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FROM THE DIRECTOR

The first and most important item I have to report is the departure from the Boisi Center of Patricia Chang. Patty has been indispensable in developing the Boisi Center as it currently functions, and she will be greatly missed by me and the rest of the Boisi staff. She will continue to be affiliated with Boston College through her teaching in the Department of Sociology, and we all wish her well. In her place, Andrew Finstuen, a doctoral candidate in history at Boston College, has been appointed Interim Assistant Director. Welcome, Andrew.

Our activities in the fall of 2005 centered around our regular lunch series, as well as the annual Prophetic Voices of the Church Lecture. Jim Wallis has been one of the most prominent voices in America's debates over religion and politics in the wake of his new book and we are most grateful to him for taking time out from his busy schedule to address the BC community. I also want to thank Dorsey McConnell, rector of the nearby Church of the Redeemer, for jointly sponsoring the event.

My main activities this semester have involved continued efforts to explain American religion to non-Americans. I visited Beirut in October at the invitation of the University of the Holy Spirit, Kaslik, a Maronite institution very much involved in the fascinating mélange of faiths that is contemporary Lebanon. While in Beirut I also spoke at the American University in that city. This visit enabled me to gain first hand experience with confessional politics – a political system in which a number of religions are officially recognized by the state and in which citizenship is tied to a declaration of religious identification. During my stay, the U. N. report on the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was published, and there were a few scary moments in its immediate aftermath. Still, the Lebanese people reacted to the report calmly, and there were even indications that Syria would cooperate, at least minimally, with the investigation. I not only learned a great deal from the visit, but even managed to sneak in some tourism, especially the stunning Roman ruins at Baalbeck.

December 2005 took me back to Berlin for a conference on

“Religion and Policy” sponsored by the Heinrich Boell Foundation of Germany's Green Party, as well as twice to Paris. One of the French trips, sponsored by the French Institute of International Relations, involved politics in the United States and the other, at Sciences Po, was devoted to transatlantic cleavages. In both cases, I talked about religion and politics in the wake of the 2004 election.

Within the United States, I spent an evening in a public discussion of Evangelical-Jewish relations with David Neff, editor of *Christianity Today*, at the Jewish Theological Seminary, participated in an all-day discussion of the impact of Reinhold Niebuhr at Union Theological Seminary, spoke to a conference on French-American relations at New York University, commented on James Q. Wilson's Tanner Lecture at Harvard, and delivered a public lecture to the Jewish Studies Program at Rollins College in Florida.

This spring looks like it will also be an exciting time at the Boisi Center. But that awaits the next report from the director.

-Alan Wolfe

Calendar of Events

January

24 “The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the Fate of God in the Modern World”
Matthew Stewart
Boston College 12-1:15pm
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

February

8 “Faith and Poverty: Personal Religiosity and Organized Religion in the Lives of Low-Income Urban Mothers”
Susan Crawford Sullivan
Sociology, College of the Holy Cross 12-1:15pm
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

23 “Combating ‘Evildoers’ in the Developing World: From Eisenhower’s Vietnam to Bush’s Iraq”
Seth Jacobs
History, Boston College 12-1:15pm
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

March

15 Topic: TBA
Ann Braude
Religious History, Harvard Divinity School, 12-1:15pm
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

24 “Studying Children’s Religion”
Robert Orsi
Religious History,
Religious History, Harvard Divinity School, 12-1:15pm
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

April

5 “Pope Benedict After One Year”
Thomas Groome, Kenneth Himes, Mary Ann Hinsdale, James Weiss
Theology, Boston College 4:30-6:30pm
Location: TBA

26 “Truth and Fiction in *The Da Vinci Code* or the Enduring Appeal of Conspiracy Theories”
Harold Attridge
New Testament, Yale Divinity School 7:30-9pm
Location: TBA

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Reverend Jim Wallis Speaks on God’s Politics After Hurricane Katrina



Our fifth annual Prophetic Voices of the Church Lecture (co-sponsored by the Church of the Redeemer, Newton, MA) featured Reverend Jim Wallis, founding editor of *Sojourners* magazine and author of the best-selling book *God’s Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn’t Get It*. Wallis paced the stage of Robsham Theatre as he passionately argued for a public conversation about faith and morality not hijacked by the political right or misunderstood, even ignored, by the political left. As he described, “Religious fundamentalists have a stranglehold on the right,” while “secular fundamentalists have this control on the left.” Wallis spent the first portion of his October 17 talk commenting on the landscape of the religious conversation in American politics, noting that the religious right has narrowed the field of discussion to abortion and gay marriage. As a consequence, issues demanding moral assessment such as the war in Iraq and poverty in America are woefully neglected.

