

The BOISI CENTER *Report*

VOL. 7 NO. 1

THE BOISI CENTER FOR RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

DECEMBER 2006



FROM THE DIRECTOR

The main news to report in this issue of our newsletter is the hiring of Erik Owens to be the Boisi Center's Assistant Director. We had a huge number of responses to our ad for this position, and the quality of the people on the short list was stunning. Nonetheless it was clear to me and other members of the search committee that if Erik did not exist, he would have had to be invented. His experiences organizing conferences for the Pew Forum, his intellectual interests in religion and education, his take-charge organizational abilities, his familiarity with budgets, his wide range of interests and friends—all these made him a perfect fit for the job. We also welcomed two Theology Ph.D. students, Matthew Bagot and Karen Teel, who are working at the Boisi Center this academic year. We are delighted to have them.

One of our main tasks at the Boisi Center this fall has been

organizing a conference on "Gambling and the American Moral Landscape" which will take place next fall. I can think of no change of greater significance, yet which has been subject to so little thoughtful scrutiny, than gambling's role in American life. Just to take one example, we wanted to invite to our conference someone who is studying the impact of gambling on families. I consulted the leading family sociologists in America and learned that no data exist, no studies have been published, and no scholarship-based arguments are available. We were pleased that this finding confirmed our sense that gambling deserved serious study, but we were stunned to learn how hard it was going to be to study it. Fortunately we have confirmed the participation of a wonderful group of scholars from disciplines ranging from theology and history to psychiatry and behavioral economics. We will have more to say on this in future newsletters.

Our other main activity lies in finalizing a series of pamphlets on religion and American life that are being written for non-American readers, especially for Muslims from Muslim-majority countries. This material is designed to explain the basics of Christian theology, the theory and practice of separation of church and state, the realities of lived religion, and the dynamics of religious pluralism. The material should be posted on our website in January or February.

The elections of 2006—along with the inevitable change of course bound to take place in Iraq—have begun to change the discourse about religion and politics in the United States. It is clear that in the future we will be addressing questions such as these: has the influence of

the religious right peaked? Will there be a religious left visible in future American elections? What is the significance of the election of the first Muslim to the U. S. Congress? Will conservative Christians temper their strong support of Israel? What role will America's religious communities play in the search for peace in the Middle East?

I continue to address these questions in various venues. This fall I spoke at Lebanon Valley College in Pennsylvania, Saginaw State University in Michigan, and at the Federation of State Humanities Councils annual meeting in Louisville. I will be giving a lecture to the Scientific Council for Government Policy of the Netherlands in The Hague in December. And I continue to chair the Task Force on Religion and American Democracy of the American Political Science Association.

My book, *Does American Democracy Still Work?*, published by Yale University Press in September 2006, was reviewed in the *Washington Post*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and other newspapers and magazines. It also received a front page review in *The New York Times Book Review*—in a manner of speaking. True, my book was reviewed there, but this was along with a number of others, leaving little space for the actual issues raised by the book to be discussed. Still, I have no complaints. A few of the flaws in democracy that concerned me—lack of serious issues, the failure of one branch of government to check the others—were addressed by American voters. American democracy clearly still works.

—Alan Wolfe

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Midterm Elections Shake Up Congress

Just two days after the momentous November midterm elections shifted control of both houses of Congress (and many governor's offices) to the Democratic Party, the Boisi Center sponsored a forum with three prominent political observers to assess the election results. Our own Alan Wolfe joined Daniel J. Mahoney, Professor of Political Science at Assumption College, and Michael Tomasky, Editor-at-Large of *The American Prospect* in a wide-ranging discussion.

Mahoney began by claiming that the result of the election was a message to the Bush Administration but should not be taken as a repudiation of conservatism. He pointed out that the principal losers in the election were moderate Republicans in the Northeast and that some of the

Democratic victors were notably conservative and pro-life. Consequently, Mahoney argued, even though forty-eight percent of regular churchgoers nationwide had voted Democratic, and thirty-eight percent of evangelicals in Virginia had voted for the Democratic Senate challenger James Webb, their votes were not a referendum on religious or cultural issues. Rather, he said, the electorate had simply soured on the Iraq War, and expressed its dissatisfaction with Bush's policies and one-party rule in Washington.

