

BOISI CENTER REPORT



VOL. 23 NO. 1 • JANUARY 2023

FROM THE DIRECTOR



Friends:

All of us here at Boisi hope you had a wonderful holiday season with your family and friends.

Christmas brought to a close a busy

semester. The 22 Boisi Center minors in our Religion and Public Life program were doing exciting things both here at BC and further afield—in Dublin, Madrid, and Rome, among other places as exotic as Chestnut Hill! And our seniors are gearing up for lives beyond Gasson Hall's dreaming spires—in law school, graduate work, Navy submarine work, and earning money in the Real World (to the great relief of the National Banks of Mom and Dad).

Boisi hosted four well-attended and provocative lunch colloquia with faculty working on interesting book projects: On October 3, Kristin Peterson (of BC's Communication Department) discussed her new book entitled *Unruly Souls: The Digital Activism of Muslim and Christian Feminists*, a presentation which included clips from various websites that had attendees riveted. On October 12, Randall Balmer of Dartmouth College read parts of his new monograph, *Passion Plays: How Religion Shaped Sports in North America*, which I (not a sports fan) and everyone else found truly interesting and—at times—very funny. On October 21, Kate Jackson-Meyer (a product of BC's doctoral program in theology but now at Harvard University) talked about her research that led to her new book, *Tragic*

Dilemmas in Christian Ethics, a wonderful study based on case studies of complex moral situations. And on November 2, we hosted Saint Anselm College's R. Ward Holder, who offered an overview of a work he had been working on for some time, *Calvin and the Christian Tradition: Scripture, Memory and the Western Mind*, an important work with significant implications for American religion.

On October 26, I interviewed Susannah Heschel (Dartmouth College) and Elisha Wiesel (Elie Wiesel Foundation) before a capacity crowd in Gasson Hall on "Two Jewish Fathers Who Changed History: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Elie Wiesel." Both told wonderful stories of growing up in families of public religious intellectuals, and we had to bring the "questions from the audience" part of the evening to a close after 40 minutes, although there were still many raised hands.

On December 7 and 8, the Boisi Center co-sponsored a meeting at the Leonard Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life at Trinity College Hartford on "Orthodox and Catholic Understanding of 'Just War' in Light of the Ukraine Invasion." Roman Catholic and Orthodox scholars from around the country were invited to give papers on the Eastern and Western Churches' understandings of the components necessary for considering armed conflict "just," and by the end of the second day, everyone agreed that the conversation had been so rich that the topic deserved a follow-up conference, which is being planned for next fall.

Throughout the fall semester a lively group of twelve faculty met monthly for dinner and conversation at Boisi in an ongoing faculty seminar entitled "Religion and Politics in the U.S. After *Dobbs*." Reading widely over common texts as diverse as Mary Ann Glendon's "Divorce and Abortion in Western Culture" and legal commentaries on the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* colleagues from history, philosophy, sociology, theology, nursing, the School of Theology and Ministry, the Schiller Institute, and BC Law took turns convening the always-interesting conversations. The experience was rich and rewarding, so much so that the seminar will continue in the spring semester focused on the topic of "Religious Nationalism."

As always, we are looking toward the future and planning an exciting lineup of smart guests to discuss interesting and timely topics. We look forward to seeing you this spring. Stay tuned: this is going to be an interesting semester.

~Mark Massa, S.J.

MEET OUR NEW UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOWS



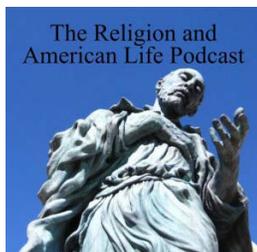
Emily Caffrey is a junior majoring in Boston College's Political Science Honors program and minoring in Religion and Public Life. As an undergraduate research fellow for the Boisi Center, she enjoys examining the effects of religion on individuals' motivations and behavior. Outside of academics, Emily is a tour guide and panelist for BC's Student Admission Program, associate editor for *Mysterion: The Theology Journal of Boston College*, and studio crew member at SoulCycle.

Fallon Jones is a junior in the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences majoring in Theology with minors in Studio Art and Religion and Public Life. Fallon is interested in pursuing theology's connection to service and nonprofit organizations. She is unsure whether that pursuit will be through continuing theological studies or working directly in nonprofits. She is a member of the Boston College Women's Club Water Polo team, which has become her favorite group of girls to spend time with on campus. When not working in the Boisi Center, doing homework, or playing water polo, you will find Fallon enjoying dinner parties and watching documentaries with her friends.



