

The Boisi Center Report

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

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From the Director



Our first news to recount ought to be apparent to readers already: we have redesigned the Boisi Center Report. We hope you agree that this version will be more readable and appreciate that it offers us more space to comment on our activities. We have been undertaking a related redesign of our website, the results of which should be on display by the end of the summer.

The aim, of course, is not just to project a new image but to reflect in our communications the increased activity here at the Boisi Center. This activity produced ten public events this semester: a large conference, three panel discussions, five lunch colloquia and a major lecture. A full report on each of these events follows in these pages, but several warrant special attention. Our sixth annual Prophetic Voices of the Church lecture was brilliantly delivered this year by Harvard's Peter Gomes, who marked his first speaking engagement at Boston College. The audience also raved about the day-long conference we hosted on "Blasphemy, Free Speech and Journalistic Ethics" that featured a keynote address by Charles Haynes of the First Amendment

Center and panels of interfaith religious leaders and prominent national journalists who cover religion. Our panel on political polarization (co-sponsored with the Brookings Institution) drew a sizable crowd and elicited robust discussion. Several of our events this semester explicitly examined the challenge of integrating Muslims into Western society: the conference on blasphemy, lunch discussions with Baroness Kishwer Falkner (of the U.K. House of Lords) and art historian John McCoy, and a panel on legal protections for religious freedom in the U.S. and Europe. Audio and/or video recordings of many of these events will be posted on our web site.

My most significant event of the past half-year was a debate with Pastor Russell Johnson, founder of the Ohio Restoration Project in Lancaster, Ohio, before a packed auditorium at a conference organized by the New Hampshire Council on the Humanities.

Among those in the audience were Eugene Robinson, Mark Silk, and Richard Land. In the April 26, 2007 issue of the New York Review of Books, the writer Frances Fitzgerald calls Russell Johnson "an energetic and skillful debater," and it was indeed both entertaining and instructive to share the platform with him. In the next director's letter I'll recount my upcoming trips to Dublin and Vienna to speak about American religion.

I am pleased to report that both our graduate assistants have accepted academic jobs for next year as assistant professors of theology, both at Catholic institutions. Matthew Bagot will join the faculty at Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama; Karen Teel will join the faculty at the University of San Diego. We also congratulate Karen and her husband Matt on the recent birth of their daughter Madeline. We will miss both Matthew and Karen, who did terrific work for us this year; we wish them the best of luck. I would also like to thank Isabelle Martinez for her excellent work behind the scenes on our new web site.

A final staff note: This marks the end of the first year that Erik Owens spent as assistant director. His energy and intelligence are on display everywhere, not least in the design and content of this report.

ALAN WOLFE

BLASPHEMY AND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

On March 24 the Boisi Center hosted a full-day conference entitled "Blasphemy, Free Expression and Journalistic Ethics" to discuss the conflicts that arise when religious values confront the journalistic ethics of free speech and a free press. The event brought journalists, religious leaders and scholars together in a rare conversation across professional and religious boundaries.

A morning keynote address by Charles Haynes, senior scholar at the First Amendment Center in Washington,

D.C., provided excellent context for the day's discussion. Haynes appealed to Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island for whom religious freedom and free speech were inextricably intertwined. "The very power [to censor speech] that protects a religious group today will be used against them tomorrow," Haynes said. "What is blasphemy to one is religious conviction to another." A recent poll indicates that 43% of Americans do *not* believe "people should be allowed to say things in public that might be offensive to religious

REV. PETER GOMES ON “THE DANGER OF PROPHECY”



Rev. Peter Gomes

For the sixth annual installment of our “Prophetic Voices of the Church” lecture series, we invited Rev. Peter J. Gomes, Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and Pusey Minister in The Memorial Church at Harvard University, where he has served for more than thirty years. Gomes is widely regarded as one of America’s most distinguished preachers, and his lecture on March 15 certainly sustained that reputation.

