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# The Boisi Center Report

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

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VOL. 9 ❖ NO. 1 ❖ JANUARY 2009

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## *From the Director*

*In early December 2008, I travelled to Paris at the invitation of the French Institute on Foreign Affairs (IFRI), a private think-tank that advises the French Foreign Minister, to speak about the Obama victory and its implications. Joining me from the U.S. were Francis Fukuyama, Steve Clemons, Stanley Greenberg and Ian Shapiro. Europeans are insatiable when it comes to Obama. Our discussions were lively and difficult to bring to an end.*



*As it happens, much of the work of the Boisi Center in the fall of 2008 was devoted to the election that produced the Obama victory. One of our most lively panels was devoted to the role played by Catholics and featured a discussion between Amy Sullivan of TIME and Michael Sean Winters of the Catholic magazine America. The audience was substantial, and the questions asked by students were most impressive; our guests came away deeply impressed with the quality of BC's intellectual life. As is our custom after general elections and presidential primaries, the Boisi Center also sponsored a panel discussion to analyze election results and look ahead to the future. This fall we reprised the BC faculty lineup that had worked so well in previous occasions, with me joining political science colleagues Kay Schlozman and Marc Landy. The three of us have just the right mixture of intellectual interests, methodological skills and political viewpoints to produce both mutual respect and sometimes profound disagreement.*

*Although we did not play a role in organizing the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities' November 22 symposium ("One Nation Under God? The Role of Religion in American Public Life"), we were very much part of the affair. I chaired a session featuring Mark Lilla, Peggy Steinfels, Jon Meacham and Peter Paris. Among other things, this event brought Amy Sullivan back to campus. She is one of the best writers in the country on religion, and it was terrific to have her here twice.*

*We were truly fortunate to have a first-rate speaker for our annual "Prophetic Voices" lecture, namely Abdullahi An-Na'im of Emory University, a native of Sudan and an internationally acclaimed scholar of law and religion. His lecture "American Secularism for American Muslims" sparked fascinating questions from the audience, which stayed with rapt attention for the whole event. My political science colleague Ali Banuazizi set the tone for the lecture with a wonderful introduction.*

*Our lunch colloquia this semester were nearly exclusively devoted to themes related to "Ways of Knowing and the Catholic Intellectual Traditions," which is the name of a faculty seminar I am leading here at BC. Special thanks to those seminar members who gave talks, including Anderson J. Franklin, Stephen Schloesser, Mary Sarah Bilder, James Morris and Paul Mariani. We will continue this theme during the Spring semester.*

*I am also pleased to report that my new book, The Future of Liberalism, will be published by Alfred A. Knopf (and will be available on Amazon.com) in early February. I look forward to the comment and criticism it will hopefully provoke, not least during the Boisi Center's April 29 "author meets critics" panel discussion of the book.*

*Finally, I want to thank our terrific research assistants: Suzanne Hevelone, Corinne Madigan and Daniel Bruen. Joined by web designer Isabelle Martinez, this team of students helps the Boisi Center run at full capacity throughout the year.*

*As we look ahead to the first year of the Obama administration, it seems clear that economic and financial issues will dominate much of the public discussion. The Boisi Center is poised to join that conversation through its events and publications, even as we continue to pursue the full range of topics that have kept us busy as a research center for nearly ten years.*

— Alan Wolfe

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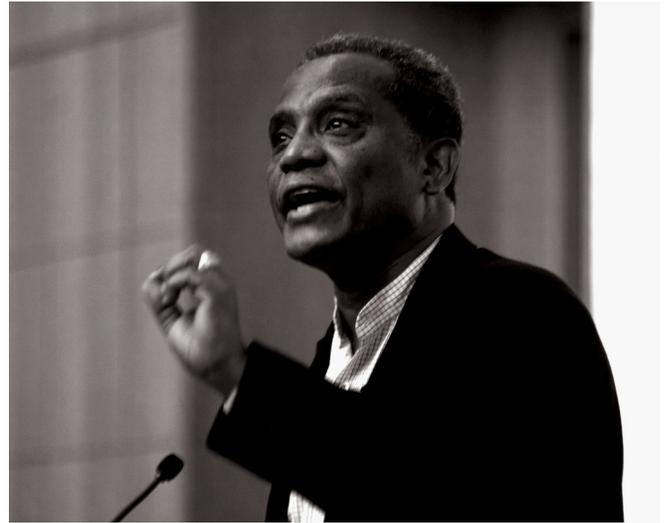
## A PROPHETIC VOICE FOR AMERICAN MUSLIMS

On November 13 the Boisi Center brought Abdullahi An-Na'im, the Charles Howard Candler Professor of Law at Emory University, to campus to deliver our Prophetic Voices Lecture. Professor An-Na'im, a native of Sudan, is a world-renowned scholar of law and religion, who has written extensively on human rights, constitutionalism, Islamic law and politics. His lecture was entitled "American Secularism for American Muslims: Challenges and Prospects."

