

Boston College  
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and American Public Life  
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## Calendar of Events

### January

**28** Voluntary and Diverse: American Religion and American Society  
**Nancy Ammerman**  
Theology and Sociology,  
Boston University 12-1:15pm  
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

### February

**10** American Jesus: How the Son of God Became an American Icon  
**Stephen Prothero**  
Religion, Boston University 12-1:15pm  
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

**23** French Perceptions of Religion in America: From Voltaire to Regis Debray  
**Denis Lacorne**  
Directeur de Recherche,  
Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales,  
12-1:15pm  
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

### March

**9** Religion in the Urban Context  
**Lowell Livezy**  
Divinity School, Harvard University  
12-1:15pm  
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

**19** The Role of Soft Religions in Democratization  
**Amitai Etzioni**  
Professor of Sociology, George Washington University, Founder and Director of the Communitarian Network  
Place: TBA 12-1:30pm

**23** Third Annual "Prophetic Voices of the Church Lecture"  
**Rabbi David Saperstein**  
Director of Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism  
Place: TBA 7pm

**24** Topic: TBA  
**John Paris**  
Theology, Boston College 12-1:15pm  
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

### April

**6** Topic: TBA  
**Jim Keenan**  
Theology, Boston College 12-1:15pm  
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

**23** Economic Spirituality: Integrating Who You Are With What You Buy  
**Tom Beaudoin**  
Theology, Boston College 12-1:15pm  
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

# The BOISI CENTER Report

VOL. 4 NO. 1

THE BOISI CENTER FOR RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

FALL 2003

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

For me as director of the Boisi Center, the fall of 2003 was taken up with public discussions of the changing nature of American religion. My book *The Transformation of American Religion* was published in September, along with a collection of my essays that appeared under the title *An Intellectual in Public*. And so I spent a busy fall doing a good deal of media work, including an appearance on the O'Reilly Factor discussing the "under God" clause in the Pledge of Allegiance, as well as a number of NPR outlets. The recent decision of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts affirming gay marriage also brought extensive media coverage my way.

One of the surprises I encountered was the reception of my book among very conservative Protestants

such as newspaper columnist Cal Thomas and Southern Baptist Seminary President Albert Mohler. They were respectful and willing to hear my criticisms of evangelicalism, and I was very gratified by their open-mindedness.

To a limited degree, the findings in my book were seen as relevant to the ongoing fallout from the sexual abuse scandal within the Catholic Church. The Boisi Center sponsored an event at Boston College featuring Peter Steinfels, David Brooks, Wendy Kaminer, and Scott Appleby in a discussion of my book along with Peter's. And Geoff Boisi, whose generosity made our Center possible in the first place, was instrumental in assembling a group to discuss the findings of a poll he supported among Catholics which was held at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington DC. Fr. Brian Hehir,

George Weigel, John Zogby, and I elaborated on the poll's findings and significance.

Although we are no longer conducting seminars for Muslim scholars – two, which we have done, is the limit – there is no lack of interest in the questions we address, as religion and politics have more and more to do with each other, both here and abroad. We are engaged in an effort to continue our work with Islam in other venues, and if any of those efforts are successful, I will be discussing them in future newsletters. In the meantime, the soon to be with us election of 2004 surely will focus the attention of the nation on the intersection between religion and politics, and we at the Boisi Center plan to be part of the resulting national conversation.

- Alan Wolfe

## Tom O'Connor Speaks on "Bishops and Bosses in Boston"

Two dozen faculty and community members from across Boston crowded into the Boisi Center's conference room on September 9th to hear the "Dean of Boston historians" Tom O'Connor share his thoughts in a presentation titled "Bishops and Bosses: Changing Trends in Church-State Relations in Boston." O'Connor began by emphasizing the significance of the recent events that resulted in the highly publicized and scandal-ridden resignations of two Irish Catholic power brokers---Cardinal Bernard Law and William Bulger. O'Connor characterized the era in which these two men presided over political life in Boston as being marked by "separation, secrecy and silence." Problems were handled behind closed doors, family loyalty was paramount, and there were high

barriers of separation between the hierarchy and the clergy; the clergy and the laity; politicians and the electorate; and civilians and criminals.

