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BOSTON, MA  
PERMIT # 55294

## 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, *Moral Freedom: The Search for Virtue in a World of Choice* and the forthcoming books *The Transformation of*

*American Religion* 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 publications.

Professor Wolfe has been a Fulbright Professor of American Studies at the University of Copenhagen. In the coming year Professor Wolfe will be teaching “Religion and Politics” in the fall and “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 past work has focused on

the institutional aspects of gender inequality among Protestant clergy, and she is a co-author of *Clergywomen: An Uphill Calling*. In addition to her work at the Center, Professor Chang will teach “Religion in a Global Context” in the fall and “Religion in Contemporary Society” in the 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 [pub-life@bc.edu](mailto:pub-life@bc.edu)



# The BOISI CENTER Report

VOL. 3 NO. 2

THE BOISI CENTER FOR RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

MAY 2003

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

Although we were worried that the war in Iraq would make it impossible for the dialogues we have conducted with Muslim scholars to continue, the U. S. State Department decided to fund a second institute at the Boisi Center designed to further this goal. For the month of June 2003, sixteen scholars from the Islamic world will be coming to Chestnut Hill to learn about the separation of church and state and the American experience with religious pluralism. Reflecting perhaps the fact that the institute was planned during wartime conditions, only one scholar from the Middle East was chosen this time, and as an alternate. Most of the scholars will be from Africa and South and Southeastern

Asia. (As if war were not enough concern, we worry about SARS in conjunction with the participants from Singapore). In addition, three will be from Europe: Turkey, the Netherlands, and France, and one, from South Africa, will be Christian.

On another front, Princeton University Press recently published *School Choice: The Moral Debate*, which grew out of a conference held at the Boisi Center two years ago. One of the speakers at that conference, Richard Mouw, President of the Fuller Theological Seminary, gave our annual spring lecture this year on the prophetic role of the church. The lecture was well attended by B.C. faculty and students and by Fuller alums in the New England region.

I am also publishing two additional books in the fall of 2003.

*An Intellectual in Public*, which is coming out from the University of Michigan Press, contains most of the essays I have written over the past decade from magazines such as *The New Republic* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. And the Free Press is publishing *The Transformation of American Religion* which I hope will contribute to the debate over the questions with which the Boisi Center has been concerned since its founding.

Those questions continue to be very much in the news. We plan to continue focusing on such current topics as the role of faith-based initiatives, the use of vouchers, the impact of non Judeo-Christian religions on American pluralism, and the moral implications of public policies.