Gomes began his talk by disclaiming the mantle of the prophet in favor of that of a preacher. Though preachers and prophets are not far removed from one another—both are “called to say things to people who would rather not hear them”—prophets are a hallowed group. With characteristic wit and eloquence, Gomes described why prophets ancient (including Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jesus) and modern (Martin Luther King, Jr.,

William Sloane Coffin, Dorothy Day) are so imposing to us: they seem to tower above us in righteousness and courage. We are, Gomes said, so “overwhelmed by this prophetic inheritance” that we think we cannot possibly participate in it. The danger of prophecy is that we may think it is an elite profession.

Yet prophecy has at its heart the act of teaching, Gomes reminded the audience, and teaching is something we can all do. In the great popular movements for justice in American history—antislavery, women’s rights, civil rights—we see “ordinary people who by their example are leading their country from one place to another.” Prophets grand and humble alike call us back to the old in order to push us ahead toward the new.

This movement toward the new carries many risks. Gomes recounted his own attempts to teach those who would listen that the move toward war in Iraq was misguided, that our government should sanction gay marriage, and that Christians should resist conformity to the prevailing culture. Despite the opprobrium sometimes heaped upon those who teach hard truths, Gomes argued, preachers should not be frightened away from this calling. Fear of offending others too often leads to “homiletical laryngitis” or a “muted voice from the pulpit,” but preachers can avoid this fate if they trust in the Word (that gives them something to say), trust in the Spirit (that is alive and well in the church if you are open to it), and trust themselves enough to teach, provoke, encourage and embrace their parishioners. This democratic form of prophecy is part of, not opposed to, pastoral care. It does not require sackcloth and ashes, but rather a willingness to teach and learn, and to commit oneself to God.

After receiving a rousing applause, Gomes took questions on a wide range of topics. For those unable to attend the lecture, streaming video of the talk will be available soon at frontrow.bc.edu. ■

SHOULD THE LAW GIVE SPECIAL TREATMENT TO RELIGION?

On February 7, the Center presented a panel discussion of legal issues pertaining to religious freedom entitled “Headscarves and Holy Days: Should the Law Make Exceptions?” Leah Farish, a civil rights attorney from Tulsa, Oklahoma, began by recounting her successful legal advocacy for a Muslim girl who sought to wear her headscarf in a local public school. Farish spoke of how her Christian faith motivated her to defend the legal rights of Muslims in the U.S., and argued that contemporary First Amendment jurisprudence should be informed by

eighteenth-century debates within religious denominations about church and state.

The second panelist, Marci Hamilton, the Paul R. Verkuil Professor of Public Law at Yeshiva University, expressed her frustration that courts too often grant religious exemptions from laws but fail to think through the public implications of their decisions. A more sensible approach would ask whether a particular exemption creates a harm to society; if no harm is perceived in that specific context, the exemption should be granted. Thus, for example, exempting head-

Continued on page 7

BLASPHEMY AND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS



Charles Haynes

groups.” As a result, speech codes—many of which, Haynes argued, are unconstitutional—have flourished in American schools and universities. Rather than enacting speech codes, he said, the best way to sustain a commitment to free speech without abandoning the norms of civil discourse is to better educate citizens about religion, especially in secondary schools and universities.

The conference continued with an interfaith panel discussion of blasphemy and religious offense, moderated by Philip Cunningham, director of the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College (BC). Imam Talal Eid, founder of the Islamic Institute of Boston, told the audience that American Muslims cherish free speech and that it is no coincidence the Danish cartoons did not cause rioting here. He recounted stories of the Prophet and other passages from the Qur’an that advocated peaceful tolerance of—and meaningful dialogue with—people of other faiths. Larry Lowenthal, executive director of the Boston chapter of the American Jewish Committee, affirmed his community’s support of the First Amendment, but then described several issues that can test it, including criticism of fellow Jews, criticism of Israel, and discussions about complicity in the Holocaust. Rev. Edward O’Flaherty, S.J., director of the Boston Archdiocese’s Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, noted that “blasphemy” and “slander” (both of which connote willful destruction of a reputation) are alternate translations of the same word in the Greek New Testament. Contemporary forms of slander should be strongly rebutted, he said, but definitely not censored, and the Church should not lobby for restrictions on free speech. Rev. Eric Severson, associate professor of religion at Eastern Nazarene College (ENC) recalled *Newsweek* magazine’s 2005 report about mistreatment of the Qur’an at the U.S. prison camp in Guantanamo Bay. While an awful truth was rightly revealed in this case, he argued, *Newsweek*’s editors should have written the story in a less provocative manner. “Journalism is not just fact-finding and fact-reporting; it is social reformation,” he said.