Defining secularism was, of course, a central theme of An-Na'im's lecture. As he uses the term, secularism entails neither the exclusion of religion from public life nor the absence of religion in society, but rather the government's position of neutrality with regard to religious doctrine. Though citizens, collectively and individually, need to take strong moral positions, secularism means that the laws ought not to do so; the secular state (i.e. the government), An-Na'im said, must be "normatively minimalist" in order that people in the society have the freedom to live their lives in accordance with their religious beliefs. "My pursuit of a secular state," he stated, "is undertaken precisely to enable a religious society. I need the state to be secular so I can be the Muslim I choose to be."

In fact, An-Na'im argued, a state cannot properly be said to be religious at all because only individuals can be religious, and individuals (here An-Na'im spoke only of Muslims) can only be religious by conviction and free choice, not by the coercion of law. Crucial implications follow from this argument, including the understanding that despite longstanding and vigorous claims to the contrary, there is no such thing as an Islamic state. "The state was never 'Islamic,' at any time," An-Na'im told the audience. "The 'Islamic state' is an historical misconception, a logical fallacy and a practical impossibility." Furthermore, Shari'a (the religious law of Islam) cannot be enforced by the government, for if religious law is administered by the state, it is, by definition, no longer religious.

Secularism is inherently contextual, according to An-Na'im, and every society must negotiate over time the proper role of religion in public life. The American negotiation continues today, based upon the eighteenth century Constitutional framework of non-establishment and religious freedom, but adjusted in recognition and response to changing realities. Just as Catholic immigrants challenged the prevailing (Protestant) norms of American secularism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Muslim immigrants in recent decades present a challenge to the prevailing "Judeo-Christian" norms of our day.



*Abdullahi An-Na'im*

Yet in important ways, An-Na'im argued, American Muslims face a greater task than Catholics did. American Muslims are primarily members of cultural, ethnic and racial minorities in addition to being a small religious minority. Muslims also lack a history of civic empowerment and engagement, and therefore need to foster a new model of confident, engaged citizenship in the United States. It is a huge task, he said, one that will require a secular state that allows Muslims to be "Americans on our own terms." Responding to a final question about the prospects for American Muslims under the presidency of Barack Obama, An-Na'im cautioned listeners: "Obama won't change things for us. We make the difference that we deserve. Muslims must make ourselves part of the American dream."

In a robust discussion following his lecture, An-Na'im responded to numerous questions about his conception of the state, theories of post-modernism and post-secularism, civic and public reason and American Muslims' civic responsibility. The following morning, he graciously sat down with a small group of undergraduate and graduate students to discuss a wide range of topics, from the situations in Darfur (the war-torn region of his native country) and Iraq to the role of Shari'a courts in Western democracies and the possibilities of human rights as a ground for interfaith dialogue.

From beginning to end, Professor An-Na'im's visit was an extraordinary success, and we thank him for being another stellar speaker in the Boisi Center's Prophetic Voices lecture series. An audio recording of his lecture is already available on our web site; video will be posted soon, along with a transcript of his lecture and an interview with Erik Owens. ■

## ELECTION 2008: THE ROLE OF CATHOLICS

As the presidential campaign season raced towards election day, the Boisi Center hosted a panel on October 9 about the important role Catholic voters and the Catholic Church were sure to play. Two experts on Catholics and American politics, Amy Sullivan and Michael Sean Winters, joined our own Alan Wolfe for a lively discussion. Sullivan is a national correspondent for *TIME* and author of *The Party Faithful: How and Why Democrats are Closing the God Gap*; Winters is a contributor to prominent Catholic magazines *America* and *The Catholic World*, and author of *Left at the Altar: How the*



Michael Sean Winters, Amy Sullivan, Alan Wolfe

*Democrats Lost the Catholics and How the Catholics Can Save the Democrats.*

Sullivan began by charting the evolution of the relationship between Catholics and Democrats since the early part of the twentieth century. During the New Deal era, Catholics and liberals had a strong bond as they sought to promote economic equality in the United States. Abortion was the singular issue that came to divide the two groups, in part because liberals underestimated the passion with which Catholics opposed abortion. Winters placed blame for this separation between liberals and Catholics on President John F. Kennedy, whose public declarations of a separation between his religious beliefs and his politics caused Democratic politicians to develop an “aversion to enunciating a moral vision of the country.”