THE RELIGION AND AMERICAN LIFE PODCAST

Subscribe to the Boisi Center's must-hear podcast!



The Boisi Center's newest initiative, "The Religion and American Life Podcast," is getting more interesting by the episode!

In August, the podcast featured a conversation among David Gibson, director of Fordham University's Center on Religion and Culture; Mark Massa, S.J., director of the Boisi Center; Michael Murphy, director of the Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage at Loyola University Chicago; and R. Zachary Karanovich, graduate research assistant at the Boisi

Center. They explored the co-sponsored conference held in March 2022, "Pope Francis, Vatican II, and the Way Forward," including the process and challenges in developing the conference, the insights and outcomes from it, and their hopes for its future.

In December, Massa interviewed senior researcher, Stephanie Kramer, from the Pew Research Center about their recently published study that indicated that "religious switching" is changing the face of American religion. The report concluded that if the trends continue as they are, Christian adherents will soon fall below 50% of the United States population. They discussed both the causes and the consequences of this projection.

Also in December, Massa was joined by Natana Delong-Bas of the theology department and Kristin Peterson of the communication department here at Boston College to discuss the protests in Iran, prompted by the death of activist Mahsa Amini. They explored the circumstances of Amini's death, the solidaristic protests of Muslim women around the world, and what the future holds (or should hold) for Iran.

Now is the perfect time to subscribe! It is available wherever you download podcasts.

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[The Religion and American Life Podcast](#)

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

All Boisi Center event photography by Christopher Soldt, BC Media Technology Services.

An insightful conversation explored the ways Christian and Muslim feminist movements are challenging the status quo and pushing against inequalities through the creative use of social media platforms.



Kristin Peterson offering an evaluation of social media and feminist movements.

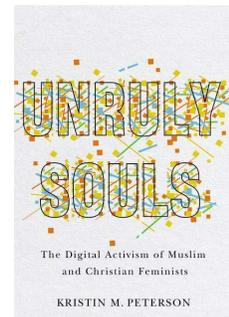
On October 3rd, the Boisi Center hosted its first guest of the school year. Kristin Peterson, an assistant professor in Boston College's communication department, spoke to an audience of students, staff, and fellow professors about the intersectionality of women in Christian and Muslim feminist movements across the digital world.

The presentation and later discussion focused on the research from Peterson's new book, *Unruly Souls: The Digital Activism of Muslim and Christian Feminists*. Peterson began the afternoon by explaining some images representing

the purity and modesty cultures in Islam and Christianity to immediately showcase the intersection of the digitalized feminist movements. Peterson calls these voices for reform "unruly souls," people who are not as accepting of the (in their view) toxic institutional and inherently patriarchal modesty and purity cultures. Peterson found that these activists were frustrated with their lack of agency—their concern was not necessarily the desire to reverse these practices or the values they represent, but to ensure that these practices were a matter of choice for the adherents. Therefore, Peterson understands their leaning into these digital spaces (i.e., YouTube, Instagram, etc.) as a way of advocating for agency within the ethical frameworks of their various religious communities. Peterson approached the presentation by illustrating each chapter's value of focus (e.g., purity) with an example of digital activism. For example, the audience heard about textual endorsements of purity culture such as the book, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* by Joshua Harris alongside the digital responses through rearticulated Twitter phrases like "I Kissed Straightening Goodbye." As the presentation shifted to a conversation, questions were raised about the indus-

try of purity advocacy. It was noted that Christianity has effectively utilized the market to propagate a commercial purity line that permeates society—something that, at least in the United States, is missing from the Islamic counterpart. This led the group further into discussion about the connections between movements, institutions, and the association of the movements and their beliefs in sexual ethics and celibacy that is sometimes forgotten by the secular followers and hidden in the excitement of social activism. It was clarified that many of these digital spokespeople still hold values of Muslim and Christian sexual ethics and pre-marital celibacy, but are fighting for their choice and agency within those values.

To listen to Peterson's lecture presentation and see her PowerPoint, visit the event page on the Boisi Center's website.



SPORTS AND RELIGION IN NORTH AMERICA

Randall Balmer returned to discuss his new book exploring the religious implications of U.S. sports culture.