Although O'Connor's view is that the resignation of these men marks the end of an era, audience members raised theories of their own during the discussion period suggesting that the erosion of Irish Catholic power had begun even earlier. One audience member, a former editor at the *Boston Globe*, observed that significant changes were wrought in the power structure when the *Boston Globe* was purchased by the *New York Times*. This shift in ownership resulted in out of town editors being brought in who were more resistant to the "late night



calls from the chancery" that he witnessed in an earlier era. Christopher Winship, from the Harvard sociology department, commented that the power balance also began shifting in the 1990's when dot com money began to flow into Boston giving rise to a new kind of community leadership. There was also discussion about

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## Boisi Center Hosts Second Fulbright Muslim Seminar



At the beginning of June, the Boisi Center played host a second time to a group of international scholars in a month long Fulbright program sponsored by the US State Department. The focus of the seminar was to introduce international scholars to the many ways that Americans understand the relationship among religious pluralism, diversity, freedom, tolerance, and politics.

Unlike the seminar hosted by the Boisi Center in the previous year, this seminar brought together scholars from a broad range of disciplines, including American studies, literature, psychology and political science, as well as religious studies. It also included more scholars from countries in which Muslims are a minority, such as the Netherlands, France, the Philippines and India. This diversity resulted in a far more liberal group than that which visited

in Fall 2002 and who came largely from countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia in which Muslims are a majority.

Rather than being surprised by the amount of religious faith Americans displayed, scholars in this group were often dismayed by the degree to which religion and politics seemed to mix in American public life. The group also clearly displayed divisions between those who came from countries in which Islamic principles were incorporated into public life, generally from Muslim majority countries, and those who came from countries in which religion and public life were held separate and apart. Those Muslims who lived as minorities in a non-Muslim society were far more likely to embrace political institutions that favored tolerance and secular political systems.

The visitors stayed on campus for three weeks and spent a week visiting Washington DC. The Fulbright participants included Dr. Emran Hossain, a historian from Chittagong University in Bangladesh; Dr. Redouane Aboueddahab, a professor of American Studies at Lyon II University; Dr. Raj Basu, a historian from Rabindra Bharati University in India; Ms. Aisha Farooqui, a professor in Islamic Studies at Osmania

University in India; Professor Yahyah Khisbayah, a psychologist from the Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta in Indonesia; Mr. Hasnul Arifin, a lecturer in Islamic Law at the State Institute of Islamic Studies in Indonesia; Mr. Khaldun Malek, a lecturer in Politics at the University of Malaya in Malaysia; Mr. Levent Ermek, a politician from the Netherlands; Dr Adam Ajiri a lecturer in Islamic Studies at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria; Ms. Sadia Mahmood, an instructor of Comparative Religion at the Fatima Jinnah Women's University in Pakistan; Mr. Emir Espano, a professor of Religious Studies at Ateneo De Zamboanga University in the Philippines; Mr. Ibrahim Badiane, Secretary General of The Islamic Institute of Dakar in Senegal; Dr. Mukhlis Abu Bakar, a Fellow at the National Institute of Education at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore; Dr. Gert Lubbe, professor of Classical, Near, Far Eastern and Religious Studies at the University of South Africa; Dr Azize Ozguven, professor of the American Studies Department at Dokuz Eylul University in Turkey; and Mr. Jakana Muwendo, a lecturer in Islamic Studies at the Islamic University of Uganda.

Details of the scholars' visit can be viewed on the Boisi Center website at [www.bc.edu/boisi](http://www.bc.edu/boisi)

## Bush Advisor Speaks on Faith Based Initiatives

On October 21st, Steven Goldsmith, Special Advisor to President Bush on Domestic Issues and Faith Based Initiatives, spoke as part of an evening program at Gasson Hall assessing the status of President Bush's measures to promote the delivery of social services through religious and community programs. The panel, co-sponsored by the College of Arts and Sciences and the Boisi Center, was moderated

by Professor Alan Wolfe, director of the Boisi Center, and featured commentary by Father Tom Massaro of Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Father Joseph O'Keefe, interim Dean of the Lynch School of Education at Boston College, and Professor Marc Landy of the Political Science Department at Boston College.