The afternoon panel moderated by Soterios Zoulas (conference co-organizer and associate professor of communication arts at ENC) brought four distinguished broadcast and print journalists together. Michael Paulson, religion reporter at the *Boston Globe*, began by recounting the paper’s coverage of the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church that earned him (and others at the *Globe*) a Pulitzer Prize in 2003. He then discussed two tensions religion reporters face: finding the proper tone (do journalistic subjects deserve deference or merely respect?) and choosing the proper content (balancing coverage of “lived religion” and “institutional religion”). The next speaker, Monica Brady-Myerov, covered the sex abuse scandal in the Boston Archdiocese for WBUR Radio, an NPR affiliate in Boston. She noted that the Catholic Church had previously seemed above journalistic reproach, whereas her reporting since then had focused on its poor institutional management.



Philip Cunningham, Imam Talal Eid, and Larry Lowenthal

journalists need to learn about various “symbol systems” so they understand what makes certain statements deeply offensive. The final panelist was Hanna Rosin, reporter for the *Washington Post* and author of a forthcoming book on evangelical colleges. She recounted the *Post*’s infamous 1995 article describing evangelicals as “poor, uneducated



Michael Paulson

and easy to command,” and remarked that although religion reporting has greatly improved in recent years, it remains the case that even ill-informed speech should be protected.

The Boisi Center would like to thank the numerous organizations who helped to organize and sponsor this event. The conference was presented jointly by the Boisi Center and the Communication Arts Department at ENC. We received generous financial assistance from organizations at both schools: at BC, the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning, the Jesuit Institute, BC Magazine, and the Winston Center for Leadership and Ethics; at ENC, the Division of Religion and Philosophy, the DeFreitas Mission Program (funded by a grant from the DeFreitas Foundation) and the Music Department. The text or multimedia from several of the presentations, including Dr. Haynes’ keynote address, is available on our website. ■

THE FUTURE OF CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES

Our first lunch colloquium of the semester took place January 30, when David O'Brien, Loyola Professor of Roman Catholic Studies at the College of the Holy Cross, spoke on the role of Catholic universities in American public life. O'Brien noted that Catholic universities affirm three lines of responsibility: professional, ecclesiastical, and civic. In the 1960s, these lines cohered well and were epitomized by the inscription over the chapel doors at the University of Notre Dame: "God, Country, and Notre Dame." In the late 1960s, however, with the American values of institutional autonomy and academic freedom at stake, a number of Catholic universities turned their charters over to independent boards of trustees. For a while, this new arrangement worked as these universities gained prominence in the academic world. But some critics now fear that such assimilation has entailed a loss of Catholic identity.

O'Brien rejected this criticism and the passive voice of assimilation and accommodation that lay behind it; he articulated an alternative narrative that uses the active voice of liberation, solidarity, and shared responsibility. For him, the move of Catholic universities into the mainstream has been



David O'Brien

positive in that it has helped the Church to participate in the transformation of the United States and the world. The move has not been without tension, but the "bilingual approach" (which allows for both faithful Christian discipleship and responsible American citizenship) favored by university presidents such as Theodore Hesburgh reflects

the daily Christian practice of using one language among friends and another in areas of shared responsibility. O'Brien noted that Catholic universities have reintroduced religion into the undergraduate curriculum and focused on the needs of the poor in a way that serves the public good. Thus academic work is located within the horizon of the world in a way that reflects Vatican II's call for Catholics to embrace the world in which they live. ■

BLASPHEMY IN INK



John McCoy

In September 2005 a Danish newspaper published twelve satirical cartoons depicting the Islamic prophet Muhammad in ways that many Muslims consider to be blasphemous. The cartoons were accompanied by a strident editorial arguing that everyone who lives in a secular democracy that protects free expression must be prepared to face "scorn, ridicule, and humiliation" without receiving special consideration or legal protection. The cartoons and editorial were intentionally provocative, and most of the ensuing media coverage duly reported the anger, resentment, recrimination and violence that broke out in more

than a dozen countries around the world. Very few reports, however, closely examined the cartoons themselves.

