

BOISI CENTER REPORT



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FROM THE INTERIM DIRECTOR



At the Boisi Center we work hard to convene and sustain rigorous, civil, and constructive conversations about religion in public life, in pursuit of the common good of a religiously diverse society. We

frequently bring exceptional scholarship into dialogue with engaged citizenship and the creative arts, to produce meaningful exchanges that inform, challenge, and inspire. It's a collaborative effort, not just between our staff and the speakers, or between the speakers and the audience, but also between the Boisi Center and all the other academic units, institutes and centers that we work with.

This academic year alone, in addition to our graduate student symposium, we organized and hosted twenty public events on campus and co-sponsored six others. In the process, we collaborated on at least one public event with seven of BC's eight schools and colleges (and I'm sure we will work with the Woods College soon), ten departments or interdisciplinary programs, seven other BC institutes or centers, several graduate and undergraduate student organizations, and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Collaboration, for us, isn't merely making a virtue of necessity (though it is that, too, given our limited resources); it's integral to the work we do as interdisciplinary public scholars, and as scholars of religion and public life. In talking about this recently with colleagues who lead centers like ours at other universities around the world, it has become clear that many others feel the same way, and are eager to break out of the silos that usually prevent us from working together as institutions.

As a result, I have begun to work on several projects with centers at other universities, and I am pleased to announce that the Boisi Center will be convening a summit of academic centers on religion and public life in advance of the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), which meets November 17-21 in Boston. We have invited leaders from fifty centers and institutes in North America, Europe and Africa, and will be joined by AAR senior staff and its next three presidents (who are elected three years in advance), plus members of the AAR's Committee on the Public Understanding of Religion (which I chair). Participants will share best practices, discuss common ends, and hopefully make a plan for some sort of collaboration in the years ahead. Although the meeting is closed to the public, we will provide a report in our next newsletter.

A number of other fall 2017 projects and events are taking shape as well. On October 11 we will host a high-profile conference marking the 50th anniversary of a seminal document in American Catholic higher education known as the Land O'Lakes Agreement, featuring the presidents of five Catholic colleges and universities. We're co-sponsoring a multi-day conference on "Educating for Modern Democracy" (November 7-9), and we have several lectures, seminars, and evening events that we'll announce later this summer.

Our popular lunch colloquia will continue with sessions on the new critiques of religious freedom; Islamic intellectual traditions; and the 500th anniversary of the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation (noting, of course, that Martin Luther was both an Augustinian Catholic priest and a contemporary of Jesuit founder Ignatius of Loyola).

University of Oklahoma professor Mara Willard will be in residence for the 2017-18 academic year as a visiting scholar, researching a book on communities of practice among Boston Catholics during the 2002 crisis in the Church.

Perhaps most importantly, this summer we welcome the Boisi Center's new director, Mark Massa, S.J. a distinguished historian of twentieth-century Catholicism and former dean of BC's School of Theology and Ministry. Mark and I have been in close contact this year and I expect the leadership transition to be seamless as we continue the Boisi Center's work in the years to come.

Finally, I note with sadness the departures of five (!) of our terrific staff members from this year. Undergraduate research assistants Ryan Duffy, Amelia Parker and Sylvia Wagborne are graduating; graduate research assistant Tom Fraatz will complete his dissertation this summer and receive his Ph.D. in Biblical Studies this fall; program coordinator Suzanne Hevelone, who earned her Ph.D. in our theology department several years ago, will start teaching in the beloved PULSE program here at BC. (See the back page for more about their next steps.) This crew has done an enormous amount of work this year to pull together our public events, web content and this newsletter, and I will miss them greatly. We'll have a new crop of research assistants in the fall (along with veteran Omeed Alidadi, who returns from study abroad in Tajikistan), but it's bittersweet to see a fun and productive staff move on to other positions.

Best wishes for a restful, productive and adventurous summer to all.

~ Erik Owens

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND THE COMMON GOOD

Melissa Rogers, distinguished church-state lawyer and former White House official, argued for the centrality of religious freedom in efforts to advance the common good.



Melissa Rogers

On February 23 the Boisi Center hosted Melissa Rogers, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, for a lecture on the legal underpinnings of religious freedom and the advancement of the common good. At the time of her visit, Rogers had just stepped down as special assistant to President Obama and executive director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, roles she held from 2013-2017.