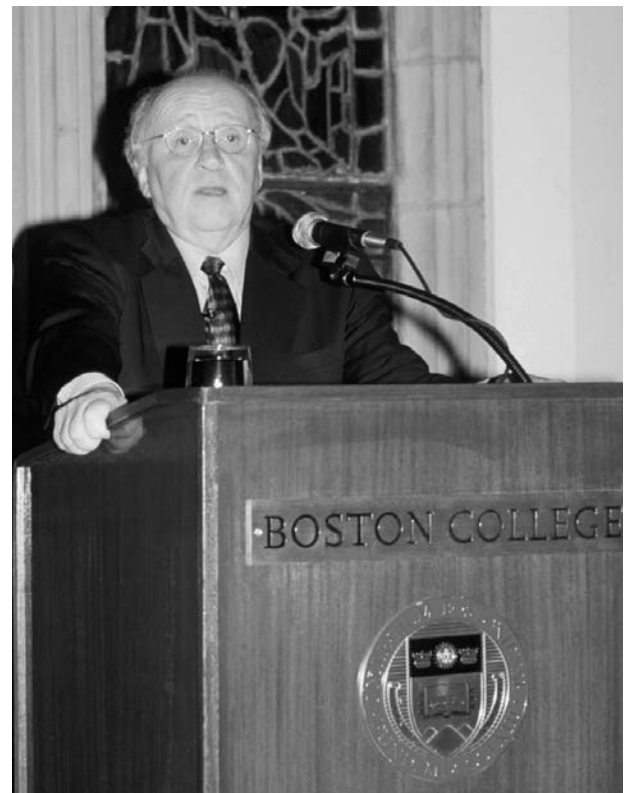
- Alan Wolfe

## President of Fuller Seminary Gives Annual Prophetic Vision of the Church Lecture

The Boisi Center's Annual Lecture on "The Prophetic Vision of the American Church" featured a reception and lecture by Dr. Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary on April 10, 2003 in Gasson 100. This lecture, now in its second year, invites a prominent national religious leader to offer a timely and prophetic message to Boston College students and the larger community, addressing the insights that a focused religious perspective offers to the current challenges facing American society. Dr. Mouw, philosopher and president of one of the most important evangelical seminaries in the country has long argued for a more engaged political presence for evangelical Americans in his writings and public appearances, which include a regular column for *Belief.net*.

Beginning with an explanation of the basic features of Evangelicalism for his audience, Mouw explained that by some estimates there are 50 million Evangelicals in this country as defined by the following characteristics: 1) they place a strong emphasis on personal conversion and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ; 2) they believe in the Bible as the supreme guide of God's will; 3) they place a strong emphasis on the cross and what it represents, and; 4) they are 'activists' in the sense that their faith calls them to act on their beliefs.

After the Scopes trial in 1925, Mouw argued, the role of Evangelicals in the public square declined for the next five decades, focusing more on conversion and cultivation within the evangelical sub-culture rather than engagement with the secular world.



Dr. Mouw speaks to an audience in Gasson 100

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## McGreevy Speaks on the Catholic Intellectual Tradition and its Encounters with Liberalism

On April 29th, John T. McGreevy, professor of history from the University of Notre Dame, visited the Boisi Center on a book tour to promote his latest work, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (Norton, 2003). McGreevy argues that Catholic history has largely been characterized in terms of its ethnicity, regionalism and immigrant status in American culture, to the neglect of the contributions it has made to the political and intellectual life of the United States and American thought. Citing the deeply held liberal belief “that Protestantism advanced human progress and freedom while Catholicism retarded it” that characterized Protestant thinking in the 19th century, and can still be found today,



McGreevy builds the case for a distinctively Catholic intellectual tradition in 19th and 20th century America. This tradition, which has emphasized the communal over the individual, protections for workers and the poor from the dangers of market freedoms, and faith in eternal truths over pragmatic compromise have provided an intellectual alternative to, and thus a target for, liberalism. Starting with an analysis of the Eliot School Rebellion in Boston in 1859, and moving onto many of the major issues that have shaped American society including slavery, public education, economic reform, contraception and abortion, McGreevy discusses the clashes between

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## Huda Dissects the Roots of Militant Islamic Beliefs

Qamar-ul Huda of the Theology Department at Boston College launched this spring’s lunch colloquia on Wednesday, January 22 with a presentation titled “Unholy Wars in Islam” in which he discussed how various strands of political Islam have developed over the centuries. Huda began his presentation with a discussion of the Islamic rules of conflict that began to be codified in the first century after the Prophet’s death and continue in the Sunni tradition. He summarized these rules into four general statements. First, one needs to try to resolve conflicts with non-confrontational methods. Second, if forced into confrontation, one may fight defensively to secure one’s survival. Third, pre-emptive strikes are permissible only with the consensus and continual supervision of a council of legal scholars. Fourth, one may fight those who threaten your faith or the practice of your faith. This last rule, Huda pointed out, was more often applied to other Muslims than to non-Muslims.

In the second part of his presentation, Huda discussed how contemporary Islamic political parties began in

18th-19th century reformist movements which tried to apply modern methods to religious studies and to contest colonialism. With the creation of independent states, these Islamic parties were marginalized, and even violently oppressed by the secularist nationalist regimes of leaders such as Pahlavi in Iran, Ataturk in Turkey, and Nasser in Egypt. This began to change in the mid-1970’s when elements within the Saudi Arabian royal family began to fund Islamic thinkers and organizations whose goal was to achieve unity amongst Muslim states. The political goal of this movement was to create a coalition of Muslim political parties that would counteract Arab nationalism, secularization, and unchallenged westernization. Some of the prominent religious thinkers and leaders produced a very “puritanical” understanding of Islam in which religion was a complete way of life encompassing the economic, political, and social aspects of daily living. This form of Islam, which has become known as “Wahabbism” also rejects all sources of knowledge outside the Qu’ran and rejects those



