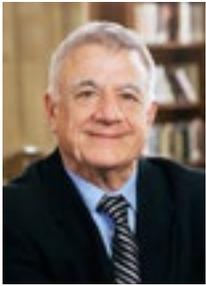


BOISI CENTER REPORT



VOL. 14 NO.1 JANUARY 2014

FROM THE DIRECTOR



*An exciting semester at the Boisi Center: we hosted the Religious Diversity and the Common Good sesquicentennial conference, as well as a lunch with former Irish president Mary McAleese; plus, my new book, *At Home in Exile: Why Diaspora Is Good for the Jews*, was sent to the publisher.*

Fall 2013 was an especially gratifying time for us here at the Boisi Center.

Most importantly,

we held a major conference in support of the sesquicentennial celebrations at Boston College, on the theme of religious diversity and the common good. Outstanding scholars such as Reza Aslan, Laurie Patton, Randall Kennedy, Jonathan Sarna, and Marie Griffith appeared during the day-long event, which featured a keynote address by E.J. Dionne. The evening session, which focused on institutions that work for the common good in the Boston area, brought together the leaders of the Boston public schools, Boston Public Library, the Islamic Center of Boston, Harvard's Memorial Church, and the Health and Social Services division of the Catholic Archdiocese. We were thrilled to be assigned such an important event in BC's history, and to do our part to celebrate the century-and-a-half accomplishments of this institution.

Our "regular" events were also terrific this semester. We were especially pleased to host Mary McAleese, the former president of Ireland, as well as her husband Martin. Their moving account of the Irish peace process was fascinating from beginning to end. (I encourage everyone to read the transcript or listen to their presentations, which are available on our web site.) Other lunch talks were given

by Drew Christiansen, S.J., who has been working on the tradition of nonviolence in Catholic social teaching; and Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, who is working on a book extending the Kantian and Habermasian traditions in moral philosophy to the international community.

During the term I was also able to finish, and send to my publisher (Beacon Press), a book on which I have been working for the last three or four years. Now entitled *At Home in Exile: Why Diaspora Is Good for the Jews*, it explores the question of what it means to be a minority. I argue that minority status, for all the problems associated with it, can yield a universalistic way of thinking that both Jews and non-Jews can especially use at this time. It will be published in the fall of 2014. I also presented an overview of the themes of the book at one of our luncheons. Finally, the publication by the Pew Forum of a new study of American Judaism enabled me to offer comments on the future of American Jewry in the on-line magazine *The Forward*.

During the fall term I gave a presentation on the book at Paideia, the European Institute for Jewish Studies in Stockholm, Sweden. In the book I write about the efforts of groups such as Paideia to enrich the conditions of Jewish life in Europe, which constitutes a kind of third location of contemporary Jewry besides Israel and the United States. I then traveled to Riga,

Latvia, where one of the figures with whom I am concerned, Isaiah Berlin, was born and another, Simon Dubnow, died.

We are planning another exciting set of events for the spring term, including our annual Prophetic Voices lecture, which will be delivered by a major figure on the American political and religious landscape. I look forward to writing about it in my next director's letter.

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RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND THE COMMON GOOD

In November the Boisi Center hosted the final academic event of Boston College's year-long sesquicentennial celebration: a major conference on the challenge of pursuing a common good amidst religious pluralism.



Some of the speakers from the morning and afternoon panels, clockwise from top left: Marie Griffith, Jonathan Sarna, Reza Aslan, Catherine Cornille, Laurie Patton and Omar McRoberts.

On November 13 the Boisi Center organized the university's final academic event of its sesquicentennial celebration, on the theme of Religious Diversity and the Common Good. The daytime portion of the conference, open to the public and well-attended by an audience that filled the Heights Room throughout the day, featured thirteen distinguished scholars from the fields of history, sociology, law, government, theology and religious studies. They were divided into two panels, entitled "Historical Trajectories 1863-2013" and "Contemporary Issues and Approaches," followed by a keynote address by journalist and professor E.J. Dionne. A private dinner for religious, civic and academic leaders closed with a panel discussion on "Working for the Common Good in Boston" that featured five leaders of influential local organizations. A summary of each session follows here; speaker biographies and complete transcripts, along with photographs and audio and video recordings of the entire event, are available at bc.edu/boisi-rdcg.

Boisi Center associate director Erik Owens opened the conference with introductory remarks on the fundamental tension between unity and diversity, and the problem of the common good it reveals. "Is there such a thing as the common good?" he asked. "In what might it consist, when we disagree on so many things about what is true and good, and what it takes for individuals and communities to flourish?" Though religions and politics have provided answers to those questions for thousands of years, the focus that day was to assess how we have done and what we have learned in the past 150 years—the Boston College era—and where we might be headed.

