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## 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 12 books. His most recent books include *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Practice Our Faith* (2003) and *An Intellectual in Public* (2003). 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.

Professor Wolfe will be on leave during the fall, and will be teaching the seminar, Religion 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 specializes in research that examines the organizational aspects of religion. Her past work has



focused on the institutional aspects of

gender inequality among Protestant clergy. She is currently working on a book that examines the role of the family in the transmission of faith. She has also written articles for *Christian Century* and *BC magazine*. In addition to her work at the Center, Professor Chang will be teaching a course on Sociological Research Methods in the fall and Religion and Globalization in the spring.



### **Susan Richard**

serves as the Center's administrative assistant. She will be on leave Fall 2004

# The BOISI CENTER Report

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

When the Boisi Center began nearly four years ago, we knew that our focus would be on American religion and its role in public life. What we did not anticipate was the degree to which Islam would become one of the American religions with which we would be concerned.

September 11 may not have changed everything, but it surely changed us. Like so many others in the aftermath of that event, we struggled to fill in the gaps in our understanding of a faith that had never gotten its fair share of attention by those whose focus on American religion rarely ventured beyond the "Judeo-Christian tradition."

As readers of this newsletter know, the main focus of our activities in this area have been the two seminars we conducted under U. S. State Department auspices that brought scholars of Islam from the Muslim

world to Boston College to discuss issues of church-state separation and religious pluralism. This initiative will now go forward in other ways.

We have received a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to write up in booklet form, and then to translate into other languages, basic ideas about U. S. religion for a primarily Muslim audience. We will seek to explain in clear language what the First Amendment means and how it has been interpreted by courts. Our experience teaches us that church-state separation is one of the most widely misunderstood ideas in American politics and religion, especially abroad, and we will do what we can to clear up some of those misconceptions.

Our other work also continues. Because *The Transformation of American Religion* dealt at such length with American evangelicalism, I've been doing a lot of speaking, writing, and consulting on conservative

Protestantism and its implications for American politics. With another election approaching, that work will surely continue.

It will continue, however, from Europe. I will be spending most of the fall semester at the American Academy in Berlin. I expect to be spending considerable amounts of time trying to explain American religion and politics to Europeans, a role I consider particularly important in the face of widespread mutual antagonism between the U. S. and Europe in the wake of the war in Iraq. While I am away, the Boisi Center will slow down its activities considerably, especially because Susan Richard, our wonderful administrative assistant, will also be on leave in the fall. Her reason is better than mine; she and her husband Chris are expecting their second child. The Boisi Center activities will resume their normal speed in January 2005.

Alan Wolfe

## Ammerman Speaks on the Diversity of American Religion

On January 28th, Professor Nancy T. Ammerman of the School of Theology and the Department of Sociology at Boston University launched the spring lunch seminar series with a presentation entitled, "Voluntary and Diverse: American Religion and American Society." Reviewing the origins of religious diversity in the United States, Ammerman emphasized both the plural aspects of American religion and the things about the American context that make immigrant religions more homogeneous. She pointed to institutional patterns and organizational forms that religious organizations assume to help them to adapt and get along in a diverse and religiously plural society. For example, they tend to become voluntary associations; they adopt a democratic or congregational structure; they develop a role that has a status similar to that of the professional clergyman; and they become dependent upon members for social and financial resources. In these ways, the American environment has a homogenizing influence on new religious groups. The process of forming and supporting new congregations provides important exercise in the skills that are necessary for participation in civil society, such as cooperation, developing collective goals and strategies, and building communities which contribute to the thickening of the civic culture.



## Prothero Speaks on How America Became a “Jesus Nation”

In his book *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became an American Icon*, Stephen Prothero, Professor of Religion at Boston University, provides a cultural account of how the idea of Jesus has become assimilated, popularized, and integrated into a variety of American sub-cultures and religions ranging from Buddhism to the Ku Klux Klan. Prothero traces the rise of Jesus across American history from a status as the Son of God to that of an American icon. He points out that in the Colonial period, Jesus was a relatively inconsequential figure relative to the figure of God. Christian thinking in this period was more Hebraic, emphasizing God the Father. It was not until the early republican period when Jefferson effectively begins to separate the idea of Jesus



from the system of Christianity that Jesus begins to take on a separate and distinctive status that transcends Christian religion. Prothero demonstrates Jesus' evolution into an American icon with a collection of pictures, postcards, and popular art images that show how the Jesus figure is appropriated by new immigrant groups that absorb him and make his message their own in a variety of ways. He discusses that the United States has moved, over the past 200 years, from being a God-fearing nation to a Jesus loving nation. The image of Jesus, Prothero contends, has been particularly malleable because of the various accounts that exist in the four Gospels that allow him to be perceived in multiple ways.