Goldsmith began his talk by describing his relationship with the black churches in Indianapolis dur-

ing his tenure as mayor of that city. The conversations he had with black church leaders there shaped his conviction that the social services provided by urban churches deserved government support and that churches could effectively be used to provide services more directly to the community. He disagreed with those who have argued that the government should leave all welfare programs to the churches, staking his position on

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## **Jim O'Toole Traces the Past** *(continued from page 6)*

of Portland, Maine. Patrick, became a Jesuit and ultimately the president of Georgetown University, while another son, Sherwood, served as the rector of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston and a daughter, Eliza, joined a teaching order and became a superior of several convents in Canada and the United States.

Although not all of the siblings continued in the Church, the majority were successes both inside and outside religion. Despite varying degrees of African American physical characteristics, they were able to pass for white at a time when racial boundaries were distinguished by a single drop of black blood.

In explaining the color blindness of parishioners and the society in which the Healys moved, O'Toole attributes it in part to the status that the priestly role occupied in the minds of white parishioners. When Sherwood Healy, whose physical appearance was the most obviously African American of the siblings, celebrated mass in front of his Irish immigrant parishioners in the Cathedral of Holy Cross, his role as a priest blinded parishioners to his ethnicity. O'Toole also points to the active collusion by some Church officials who baptized and ordained the Healy boys, despite the fact that their parents, by law, could not be legally married in Georgia, thereby making them illegitimate. O'Toole also presented evidence that the Healys actively sought to distance themselves from their African American descent, writing about "negroes" and issues of slavery as if they were from a world apart.

While the racial origins of the Healy children were known in the circles of Holy Cross and among a small circle of Jesuits and Church leaders, the Church served as an active agent in the codification of the Healy's as white, allowing their natural gifts to shine in brilliant careers.

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## **Tom O'Connor speaks** *(continued from page 1)*

the role of non-Irish Catholic minority groups in Boston politics, the ethnic tribalism that seems to be a part of Boston's character, and whether race and ethnicity still play as powerful a role in politics as they once did. True to historical form, O'Connor deferred a conclusive response to such predictions as a history yet to be written.

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## **Catholic formation at BC** *(continued from page 3)*

programs like Pulse, or the immersion experiences that provide some of the most important formative spiritual experiences of student's lives. They claimed that one of the biggest complaints they hear is that so many students are unable to get into these highly competitive programs. While the discussion possibly raised more questions than it answered, it gave many in the room further food for thought for reflecting upon the role of Catholic mission in the University's future.

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## **"God is not Neutral"** *(continued from page 4)*

America's security and interests and take a leading role in world leadership. She warns that Manichean worldviews tend to leave very little room for compromise and peace-building and thus believes that ultimately, this alliance could well lead to the further militarization of American foreign policy.

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

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## Alan Wolfe and Peter Steinfels Reflect on “The Future of American Religion: A Conversation about Two Books”

On the evening of November 4th, the Boisi Center and the Church in the 21st Century initiative co-sponsored an “authors meet critics” event at Robsham Theatre featuring Alan Wolfe, the director of the Boisi Center and author of *The Transformation of American Religion: How we actually live our faith* (Free Press 2003) and Peter Steinfels, New York Times religion correspondent

are moving away from a focus on the distinctions that differentiate Protestant sects and more towards an individually oriented style of faith that centers on prayer, worship, and witness.

Steinfels’ book, which was begun before the sex abuse scandals reshaped the way we think of the American Catholic Church, argues that this institution is on the brink of

of all stakeholders. Rather than run from the looming changes facing the Church, it assesses them head on.