Before serving in the White House, Rogers, a widely respected church-state lawyer, served as director of the Center for Religion and Public Affairs at Wake Forest University Divinity School. She has led efforts to forge consensus among diverse religious and secular groups on numerous key public policy issues. Her areas of expertise include the First Amendment's religion clauses, religion in American public life, and the interplay of religion, policy, and politics.

Rogers outlined the fundamental right to religious freedom and the constitutional and legal provisions that guarantee them. The Establishment and Free Exercise clauses ("Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof") were indispensable in granting and protecting the religious freedom and plurality that we have in the United States today, she noted.

Rogers drew on her extensive legal background to explain the constitutional principles and precedents that have shaped religious freedom in the United States today. Though divisions in the country about the separation of church and state persist, Rogers argued we have made significant gains. She celebrated the degree to which religious freedom and plurality have flourished in the United States and commended our government's protection of the non-religious and of majority and minority faiths alike.

She also discussed the spike in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States, including the desecration of headstones in a Jewish cemetery that had occurred just days prior.

Regarding President Trump's initial immigration and refugee executive order, Rogers focused not on moral, social, or

religious imperatives, but a constitutional argument. She approvingly cited Ilya Somin, who wrote in the *Washington Post* that "Despite a thin veneer of religious neutrality, the order does in fact target Muslims," placing it at odds with the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses.

Rogers reflected on her experiences working in the White House throughout her talk. She spoke about the difficulty that policymakers, governmental agencies, and courts alike face in balancing the competing claims and interests from various religious and secular groups. She also stressed the importance of partnering with diverse organizations and including public officials with deep sensitivity and appreciation for religious freedom. She concluded with a note that in addition to the three branches of the federal government, "We should never forget that citizens have an important role in protecting religious freedom."

Questions from the audience covered the different language with regard to the common good used by Presidents Obama and Trump; how to define the term "religious freedom;" the transition between administrations and its implications for her former positions; social ethics; religious tolerance; and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

More information and pictures can be found on the event page.

www.bc.edu/boisi-rogers



Toward a Culture of UNIVERSITY ETHICS

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE

The Boisi Center is pleased to have played a role as a co-sponsor of a major interdisciplinary conference on April 5-7, led by the Jesuit Institute, entitled “*Toward a Culture of University Ethics*.” Eighteen presentations and three keynote addresses took up the multifaceted ethical challenges facing universities today.

BC theologian and Jesuit Institute director James Keenan, S.J., author of the 2015 book *University Ethics*, opened the conference with the observation that although universities teach ethics, they pay scant attention to the “systemic problem” of the lack of ethics within university culture.

Historian Taylor Branch delivered a keynote on university sports that highlighted the ambiguity of the term “student-athlete,” noting that the term created a unique category of students whose work is uncompensated. Academic institutions, however, accrue substantial financial benefits from their unpaid work, and Branch pushed institutions to consider whether they are complicit in wage theft from students who participate in athletics.

The next day, Ruth Simmons, former president of Brown University, gave a plenary address on race, gender, and ethics at the university, lauding universities as a force for change. While glaring ethical lapses have occurred in university settings, Simmons said that by being honest about these lapses, universities can be ethical agents for social good. While much remains to be done in dealing with both race and gender, university voices and protests are the seeds for change.

In the first breakout panel, Nicholas Bowman (University of Iowa), Ximena Zúñiga (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), and Janet Helms (Boston College) considered diversity as a moral and ethical imperative. The most genuine encounter with diversity occurs, they said, in sustained conversations and interactions over time with real people, even when the topics under discussion are uncomfortable.

Ronald Ehrenberg (Cornell University), Scott Jaschik (*Inside Higher Ed*), and James Finkelstein (George Mason University) raised questions about money and transparency. Only a handful of our nation’s private institutions have both need-blind admissions and financial aid policies. The necessity for donations must be tempered by flexibility in the use of those funds. Admission policies, the obsession with rankings, and the cost of higher education all have serious ethical consequences for students, the universities themselves, and the country. The increase in university president compensation packages points to the increased corporatization of the university.

Benjamin Ginsberg (Johns Hopkins University), Goldie Blumenstyk (*Chronicle of Higher Education*), and Kevin Kruger (NASPA) addressed the compartmentalization within universities. University administration, faculty, and staff are distanced from one another, and faculty are often removed from students’ lives and unaware of the issues that students face outside of the classroom that impede

their abilities to successfully complete their education.