Inspired by Americans' captivation by sports, Randall Balmer, the John Phillips Professor in Religion at Dartmouth College and member of the Boisi Center's Board of Advisors, wrote a new book titled, *Passion Plays: How Religion Shaped Sports in North America*. On October 12, Balmer participated in a well attended lunch colloquium at the Boisi Center, entitled "Sports and Religion in North America," where he discussed his recent publication and engaged in a riveting conversation about the intersection of America's two passions.

In his presentation, Balmer explained certain aspects of popular sports. For example, football became America's game because, he argued, it conquered "the three R's: region, race, and religion." Football successfully spread to the south because it is a military-style game, and the south is embedded in a culture of militarism. Racial integration—albeit violent—also occurred on the field, which led to the sport's increasing popularity during the mid-twentieth century. Furthermore, football spread across religious groups. Specifically, Boston College, Fordham, and Notre Dame embraced



Randall Balmer



Balmer leads a discussion on sports and religion in the U.S.

football as an opportunity to “beat Protestants on the field,” which further contributed to American Catholic identity formation.

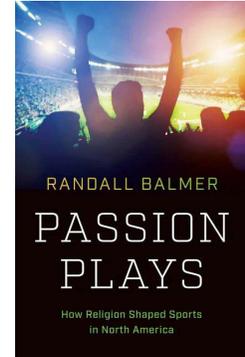
He similarly explored basketball’s origins in the Calvinist ideals of seeking boundaries and limits—consider in basketball’s tight court dimensions. James Naismith was a Presbyterian, after all.

Balmer concluded his lecture describing

how sports fanaticism manifests itself as a religion for many Americans. Today, church services will be moved so they don’t interfere with sports events. Over the past few decades, religious adherence has decreased while sports fanaticism has increased dramatically.

An enriching Q&A followed Balmer’s presentation; the conversation discussed transcendent moments that occurred

in sports, including Doug Flutie’s Hail Mary pass. It also addressed how Americans have transitioned from looking to theologians—such as MLK and Reinhold Niebuhr—to looking to athletes—including Colin Kaepernick and LeBron James—for moral guidance.



To listen to Balmer’s presentation, visit the event page on the Boisi Center’s website.

TRAGIC DILEMMAS IN CHRISTIAN ETHICS

A lively conversation explored the challenges faced and possible remedies available to those making a decision when no good decision can be made.

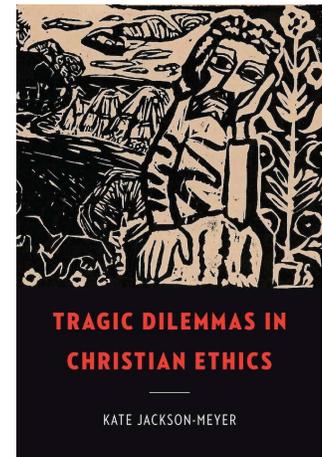


Kate Jackson-Meyer explores new evaluations for moral dilemmas.

On Friday, October 21, Kate Jackson-Meyer, currently a postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University, returned to Boston College, where she completed her doctoral studies, to speak about her book *Tragic Dilemmas in Christian Ethics*. There was a great turnout of Jackson-Meyer’s former students, faculty peers, and mentors as she returned to what she sees as her “intellectual home.”

Jackson-Meyer began her presentation with two general points: what makes

a dilemma and how her work fits into Christian ethics. A dilemma, in her words, is when one ought to do A and one ought to do B but cannot do both, and a choice has to be made. This decision will result in positive impacts from choosing either A or B but negative impacts from the option not chosen, resulting in guilt. To understand why these choices or dilemmas exist, she concentrates on sin and sinful social structures. Taking insights from moral theology and specifically Catholic social ethics emphasis on relationality, Jackson-Meyer presented three illustrative cases of dilemmas to argue that current moral guidelines, such as the principle of double effect, are insufficient in situations of moral dilemma. Jackson-Meyer turned to the idea of moral injury—a concept still emerging in the current moral paradigms. Current insufficient strategies focus on choices in dilemmas rather than the experiences of the people after making those choices. Jackson-Meyer posed a great question: what are ethics if they only strategize with regard to choice and do not consider the moral experience of the people choosing?



Central to her solution is lament: our response to the guilt we feel for not performing the alternative obligation—it is all we can do.

A great discussion followed this presentation. Jackson-Meyer concluded that her work is not supposed to make these choices easier but, instead, provide options for reflection after such decisions and the healing steps needed after tragic dilemmas.