The opening session, "Historical Trajectories 1863-2013," outlined the rise of religious diversity in the United States, with panelists describing the ways in which Jewish communities, Catholic immigrants, and black churches all expanded the boundaries of shared identity in an initially homogeneous nation. Jonathan Sarna described this process as a nonlin-

ear shift away from a missionary mindset, which seeks to convert the other, toward a positive assessment of pluralism, while Omar McRoberts highlighted the persistence of diversity within religious communities as well. Marie Griffith challenged the prevailing assumption that diversity is inherently good, and other panelists agreed that too much diversity might dilute public voices for the common good. Jim O'Toole, however, underscored the contributions diverse religious communities have made through their faith-based hospitals, schools, and social service organizations. On the question of the common good itself, the panelists collectively promoted the importance of enabling political participation by diverse groups, and condemned the abuse of the concept to impose conformity against diversity. A vigorous question and answer period with the audience addressed the rise of the "nones," secularization, the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, and the future of Islam in the United States.

The "Contemporary Issues and Approaches" panel primarily explored the processes by which communities in the United States encounter and explore religious diversity. Panelists noted that cultural efforts to welcome religious groups can both challenge rigid boundaries between faith communities and minimize theological differences within religions. Laurie Patton introduced the idea of "pragmatic pluralism," most prev-



Harvard Law School professor Randall Kennedy speaking at the afternoon panel.

alent in situations where one religious tradition cannot meet its needs alone and requires the assistance of another. Nancy Ammerman affirmed the value of similar small-scale interactions between people of different faiths, stressing that relationships formed in pursuit of one or more mutually held goods is essential to bridging diversity, while cautioning that this process cannot operate within an “enclave mentality.” As a concrete example, Reza Aslan touted the success of Interfaith Youth Core’s commitment to shared community action, suggesting that the experience of cooperation would be more fruitful than dialogue alone, and he referenced the ways in which public challenges to one religion’s freedoms—like the legislative attempts to ban Sharia law—often garner the support of other religious groups. Randall Kennedy added a helpful voice of realism to the conversation, questioning excessively optimistic notions of the common good that ignore its sometimes ideological uses by majorities to oppress minorities and insisting on the need for some boundaries to diversity in the name of the common good. Audience questions dealt with intentionality in interreligious dialogue and how schools could provide non-academic avenues for bridging religious diversity.

Echoing themes from the second panel,



E.J. Dionne delivers the conference’s keynote address.



Post-dinner panelists Amy Ryan, Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, Mohammad Ghiath Reda, Alan Wolfe, Rev. Jonathan Walton, and John McDonough (l to r) discuss their work for the common good in Boston.

E. J. Dionne argued in his keynote that collective action for the common good is the best way to connect across religious differences. If religious adherents should be able to contribute to public life in a diverse society, he said, the fact of pluralism imposes dual obligations upon them: to tolerate the rights of others to express their beliefs in public, and to explain one’s own convictions in an accessible, rather than parochial, fashion. Dionne cited the success of “civil rights Christianity,” which brought faith commitments to the public square, as proof that such engagement need neither obliterate distinctiveness nor devolve into relativism. He expressed a fear, however, that exclusively political engagement might undermine the spiritual significance around which religious communities are originally founded, and serve to reinforce political differences, making them even more intractable. Nevertheless, he closed with a note of hope, asserting that Pope Francis’s vision for the Church is encouraging Roman Catholics to make a more holistic contribution to political life.

The dinner panelists all offered insights into the challenges their organizations face when encountering Boston’s diversity. John McDonough cited the increas-

ing diversity of Boston public school students and spoke of the need to tailor strategies to eliminate the achievement gap among them. Amy Ryan described Boston Public Library’s unchanging mission in an evolving city, citing its long-standing English language classes taught to ever-changing constituencies. Mohammad Ghiath Reda acknowledged the ethnic diversity of Boston’s Muslim population but underlined the community’s collective desire for policies promoting the common good rather than its own isolated interests. Bryan Hehir discussed the secularization of the city’s Catholic population and suggested that academic institutions offered a unique environment for renewed interactions across religious differences. Jonathan Walton insisted that institutions privileged to work with the next generation of leaders must empower them to use their diverse backgrounds to serve some higher cause in new and distinct ways, rather than pigeonholing them into antiquated models of leadership. The panel complete, academics and practitioners returned to their tables to plan their next steps in the work for the common good in Boston and beyond.