Tomasky agreed with much of Mahoney's presentation, but added that the Democratic coalition had in fact grown considerably. He pointed out that only five of twenty-eight new Democratic House members were social conservatives, but that the inclu-

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Religious Freedom and the Pledge of Allegiance



Every day millions of Americans, many of them schoolchildren, are asked to pledge their allegiance to the American flag and to "the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." By invoking God, does this familiar act of citizenship constitute a profession of faith or simply an acknowledgement that Americans have historically believed in God? In either case, does it imply that a good citizen must believe in God? On October 9 the Boisi Center hosted a

panel to discuss the Pledge's invocation of a nation "under God," and its implications for religious freedom in this country.

First among the panelists was Michael Newdow, a lawyer, physician and First Amendment activist who sued the U.S. Congress over this issue and personally argued his case before the U.S. Supreme Court in 2004. The Court ultimately declined, for technical legal reasons, to rule on the permissibility of "under God" in the Pledge, but Newdow has re-filed his case, which many expect to return to the Supreme Court in the coming years for final resolution. At the panel discussion Newdow focused his remarks on the concept of equality, arguing that the First Amendment's guarantee of religious freedom means that all citizens—including those who reject religion—must be treated equally. The inclusion of "under God" in the Pledge, he said, unconstitutionally signals government support for theistic

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“Intelligent Design” in the Classroom and the Courts

Our fall semester opened with a lunch colloquium on September 27 with Jay Wexler, Associate Professor at the Boston University School of Law. An expert on constitutional issues involving religion and education, Wexler spoke about the recent controversy over teaching the theory of “intelligent design” as part of a science curriculum. His presentation, “Judging Intelligent Design: Should the Courts Decide What Counts as Science or Religion?” drew an interdisciplinary audience of physical and social scientists, theologians, and educators.

In a federal court case last year that many compared to the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial, a federal judge barred

a Pennsylvania public school district from teaching the theory of intelligent design (ID) in biology class, ruling that ID is a religious (not scientific) theory and therefore its teaching represented an unconstitutional establishment of religion in public schools. Wexler argued that the court’s 139-page opinion was a comprehensive and complete victory for ID opponents, but that it nevertheless presents a serious philosophical and jurisprudential problem: it puts judges in the position of definitively ruling what is—or is not—both science and religion. Legal precedent did not require the court to define “science” in order to declare ID a violation of the establishment clause;



this judicial overreaching was thus both unnecessary (since the definition of non-legal terms are usually

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Integrating Islam into Western Culture

On October 4 the Boisi Center welcomed Professor Jonathan Laurence of Boston College’s Political Science Department, who presented his latest research on the integration of Islam and Muslims into French society. Laurence began by debunking several myths about Islam in Europe, including the idea that Islam is growing at an alarming rate and the perception that French Muslims generally hold extreme cultural and political attitudes. Laurence then raised the question: Are the present conflicts arising simply out of poor communication between immigrant Muslims and their “host societies,” or do they manifest a massive failure of the system to integrate this new population?

Drawing upon his recent book *Integrating Islam*, Laurence put the current issues in historical perspective by recalling the first round of discussion about headscarves in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the controversy over Salman Rushdie’s work, and the initial Gulf War. Now, as Muslims become a larger and more established group in European soci-

eties, new questions are being asked about the impact of their presence. Is a new continent emerging which might be called “Eurabia”? Do the meetings between government and religious leaders in castles around Europe evoke the ghosts of Napoleon and Mussolini? In this era of communications technology and easy travel between countries, has the assimilationist urge of immigrants subsided in a way that might allow a new kind of multi-ethnic state to emerge? In other words, to what extent do Muslims want to become “French,” “German”, and so on? What about the pluralism within Islam itself and how these various groups are represented in the host



societies? Finally, are these concerns encouraging a more right-leaning or conservative host state, and what might be the wider implications of such a tendency?