The conference continued Friday with poster presentations on topics including food justice, divestment from fossil fuels, and Islamophobia.

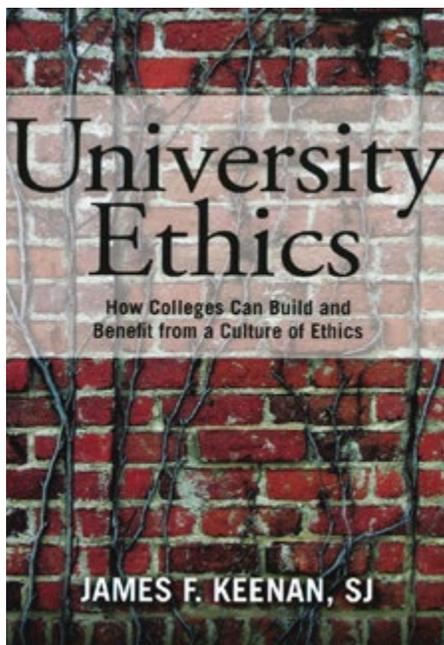
Maria Maisto (New Faculty Majority), Peter Markie (University of Missouri), and Debra Erickson (Bucknell University) took on the challenge of contingent faculty. The poor working conditions under which contingent faculty often teach touch on all issues of university ethics and make it harder for faculty to act ethically. The virtue of solidarity is needed; tenured faculty must recognize that their own fate is tied to that of contingent faculty.

A panel on stakeholders focused on the role of the university as citizen, featuring former presidents Margaret McKenna (Suffolk University) and Jackie Jenkins Scott (Wheelock College), and president Brian Linnane, S.J. (Loyola University, Maryland). They addressed the roles and obligations of universities to all stakeholders, internal and external, and the key ethical challenges facing university leadership. A handful of critical questions emerged: What is the role of the governing board of a university? How can the university be a responsible citizen in the community? How does a university president make her- or himself available and accessible to the broader university community?

The final panel looked to the future by highlighting three positive institutional responses to recent major ethical crises. Tim Balliett (Pennsylvania State University) reviewed the structures set in place to oversee ethical accountability in the wake of his school’s sexual abuse scandal. Kelley Adams (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) described M.I.T.’s efforts to better understand campus sexual assault and enhance programs that can reduce it. Matthew Carnes, S.J. (Georgetown University) offered a profound account of institutional repentance for the role of slavery in Georgetown’s development.

More information and videos of the speakers can be found on the Jesuit Institute website. Follow our link there!

www.bc.edu/boisi-universityethics



SILENCE: A FILM BY MARTIN SCORSESE

Hitomi Omata Rappo, Robert Maryks, and Richard Blake, S.J., joined the Boisi Center and its many co-sponsors for a film screening and panel discussion of Martin Scorsese's latest movie, Silence.

On March 24, the Boisi Center hosted a screening and panel discussion of *Silence*, a film by Martin Scorsese. The panel, moderated by Boisi Center interim director Erik Owens, featured Hitomi Omata Rappo, a visiting researcher at Boston College's Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies; Robert Maryks, associate professor of history at Boston College and associate director of the Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies; and Richard Blake, S.J., professor of film studies at Boston College.

Silence, based on the 1966 novel of the same name by Shusaku Endo, tells the story of two seventeenth-century Portuguese Jesuits as they search in Japan for their mentor, who is presumed to have renounced his faith



Robert Maryks (L) and Richard Blake, S.J. (R)

under torture. In their journeys, they find their western preconceptions of the Church and faith challenged by Eastern realities.

Rappo opened the panel by addressing the film's historical accuracy. She noted that accounts from Western missionaries and traders rarely reflect a Japanese perspective of events. Christianity in seventeenth-century Japan was seen not as an illicit religion, but rather sedition against the government and social order.

Maryks compared Scorsese's film to the Japanese film adaptation of *Silence*, directed by Masahiro Shinoda in 1971. Maryks noted the contrast between Scorsese's music-less soundtrack and Shinoda's Iberian guitar and vocals, and found Scorsese's film a helpful depiction of historical events for the classroom that complicates mission and martyrdom narratives.