➔ www.bc.edu/boisi-rdcg

PEACEBUILDING AND RECONCILIATION

How does a nation move beyond decades of sectarian violence to peace? At an intimate Boisi Center lunch in October, former Irish president Mary McAleese spoke to a packed room about her work helping to broker peace in Ireland.



Former president of Ireland Mary McAleese speaking at the Boisi Center on October 29. She was joined by her husband Martin. Together, they played crucial roles in cementing peace in Ireland.

Former Irish President Mary McAleese spoke to a packed room at the Boisi Center on October 29 about her decades of peace and reconciliation work as well as her historic fourteen-year presidency, which ended in 2011. Irish presidents are heads of state, not government, a fact that allowed McAleese to embrace the pastoral dimension of the position. She used her office to promote respect for the claims, and wounds, of Irish Protestants and Catholics alike. The office gave her the prominence to provide important moral leadership, as well as the institutional support required for the difficult work of political reconciliation. She told the audience that she was consistently motivated by the gospel of love she imbibed as a child, and by the Irish hero Daniel O’Connell’s reminder that “rights are not something government gives, but something government protects.”

“Building Bridges” was the theme of

McAleese’s presidency. She and her husband Martin—who also played an instrumental role in the peace process—sought to foster genuine dialogue between Catholics and Protestants in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, often in secret. They established a new language of respectful engagement, resulting in the concept of “parity of esteem” featured in the Good Friday Agreement that signaled the end of “the Troubles.” McAleese’s efforts culminated in a poignant visit by Queen Elizabeth in 2011, the first ever by a British monarch to the Republic of Ireland. Over four days, the Queen’s visit helped to heal a painful past, and proved a powerful example of McAleese’s use of collective memory as a tool to unite a divided populace.

The first Northern Irish native to be president of the Republic of Ireland, McAleese drew from her experiences growing up in a highly sectarian society

to inform her peacemaking policy. She spoke of the norm of violence that had consumed her society, taking the lives of many of her friends and prompting others to join paramilitaries as a means to fight for their political objectives. McAleese herself found strength and solace from the violence in the Gospel of love proclaimed every Sunday in her Catholic parish. These teachings, coupled with her family’s disapproval of violence, prompted her to find alternative means of conflict resolution. Rather than adding to “the toxin of violence” that begets more violence, she tried to put herself in Protestant shoes: to understand what Protestants held as their fiercest objections to Irish rule, and to work through their resentment to find ways to compromise and forge peace.

Part of Northern Ireland’s first generation to receive free secondary education, McAleese came to see education as the key to breaking cycles of violence. She recounted how biased education can perpetuate discrimination, as when textbooks repeat old prejudices, and how an educated minority can still be locked out of the job market. Ultimately, though, education and truth proved to be tools for great healing. McAleese recounted one instance of biased history about the First World War that had been widely promulgated in Ireland: Protestants and Catholics alike were taught that only Protestants volunteered for the British cause during the war, a story that suited the Protestant narrative of allegiance to the Crown and the Irish narrative of resistance. The truth, however, was that the vast majority of those who volunteered and died for the British cause were Irish Catholics. When this truth came out, a divisive memory was transformed into a common cause, illustrating the power of memory-building in conflict resolution.

➔ www.bc.edu/boisi-mcaleese

AT HOME IN EXILE

Jews should embrace, not fear, the reemerging universalistic outlook in their community, Boisi Center director Alan Wolfe argued at the Center's inaugural lunch event of the semester.

Assimilation is a prospect faced by all minorities in America. Some groups respond by embracing it wholeheartedly; others turn inward to resist the possibility. In his new book *At Home in Exile: Why Diaspora Is Good for the Jews*, Alan Wolfe argues in favor of the current rebirth of a universalistic outlook among American Jews.



Boisi Center director Alan Wolfe, speaking before his September 29 lunch talk.

Wolfe explained that the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel—both monumental and particularistic events—prompted American Jews to focus their attentions for decades on the well-being of their own community, and were encouraged in doing so, Wolfe argued, by the American Jewish establishment. In recent years, however, as a result of the fading memory of the two most important Jewish events of the twentieth century, the establishment has lost its hold on the minds of American Jews, especially among the younger generations. These Jews have adopted a more universalistic attitude of late: they exhibit more openness to intermixing with other cultures as well as concern for the well-being of other peoples.

This is positive, Wolfe argued, for both Jews and for the wider society. Jews' history in the Diaspora makes them particularly adept at understanding the suf-

ferings of other minorities, and they have a great capacity to benefit all of society if their attentions are directed outward.