One theme that the panelists lifted up from both books is the reason for these changes. Appleby commented that in the last 30-40 years, the idea that there can be one “Truth” has come under attack in certain areas of the culture so that truth claims, whether of a religious or secular nature are automatically suspect. This in turn has led to an erosion of faith in the authority of doctrines and institutions. Panelists also discussed the rise of individualism as a probable cause and the shift



and author of *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (Simon and Schuster 2003). The panel of critics included David Brooks, columnist for the *New York Times*, Wendy Kaminer, contributing editor for *The Atlantic Monthly*, and R. Scott Appleby, director of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at Notre Dame.

Both books deal with issues related to how American religion has changed in the past few generations. Wolfe focuses on the Protestant majority and how the styles of faith, commitment, and doctrine have changed. He argues that Americans

either moving further into decline or forward into a thoroughgoing transformation. He marshals evidence from a variety of reports on Catholic beliefs, the status of Catholic institutions, and the shortage of vowed and ordained personnel to support his argument about the vulnerabilities of the church in the current situation. Although his account has been dismissed as the perspective of a “liberal critic” by his detractors, Appleby argued that he considers the book quite “equable” in its approach in that it takes on the undeniable problems within the Catholic Church whose impact cuts across the interest

towards an understanding of individualism that is increasingly associated with the idea of self-centeredness rather than originality. Wolfe pointed out that although there is a certain narcissism associated with contemporary American individualism, it is also characterized by a self-reliance and entrepreneurship which is one of the more positive characteristics of American culture.

The entire event can be viewed on Boston College’s Front Row website:  
<http://www.bc.edu/frontrow/>

## Jim O’Toole Traces the Past of a Remarkable Bi-racial Catholic Family

How did the sons and daughters of a white slave owner and a black slave rise to positions of prominence in the Catholic Church in the late 1800’s? Professor of History James O’Toole addressed this topic at the Boisi Center on October 7th in his talk, “Unlikely Allies: Church and Society in Racial Passing” based on his

book *Passing for White: Race, Religion, and the Healy Family, 1820-1920* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2002). The book, which was selected as an alternate selection of the Book-Of-The-Month Club recounts the complicated story of the Healy family and the fortunes of their nine children. Born in Macon County, Georgia,

where black slaves could not legally marry whites, be freed, nor own property, the children of Michael Healy, an Irish immigrant cotton farmer, and Eliza Clark, a black slave, eventually went on to achieve prominent positions in American society. The oldest son, James, eventually became the second bishop

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## Studying Hinduism Between the Disciplines

On October 21, Father Francis X. Clooney, S.J. presented observations from his forthcoming book *Hindu Goddesses and the Virgin Mary: Six Hymns in Praise of Her* (Oxford University Press, 2004). It studies three Hindu goddess hymns in their theological contexts, and then relates them back to the Christian tradition, including contemporary feminist theology. Clooney began his presentation by leading the audience through a variety of commentaries on the South Indian Hindu goddess Sri Lakshmi from a range of sources and historical periods. His talk focused on the ways that different groups of scholars relate to his work and how he accommodates these interests in his discussions of the goddess texts.

Devout believers in the southern Indian Srivaisnava tradition, for example, were mainly concerned with the authenticity of his interpretation. Their interest is in whether scholars

are able to read the texts in the original language, and to present them more or less as insiders do. Oxford philologists, on the other hand, tend to focus on the accuracy of the translations of the texts, unconcerned by issues of religious truth or authenticity of belief. University scholars in New Delhi have been mainly interested in how Clooney's work fits into a post-colonial intellectual agenda and the problems of modernization. At Boston College, Clooney has discussed these texts in ways that raise analogies between the worship of Sri Lakshmi and the Marian devotions in the Catholic tradition.

While all of these scholars would agree that tradition is important in their approaches, Clooney's international and inter-disciplinary travels have allowed him to survey the multi-valent meaning systems that various disciplinary perspectives bring to these texts as they relate to the Hindu Goddess Sri Lakshmi.

The ensuing conversation at the Boisi Center was spirited, raising discussions about asymmetry between cultural and intellectual traditions. Professor Wolfe observed that traditions in Judaism and Protestantism emphasize the critical reading of texts, which in turn cultivates skills for scholars in these traditions to analyze the texts of other traditions. Islamic traditions that focus on the memorization of the Qu'ran, on the other hand, do not as naturally lead to comparative textual studies.