Blake explored *Silence* from a film critic's perspective. An expert on Catholic film directors and author of several books on Martin Scorsese, Blake noted that the film was a box office failure and criticized the director for using the same plot patterns in many of his films.

A robust audience then shared their reactions to the film and asked panelists about the effectiveness of translating a deeply introspective book to film, the accuracy of its theological elements, the Orientalist depiction of Japanese characters, and the meaning of the priesthood as depicted in the film.

This event was co-sponsored with the Center for Ignatian Spirituality, The Institute for the Liberal Arts, and The Church in the 21st Century Center. An expanded recap and an interview with Dr. Rappo are available on the event page.

www.bc.edu/boisi-silence

SAVE THE CHILDREN: RELIGION, POLITICS, AND INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

Boston College history professor Arissa Oh spoke on the role of religion and Cold War politics in international adoptions.

Professor Arissa Oh discussed her book, *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption*, at a lunch colloquium at the Boisi Center on March 1. Oh laid out the motivations that drove the international adoption movement.

After the Korean War, concern in the United States grew about unwanted children in Korea at a time when Americans idealized the nuclear family. While many adoptions were religiously moti-

vated, adoption advocates also argued that the practice demonstrated American benevolence toward the world.

Today, the "global orphan crisis," rooted in Cold War politics and promoted by the religious right, has been disputed; many "orphans" have extended family or living parents, but are placed in orphanages because of socio-economic and culture pressures. In recognition of these forces, international adoption is decreasing, and there is a growing

emphasis on family preservation internationally.

Attendees discussed the differences between public motivation and individual reasons for adoption, the future of international adoption in the United States, and the potential impact of the new administration.

An audio recording and an expanded recap of the event with photos is available on the event webpage.

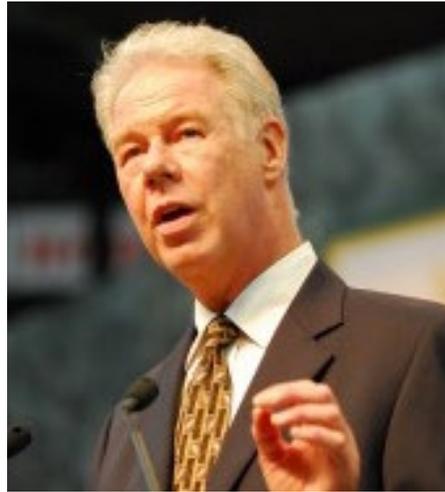
www.bc.edu/boisi-oh

AN AMERICAN CONSCIENCE: THE REINHOLD NIEBUHR STORY

Award-winning filmmaker Martin Doblmeier and a panel of theologians and historians discussed the new documentary, *An American Conscience: The Reinhold Niebuhr Story*, airing on PBS in the spring of 2017.

The award-winning filmmaker Martin Doblmeier presented his film, *An American Conscience: The Reinhold Niebuhr Story*, at a screening and panel on February 1. The panelists, in addition to Doblmeier, were Lisa Cahill, professor of theology at Boston College; Andrew Finstuen, dean of the honors college and interim vice provost at Boise State University (and former Boisi Center assistant director); Mark Massa, S.J., former dean of the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, and future Boisi Center director; and Jeremy Sabella, author of the film's companion volume. Erik Owens, interim director of the Boisi Center, led the conversation.

The documentary focuses on the life and career of Reinhold Niebuhr, one of America's most prominent theologians. Niebuhr is known for his theological engagement with the public affairs of his era (chiefly: two world wars, economic depression, and the civil rights movement) and his theological development in dialogue with friends



Martin Doblmeier

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and colleagues at Union Theological Seminary. The panel highlighted the relevance of Niebuhr's insights and wisdom to the 21st-century world, nearly half a century removed from his death.

Comments and questions from the audience included comparisons between Niebuhr and other philosophers,

discussions of how to interpret and define human rights, speculation about how Niebuhr would interpret certain contemporary and historical events, and critiques of Niebuhrian Christology.

The panelists wrapped up by discussing how to implement Niebuhr's theology today. Responding to the proliferation of nationalist and isolationist ideologies, Doblmeier said that we cannot be closed to the world. Sabella highlighted Niebuhr's belief that flawed institutions implicate the people that act within them. "We are called to resist and change," Cahill agreed. Finstuen expanded upon this call to resistance by saying that love works as an instrument to attain justice. Massa concurred: "Love is the carrot at the end of the stick."