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European Attitudes Toward American Religion

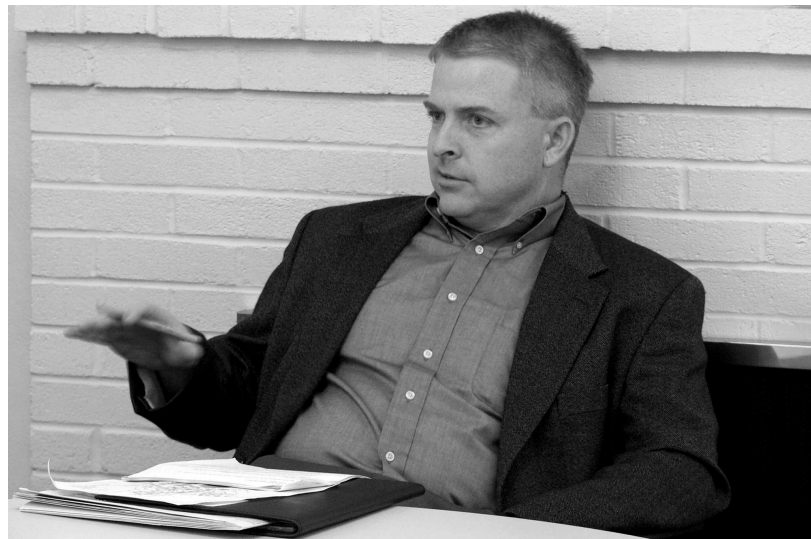
On September 21, the Boisi Center hosted Professor Thomas Albert (Tal) Howard of Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts. Howard shared his recent work on anti-Americanism in Europe under the title, "American Religion in the European Mind: From Georg W. Hegel to George W. Bush." He matched his provocative title with an equally provocative discussion of the roots of European anti-Americanism. Contrary to explanations that locate America's fall from grace among especially "highbrow" Europeans with the end of the Cold War, 9/11, and the war in Iraq, Howard outlined a longer history of derision from both the "right" and the "left." Crucial to this attitude, he argued, is the history of European criticism of the American religious scene.

Howard illustrated his point with a tour through the pantheon of eighteenth and nineteenth-century European intellectuals. On the right, objections from the likes of Jacob Burckhardt, Max Weber, and Werner Sombart to the American religious situation focused on what they perceived as the absurd and outrageous forms of belief in the United States. The lack of a state church wrought cultural anarchy where, according to Swiss theologian Philip Schaff, "Every theological vagabond and

peddler may drive here his bungling trade, without passport or license, and sell his false ware at pleasure." America was thus a religious wild card, unpredictable and unconnected to the safeguards of a traditional society. On the left, European critics were equally worried about America's historical trajectory. From their perspective, America's sin was not ignorance of tradition but that the young nation had preserved premodern religiosity all too well. Such diverse thinkers as the Marquis de Condorcet, Georg Hegel, and Karl Marx, lamented this retention of "old world" religious forms that blocked the progressive march of history.

Howard concluded by suggesting that Americans ought to

reflect on these longstanding criticisms—whatever their accuracy—as a tool toward greater self-understanding. More importantly, he stressed that to ignore the genealogy of anti-Americanism is to misunderstand the nature of the European mind-set. Without a sense of how deeply embedded anti-American religious prejudice runs in European culture and how closely tied it is to anti-Americanism generally, Howard argued, we underestimate both the intensity of these attitudes and their staying power beyond the administration of George W. Bush.



Mathew Schmalz Speaks on Miracles and Meaning

Mathew Schmalz, professor of religious studies at the College of the Holy Cross, presented "The Silent Body of Audrey Santo" on October 11. Santo is a twenty-one year old woman who, since the age of three and a half, has lived in a comatose state as a result of a swimming pool accident in 1987. Since that time, Santo has purportedly manifested the wounds of the stigmata, and statues have appeared to weep blood and oil in her presence. Five Eucharistic hosts have also reportedly bled when consecrated in her proximity. For nearly two decades, Catholic pilgrims have journeyed to the Santo home in Worcester, Massachusetts seeking healing and communion with her.

