice among Catholic nuns in America.

Boston College theology professor Sr. Mary Ann Hinsdale, I.H.M. added that nuns' advocacy work can be a source of tension between the Vatican and American nuns. Case in point is the Vatican's critical review of the LCWR, which was ostensibly simply aimed to assess declining numbers of women religious, but was felt by many sisters, said Sr. Hinsdale, as a mistrustful intrusion on their genuine efforts to put Catholic teaching into practice.

Finally, political scientist and Aquinas College administrator Sr. Mary Bendyna focused on the educational role of contemporary American nuns. Sr. Bendyna argued that many Catholics are unfamiliar with basic Church doctrine, leading them to prioritize their political ideologies ahead of their religious commitments. While affirming the crucial importance of other aspects of their mission, Sr. Bendyna argued that theological education and spiritual formation of the Catholic laity is



Sr. Mary Bendyna

central to the public witness of religious sisters today.

Of course the panelists discussed many more controversial and important topics that we cannot cover here. The lively exchanges among panelists and an audience with many nuns is worth viewing in its entirety, and we encourage you to do so at <http://frontrow.bc.edu/program/nunsinamerica>. (Most of the Boisi Center's other events have video posted on their event pages as well.) ■

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

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Facts and Fears in the “Global War on Terror”

A 23-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency’s clandestine services, Glenn Carle retired in 2007 as the Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Transnational Threats. Having spoken at the Boisi Center about interrogation policy a year earlier, Carle returned on November 14 to discuss the current state of the “Global War on Terror,” or GWOT, to a packed room in Fulton Hall. He centered his talk on a discussion of two “fears” and four “facts.”

The first widespread fear, stoked by the government and media alike, Carle said, is that al Qaeda is a coherent global organization with operations in up to eighty countries, when in reality it is dangerous but only fully operational in six countries. The second fear driving the GWOT is nuclear terrorism, but Carle said the odds of terrorists stealing a major nuclear weapon or constructing one themselves is “infinitesimal.”

Four facts are key to understanding the current context, Carle noted. First, al Qaeda is a relatively small organization with goals quite distinct from Hamas, the Taliban and other terrorist organizations; and we know that it has been “decimated” by U.S. attacks in the last decade. “It’s hard to be a terrorist,” Carle told the audience. “The life expectancy is short and there aren’t a lot of places to go.” Second, the FBI has aggressively sought and prosecuted would-be terrorists in the U.S., even when the planning was not yet operational. Third, globalization and modernization are the root causes of



Glenn Carle

modern terrorism, so the long-term solution is not to “win” the GWOT but to help societies manage these structural transformations. Fourth, said Carle, the Obama administration has been ruthless in its use of drones but quite nuanced in its assessment of different terrorist organizations.

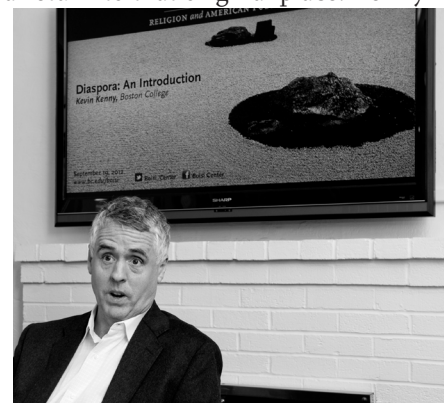
Carle closed by arguing that the idea of a unified GWOT was a fiction that is now properly put to rest. We are currently engaged in an aggressive counter-terrorism campaign that targets individual terrorist operatives, he said, but our long-term interests are best met by fostering economic and social opportunities for women and broad economic growth that makes particular populations less vulnerable to terrorist influences. ■

What Is a Diaspora Today?

Diaspora is a Greek term that describes a scattering or dispersion of people from their ancestral homeland. When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, the term was used to describe the population of Jews forced into exile during the Babylonian captivity, and the concept of “diaspora” thus took on theological significance. In the last fifty years, however, the term has been embraced by (or simply applied to) other groups who have been separated from their homeland voluntarily or involuntarily. To understand these new developments and their implications for contemporary social and political thought, the Boisi Center invited Kevin Kenny, professor of history at BC and author of the forthcoming *Diaspora: An Introduction*, to speak on September 19 about his research on the issue.

Kenny offered a rich historical account of how the concept of diaspora proliferated among scholars and non-scholars alike in the twentieth century. From the displacement caused by the Irish potato famine to the

forced removal and enslavement of Africans in the Americas, the concept has now expanded to include the movement of people related to decolonization, international refugees, and other political and economic migratory circumstances. Today’s global diasporas may involve interconnected communities around the world tied together by a common heritage who may or may not focus on a return to that original place. Kenny argued that while the term has sometimes been stretched beyond its limits, it nevertheless has great value in helping us understand the relations of people and places. ■



Kevin Kenny

American Dreams: Jews & Broadway

On November 14 the Boisi Center hosted a lunch colloquium featuring Stuart Hecht, associate professor of theater at Boston College and author of the recently published *Transposing Broadway: Jews, Assimilation and the American Musical*. Hecht spoke about the influence of Jewish Americans—especially second generation Jewish immigrants in New York—on the development of the Broadway musical. These musicals, Hecht argued, presented a template for success in America, an inclusive vision of America where assimilation is the key to upward mobility. For Jewish composers, lyricists, and audiences, the Broadway stage became a “cultural Ellis Island,” revealing the gateway to achieving the American dream.