The group engaged in a lively discussion about these and other issues, considering the history and implications for Muslims and other groups in the U. S. In the end, the group observed that although there is some policing going on in societies where Muslims have arrived more recently, this has usually happened with the process of emancipation of new groups: increased oversight is often the tradeoff as greater freedom is achieved. What all this means for the future of interstate and intrastate relations remains an urgent question. ■

Religious Illiteracy in Public Schools

At a luncheon colloquium on November 2, 2006, Diane L. Moore, Professor of the Practice of Religion and Education, and Director of the Program in Religion and Secondary Education at Harvard Divinity School, discussed ideas from her new book, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education*.

Moore posited that education's main purpose is to prepare students for life in civil society. Noting that religion is a major aspect of that life, but that religious illiteracy is widespread in the United States, she considered how schools might begin to teach students about religion more effectively. She argued that in this country, there is an unfortunate ideological divide between religious people who believe there is a secular conspiracy to get religion out of the schools and secular humanists who think that all religion is right-wing fundamentalism. She observed that Americans who know little about religions other than their own often become impatient with efforts at tolerance. Moore proposed that this reli-

gious illiteracy and impatience could be diminished by teaching religion in a nonsectarian fashion in secondary schools; this would advocate knowledge and tolerance of the many different religious faiths practiced in American society.

The ensuing lively—and, at times, contentious—discussion revolved around big questions: What are the purposes of education? What role does religion play in these purposes? What are the civic implications when parents remove their children from the schools for religious reasons (in order to home-school them, for example)? Is “deliberative democracy” a useful paradigm for education? Concern was raised as to whether an “objective” approach is desirable—or even possible—in the study of reli-



gions. Wouldn't it be appropriate, one questioner asked, for teachers to make value judgments in the classroom, such as “Terrorism is wrong” or, more provocatively, “Roman Catholicism oppresses women by refusing to ordain them”? Ultimately no consensus was reached about what to do when ideas that are intellectually coherent or historically important but morally reprehensible—such as racism—are put forth in the educational setting. Some of the participants believed that Americans' good sense would naturally lead

them to condemn such ideas, but others were less optimistic. All agreed, however, that if religion should be taught in schools, an essential starting point would be to train teachers to present the various religions accurately and fairly, regardless of their own faith commitments. ■

Ethics and the African Refugee Crisis

Our final luncheon colloquium of the semester featured David Hollenbach, S.J. and Elizabeth King, the Director and Assistant Director, respectively, of Boston College's new Center for Human Rights and International Justice. Hollenbach and King had recently returned from Nairobi, Kenya, where the Center had sponsored a conference on ethical responsibilities toward forced migrants and internally displaced persons in Africa.

Fr. Hollenbach, the Margaret O'Brien Flatley Professor of Theology at Boston College, provided an overview of the issues raised

at the conference. He began by noting the urgency of the refugee problem: there are 33 million refugees and internally displaced people in the world today, a high percentage of whom are in Africa. He then outlined five principles that ought to guide the treatment of refugees in every country. First, there should be respect for the right to freedom of movement by refugees in order to alleviate the dehumanizing experience of confinement in camps. Thus confinement should be a last resort; it should be temporary; and it should be introduced only if the harm it causes is proportionately

less than the harm that would otherwise occur. Second, richer countries have a moral responsibility to share the burdens of aiding the displaced. Third, such countries should share in addressing the deeper causes and consequences of displacement. Here Hollenbach stressed the (admittedly partial) success that the United States has achieved in southern Sudan with the peace agreement of 2005; the situation there remains unstable, but it shows that Western powers *can* make a difference. Fourth, the responsibility to protect the rights of displaced persons necessitates peace-making efforts in

Foreign Delegations Visit Boisi Center

This semester the Boisi Center hosted three delegations of foreign visitors from the Netherlands, Kyrgyzstan, and Saudi Arabia. The visiting Dutch scholars—three theology professors from Utrecht University—were founding faculty members of the new Utrecht Center for Religion and Society. They met with Alan Wolfe and Erik Owens on November 15 to discuss how university-based research centers can serve both the academy and the wider society by studying the global religious landscape. After a collegial discussion about the two Centers, the scholars headed south to Washington D.C. to attend the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion.