Schmalz's work, the first scholarly study of Audrey Santo, evaluates the competing interpretations of this phenomenon. He made it clear that he is unconcerned with proving or disproving the validity of the miracles associated with Santo. Rather, he has sought to explain the different notions of human embodiment and gender that have swirled around this young woman for the majority of her life. Although Audrey has not uttered a word in eighteen years, her "silent body" speaks within the context of the social construction of bodies,

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Reverend Jim Wallis

Continued from page 1

Wallis challenged the left to recall the achievements of progressive Christian reformers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—including the abolition movement, women's suffrage, and the civil rights movement—as a model for left-leaning religious activism.

Wallis, however, proceeded beyond simply laying out the contours of contemporary politics and religion. He maintained, "religion is not supposed to be a wedge that divides us," but "a bridge that brings us together." Drawing on the example of Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address, Wallis cautioned against "God is on our side" rhetoric in both domestic and international politics. Such thinking leads to hubris and unsound policy. Instead, he urged Americans—both right and left—to worry whether "we are on God's side."

For Wallis, the rampant poverty in America, and in the world, tests Christian devotion to "God's side." The scriptures, he reminded, contain more passages on poverty and serving the poor than any other issue. According to Wallis, the "good" of Hurricane Katrina is that "The waters of Katrina washed away our national denial of just how many Americans are living in poverty. It washed away our reluc-

tance to admit the still persistent connection of race and poverty in America." In one of a handful of partisan moments, he blasted the right for continually supporting tax cuts for the wealthy while cutting services to the poor. Finally, he suggested, Katrina provided America with a teachable moment—a moment for the leadership of this country and for the average citizen to face the reality of the poverty line, but, more importantly, to do something about it.

Wallis concluded his remarks with a call to action. To combat both the right's monopoly on public God-talk and the forces of poverty in America, he implored the audience to help create a movement of committed progressives dedicated to changing the "political wind." Changing the wind required not the election of new politicians but ordinary voters voicing concerns about morality and poverty. If the voices grow loud enough, Wallis assured, the politicians will follow. He illustrated his point by describing politicians as the individuals walking around Washington D.C. with wet fingers thrust in the air, ever-testing to see which way the wind is blowing. As a consequence, Wallis remarked, "Our vocation is to change the wind."

Graduate Student Reading Groups

The Boisi Center invites proposals for interdisciplinary and inter-institutional graduate student reading/writing groups on themes related to the study of religion and public life. In order to facilitate interdisciplinary conversations we will offer limited support to reading groups in various forms. Proposals for support should include a brief outline of the group's theme and reading list, a list of members, and a list of activities it would like the Boisi Center to support (e.g., bringing in speakers, photocopying, book subsidies). To submit a proposal or for further information, contact Andrew Finstuen at finstuen@bc.edu.

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Religion and the Academy

In November, Mark Edwards, academic dean at Harvard Divinity School, visited the Boisi Center to discuss the relationship between private belief and public scholarship. Edwards presented sections from his forthcoming book, *Religion on Our Campuses: A Professor's Guide to Communities, Conflicts, and Promising Conversations*. He argued that although religion is viewed as a taboo subject, especially in academia, the time is right for religious and non-religious academics to discuss belief in the context of the university. In earlier decades, believing scholars faced at best dismissive attitudes toward religion or at worst discrimination. For most of the twentieth century, confidence in the scientific method in both the natural and social sciences relegated belief to the margins. At present, he explained, with the diversity of intellectual approaches, space has opened for serious conversations about religion in the academy.

To insure fruitful exchanges among faculty, Edwards outlined some basic principles of conver-



sation. Key factors include: a sense of equality among participants; the importance of real-life experience versus abstraction; the value of emotion as well as reason; and the crucial role of feedback. In order to help frame these conversations, Edwards provided a historical, sociological, and personal analysis of the academy and its relation to religion. On the historical level, he encourages faculty members to

acknowledge the place of religion in the formation of disciplines, whether the communities identified with or against supernatural belief. Sociologically, the professionalization of disciplines further separated religion from academics as, ironically, devotion to the disciplinary community left little room for religion. Edwards expanded on this idea by comparing the experience of academic training to that of a monk or a nun. Also, at the level of the personal, he emphasized the importance of biographical disclosure as a way of breaking down barriers that obstruct open discussion of religion.