On April 3 the Boisi Center invited John McCoy, information and collections specialist at the McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College, to speak about these cartoons in the context of European and American traditions of political cartooning. In a presentation entitled "Blasphemy in Ink: The Danish Muhammad Cartoons and their Fallout," McCoy showed slides of the Danish cartoons alongside other examples of political cartoons with religious themes or targets. With the eye of a practitioner as well as a critic—McCoy is both an historian of graphic novels and cartoons and an illustrator and cartoonist himself—he described how certain features of the cartoons rendered them more aggressive or respectful or ambiguous. Kurt Westergaard's infamous sketch of Muhammad wearing a bomb in his turban was exacerbated, for example, by the turban's inscription of the *shahadah*, or Muslim profession of faith ("There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the prophet of Allah"). Claus Seidel's depiction of the Prophet in modest Bedouin garb was "respectful" and clear-cut, whereas Peter Bugaard's juxtaposition of Muhammad's face with the Islamic star and crescent was "poorly drawn and completely ambiguous." In that sense, McCoy noted, Bugaard's cartoon epitomized the group. A lively and wide-ranging Q&A period followed the presentation, which can be downloaded on the Boisi Center's web site; a video recording will be posted early this summer. ■

“THEOCONS” IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE



Alan Wolfe, Jorge Garcia and Damon Linker

On February 28, 2007, the Boisi Center sponsored a well-attended panel discussion entitled “The Theocons in American Public Life.” Participants included Damon Linker, author of *The Theocons: Secular America Under Siege* and former editor of the influential conservative journal *First Things*; and Jorge L.A. Garcia, professor of philosophy at Boston College who has written for *First Things*. Alan Wolfe moderated the lively and at times contentious discussion.

Linker uses the term “theoconservatives” (or “theocons”) to describe those who articulate a comprehensive ideology for conservative Christians with the goal of creating a new socio-religious consensus around biblical religion in this country. Michael Novak, George Weigel, Robert George, and Richard John Neuhaus (founder and editor of *First Things*) are the group’s most prominent leaders. According to Linker, theocons are grounded in Catholic social theory but aim for a broader Christian audience that shares their critique of American secularism; they believe American society is unsustainable without reference to its Christian foundations, and thus they seek to raze the legal wall of separation between church and state. This ominous conflation of politics and theology, Linker argued, would be a disaster for religious freedom in this country.

Garcia eschewed the label of “theocon” for himself, but stated that he appreciates theoconservative thought as helping to build and maintain morally focused politics. He believes the theocons can help provide a rational reconstruction of American norms, rights, and duties. In Garcia’s view, the theocons do not seek to dominate the country, but rather to achieve certain political objectives related to beginning- and end-of-life questions (abortion and euthanasia), the family (definition of marriage), and science (especially cloning). Garcia maintained that while a distinction between church and state is appropriate, individuals and groups must be allowed to advocate for issues they believe are important, even—perhaps especially—when their principles are informed by religious beliefs.

The ensuing discussion included many thoughtful questions and comments from the audience. In the end, it was clear that Linker believed the theocons harbored larger political ambitions (related to issues, not for themselves personally) than Garcia allowed. Where Linker saw their influence as threatening to the core value of church-state separation, Garcia saw it as a salutary influence on debates over important issues. The event provided all who participated with a model of civil and productive intellectual disagreement as well as plenty of food for thought. ■

Student Advisory Panel

This year the Boisi Center inaugurated a student advisory panel to assist the staff with planning, logistics and publicity surrounding its many events. We were delighted to have such a strong response, and the resulting panel brought together students from nearly every school at the University. At monthly meetings, students talked about religion and politics with our staff, gave us feedback about recent Boisi Center events, and proposed new events for the next academic year. Thank you to this year’s members:

ALEX COHEN (A&S '10)
JOHN CROWLEY-BUCK (GSA&S '08)
JEREMY CRUZ (GSA&S '10)
ELIZABETH EILAND (LSOE '09)
PETE FAY (A&S '10)
CHRISTINE FRIEDRICH (A&S '08)
CATHERINE KARDONG (A&S '07)
JOHN MACEK (A&S '08)
EMILY McDONOUGH (LSOE '09)
CLARE CATHERINE MURPHY (A&S '07)
TIMOTHY D. OLSON (A&S '10)
STEPHEN OROSZ (Law '08)
SALLY PENNINGTON (LSOE '07)
KATHERINE SEAWELL (LSOE '09)
KATHLEEN SELLERS (A&S '09)
MARY BETH STRYKER (GSSW/GSA&S '08)
HILLARY THOMPSON (GSA&S '10)
JOSEPH TURNAGE (A&S '09)
JOHN WEAVER (Law '08)

We will recruit a new panel of student advisors in the Fall; watch for our announcements or email Erik Owens at erik.owens@bc.edu if you are interested.



INTEGRATING MUSLIMS INTO THE U.K.

On March 28, the Boisi Center welcomed Kishwer Falkner, Baroness of Margravine and the first Muslim “frontbencher” (party spokesperson) in the United Kingdom’s House of Lords. She spoke about the challenges and opportunities Muslims face in integrating into British society.

Generational differences are extremely important in matters of cultural integration, she noted. The first generation of Muslims immigrated to the U.K. in the 1950s and 1960s, and as a whole they express more allegiance to British and Western values than successive generations, who were in many ways more excluded from British society and thus more amenable to radicalism. The most troubling aspect of immigration trends today, Falkner noted, is the continuing “high levels of spatial segregation” of Muslim communities “combined with a very generous family reunion policy” whereby these segregated communities are repopulated by new immigrants from rural villages with very low literacy rates and no exposure to the English language.

Falkner argued that the debate regarding Muslims in the U.K. has shifted recently as a result of the failed policy of multiculturalism associated with the political left. The lack



Kishwer Falkner

of integration and governmental paternalism that contributed to this failure has now become the center of a discussion about how Muslims might become more active citizens. In fact, recent survey data points to an increasing social integration of British Muslims. Surprisingly high numbers in a recent survey reported having consumed alcohol (21%), paid interest on a mortgage (65%), gambled (20%) and taken illegal drugs (10%); and 84% of Muslim respondents said they are treated fairly by the authorities. Together this suggests that British Muslims are becoming more integrated in mainstream society, for better and for worse. “I’m optimistic about Muslims,” Falkner said, “because I think they are beginning to realize that their own destiny lies in their hands” so long as they “set about engaging more openly in the public debate.” ■

RED STATES, BLUE STATES?

On March 29 the Boisi Center hosted a panel to discuss the extent to which America has become a nation politically polarized between “red states” and “blue states.”

William Galston, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, began by defining “polarization” as a drift of the public away from the political center toward the extremes. He cited clear empirical evidence that such a drift has occurred over the past forty years. The most important reason behind this polarization, Galston argued, was the profound weakening of a (formerly) shared American framework of assumptions about the world and the economy. Although polarization affords voters more distinct choices (because candidates represent more deeply opposed positions), Galston feared its corrosive effects on the body politic.

Hahrie Han, assistant professor of social sciences at Wellesley College, provided the historical context for our discussion. She recalled the early twentieth century as a period of great change and polarization, not unlike today. In fact, she said, the most notable aspect of the recent polarization in American politics is the period of bipartisanship that preceded it. Although Han argued that polarization enhances participation (by motivating voters in adversarial elections), she felt that today’s single-issue politics inhibits the growth of an organized center.



William Galston and Hahrie Han

Our own Alan Wolfe focused his remarks on the role of religion in contemporary American politics, arguing that the major religious alignment of the late twentieth century is ending. This alignment was characterized by alliances among conservatives and liberals across denominational lines and by conflict between conservatives and liberals within single denominations. But the way politics has shaped these conflicts over the past twenty years has called into question the significance of religion as an organizing force. Wolfe’s only fear is that the country will now become less polarized politically but more polarized regarding religion.