Sullivan and Winters commented upon several significant transformations in the electorate and political landscape in 2008. Among their observations were that lay Catholic groups are now in a position to push back against conservative leadership, that Catholic Democratic politicians are reimagining the way they talk about faith and that divisive social issues were likely to take a back seat to the economy as the central motivating force in the election. ■

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## ELECTION 2008: POST-ELECTION ANALYSIS

We hardly need to mention how exciting, important, emotional, and historic the 2008 presidential election was for Americans and indeed citizens of the world. As the global economy shuddered and slumped into a severe recession, Americans fought two wars abroad and debated the future of national security, healthcare, energy policy and education. Barack Obama’s election heightened expectations—as well as anxiety—about the direction of American politics and public life in the coming years, and the Boisi Center invited its crack team of political analysts to make sense of it all.

Alan Wolfe joined his BC political science colleagues Kay Schlozman and Marc Landy for the event. The panelists agreed that Obama’s election demonstrated important social progress with regard to racism, though they were less satisfied that Sarah Palin’s vice-presidential bid represented a blow against sexism. Schlozman argued that, despite Obama’s commanding win in the electoral college, it is simply too early to tell if a major electoral realignment is in the works. Landy deftly parsed exit polling data, which Wolfe also cited while lamenting the apparent racism revealed in the strong rejection of Obama in counties of the former Confederacy. Wolfe



Left to right: Alan Wolfe, Marc Landy, Kay Schlozman

wondered aloud whether the Republican Party that reemerges following this thorough defeat will be more conservative (and primarily Southern) or more moderate. The ensuing conversation with the audience added issues of immigration, gay marriage, media coverage of religion, Obama’s reputation abroad and Rahm Emanuel’s selection as White House Chief of Staff. It was, unsurprisingly, a spirited discussion. ■

## HOW FDR SHAPED THE MODERN PRESIDENCY

As the United States faces a massive economic crisis, politicians on both ends of the political spectrum routinely invoke Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who led the nation through the Great



*Patrick Maney*

days to an unparalleled degree. Children were named after him, songs were sung about him and movies portrayed him. Through his Fireside Chats on the radio and his administration's effort to respond to all of his personal mail, Americans identified with him personally and felt that he knew them personally. He did have detractors, but they were largely silent in the face of his overwhelming popularity. Still, many Republicans

Depression. Patrick Maney, then Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and professor of history at Boston College, spoke about FDR's legacy at a colloquium on September 17.

Roosevelt dominated popular culture during his own

despised the shift towards big government and FDR's pro-labor stances. The Republican shift towards admiration of FDR began in the 1980s when Ronald Reagan cited him regularly to attract Democratic voters—though Reagan still critiqued many components of the New Deal. Roosevelt's importance is now assumed by most people, and even Newt Gingrich declared him the greatest political leader of the twentieth century.

But does FDR deserve this glowing legacy? To be sure, Maney argued, this legacy is more complicated than is commonly understood. FDR did support sweeping reforms that transformed the United States during the Great Depression and World War II, but the historical record does not show him to be the activist president so fondly remembered. He worked with an extremely proactive Congress, which had begun to develop before FDR's election some of the programs (such as the Tennessee Valley Authority) that would come to be part of the New Deal. FDR initially opposed the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and it was Congress, not the President, that developed the Social Security Administration. Furthermore, FDR's shameful role in the Japanese internment camps has not been adequately remembered. Overall, Maney said he did not want to detract from FDR's accomplishments, but that his legacy was much more nuanced and ambivalent than is commonly allowed. ■