To listen to Jackson-Meyer’s presentation, visit the event page on the Boisi Center’s website.

TWO JEWISH FATHERS WHO CHANGED HISTORY

Susannah Heschel and Elisha Wiesel spent an evening discussing their fathers' friendship and legacies.

On October 26, Susannah Heschel, the Eli M. Black Distinguished Professor and chair of the Jewish Studies Program at Dartmouth College, and Elisha Wiesel, chair of the Elie Wiesel Foundation, came together for the Boisi Center event, "Two Jewish Fathers Who Changed History: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Elie Wiesel." Susannah and Elisha discussed their fathers' legacies and relationship in a wide-ranging conversation with Boisi Center director Mark Massa, S.J. This event was co-sponsored with the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College.

Massa began the conversation by asking Susannah and Elisha to elaborate on how they saw their fathers' relationship. What followed was a recollection of stories that illustrated the close friendship between them as well as with each other's families, revealing the kindness and strength of the relationship that was shared between their two fathers.

When asked at what point they realized their parents were famous, Elisha talked about how kids his age would discuss what their fathers did for a living. Through that, Elisha realized that he didn't know what his father did. He remembered his father keeping the answers to his questions very simple, and that most of Elisha's knowledge was gained through a sort of "osmosis." This osmosis was the knowledge he gained



Susannah Heschel



Elisha Wiesel

when his family vacations were to Auschwitz instead of the Hamptons. Susannah's experience was similarly osmotic as she also described walks with her father during which he would share his experiences and family stories.

The panel turned to their fathers' legacies. Elisha began by describing his father's legacy as that of a Universalist, ensuring that the world was a better place but not as often envisioned with his reputation as an observant Jew.

Regarding Rabbi Heschel's legacy, Susannah explained it very similarly to Wiesel's. She remarked that their fathers preserved something that was destroyed. This highlighted again the importance of their deeply rooted Jewish faith. Looking at the different perspectives of his legacy, she observed that Rabbi Heschel's political activism and the pictures of him

with Martin Luther King, Jr. sometimes overshadow the work he did preserving Jewish life and how his social justice is deeply connected to Jewish tradition. Susannah and Elisha reflected on how people tend to boil their parents' legacies down to simple sayings when they are much more.

To continue building these understandings of Wiesel and Heschel, the audience presented questions about encounters they had with one or both men and experiences they felt that their fathers' perspectives would have shed light on. These questions ranged from discussing school curriculum on the Holocaust, interreligious dialogue, and current struggles with antisemitism. Answering these questions, Susannah and Wiesel spoke about experiences of Elisha and his father at family dinner, how both speakers see the importance of Holocaust education, and how reading their fathers' works should be an ongoing dialogue to find the best methods in approaching an education that rightfully grasps vibrant Jewish life and its devastation. The audience's questions brought the event to a great conclusion, revisiting Susannah and Elisha's fathers' legacies, and the need for their continued influence today.

Watch and listen to their stories and reflections on the Boisi Center's YouTube channel.



(L-R) Mark Massa, S.J., Susannah Heschel, and Elisha Wiesel

TRADITION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

R. Ward Holder described the often misunderstood role of tradition within Calvinism.



R. Ward Holder discusses Calvin's reliance on tradition.

On November 2, the Boisi Center hosted R. Ward Holder, a professor of theology at St. Anselm College. Holder recently published his third book on Calvin titled, *Calvin and the Christian Tradition: Scripture, Memory, and the Western Mind*. During his colloquium, "Tradition and its Discontents: John Calvin and the Western Mind," Holder shared insights from his new book and explored the compatibility of Calvinism and tradition.

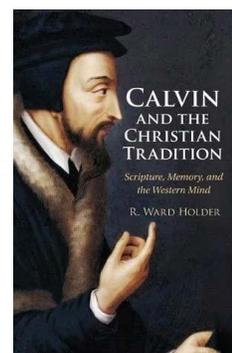
Holder began by comparing sixteenth-century Geneva, Switzerland—where Calvin worked as a pastor and

reformer—to twenty-first century Boston, Massachusetts. In Geneva, Calvin repudiated the Catholic model of hierarchical religion as well as the Anabaptist and Spiritualist practice of biblical primitivism. Calvin instead advocated for a strict following of the scripture. Yet, Holder argued that Calvin incorporated tradition throughout his works. There are several instances in Calvin's theology that include tradition and bear resemblance to the theology of Orthodox and Catholics, despite Calvin's public renunciation of tradition. For example, Calvin refutes Joachim Westphal (a Lutheran), arguing about the centrality and importance of scripture, yet Calvin dedicates the next twenty pages dictating the correct interpretation and application of Augustine. Hence, Holder concluded that Calvin utilizes a functional model of tradition and encourages us, in modern-day Boston, to reconsider the connection between Calvinism and tradition.