## Economic Spirituality: What would Jesus buy?



On April 21st, Tom Beaudoin, Professor of Theology at Boston College spoke on the topic of his newest book, *Consuming Faith*:

*Integrating Who We Are With What We Buy* (Sheed and Ward, 2003). He spoke of becoming interested in the topic in graduate school when, over his usual Vanilla Latte from Starbucks, he began to wonder who grew the beans the coffee was made from, whether they had health benefits, and whether they earned a living wage. His attempts to find answers to this question were actively discouraged by corporate spokespersons leading him to pull the clothes out of his closet and ask the same question of his favorite brands of clothes including Levis, Converse, Wilson, and Ralph Lauren. He eventually discovered that most of his clothes were made by women, between the ages of 18-30, who

worked without health benefits, and none of whom were paid a living wage. The one exception in his ensemble was the Ralph Lauren jacket which he wore to the talk, made in Toronto by union workers.

The foray into his closet lead Beaudoin to read avidly in the business literature on brand marketing and come to the realization that the twin goals of brand managers were to create lifestyle images for relatively undistinguished products, like jeans or coffee, in a way that appealed to the desires and aspirations of consumers; and to prevent consumers from wondering where those products came from. In his book, Beaudoin inspires his readers to ask these questions and question their patterns of consumption. He also explores the theological dimension by posing the question, “As a Christian, why should I care?” His response is that the gospels of Jesus spend a great deal of time focusing on the question of resources. There is an emphasis on the cultivation and stewardship of resources and a questioning of how one’s relationship to one’s resources

constitutes an expression of faith. This is a particularly relevant question for today’s young adults who, according to the book *No Logo* by Naomi Klein, whom Beaudoin cites, come to a sense of identity through the brands they buy and wear, and actively use brands to mediate a self-understanding and awareness of who they are and what groups they belong to.

In the lively discussion that followed his presentation, a number of issues came up, including the increasingly heard criticism from spokespersons in the developing world that although working conditions in the developing world are criminal by American standards, they provide a necessary and welcome form of support for families who might otherwise be far worse off. Beaudoin replied that these kinds of responses suggest a bifurcated way of thinking that we either exploit the developing world or abandon it. He prefers not to get into such dualistic modes of thinking, preferring the image of communal responsibility as an alternative, and the perspective that we are all responsible for one another.

## Paris Speaks on New Challenges in End-of-Life Care

On March 24th, John Paris, Professor of Ethics in the Theology department at Boston College, spoke on the ethical problems that arise when, at the end of life, families enter and demand treatment that the physician believes to be inappropriate.

Paris spoke of two distinct eras in end of life debates. From the time of the Hippocratic Oath until 1960, there was little change in what medicine could provide to the dying other than palliative care. In the 1960's, dramatic innovations in medical technology resulted in the ability to sustain life for longer and longer periods of time. Between 1960-1990, we also saw the emergence of third party payment, which Paris says was "like giving people an American Express Gold card", feeding a tremendous expansion in the demand for medical treatment. Two values also emerged at this time, which Paris sees as originating in a culture of autonomous rights and rampant self-interest. These values are that 1) cost should not be a consideration in medical treatment, and 2) everyone should have equal access to the medical treatment they need. This has resulted in



what Paris sees as an untenable system in which people expect the best quality of medical care for everyone but are unwilling to pay for it.

These issues are illuminated at the end of life when families, unwilling to let go of loved ones, demand that doctors do everything in their power to extend the life of the patient, regardless of cost or outcome. This raises an ethical dilemma, namely, "Who gets to decide what to do in this case?" Plato and Hippocrates argued that the doctor is in the best position to exercise the moral judgement necessary. The courts have decided that in judgements of value between doctors and patients, patients will always win. The economist Lester Thurow argued that society must collectively decide what is bad medicine, or else the market will control these decisions through one's economic ability to pay.