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## RE-INTEGRATING SPIRITUALITY INTO THE LIBERAL ARTS

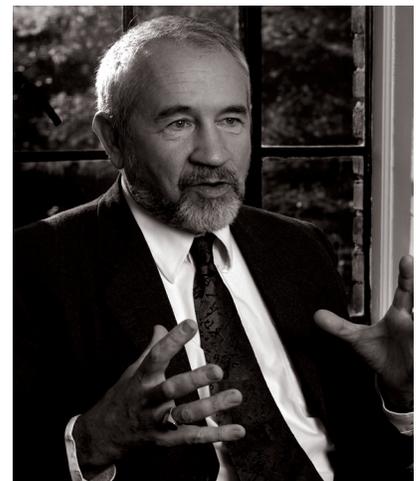
On November 12 the Boisi Center hosted a colloquium with James Morris, an expert on Islam and professor of theology at Boston College. Morris presented the complexities of grappling with religious spirituality in the twenty-first century. Although "spirituality" is a term that is difficult to define, Morris said it is the spirit that teaches us "what we are as human beings within any of these [religious] traditions."

Morris began his lecture by pointing out the historical shift from agrarian societies to "modern" societies. In agrarian societies, a localization of spiritual practices occurred within religious traditions both Islamic and otherwise. The presence of the divine was seen in the midst of the local human community.

Today, however, the world is globalized rather than localized. Spiritual experiences—and the understanding of what it means to be human that goes with them—cut across religious, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Because expressions of spirituality are no longer local, students must find explanatory contexts for understanding the new forms of spirituality to which they are being exposed, and which are often culturally and

religiously foreign to them. The liberal arts curriculum provides one accessible location where students can be instructed about spirituality in a variety of its expressions.

Morris pointed out that access to spiritual texts, once the domain of experts in particular religions, are now available to the general public. Teaching the liberal arts allows them to contextualize these teachings, and they appropriate and transform these teachings into a variety of actions, such as medicine, environmentalism, peace-making and artistic endeavors. ■



*James W. Morris*

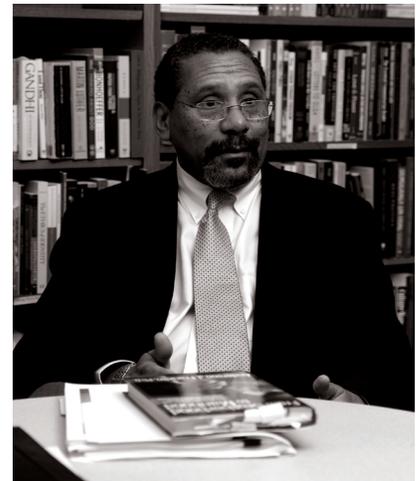
## INVISIBILITY SYNDROME AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS

Members of racial minorities face challenges as they strive to succeed as students at institutions of higher education. African Americans in particular often struggle to discover and express their identities within the university, according to psychologist Anderson J. Franklin, who spoke to a packed Boisi Center colloquium on October 1. Franklin, the Hon. David S. Nelson Professional Chair at Boston College's Lynch School of Education, has written extensively about the resulting "invisibility syndrome" among African-Americans.

While the name of the syndrome is inspired by Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel *The Invisible Man*, Franklin's work is focused upon helping current students find their own identity, and thus rendering them visible again. He has found that a vicious cycle begins when faculty and fellow students ignore the insights and contributions of African-American students, whose academic performance can then falter out of frustration or insecurity. Social and academic invisibility also prevents African-American students from integrating into the social networks that define campus life and cultivate an individual's identity.

In an attempt to avoid just this problem, Franklin said, some faculty or students overcompensate by singling out for attention minority students, who are then (implicitly

or explicitly) forced to stand as the representative of an entire group of people. The pressure resulting from this "spotlight phenomenon" can be as crippling as that arising from invisibility syndrome.



*Anderson J. Franklin*

African-American students will only realize their full academic potential, argued Franklin, when they are able to find their place within the university as complete individuals, bridging their past and present experiences and roles into an integrated identity. For university administrators, this means helping them cultivate friendships and social networks with others who face similar challenges; support services and opportunities for minority students to meet together are essential to this process. ■

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## JAMES MADISON AT THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

James Madison is known as the "father of the American Constitution" for his crucial role in drafting that document and its Bill of Rights. It is no surprise then that historians have traditionally considered his personal notes from the constitutional convention to be the most reliable source of



*Mary Sarah Bilder*

information we have about the convention's debates. But as Mary Sarah Bilder argued in a lively presentation on October 29, the notes produced by "Madison's Hand" (the title of her forthcoming book on the subject) are much less spontaneous—and perhaps more interesting—than previously thought.