After illustrating Calvin's reliance on tradition, Holder argued for the need

to recognize the presence of tradition in current Calvinism and be willing to acknowledge that some elements of tradition are wrong, as seen in complementarianism, in order to reform.

An enriching Q&A followed Holder's presentation, which discussed the influences on Calvin's focus on plain sense scripture, possible connections between plain sense scripture and natural law, as well as similarities between biblical literalism and constitutional originalism.



To listen to Holder's presentation, visit the event page on the Boisi Center's website.

CALL FOR PAPERS:

3RD ANNUAL GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE "RACE AND RELIGION"

Some 60 years ago, Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed his dismay "that the most segregated hour of Christian America is 11 o'clock on Sunday morning." To this day, approximately 80 percent of congregations are attended by a single race predominantly. Despite this racial chasm, worshipping communities and religious leaders maintain a prominent role in anti-racist activism, including, for example, the collection of antiracism resources curated by the National Council of Jewish Women or the Black Lives Matter march organized by the Muslims of Greater St. Louis. Some congregations, however, are faced with a reckoning of their problematic pasts, such as the discriminatory practices that



led to the founding of the John Wesley AME Zion Church in Washington, D.C., or the sale of enslaved persons by the Society of Jesus to save Georgetown University.

The Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College will host its third annual graduate student conference exploring the relationship between race and religion. We invite papers addressing current, historical, and emerging issues at the intersection of these topics.

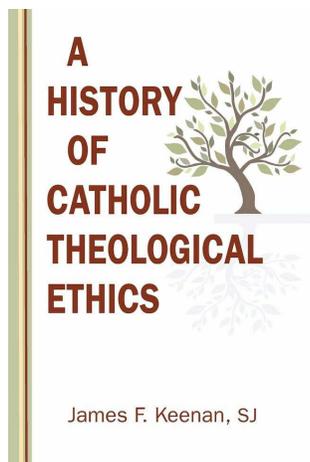
As an interdisciplinary conference, we encourage submissions from graduate and professional students in any disciplines. Offering feedback to each paper presented will be a featured respondent (to be announced). And the author of the conference's Best Paper will be awarded \$1000.

Unlike previous years, we are eager to welcome all participants to Boston College for an in-person conference.

Submit abstracts no later than Friday, January 27th to: boisi.center@bc.edu.

For additional information, see the conference page on the Boisi Center website.

An all-star panel discussed the most recent contribution of James Keenan, S.J. to Catholic theological ethics.



On Friday, November 11, the Boisi Center was happy to celebrate the publication of *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics* by one of the world's premier theological ethicists and Boston College professor James Keenan, S.J. An esteemed panel of professors and students shared brief reflections on the importance of Keenan's work. The panel included Lisa Cahill, J. Donald Monan Professor of Theology; Daniel Daly, associate professor of moral theology; M. Cathleen Kaveny, Darald and Juliet Libby Professor of Theology and Law; Brett O'Neill, S.J., doctoral candidate in theological ethics; and Katherine Ward, M.T.S. student.

Cahill began by noting that moral theology is both a structure of sin in that it controls adherents and is rooted in a power imbalance, but also a structure of grace in that it facilitates and cultivates virtue. She praised Keenan's emphasis on the latter over the former as she offered examples of these two focuses throughout history. Keenan's book aptly describes this shift throughout the tradition. So what Keenan draws attention to, Cahill argued, is the struggle within moral theology between concerns about power and structure and the gradual attention to pastoral theology and pluralism in response to greater lay involvement, growing suspicion of the institution, and the interconnectedness of the world and diversity of the discipline.

Daly's remarks drew attention to Keenan's ethical framework beginning with Jesus Christ. This "orienting prin-

ciple" is the most important contribution in Keenan's book, Daly argued. This, he claimed, was Keenan shifting the focus in moral theology from a preoccupation with sin toward virtuous living and following Jesus. Further, Daly brought attention to Keenan's description of the role of the moral theologian—a demand, he said, that only Keenan could make. This claim is evidenced most notably in the foregrounding of global voices in the field that deserve a seat at the table, ultimately because Catholic theological ethics is the reflection of a global Church.