*Huda speaks at the Boisi Center*

who challenge the scholars of the past. Huda argues that the large financial resources supporting the Wahabbi ideology has resulted in it becoming the dominant image of Islam in the West, thus obscuring the pluralism of Islamic beliefs that exist in other countries. In Huda’s view, the roots of anti-American sentiments within some parts of the Muslim world arises from the combination of American support of Saudi Arabia which perpetuates this narrow puritanical view of Islam, the complex politics within these countries that do not allow basic human rights, political participation, freedom of speech, and the growing serious inequities between rulers and their citizens.

## Reading Group Proposals Being Accepted

The Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College would like to invite proposals for interdisciplinary, inter-institutional graduate student reading/writing groups on themes related to the study of religion and public life.

We seek to support the intellectual life of graduate students by helping them to facilitate the kinds of interdisciplinary conversation and community that enriches them as scholars and as members of their academic communities. To this end we propose to offer limited support to reading and writing groups, either new or existing, in various forms which may include

offering book subsidies, support for mailing and photocopying, a site for meetings, refreshments, possible support for bringing in speakers, and professional mentoring.

Proposals for support should include a brief paragraph outlining the theme of the reading/writing group, a list of members and their institutional affiliations, an outline of a proposed reading list, and a list of activities that they would like the Center to support. Preferences will be given to groups studying topics related to the work of the Center, and those that are interdisciplinary as well as inter-institutional.

### Harris Continued

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taking their study of religion to the field, the Boisi Center invited Ms. Harris to speak about the research opportunities available to students through the Pluralism Project. The Project relies heavily upon the work of research associates who go into the field and contribute ethnographic reports of particular religious communities across the country. These reports may include a mapping of religious centers, as well as in-depth analyses of varieties of religious communities, their practices, and their beliefs. Those students who were unable to attend the lunch but are interested in gathering field experience in this area should consult the Pluralism Project's website at [www.pluralism.org](http://www.pluralism.org)

### McGreevy Continued

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a distinctive Catholic intellectual tradition shaped by events in Europe and Latin America, and an American liberalism that was often virulently anti-Catholic. Using the debates over slavery as an example, McGreevy explained that while Catholic thinking condemned the slave trade, acknowledged the moral equality of black people, and spoke against the segregation of churches, it did not condemn slavery as an institution and had difficulty arguing against the hierarchy and tradition represented by slavery. Abolitionists in turn saw this as further evidence that Catholicism presented an obstacle to free thought and moral autonomy, and many were as severe in their condemnation of Catholics as they were of slaveowners. The book, which has received generous praise from experts in the field, breaks new ground in both its outline of a Catholic intellectual tradition, and in the way it offers a critique of liberal assumptions that have shaped American life.

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## Faith Based Efforts Increase Political Participation Among the Lower Classes

On February 5, 2003 Professor Paul Osterman from the Sloan School of Management at MIT spoke before a diverse audience about his new book *Gathering Power: Re-building Progressive Politics in America* (Beacon Press, 2003). The book is a product of nearly ten years of work



*Osterman listens to a question during his talk at the Boisi Center*

with the Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation, a grass roots organization that has empowered church communities and their largely poor and traditionally disenfranchised members to use and expand their political power. Two of the distinctive aspects of the IAF, apart from its political successes, are the way that it draws upon church communities, rather than individuals, in order to build the organization, and the way that it connects to religious ideas and values as a motive for political participation. Osterman sees the gathering and wielding of power by these communities as a leading illustration of what

has disappeared from, and needs to be recaptured by, progressive politics in the United States. He argues that the progressive movement suffers from declining participation by people below the median income distribution. These people have been turned off from the current political style that is increasingly biased towards the wealthy with a focus on the “message” rather than substance. Osterman argues that the solution to this dilemma is to work harder on effective local political mobilization and to increase the opportunities that poor and working people have to learn about and participate in politics. The IAF, he argues, provides an example of how progressives can re-engage by learning how to practice politics.