The timing of Paris' talk followed almost immediately on a recent statement from the Vatican which Paris incorporated into his talk in a critical fashion. Until recently, the Vatican's "Declaration on Euthanasia" (1980) stated that account should be taken of the "reasonable wishes of families" and the "judgement of doctors." This view has been revised however by an address by the Pope to a conference of the World Academy of Catholic Medical Associations and the Pontifical Academy of Life on March 20th of this year stating that:

*"The sick person in a vegetative state, awaiting recovery or a natural end, still has the right to basic health care (nutrition, hydration, cleanliness, warmth, etc.), and to the prevention of complications related to his confinement to bed...I should like particularly to underline how the administration of water and food, even when provided by artificial means, always represents a natural means of preserving life, not a medical act. Its use, furthermore, should be considered, in principle, ordinary and proportionate, and as such morally obligatory, insofar as and until it is seen to have attained its proper finality, which in the present case consists in providing nourishment to the patient and alleviation of his suffering"*

~ John Paul II, March 20 2004

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## Virtue Ethics and Sexuality

James P. Keenan, Gasson Professor of Theology, spoke at the Boisi Center on April 6 at a lunch seminar in which he addressed the question of what a study of the virtues can bring to our understanding of sexual ethics. He critiqued the current discourse on sexual ethics as focusing too narrowly on specific issues such as abortion, gene therapy, or abuse. Chastity is often raised in this discussion as a chief virtue, but the problem with this is that its message is often simply to “slow down” and “set boundaries,” which is not enough. It applies to the function or nature of sexuality, rather than providing guidance that helps us understand how to handle people and relationships in sexual situations in an ethical fashion.

Keenan argued for a broader virtue-based ethics, suggesting as its basis four cardinal virtues including justice, fidelity, self-care and prudence along with a number of auxiliary virtues which would include chastity. These virtues would be used to orient us to the questions of “Who are we?” “Who

are we to become?” and “How are we to get there?”

Thus in relation to a sexual ethic, an application of the virtue of justice, for example, would lead us to ask “What is due each person in the



relationship?” and to appreciate what sexuality means in each person’s life. Keenan acknowledged that culture should also play a role in defining these virtues. In the United States, justice is defined in terms of autonomy and rights, whereas in the Philippines, it might have a more communal definition.

The advantage of a broader virtue-based ethics, Keenan argued, is also to provide a way to name the ways that these virtues are related and to ask how the virtues make claims on one another. For example, this approach to sexual ethics allows us to bring justice to bear on issues of fidelity and to create a virtues language that is more accessible and flexible to a range of issues. Such a language takes us away from talking about specific actions, such as abortion, or pedophilia, or homosexuality, and gives us a framework for reaching greater moral honesty.

## Dionne and Kamarck Discuss Morality, Religion and the Presidential Election

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foreign policy is so concentrated in the office of the President, Kamarck believes that voters will vote for the person whom they feel can best serve them as a global leader.

Dionne placed more focus on the domestic agenda in his remarks. He was critical of what he saw as a conceptual narrowing of ideas in political discussion. He believes that we now use market language to discuss almost everything and consequently frame both questions and answers to social problems too nar-

rowly. Instead of talking about the necessity of “immunizing little children against disease” as a social good, we now discuss it in terms of “making investments in human capital.” He argued that this move towards an economic rhetoric reflects the liberal reluctance to discuss issues on moral grounds and to say whether they believe something is right or wrong. The problem with this reluctance, Dionne argues, is that if the only way you can argue for the poor is using a market rationale, then your argument is vulnerable to any study that claims that serving the poor is inefficient. He would like to

see a broadening of the moral discourse in the political realm.

This theme was picked up by students in the audience who were frustrated that political conservatives seem to have cornered the market on God talk and observed that democrats seem to be very uncomfortable discussing God and morality. Students also expressed concerns about the war in Iraq, whether or not the draft would be re-instituted, and how America’s foreign policy would affect their futures.

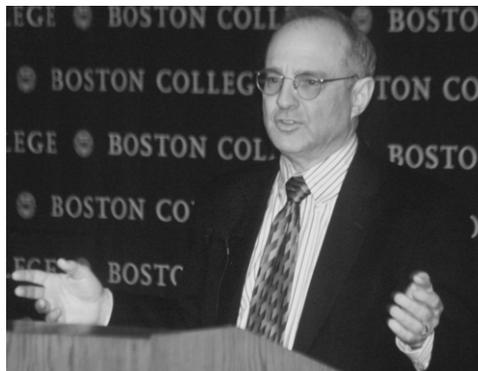
## Third Annual Prophetic Voices in American Religion Lecture: Being the Hands of God: The Jewish Call to Social Justice

Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and one of the most influential religious lobbyists in Washington, delivered the 3rd annual *Prophetic Voices in American Religion* lecture on the evening of March 23rd. The topic of his lecture was social mission in the American Jewish tradition.