Professor Bilder, a legal historian at the Boston College Law School, said that she was inspired to write a book about Madison's notes when she realized the discrepancy between the prevailing view of Madison's notes—as minutes of the convention—and the reality that these notes were neither complete nor contemporaneous. To begin with, Bilder noted, the writing technology available to Madison prevented him from providing a transcript of the debates. Quill pens required constant re-inking, and modern shorthand script had not yet been developed; he simply could not have kept pace with the flow of conversation (let alone transcribe his own comments while speaking them).

Furthermore, Madison edited—and in some cases entirely rewrote—the notes he did take multiple times throughout his lifetime. He destroyed his "original," contemporaneous, notes from the convention when re-writing them after the convention, and in subsequent iterations he added some material from the quasi-official record and removed other material that he thought might be offensive to those at the convention. Though Madison always insisted that his notes were his personal reflections, not an official transcript, historians would mistakenly come to treat them as such. ■

## SACRED AND PROFANE IN GEORGES ROUAULT'S PAINTINGS

Outward appearance, both revealing and dissembling, is key to understanding the work of French artist Georges Rouault, the subject of a critically acclaimed exhibition this fall at Boston College's McMullen Museum of Art. Curated by history professor Stephen Schloesser, S.J., the exhibit was entitled "Mystic Masque: Semblance and Reality in Georges Rouault 1871-1958." On October 15 Professor Schloesser joined us at the Boisi Center to discuss theological and philosophical themes in Rouault's work.



Rouault's Il Santo Volto

Schloesser focused upon what he called the "epistemological modesty" of Rouault's masked figures—clowns, judges, lawyers and prostitutes. Prostitutes must appear romantically interested in a client rather than reveal the harder reality; lawyers must act passionately on behalf of their clients, even when they have doubts as to their innocence. By juxtaposing these figures with religious iconography such as images of Christ and Saint Veronica, Rouault expressed his belief that divine reality often hides under outward appearance. Saint Veronica, in fact, was a favorite theme of Rouault's. Veronica helped Christ in the midst of his suffering as he carried his cross to Calvary. Most people did not recognize Christ's divinity as he faced crucifixion. In love, Veronica wiped his brow with her handkerchief, and his true, divine, image appeared on the cloth.

Surveying some of Rouault's more violent and gritty images, Schloesser argued that the artist shared with Flannery O'Connor and Graham Greene a recognition that violence sometimes corrects our vision and allows us to recognize the masks that conceal the truth of a situation.

Rouault faced persistent criticism during his lifetime from secular and religious critics alike as a consequence of what Schloesser described as Rouault's refreshing look at religion, his overturning of religious certainty and pride. Nevertheless, said Schloesser, sacramentality permeates Rouault's work, in which the appearance of a thing is only an outward sign; deeper and more significant reality lies within. ■

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## VISITING SCHOLAR, ACTIVE STUDENTS AT THE BOISI CENTER

Things were busy on Quincy Road this fall. First, we were delighted to have historian John Summers join us as a visiting scholar at the Boisi Center for the year. Summers is the author of *Every Fury on Earth* (a collection of his essays on history and politics) and editor of *The Politics of Truth: Selected Writings of C. Wright Mills*, both published in 2008. Born and raised in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, he received his doctorate in history from the University of Rochester in 2006. Summers taught at Harvard University before coming to the Boisi Center; this academic year he concurrently serves as lecturer on American Studies at Columbia University and adjunct assistant professor in the honors program at Boston College. At our first lunch colloquium of the spring semester (January 28), he will discuss his forthcoming essay in *The New Republic* that critiques recent efforts to return the Gettysburg battlefield to its Civil War era topography and landscape. (See the last page of this newsletter for a complete spring calendar of events.)

This year we also have a particularly active group of students involved with our Student Advisory Panel (SAP). An Executive Committee of students on the SAP has been formed to lead the group's planning:

*Andrew Bianco, Political Science, Undergraduate*  
*Joshua Darr, Political Science, Undergraduate*  
*Jayson Joyce, Political Science, Undergraduate*  
*Olivia Klupar, Political Science, Undergraduate*  
*Karen Kovaka, Philosophy, Undergraduate*  
*John O'Trakoun, Economics, Doctoral Student*  
*Kevin Quigley, English, Undergraduate*  
*Paul Yang, Biochemistry and Philosophy, Undergraduate*

The SAP is planning a panel this spring on the place of Muslims in American society and a discussion about the merits and drawbacks of short-term outreach programs to impoverished communities.