This event was co-sponsored with the Theology and History Departments. An audio recording of the panel and an expanded recap, including a summary of each of the panelists' comments, can be found on the event webpage.

www.bc.edu/boisi-niebuhr

DOROTHY DAY: THE WORLD WILL BE SAVED BY BEAUTY

Kate Hennessy, author and youngest grandchild of Dorothy Day, spoke on her grandmother's life and legacy.



Kate Hennessy

In mid-April the Boisi Center hosted Kate Hennessy, author and the youngest granddaughter of Dorothy Day, to speak about her new book, *Dorothy Day: The World Will Be Saved By Beauty*.

Hennessy provided a brief background on her grandmother's life as a leading figure in the founding of the Catholic Worker Movement, while emphasizing the complexity, richness, and contradictions of Dorothy Day's life. Personal

relationships also complicated Hennessy's writing process, as she felt a responsibility to everyone she wrote about. It was difficult for her to navigate the dynamics between herself, her mother, and her grandmother.

Hennessy read several excerpts from the book to represent how her grandmother sought "salvation through beauty" and then invited the audience to ask questions and share their comments.

Audience members inquired about the realities of her family relationships, and Hennessy's feelings of exposure, writing so intimately about others, and whether she considered her grandmother a saint.

This event was co-sponsored by the Department of Continuing Education (STM), Theology Department, Volunteer and Service Learning Center, PULSE, Catholic Studies Program, and The Church in the 21st Century Center.

www.bc.edu/boisi-hennessy

TOWN HALL: ENGAGING EACH OTHER IN 2017

The Boisi Center hosted a student town hall entitled What Now? Having Difficult Conversations in Our Community to encourage thoughtful discussion on the importance and difficulties of discourse in the Trump era.

Building on last semester's Boisi Center student town hall, a group of students gathered in mid-March for a follow-up, this time focusing on how to engage others with respect in the midst of a fraught national political climate. Panelists Catherine Cole, Sara Elzeini, and Maura Lester McSweeney shared their thoughts on how the Boston College community can create constructive spaces for conversation.

Cole opened the discussion, noting we often talk to others without listening. To find common ground, we should



Catherine Cole, MCAS '17



Maura Lester McSweeney, MCAS '17

genuinely seek to understand each other. Cole stated that we should not start conversations with the goal of changing minds. Rather, conversations require give-and-take and an open mind. Invoking Aristotle, McSweeney said that laws and politics reflect how we relate to one another. Important conversations can take place when we realize that our relationships and our politics are interconnected. Elzeini admitted the shortcomings of Boston College's official neutral stance on many political and social issues, and argued

that the university engage in these conversations. Dialogue, she said, can be a form of activism.

The speakers' words inspired lively discussion among the attendees. Students discussed their frustrations of life at Boston College, worries for the future, and ideas for change.



Sara Elzeini, MCAS '18

An expanded recap of the event is available on the event webpage.

www.bc.edu/boisi-townhallS17

ON CIVILITY: A CONVERSATION WITH KRISTA TIPPETT

Krista Tippett, host of the Peabody Award-winning radio show and podcast On Being, had an informal conversation with a group of students at the Boisi Center before giving her Lowell Humanities Series Lecture.

In a conversation with students on January 24 at the Boisi Center, Krista Tippett explained that she was curious about "what is concerning, confusing, and encouraging college students." The conversation explored topics such as the public expression of sorrow, the nature of wisdom, identity politics, and fruitful conversation across party lines.

Tippett encouraged a commitment to thinking and talking about the current political climate on "the level of reality." In response to this, a student asked how we can encourage conversation and action from the "silent majority" without being accusatory. Tippett argued that a major inhibitor of discourse is the tendency to imagine groups of people as monolithic; it is important not to equate any politician with all of the people who voted for him/her. Instead, we must

learn to respect one another regardless of whom we supported on Election Day.

Tippett also reflected on the nature of wisdom—the theme of her most recent book, *Becoming Wise*. Wisdom is the maturity of consciousness, she said, and the measure of wisdom is the impact you make on the people around you.

Following the conversation, Tippett delivered a Lowell Humanities Series lecture entitled "The Adventure of Civility" to a packed Gasson lecture hall.