Saperstein argued that prophetic mission is a definitive characteristic of the Jewish people and pointed to evidence that although American Jews are only 2.5% of the population, they comprise a noticeably higher proportion of progressive activists, are elected to public office at a higher rate than their proportion in the population, and vote at a rate of 80-90%. He argued that this sense of participation and social justice comes directly from the Prophets, in particular, passages of Isaiah which claim the infinite value of all human people.

The Jewish tradition, he claimed, calls for the belief in the perfectibility of people, society, and humanity

which called into being the first system of universal education. The structure of Jewish law and thinking focuses on responsibilities rather than rights. It also calls for the sword to enter where justice is denied and a belief that what is right is also just.



On the role of the prophetic voice, Saperstein stated that the role of religion is to be a prophetic voice to government. He pointed to the rising influence of religion in public debates, giving as examples the role that religious communities played in calling for a nuclear freeze, the introduction of Just War theory into political debates since the first Gulf War, and the humanitarian motivations for sending

Americans into Somalia.

Saperstein ended his lecture on an exhortatory note to the assembled students. "This is the first generation in which we can make real everything the Prophets dreamed of," he said, calling upon students to be the prophetic voices of their generation.

## French Perceptions of American Religion

Addressing an audience of French and American scholars, Denis Lacorne, the Director of Research at the Center for International Studies in Paris, spoke at the Boisi Center on February 23rd on the perceptions and misperceptions that French have of American religion. The French are, in general, continually astonished by the frequent references that Americans make to God in their political rhetoric. This rhetoric reinforces the popular image the French have of Americans as 17th century Puritans, ascetic and prudish in their attitudes towards sex and morality. The average French person, Lacorne argued, has very little understanding of mainstream American religion and its variants.

Lacorne compared attitudes in France, where a strict separation of Church and State is taken much more seriously than in the United States. During the French Revolution, the Church was seen as the primary institution supporting

the political legitimacy of the monarchy and its divine right to rule. Against this history, subsequent leaders have been extremely wary of permitting religion to have too much power within the Republic. This is a contrast to the United States, in which the founders felt that religion offered a necessary constraint against the base self-interests that could potentially be released in a popular democracy. In this context, many of the symbols and materials of Protestant culture were absorbed as part of the secular culture in order to provide moral safeguards and mechanisms of social control.

During a lively discussion period, many issues were discussed, including the recent vote in France on whether Muslim girls would be allowed to wear headscarves to school. An American scholar of

French-Muslim descent argued that constitutional guarantees of freedom of conscience were worthless unless citizens were allowed to act upon their freedom by displaying



and exhibiting their religious beliefs. LaCorne acknowledged this and added that there is no "First Amendment Culture" in France the way there is in the United States, and that the fears that the French people have of radical Islam might be exaggerated.

## Founder of Communitarian Network, Amitai Etzioni, Speaks at Boston College

On March 19th, the Boisi Center invited Amitai Etzioni, University Professor of Sociology at George Washington University, former President of the American Sociological Association, founding



President of the International Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics, and Founder and Director of the Communitarian Network, to speak on campus.

Etzioni spoke broadly on the communitarian perspective, which developed in the late 1980's into a formal institution concerned with the

breakdown in the moral fabric of society. Attributing this condition to an excessive emphasis on individualism in the public sphere, the communitarian perspective recognizes the need for a social philosophy that both protects individual rights and attends to corresponding responsibilities to the community. Transcending the stalemate between left and right, this new "responsive communitarian" philosophy articulates a middle way between the politics of radical individualism and excessive statism.

Etzioni argued that today transnational corporations, INGOs, NGOs, and terrorist networks such as al Qaeda, have created global networks that are superimposed over the old nation-state system. Because these networks span national boundaries and affect events within them, one of the important unanswered questions we face today is how to hold them accountable.