Wolfe acknowledged concerns many Jews have with universalism, especially its connection to assimilation and intermarriage and the threats these pose to the continuity of the Jewish people. All minority groups face this challenge, Wolfe explained, with many facing far higher intermarriage rates than do the Jews. It is moreover important to remember that, due to its history of exile, Judaism is adept at traveling and transforming. The richness and beauty of Yiddish culture results from the mixture of its Jewish and Eastern European roots, for example. Similarly, Jews have already contributed a tremendous amount to American culture, and Wolfe expects good things as they continue to contribute with this reemerging universalistic outlook.

➔ www.bc.edu/boisi-wolfe

THE NARROW PATH

Despite their seeming incompatibility, the Catholic teachings of “just war” and nonviolence are in fact complementary, argued Rev. Drew Christiansen, S.J., at a Boisi Center lunch on November 6.

The tradition of “just war theory” has guided the Catholic Church's response to conflict in some form for nearly 1,500 years. In recent decades, however, the Church has come to place more emphasis on nonviolent resistance, a tradition more closely associated with the early Christian period before Constantine. On November 6, Rev. Drew Christiansen, S.J., visited the Boisi Center to discuss this shift to nonviolence in Catholic thought.

Christiansen presented the different steps in the transition chronologically, beginning with the Second Vatican Council in 1963, whose praise of nonviolent activists set a foundation for the steady return to nonviolent thinking. The Council's message was not one of pacifism, though, as it also stressed the legitimacy of using force to promote justice in

the world. The 1983 American bishops' pastoral letter “The Challenge of Peace” signaled another step when it described just war and nonviolence as distinct but intertwined teachings. Though they may seem incompatible, Christiansen argued that shared presumption against the use of force and emphases on active resistance enable them to coexist within Church teaching.

Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991) credited nonviolent resisters with ending World War II and urged peaceful conflict resolution. Two years later, the American bishops published another pastoral letter, “The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace,” which placed nonviolence at the core of the Catholic response to conflict.



Rev. Drew Christiansen, S.J., at the Boisi Center on November 6.

The Church continues to recognize the right of states to go to war, but only after chances for peaceful settlement have been exhausted; the teaching of nonviolence thus ultimately ends in the tradition of just war, and not in pacifism.

➔ www.bc.edu/boisi-christiansen

COSMOPOLITANISM AND MORAL OBLIGATION

What moral responsibility falls on Americans when textile workers are killed by collapsing factories in Bangladesh? Philosophy professor Jonathan Trejo-Mathys provides a framework for judgment.

At a Boisi Center luncheon on October 2, Boston College philosophy professor Jonathan Trejo-Mathys discussed how philosophy can help us understand our moral obligations in an increasingly connected world.

In April 2013 an eight-story Bangladeshi textile factory collapsed, killing over 1,100



Boston College philosophy professor Jonathan Trejo-Mathys at the Boisi Center on October 2.

workers. Recalling the gruesome accident and the dismal working conditions that preceded it, Trejo-Mathys argued that Americans need to better understand how our close business connections to Bangladeshi workers tie us to their safety and welfare. (He himself was wearing a shirt made in that country, Trejo-Mathys noted.) When industrial disasters occur in the United States, such as the 1911 fire that killed nearly 150 workers at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City, Americans frequently strengthen laws that protect workplace safety. Shouldn't we be obligated to demand the same for Bangladeshis when we buy the products they make in their factories? Or are the differences in our societies too great to expect American-style worker protections?

To make his case, Trejo-Mathys argued that a "world society" now exists that is

rooted in our global interconnectedness and generates moral claims on individuals and groups within that large society. Immanuel Kant properly recognized in the eighteenth century that the "violation of rights in one place on the earth [is] felt everywhere." In our time, states and corporations will be the primary actors that must bring change, since they are the locus of power in the world today.

Drawing upon Kantian and neo-Kantian arguments about the foundations of moral obligation, Trejo-Mathys refuted schools of thought that deny the existence of international moral norms ("IR realism") or claim such norms to be too thin to be broadly applicable (the "English School"). Neither alternative, he argued, accurately capture the realities of contemporary life, nor provides a solid guide for members of a world society.

➔ www.bc.edu/boisi-jtm

MANDELA: LONG WALK TO FREEDOM

On the evening of Nelson Mandela's death, the Boisi Center hosted a poignant screening and discussion of a new feature film based on the former South African president's autobiography.