An extended recap of Tippett's visit, including her public lecture, is available on the event webpage.

www.bc.edu/boisi-tippett



Krista Tippett (center) with students

THE ETHICS OF CITIZENSHIP IN THE TRUMP ERA

Boisi Center interim director Erik Owens discussed civic engagement in 2017.

At our final lunch colloquium of the year, Boisi Center interim director Erik Owens spoke about the oppositional politics at the center of the new ethics of citizenship in the Trump era.

Owens sketched two prevailing visions of citizenship that derive from liberal and civic republican political traditions, noting the inclinations of the former toward protecting individual rights, and the latter toward fostering collective self-government. He argued that President Trump is promoting, implicitly and explicitly, an exclusive vision of citizenship driven by the binaries of trust/fear, popular/elite, chaos/control, patriotism/globalism; and that Trump's "America First" program rejects the view of "global citizenship" that frequently animates work for human rights and environmental issues.

Some of the most popular responses to Trump's civic vision have been satirical or despairing, and some resistance



Erik Owens

movements have failed to offer any constructive vision. Owens argued that we ought to nourish the latent strain in oppositional politics that offers a more generative vision of human flourishing and inter-relationality, through conceptions of solidarity and the common good. The ensuing discussion considered voting, impediments to the common good, political compromise, and the limits of "global citizenship."

An audio recording and an extensive list of further readings are available online.

www.bc.edu/boisi-owensS17

THE BIBLE IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE, 1960-2016

Graduate symposium explored the use of the Bible in American public debate.

The Bible has played a foundational role in the construction of American identity and public discourse. This year's graduate symposium, led by Boisi Center graduate research assistant Tom Fraatz, explored some touchstone debates of the last fifty years.

These included: Ronald Reagan's nuclear apocalypticism, the end of the Cold War, and American support of Israel; the Civil Rights Movement through the works of Abraham Heschel, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bob Jones; the public display of the Ten Commandments and competing claims about their importance for the American legal tradition; the attacks of September 11 as divine retribution for American sin, represented by the infamous statements from Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, and Jeremiah Wright's sermon; and debates over same-sex marriage, the legality of California's Proposition 8, and LGBTQ issues in the Bible.

The discussions focused on six questions: What are the author's historical circumstances? Why are they writing? How do they use the Bible? What assumptions do they make about the Bible? How persuasive are the author's points? What lessons for today can we take from these readings?



Tom Fraatz

Links to the primary texts and scholarly articles are available on the symposium website.

www.bc.edu/boisi-symposiumS17

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For complete information and resources on all of our events, including audio and video recordings, transcripts, interviews, photos, videos, bibliographies and more, visit our website: www.bc.edu/boisi.

Unless otherwise noted, all Boisi Center event photos by Christopher Soldt, MTS Photography.

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STAFF UPDATES: WHAT'S NEXT?

Ryan Duffy, undergraduate research assistant, is currently deciding between pursuing a master's degree in global policy studies from the LBJ School at the University of Texas at Austin or working in the public sector in Boston or New York City.

In September, undergraduate research assistant **Amelia Parker** will begin a Master's program at the University of Chicago Divinity School, where she will focus on theology and religious ethics.

After returning home to see friends and family in Chicago, undergraduate research assistant **Sylvia Waghorne** will be looking for work in the paralegal or public policy field.

Graduate research assistant **Tom Fraatz** is finishing his dissertation on the Book of Revelation and its use of Scripture. He looks forward to developing the themes of the graduate symposium in future projects.

Program coordinator **Suzanne Hevelone** will be teaching PULSE at Boston College next year. This summer she will be saving the universe from many (mostly imaginary) evil villains with her two young sons.

FALL 2017 EVENTS

- Sep. 12 **David DiPasquale** (Boston College) on Islamic intellectual traditions [lunch]
- Oct. 4 **Christine Helmer** (Northwestern U.) on the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation [lunch]
- Oct. 11 **Land O' Lakes at 50: The Future of Catholic Higher Education** [conference]
- Nov. 2 **David Decosimo** (Boston U.) on the new academic critiques of religious freedom [lunch]
- Nov. 7-10 **Educating for Modern Democracy** [conference, co-sponsored]
- Nov. 16 **Summit of Centers on Religion and Public Life** [not open to the public]
- Plus... Other public events TBA on business ethics, medical humanities, and other topics; plus a faculty seminar; graduate student symposium; and more.

See our web site for an updated schedule later this summer.