Etzioni also addressed issues related to the globalization of human

values and religious conflict. He argued that the rights governing the global system today are primarily western ones: universal values, human rights, democracy and free markets. He argued that the message this sends to the East is that "you have nothing to contribute to this" and precludes whole societies from engaging in conversation. He pointed out that from the Islamic perspective, Americans respect "goods not Gods,"... "we abuse women... we use them to sell cars," and that "we are afraid of death because we have no purpose in life."

Drawing from the example of Afghanistan, he argued that under the Taliban, social order was coerced. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the US has taken away the social coercion and essentially told them to "go and be free." Etzioni argued that "there needs to be something in between" and that there needs to be a balance between order and autonomy.

## Faith in Boston: How Congregations Confront the Changing Urban Structure

Days after the Boston Archdiocese announced its process to choose which churches would be closed, the Boisi Center hosted Professor Lowell Livezey, a visiting professor at the Harvard Divinity School, who spoke about his ongoing research on urban congregations in Boston and Chicago. Focusing on the Boston congregations in this presentation, Livezey discussed the patterns of demographic shift in the Boston area. He described the more recent emergence of large commuter churches and compared these to the features of neighborhood churches. The commuter church follows an entrepreneurial model of church building that seeks to draw members from a broad geographic area. These are "niche" churches that appeal to a common cultural ideal which might be a particular kind of demographic emphasis, i.e. well educated, suburban, environmentalists. Their members tend to be more homogeneous in terms of race, social background, lifestyle and interests and, because of this, members are more likely to form more personal bonds with one another. To address the intimacy challenges which these large mega churches

encounter, they are also more likely to form small personal fellowship groups based on shared interests, i.e. young mothers with toddlers, fathers who fish, etc.

The neighborhood church tends to be smaller, is more likely to be racially mixed, and because ties are based on a geographic sense of place, members are less likely to have the kinds of strong intimate social ties that emerge from shared interests and background. On the other hand, these relationships are more likely to be layered because they are tied to place rather than interest. For example, one might know a fellow member from the playground, see them at the grocery store, and say hello to them at church. Their membership at church is more likely to be ascribed and habitual rather than chosen. Members of neighborhood churches are also more likely to focus on social action targets within their neighborhood, and are more closely tied to their local community in a number of ways. While he did not endorse one model over another, Livezey's presentation clearly showed the different qualities that are present in each of the ideal types.



## Dionne and Kamarck Discuss Morality, Religion and the Presidential Election

A panel consisting of E.J. Dionne, columnist for the Washington Post, and Elaine Kamarck, former domestic policy adviser to Al Gore, was moderated by Alan Wolfe, director of the Boisi Center on the evening of April 26th in the Jenks Honors Library to discuss the role of religion and morality in the upcoming Presidential election.

Kamarck believes that the upcoming election will revolve largely around issues related to the war in Iraq and foreign policy. The central question the electorate will be deciding in her view is "How will the US use its power in the world?" She characterized Bush as believing that,



"We use it [power] unilaterally to do what we want." She characterized Kerry's position as, "Yes, we can beat people; the question is how do we

mobilize global society to see the world the way we see it?" Since foreign policy is such a central issue in this election, and the power for for-

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## David Chappell Speaks on Religion and Civil Rights

Speaking on his new book, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), Professor David L. Chappell from the History Department of the University of Arkansas addressed a lunch seminar at the Boisi Center on April 28. The book, which has been critically acclaimed in a number of reviews, challenges the idea that the civil rights movement is a story of a culminating triumph of liberal ideas. Chappell argues that the liberals' belief in the inevitable social progress of reason, education, and



human nature did not provide the cultural resources needed to create the climate of solidarity, passion, and self-sacrifice required for immediate social change. Black activists like Bayard Rustin, Fannie Lou Hamer, Modjeska Simkins and Martin Luther King Jr., on the other hand, were far more effective because they

had a more realist vision of the situation. They understood that power was a corrupting force and that those

who had it would not relinquish it easily. They knew that a "prophetic Christian" message would resonate far more deeply and clearly than rational argument. They also knew that human nature was far more venal than white liberals credited. Chappell argues that black activists saw far more clearly that their struggle was to "hew a stone of hope from the mountain of despair," in contrast to the optimism of northern white liberals. Chappell's arguments are viewed as challenging some of the standard arguments in the interpretation of the civil rights, particularly in the emphasis that he gives to the role of religious understandings in the movement among black activists as well as white segregationists.