## WRITING BIOGRAPHY: GIVING THE DEAD THEIR LIVING VOICES

Biographers face a daunting task when they seek to capture the essence of someone else's life within the pages of a book. But when the subject is an artist, and especially a poet, the challenge rises to a new level. How to convey the meaning of poetry in prose? How to balance historical documentation with literary license? On November 19 distinguished poet and biographer Paul Mariani, University Professor of English at Boston College, joined us to discuss these and other questions in a presentation entitled "Giving the Dead Their Living Voices: On Writing Biography." His talk corresponded with the publication by Viking Press of his fifth major biography of a poet, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Life*.

While Hopkins, a convert to Catholicism and later a Jesuit priest, never published his work during his lifetime (1844 - 1889), he came to be recognized in the twentieth century as one of the greatest poets of Victorian England. Professor Mariani said he was attracted to Hopkins in part because of his proto-modern poetic achievements, which broke new ground in form and language, but also because of the rich complexity of his inner life. For example, Hopkins was a sensualist who loved nature but nevertheless felt compelled to live a strict ascetic life.

Mariani described the process of inhabiting a biographical subject's life and work for five or even ten years. You can only begin to write, he said, when you understand your subject so deeply that you almost feel his blood pulsing and predict the pauses of his breath when reading his poetry. This sort of understanding requires access to the poet's diaries and correspondence, something that can never be taken for granted. Some families and estates, Mariani recounted, are highly protective of private papers, while others are eager to have an outside voice interpret the material they have. In any event, the successful poetic biographer must love his subject—and be inspired by him. Without that emotional commitment, Mariani argued, the biographer cannot give the dead their living voice. ■



Paul Mariani

The BOISI CENTER for  
RELIGION and AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

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### SPRING 2009 EVENTS

#### **Gettysburg in Rehab**

John Summers, Boston College  
Wednesday, January 28, 2009  
12:00-1:15 PM • Boisi Center (RSVP required)

#### **Ways of Knowing: Field Science in the 21st Century**

Noah Snyder, Boston College  
Wednesday, February 4, 2009  
12:00-1:15 PM • Boisi Center (RSVP required)

#### **The Faiths of a Catholic University: Personal or Impersonal?**

James Bernauer, S.J., Boston College  
Wednesday, February 11, 2009  
12:00-1:15 PM • Boisi Center (RSVP required)

#### **Realism, Ethics & U.S. Foreign Policy**

Jean Bethke Elshtain, University of Chicago  
Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, Harvard University  
Andrew J. Bacevich, Boston University  
Wednesday, February 18, 2009  
4:30-6:00 PM • Higgins 300

#### **Women Living with HIV/AIDS in the U.S.**

Rosanna DeMarco, Boston College  
Thursday, February 26, 2009  
12:00-1:15 PM • Boisi Center (RSVP required)

#### **Intuition, Emotion and Visualization**

Crystal Tiala, Boston College  
Wednesday, March 11, 2009  
12:00-1:15 PM • Boisi Center (RSVP required)

#### **Global Evangelicalism and Democracy**

Timothy Samuel Shah, Council for Foreign Relations  
Wednesday, March 18, 2009  
4:30 – 6:00 PM • Higgins 300

#### **Scientific Knowledge and Faith**

Paul Davidovits, Boston College  
Wednesday, March 25, 2009  
12:00-1:15 PM • Boisi Center (RSVP required)

#### **Human Evolution and Christian Ethics**

Stephen Pope, Boston College  
Tuesday, March 31, 2009  
5:00-6:30 pm • Higgins 300

#### **Ways of Knowing through Iconography:**

**The Temple of Solomon and the Dome of the Rock**  
Pamela Berger, Boston College  
Wednesday, April 8, 2009  
12:00-1:15 PM • Boisi Center (RSVP required)

#### ***The Future of Liberalism: Author Meets Critics***

Alan Wolfe, Boston College  
Mary Bilder, Boston College Law School  
Daniel Mahoney, Assumption College  
Wednesday, April 29, 2009  
4:30-6:00 PM • Higgins 300