## The Importance of the Doctrine of ‘Skillful Means’ to Transnational Buddhism

On March 12, 2003 the Boisi Center hosted a lunch seminar with Professor John Makransky of the Theology department at Boston College. Makransky, who teaches comparative theology and Buddhism, is also an associate teacher, or lama, with the Lama Surya Das’Dzogchen Foundation, and directs the program for Vajrayana Studies at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies. His talk, titled “How Buddhist Doctrine of Skillful Means Supports Transnational Buddhist Expansion and Adaptation” focused on the doctrine of Skillful Means in the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism, a tradition that also encompasses Zen, Pureland, and Tibetan forms of Buddhism.

Buddhists seek to help people enter a path of discernment that will

ultimately bring them to wisdom and compassion. A central belief is that most people are caught in a state of continual suffering because they are trapped in desires that focus on an unchanging self in relation to nature, as opposed to a more realistic view of nature that is always being created in each moment. The process of discernment for Buddhists involves realizing how one is caught up in those desires, and in so doing, catching glimpses of the emptiness that is inherent in the nature of things. The realization of this emptiness is necessary to objectively see one’s own suffering in a way that brings wisdom and compassion.

The doctrine of Skillful Means justifies the adaptation of Buddhist principles to the needs of various cultural contexts in order to help people

enter a path that will lead to greater discernment. According to Makransky, this doctrine helps account for the proliferation of popular Buddhist-related forms and practices such as Zen gardening, meditation centers, the growth of Buddhist themes in self help books and mental health forums, and the popularity of yoga videos. Makransky sees the doctrine of Skillful Means as authorizing various means of bringing people into a relationship with Buddhism which will hopefully lead to a curiosity about its sources and a deepening of understanding. At its foundation, it emphasizes responding to individual and cultural needs with wisdom and compassion, as an exemplar of Buddhist principles.

## Mapping Non-Western Religious Diversity in America

In the last thirty years, the American religious landscape has changed dramatically as the result of increased immigration from non-European countries. This in turn has introduced a far more diverse range of religious world-views into American culture, including those from Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic traditions to name a few. On March 26th, Grove Harris, the project director of the Pluralism Project at Harvard Divinity School came to the Boisi Center. She discussed the ongoing goal of this research enterprise: to map and document part of this changing landscape and make these resources available to the larger scholarly community via publications and their website. Developed by Diana L. Eck, Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian studies at Harvard Divinity School, the Pluralism Project has been collecting information on minority, non-Christian religious groups in the US for over a decade. It has focused particularly on the newer immigrant religious communities, and has attempted to locate and map Islamic centers and mosques, Hindu and Buddhist temples, and meditation centers in virtually



*Grove Harris chats with Adrienne Nagy about the Pluralism Project*

every major American city. Eck believes that the way in which Americans of all faiths begin to engage with one another in shaping a positive pluralism is one of the most important questions American society faces in the years ahead.

At this luncheon, which was particularly aimed at undergraduate and graduate students interested in

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## Mouw Lecture

*Continued from page 1*

Yet in the 1970's and 80's the increased social mobility of Evangelicals and their rising social influence lead to an important shift in the political stance of some evangelical leaders resulting in the emergence of the so-called "Moral Majority" and a rise in political influence. Mouw identifies this as the two modes of political evangelism, the first is represented by a stance of cultural withdrawal, and the other is represented by cultural imperialism. Mouw argues that the current mode of cultural domination highlights challenges that Evangelicals need to face more directly. The contemporary challenge Evangelicals face today, he believes, is to develop a more nuanced theological and philosophical understanding of the common good, similar to the work done by Catholic theologians such as David Hollenbach. At the same time, he also argued that Evangelicals need to develop a greater spirituality of empathy, drawing parallels between empa-

thy and art appreciation, both of which benefit from cultivation and sensitivity.

Mouw believes that an evangelical theology of the common good is likely to look different from the ideas produced by the Roman Catholics or the Mainline Protestants. The history of Evangelicals as a marginalized people in the United States, their skepticism of official documents, and their trust in local, rather than national, organizations are characteristics that he believes will continue to shape evangelical perspectives. However, he also believes that their long tradition of mercy and compassion in their work with the poor through such institutions as rescue missions provides them with a starting point for conversations with other faith traditions, particularly Catholicism, that would prove mutually beneficial.