Until the 1930s, Hecht noted, Jews portrayed their aspirations for assimilation predominantly through narratives about upper-class white characters. This dynamic began to change with the 1943 premier of “Oklahoma!” This musical featured a comedic secondary character, the Persian peddler Ali Hakim, which marked the introduction of increasingly prominent characters from marginal social groups. By the 1960s, characters from these groups became more commonplace and were even the central protagonists in some shows. The gradual incorporation of these



Stuart Hecht

characters into the Broadway mainstream reveals the inclusive vision presented in musicals composed by Jewish Americans.

After seeing how the Jews had used the musical, other underrepresented social groups followed suit, leading to the production of “Hair,” “Rent,” “The Color Purple,” and “The Book of Mormon.” These plays resonated with American audiences, who found they could empathize with protagonists from marginal racial, ethnic, sexual, or religious identities. ■

Renewing America’s Catholic Schools

Patricia Weitzel-O’Neill, Executive Director of the Roche Center for Catholic Education at Boston College, visited the Boisi Center on September 25 to discuss Catholic school reform. Weitzel-O’Neill has been instrumental in drafting and disseminating the new National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools, a project co-sponsored by the Roche Center, the Center for Catholic School Effectiveness at Loyola University Chicago, and the National Catholic Educational Association.



Patricia Weitzel-O’Neill

The document addresses a variety of issues facing U.S. Catholic schools today, emphasizing questions of Catholic mission and identity, governance and leadership, academic excellence, and operational vitality. Weitzel-O’Neill noted that many schools operated by religious orders, such as the Jesuits or the Cristo Rey network, already have standards in these areas. Yet for a variety of reasons, Catholic schools on the parish level have struggled to implement similar principles in their institutions. Weitzel-O’Neill argued that these standards will help to clarify the Catholic school “brand,” provide a framework for improvement and guidance, offer a basis for accreditation and increase donor confidence in the sustainability of Catholic schools.

This attempt to reform Catholic education is essential given the important role Catholic schools play in our society. The opportunities and values these schools provide to Catholics and non-Catholics alike are crucial, especially for underprivileged inner-city communities. Catholic schools teach their students about interior life, prayer, conflict resolution, and mindfulness among other values that can contribute to societal flourishing and constructive citizenship. In this manner, the goal of Catholic schools is to not only educate but also to “nurture the soul of the nation.” ■

THE BOISI CENTER FOR RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

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Spring 2013 Events

Panels:

The Future of Catholic Periodicals: Finances, Faith and the Digital Age

February 20, 2013 • Gasson 100 • 5:30-7:00pm

Speakers: Paul Baumann, *Commonweal*, Meinrad Sherer-Emunds, *U.S. Catholic*, Matt Malone, S.J., *America*; moderated by Tom Roberts, *National Catholic Reporter*. Co-sponsored by the Church in the 21st Century Center

Poverty and American National Priorities

February 26, 2013 • Higgins 300 • 7:30-9:00pm

Speakers: Eric Gregory (*Princeton University*), Susan Crawford Sullivan (*College of the Holy Cross*), William Julius Wilson (*Harvard University*); moderated by Erik Owens (*Boston College*)

The Papacy after Benedict XVI

February 27, 2013 • Higgins 300 • 7:30-9:00pm

Speakers (all from Boston College): Rev. James Bretzke, S.J.; Sr. Mary Ann Hinsdale, IHM; Rev. Robert Imbelli, Rev. James Weiss; moderated by Rev. Mark Massa, S.J.

12th Annual Prophetic Voices Lecture:

Prophetic Action and Imagination

Ernesto Cortes, *Industrial Areas Foundation*

Tuesday, March 26, 2013 • Heights Room • 5:30-7:00pm

Lunch Colloquia:

Boisi Center, 12:00-1:15 pm; RSVP required to richarsh@bc.edu

My Experience as the U.S. Youth Delegate

Brooke Loughrin, *Boston College*

February 6, 2013

Youth Civic Engagement

Meira Levinson, *Harvard Graduate School of Education*

February 28, 2013

What is Liberation Theology?

Roberto Goizueta, *Boston College*

March 12, 2013

Cosmopolitanism in Constitutional Law

Vlad Perju, *Boston College*

April 11, 2013

Religion, State and Education: Turkish and American Perspectives

Erik Owens, *Boston College*

April 17, 2013