The final panelist, Marc Landy, professor of political science at Boston College, claimed that political polarization is too often exaggerated in the United States. He acknowledged the paradoxically high incidence of divorce in the religiously inclined “red” states, but suggested that social instability (which causes divorce) is the reason religion has taken hold there. Landy also pointed out that foreign policy is always a source of discord. ■

SHOULD THE LAW GIVE SPECIAL TREATMENT TO RELIGION?

scarves from a ban on hats in a public school makes sense when no harm would result, but privileging *all* communication between a priest and parishioner (not just that undertaken in confession) might wrongly protect discussions of child abuse or other crimes that result in social harms. This approach rejects the possibility of blanket exemptions, since “exemptions given in the abstract are almost always uninformed.”

Jytte Klausen, professor of comparative politics at Brandeis University, spoke last about the legal situation in Europe, where the benefits (and constraints) of the First Amendment do not pertain. Though Europeans enjoy the protections of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, these conventions do not carry the full weight of law. Each nation has worked out different means of protecting religious freedom, Klausen noted, but exemptions are usually permitted only in the interest of public safety. Given the dramatic demographic changes in recent years, including increased Muslim immigration, the situation remains fluid and difficult to predict. ■

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Our final luncheon colloquium of the semester featured Shai Feldman, the Judith and Sidney Swartz Director of the Crown Center for Middle East Studies at Brandeis University. Professor Feldman discussed a wide range of current political developments in the Middle East. He began by noting the importance of the current geopolitical context, namely the effects of a unipolar international system (with the U.S. as the sole superpower); growing demand for oil in India, China, and Russia (which disinclines them to antagonize Iran); and the resurgence of Russian nationalism (partly as a reaction to NATO expansion).

Feldman then placed the Middle East within this broader context, highlighting several key points. First, Arab states have been weakened by the rise of sub-state movements (e.g Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah and Hamas) and the decline of local national media outlets. Second, insurgents can win easy victories against weakened Arab states by exploiting the asymmetry of expectations: merely avoiding defeat against more powerful adversaries can appear as victory. Third, he argued, the American project of democratization as a means to promote peace has clearly failed. Fourth, it is also clear that Turkey will play an important role in the future of the region given its unique, secular political system. Finally, there is the paradox of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: a vast majority on both sides knows that the only way forward is a two-state solution premised on the 1967 border and a divided Jerusalem, but very few know how to proceed given the current weakness in their respective leadership.

Feldman’s presentation generated a number of questions, particularly about peace between Israel and Palestine. Feldman stressed his belief that the key building block to peace in that conflict—namely strong political leadership on both sides—is lamentably absent. ■

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

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“Gambling and the American Moral Landscape”

OCTOBER 25-26, 2007 • THE HEIGHTS ROOM, CORCORAN COMMONS • BOSTON COLLEGE

This fall, the Boisi Center will host a major conference on the moral dimensions of gambling in the United States. Twenty distinguished scholars will discuss the pervasive influence of gambling from a wide variety of perspectives including economics, psychology, theology, public health, sociology, political science, criminology, and law. Much more information will be posted on our web site this summer. The event will be free and open to public; all are invited, and we hope you will join us.

STAFF NOTES



ALAN WOLFE is professor of political science and director of the Boisi Center. This semester he delivered lectures in London, Dublin and at

Brown University, among other places. In February he joined an Oxford-style debate in New York City on the question “Is America Too Damn Religious?” (available at npr.org). His essay on American religion was published in *Red and Blue Nation?*

Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics in December. In the Fall he will teach a seminar (PO 340) on “Religion and Politics” in the political science department.



ERIK OWENS is assistant director of the Boisi Center and adjunct assistant professor of theology. This Spring he delivered a paper on “Civic Education for Religious Freedom” at the annual meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics; published a chapter on “Religion and Civic Education in

American Public Schools” in *German and American Perspectives on Religion and Public Life*; and taught the theology seminar “For God and Country?” In the Fall he will teach “Ethical Issues in Business & Economics” (TH 210).

SUSAN RICHARD serves as the Center's administrative assistant and handles reservations for our regular lunch colloquia. If you would like to attend these events, please email her at susan.richard.1@bc.edu.