## Is Catholic Formation a Parallel Curriculum at BC?

On November 18th, the Boisi Center hosted Father Joseph A. Appleyard S.J., Vice President of Mission and Ministry at Boston College, who led a discussion on "Where does Character Formation Happen in the University Today?: Thinking about the Parallel Curriculum." Fr. Appleyard began with the observation that it appears as if programs related to Catholic formation such as First-Year Orientation, 48 Hours, the international service programs, 4 Boston, Appalachia, Kairos retreats, Intersections, and Halftime have become a parallel track within the university, rather than



remaining a central part of the academic curriculum. He invited the diverse audience, which included representatives from undergraduate admissions, student affairs, development, housing, and a number of departments, to comment on this, and to either agree or disagree with his observation.

Some people felt that Boston College provided a unique Catholic perspective for students, citing the required theology and philosophy

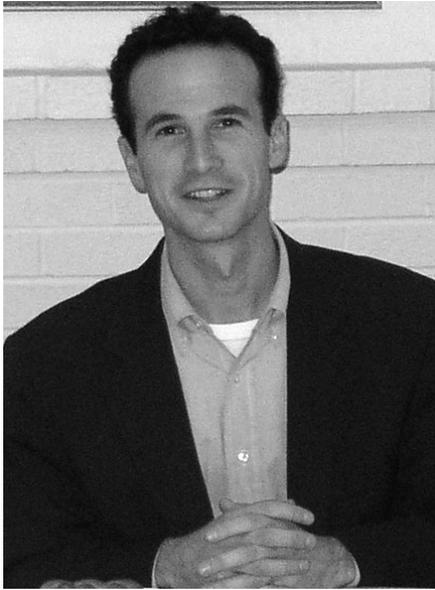
courses, programs like Pulse, Perspectives, Cornerstone, Capstone, and the emphasis on social justice shared by a number of departments and centers. Others agreed with Father Appleyard's sense that priorities of Catholic formation had been pushed onto a parallel track by pressures to compete as a major research university. Professor Wolfe suggested that, as it proceeds with its strategic planning, the University might do well to subject itself to a "Jesuit Capstone experience," similar to ones that some students take, to reflect intensively about where the University has come from, where it seeks to go, and how its Catholic identity shapes those decisions.

Staff members from the Admissions Office pointed out that only a minority of students at Boston College are able to get into the various

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## A Road Trip in Search of God in America

In *All That's Holy: A young guy, an old car and the search for God in America* (Jossey Bass, 2003), Tom Levinson recounts the story of his decision to drive across America and talk to people about their relationship to God, to religion, and their spiritual lives, in a journey that ultimately leads him to a greater understanding of his own religious identity. Visiting the Boisi Center on September 23rd, Levinson read passages from his book that illumi-



nated the spiritual pathways he uncovered in others, and hinted at the discoveries these experiences also revealed within himself.

Describing himself as a fourth generation Jewish New Yorker, Levinson's religious quest took him

from an undergraduate degree in religious studies from Princeton to a Masters in Theological Studies at Harvard Divinity School. After graduation his journey took him to work in a faith based social justice organization in Boston, where he was also struck by the idea of producing a Studs Terkel-like oral history of spirituality in America.

He embarked upon his journey in the fall of 1999 and traveled by car for three and a half months, during which he spent hours having conversations, and listening to the stories of others, only to find that he had embarked upon a pilgrimage rather than a fact finding mission as he had first intended. His journey brought him

insight, understanding, and ultimately, transformation.

Levinson read passages from his narrative and answered questions from the audience about how he was received by the people he met on the road. He was asked whether the people he met tried to convert him to Christianity and whether he encountered any anti-semitism. Although he did experience some attempts to convert him he felt no ill feelings from people he met towards his Jewishness. He said he found himself sharing more of himself than he anticipated in his conversations, most of which lasted for hours and included sharing meals and invitations into the homes of people he met. His encounters included a conversation with a convicted killer days before his execution, the owner of a café called "Coffee Messiah" who dubbed his enterprise a "postmodern church," and a Buddhist seeker named Elvis Miranda. Levinson is currently a second year law student at the University of Chicago.