Ward's comments started with a reflection on the limits of her own moral knowledge. In the face of so many voices in moral theology vying to claim authority, this book, she argued, helps get a handle on the populous field. It shows how the tradition has developed, but it also gives insights into how one might be able to shape that same tradition. Speaking from the graduate student perspective, she reflected on her own desire—along with her peers'—to try to innovate within the field, and that, to do so, those students need teachers like Keenan and the tool that is his text.

O'Neill, once a student of Keenan's, saw the model of Keenan's theological ethics through his engagement with the work of Francisco de Vitoria, Bartolomé de las Casas, and Alphonsus Liguori, who reflected in their own theologies the need for both theological education and pastoral accompaniment. O'Neill sees this pastoral accompaniment as shedding a light on Keenan's mantra that to be an ethicist requires one to be an activist. The ethicist, he sees Keenan as arguing, is not to merely parrot the teaching of the magisterium. Instead, he noted, the ethicist is a part of a living, dynamic tradition.

Kaveny wrapped up the panelists' remarks by calling the book "magisterial." Keenan, she said, is a teacher and a teacher in conversation—one who, at the same time, teaches and learns. She then focused her remarks on casuistry—a

shared interest with Keenan. Unlike Keenan, Kaveny acknowledged, Pope Francis is not a fan of casuistry (even calling it "hypocritical thinking," a "deception," and "decadent Thomism"). She concluded with this question: What does Francis' remarks about casuistry mean for theological ethicists who engage in the practice? Later in the evening, Keenan answered, half-jokingly, that Francis needed to read more.

At the conclusion of the panelists' remarks, Keenan offered a few remarks of his own. He said that he understands his work as a counterpoint to that of John Mahoney's *The Making of Moral Theology: A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition*—offering a new way of understanding how we think about theological ethics and moral theology, shifting away from a preoccupation with avoiding sin toward a focus on growing in holiness. This better reflects the history of the Church that is marked by a concern for practices over teaching, among other things.

Finally, Keenan returned to Liguori. As Keenan got to know Liguori, whom he initially thought to be too concerned with sin, he began to like him more because Liguori raised up the voices of the poor and attended to those suffering at the hands of unjust legal structures. While Liguori had excessive scrupulosity, it did not detract from his belief that the people deserved pastoral accompaniment. This, Keenan argued, is evidence of our own need to listen to the concerns of real persons as we continue the process of traditioning in the Church.

A few questions followed from the role of Jesus in Christian theological ethics, the relationship between moral theology and spirituality, the influence of the sacrament of confession on the development of moral theology, and comparing Protestant and Catholic casuists.

To see the discussion in its entirety, visit the Boisi Center's YouTube channel.



(Front L-R): Lisa Cahill, M. Cathleen Kaveny, and James Keenan, S.J.
 (Back L-R): Mark Massa, S.J., Brett O'Neill, S.J., Daniel Daly, and Katherine Ward

SPRING 2023 EVENTS

- January 26 | 12-1:15pm *Luncheon Colloquium: "The Role of the Church(es) in the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. and 'Solidarity' in Poland: Expectations, Divisions, Engagement, and Its Consequences," with **Paulina Napierala***
- February 1 | 4-5:30pm *Wolfe Lecture on Religion and American Politics: "Parties in the Pews in a Divided Nation," with **Kay Schlozman** and **David Hopkins***
- February 15 | 4-5:30pm *Prophetic Voices Lecture: "'Prophets are Never Honored at Home': Prophecy and Synodality in the Catholic Church," with **Massimo Faggioli***
- March 25 *3rd Annual Graduate Student Conference: "Race and Religion"*
- March 29 | 12-1:15pm *Luncheon Colloquium: "A Capital Congregation: Proximity, Community, and Ministry for American Statehouse Neighborhoods," with **Richard Burnett***
- April 4 | 12-1:15pm *Luncheon Colloquium: "Russia's War with Ukraine One Year Later: Orthodox Christianity, Geopolitics, and Power," with **Elizabeth Prodromou***
- April 18 | 5-6:15pm *Co-Sponsored Event: "People Love Dead Jews," with **Dara Horn** (In commemoration of Yom HaShoah/Holocaust Remembrance Day)*