On December 5, 2013—coincidentally, the very evening of Nelson Mandela's death—the Boisi Center hosted a free screening at the Coolidge Corner Theatre of the new biopic based on his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*. Boston College professors Shawn Copeland (theology) and Zine Magubane (sociology) introduced the film and led a brief discussion following the screening. The screening received wide attention, and tickets quickly ran out; in attendance were BC professors, Jesuits and students, along with many community members and groups. News of Mandela's death arrived just before the screening; several local news outlets sent crews to interview students and professors afterward.

➔ www.bc.edu/boisi-mandela



STUDENT SYMPOSIUM ON RELIGION & POLITICS

Undergraduate and graduate students meet monthly at the Boisi Center to discuss religious diversity and the common good in America.

The fourth annual Boisi Center Symposium on Religion and Politics is examining religious diversity and the common good this year, in conjunction with the November 13 sesquicentennial conference (see pp. 2–3). A group of graduate and undergraduate students meet each month



Participants in the Boisi Center's 2013-2014 Student Symposium on Religion and Politics. Pictured are graduate students Yael Hungerford, Kate Jackson, Chris Conway, Stephanie Corigliano, and Cooper McCullough (l to r). Not pictured are undergraduates Catherine Larrabee, Ben Miyamoto, Catherine Putko, and John Wiley.

at the Center to discuss the virtues and challenges of religious diversity in a liberal society. Discussions center around each session's readings—comprised of primary texts, essays, and articles—and also incorporate the expertise and knowledge of the students in the room.

Readings have thus far examined historical and contemporary religious demographics as well as the tradition of free exercise of religion in America. Next semester we will examine religious freedom and tolerance from a comparative theological perspective, look at different approaches to the prospect of assimilation, try to better understand the connection between religious diversity and the common good, and ultimately examine the topic in the context of Boston College student life.

➔ www.bc.edu/boisi-1314symposium

HEARD AT THE BOISI CENTER

- “I didn’t want to confront the world armed to the teeth and frightened of my fellow man . . . somebody has to stand their ground for a moral value that says ‘I won’t let fear corrupt me too.’ . . . You have to be very courageous, and [also recognize] you may well lose your life in the process.”
-Mary McAleese, at her October 29 lunch colloquium
- “There’s no question that education is important, but it’s also undeniable that data very infrequently changes minds. Bigotry tends to be impervious to data and information; what really reframes perceptions in truly radical ways is connections, relations with individuals.”
-Reza Aslan, at the November 13 sesquicentennial conference
- “If you begin with the assumption of difference, and the purpose of the talk between people is to discover similarities, that relationship is going to last longer than if the assumption is similarity and the talk is about difference.”
-Laurie Patton, at the November 13 sesquicentennial conference
- “I have found over the years that if you happen to agree with what a preacher says on a political matter, you see that preacher as a prophet. If you happen to disagree with what a preacher says on a political matter, you see him as descending into vulgar politics.”
-E.J. Dionne, at the November 13 sesquicentennial conference keynote lecture

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Nonviolent Campaigning for Nuclear Disarmament

Joseph Gerson, American Friends Service Committee
Thursday, January 30, 2014, 12:00-1:15 pm
The Boisi Center, 24 Quincy Road
RSVP required: susan.richard@bc.edu

Religious Diversity and Military Service: The Israeli Experience

Miri Eisin, retired Israeli colonel, former advisor to PM Ehud Barak and the Israel Defense Forces
Thursday, February 6, 2014, 12:00-1:15 pm
The Boisi Center, 24 Quincy Road
RSVP required: susan.richard@bc.edu

Democracy Beyond Elections: Citizen Claim-Making in Rural India

Gabrielle Kruks-Wisner, Boston College
Thursday, February 13, 2014, 12:00-1:15 pm
The Boisi Center, 24 Quincy Road
RSVP required: susan.richard@bc.edu

Pope Francis and the Future of the Global Church

Francesco Cesareo, Assumption College
M. Shawn Copeland, Boston College
Richard Gaillardetz, Boston College
Maria del Mar Muñoz-Visoso, USCCB
Tuesday, February 25, 2014, 6:30pm, Gasson 100

The Prophetic Minority

13th Annual Prophetic Voices Lecture
Russell Moore, Southern Baptist Convention,
Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission
Wednesday, April 2, 2014, 5:30 pm, Gasson 100

Terrorism and the Boston Marathon: Fear, Hope and Resilience

Peter Krause, Boston College
Tuesday, April 8, 2014, 7:00 pm, Higgins 300

Business, Ethics and the Future of American Healthcare Reform

A major panel discussion bringing together business, medical, civic, and academic leaders to discuss the state of American healthcare reform.
Spring 2014, *Details to be announced*