In conclusion, Edwards proposed that allowing religion a place at the academic table bodes well for the overall pursuit of knowledge. Specifically, he claims, the cautious use of religious perspectives as a warrant in the realm of morality, metaphysics, and anthropology would enrich each of these topics as they arise in various disciplines.

Mathew Schmaltz *Continued from page 2*

the abortion debates, and the notion of the Catholic Church as the body of Christ. For example, supporters have actively sacralized her body, creating a chapel replete with relics, photographs and videos. Many believers understand Santo as a "victim soul" atoning for the sins of others through her own personal suffering. The plight of Audrey, according to Schmaltz, has also been a locus of empowerment for women. Women, including Audrey's mother Linda, lead the Apostolate of a Silent Soul—the lay organization formed to publicize and orchestrate the ministry of Audrey. The virtues of motherhood are celebrated and emphasized through the person of

Linda and her utter devotion to her child. And Schmaltz further argues that Audrey's suffering connects to women who live lives of "silent suffering" as under-appreciated care-giving professionals or as daughters and mothers in patriarchal families.

Schmaltz's vivid picture of Audrey Santo generated a lively discussion. Among their many questions, audience members asked about the ethics of the public "consumption" of the incapacitated Santo, the attitudes of the official church toward her, and the phenomenon's relationship to the supposedly increasing privatization of religion in America.

Jews of Boston

At the end of October, Jonathan Sarna, a leading historian on the American Jewish experience from Brandeis University, joined us at the Boisi Center. Sarna focused his comments on the Jews of Boston from the mid-1990s to the present, but he began with an outline of the unique history of Jews in the Hub.

Sarna explained that compared to the Jewish population in other major American cities, Jews arrived late in Boston. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Boston had a smaller Jewish population than such cities as Baltimore, St. Louis, and Cincinnati. As a consequence of their tardiness, Jews experienced greater discrimination in Boston than in any other American city during the first half of the twentieth century. Without a population of "pioneer Jews," Boston's Jewish community retained their "alien" status longer. Another distinctive feature of Boston's Jews was that less tension existed within the Jewish community than in other cities. Boston was most affected by the Eastern European, particularly Polish, Jewish populations that immigrated in the late nineteenth century. By comparison, in other cities earlier waves of German Jewish immigrants clashed with later arriving Jews from the East.

As a consequence, the story of Boston's Jews is the story of relationships with their Protestant and Catholic neighbors. Through the first half of the twentieth century, the relationship was tense and occasionally violent. Yet after World War II, rela-

tions improved. As Jews came of age in the city, they targeted education as a major community goal. This stress on education, Sarna argued, has never been more apparent than in the last decade.

The increasing stability of Israel and the dissolution of the Soviet Union helped spark efforts to improve Jewish education. Sarna stressed the immense financial significance of these events.

Funds previously slated to assist oppressed Jews in these regions were available to assist educational endeavors at home. At all levels of education, Jews have made important advances. Seven new private Jewish day schools, such as the successful Gann Academy, strides in adult education, and the dozens of Jewish

studies positions in Boston-area universities headline the list of accomplishments. These educational achievements, along with other important markers of Jewish presence in the city, have fueled what Sarna described as a Jewish cultural renaissance within Boston.



Staff Notes



Alan Wolfe serves as the director of the Boisi Center and is a professor of political science at Boston College. He is the author or editor of more than 12 books. His most recent books include *Return to Greatness: How America Lost Its Sense of Purpose and What it Needs to Do to Recover It*, (2005) *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 *Commonweal*, *The New York Times*, *Harper's*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Washington Post*, and other magazines and newspapers. Professor Wolfe will be teaching a seminar entitled "American Culture War" (PO 358) in the spring.

Andrew Finstuen serves as the interim assistant director of the Boisi Center. A doctoral candidate in the Department of History at Boston College, Finstuen will defend his dissertation, "Hearts of Darkness: American Protestants and the Doctrine of Original Sin, 1945-1965," in March of 2006.



Susan Richard serves as Boisi Center's administrative assistant. When she's not at work, she keeps herself busy with her family.