## "God is not Neutral" in American Foreign Policy

Elizabeth Prodromou, an international relations professor from the Institute on Religion and World Affairs at Boston University, presented a paper titled "God is Not Neutral: Religion and US Foreign Policy After the Cold War" at the Boisi Center on November 4th. Her paper examines the turn towards religion that US foreign policy has taken since the end of the Cold War, and focuses on the current president's use of religion in justifying his approach to foreign affairs. Prodromou states that Bush's personal theology had a strong effect on his response to the crisis presented by the attacks of 9/11. She argues that he framed the events as a confrontation in a "Manichean world

of good versus evil, and returned continuously to the discursive theme of America's position on the side of good." Terrorists were cast as the embodiment of evil, or as he referred to them in an October 2001 speech as "the evil ones...they're motivated by hate." Similarly, the regimes that gave them support were considered "the axis of evil." America, on the other hand, is portrayed by Bush as responding directly to God's call as suggested by a recent speech in which he states that "God told me to strike at al Qaida and I struck them, and then he instructed me to strike at Saddam which I did."

Prodromou argues that Bush's fundamentalist Christian

worldview coincides neatly with the secular worldview of neo-conservative ideologues within the govern-



ment. These advisors have advocated that America take a strong and aggressive stand towards protecting

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## Bush Advisor Speaks (continued from page 2)

the ground that government and churches should work in community based partnerships to provide social services. Goldsmith argued that churches, because they are based in the community where the problems exist, are more likely to provide sensitive, comprehensive and efficient delivery of those services than the government.

A number of obstacles exist, however, and Goldsmith acknowledged them openly. One problem is government bureaucracy. Accounting systems measuring performance must be attached to federal funds, and politicians have still not figured out a way to address this issue without resorting to heavy handed regulatory procedures that would unduly interfere with the operations of churches. Another obstacle is that providing federal funding to churches could

violate the separation of church and state. Goldsmith cited the example of drug abuse and homeless shelter programs that were effective, yet run with the explicit purpose of proselytizing to those who came through the door. He argued that while such programs should not be the only option available to needy citizens, neither



should they be discouraged from seeking federal funding. While the panelists were supportive of the idea of providing government funded social services through the

churches, they also expressed a variety of reservations about the logistics of implementation. Many of the comments revolved around the thorny issue of trying to define what constitutes "religion" in awarding federal funding, and how much distance one needed to put between the interests of religion and government. Goldsmith argued that if funding were given to religious groups they would be obligated to serve everyone who came to their doors. He also argued that if a religious group met government qualifications then it should be entitled to receive the money even if its views were unpopular and defamatory of other religious groups. The evening's discussion made it clear that while there was the potential for positive gain in this initiative, there were also serious concerns.

The entire program can be viewed on Front Row at [www.bc.edu/frontrow](http://www.bc.edu/frontrow)

## Staff Notes

**Alan Wolfe** serves as the director of the Boisi Center and is a professor of political science at Boston College. Professor Wolfe is the author or editor of more than ten books, including



*One Nation, After All* and most recently, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith and An Intellectual in Public*. Professor

Wolfe is a contributing editor of *The New Republic* and *The Wilson Quarterly*. He also writes frequently for *The New York Times*, *Commonweal*, *Harpers*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Washington Post*, and other publica-

tions. Professor Wolfe has been a Fulbright Professor of American Studies at the University of Copenhagen. Professor Wolfe will be teaching *Morality and Politics* in the Spring.

**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. Professor Chang has published numerous scholarly articles related to the organizational aspects of religion, women and



work. Her current research is focused on problems related to the supply of clergy in the Protestant churches and how understandings of faith and practice are transmitted within Catholic families. Professor Chang will teach *Religion in a Global Context* this Spring.

**Susan Richard** serves as the Center's administrative assistant and handles reservations for our regular lunch colloquia. If you would like to attend any of these events, please email her at [publife@bc.edu](mailto:publife@bc.edu)