The Kyrgyzstani delegation visited the Boisi Center on August 21 as part

of a three week cultural exchange program funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and administered locally by WorldBoston, a nonprofit group that brings emerging leaders to Boston to discuss important issues. About half of the group were professors or students of Islamic studies, while others work for religious organizations or media outlets in the former Soviet republic located in central Asia. Nine of the ten visitors were Muslim, with one Eastern Orthodox Christian among them—a rough approximation of the Kyrgyz Republic's religious demographics. The conversation that followed Owens' presentation on religion and American public life was lively and good-natured, thanks in part to the able assistance of two expert translators. Several

delegates were intrigued by the Jesuit governance of Boston College as well as the religious roots of many other American universities, asking if these religious ties shaped avenues of scientific inquiry or the presentation of Islam in classrooms. Extended discussion was given to issues of church-state separation, religion in political campaigns, and Americans' perception of Islam since 9/11.

September 8 marked the arrival of five female educational leaders from Saudi Arabia traveling under the auspices of the International Visitor Leadership Program of the U.S. Department of State (with local assistance from WorldBoston). Owens spoke to the group about the legal, cultural and educational challenges that religion presents to American

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Pledge of Allegiance *(continued from page 2)*



(particularly Christian) religious beliefs, making belief in God a component of good citizenship. Atheists and other non-theists are treated as unequal citizens who must suffer in silence as the majority robustly declares its faith to be integral to its patriotism.

Author, attorney and social critic Wendy Kaminer sympathized with Newdow's principled argument for equal treatment of atheists, but said that his legal challenge was doing more harm than good to that

cause. As an atheist herself, Kaminer said, "We can't afford to win this case" because the public backlash would likely result in passage of a constitutional amendment protecting religious language in this and many other circumstances. Furthermore, she noted, religious people should be much more worried about the Pledge's form of "ceremonial deism" than non-religious people, since it signals a secularization of religious meaning.

Constitutional scholar Phillip Muñoz, professor of political science at Tufts University, argued that Newdow would have won his case if the Supreme Court had considered the substantive issues, because all their prevailing legal tests support

his position. But while Newdow's argument may be legally sound under present constitutional interpretation, he said, it conflicts with the Founders' more capacious understanding of religious freedom. Muñoz, who is writing a book on religion and the American founding, argued that while the First Amendment prevents the state from rewarding or punishing people for being religious or not religious, such punishment does not include the psychological harm that comes from hearing religious people express their faith.

A vigorous discussion among panelists followed their initial presentations. When pressed by Newdow, Muñoz argued that it would be constitutionally permissible even to include the phrase "under Jesus Christ" in the Pledge of Allegiance—although it would be a bad idea. "Not all bad things are prohibited by the constitution," Muñoz said. The audience left the session energized by the debate. ■

Announcing the Boisi Center Student Advisory Panel

The Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life invites graduate and undergraduate students from all the schools at Boston College to join its Student Advisory Panel. We seek up to 15 students from across the university—at least one from each school—to meet monthly with staff members to discuss current issues in religion and public life, and how the Center can address them in its programs and publications. Panel members will then help to promote the Center's events among the university community.

Benefits for panel members include the opportunity to meet visiting speakers before events, help shape the Center's programs, and join lively and informed conversations about current events with Alan Wolfe and the rest of the Center's staff. This will entail a relatively minor time commitment, so if you or anyone you know—students, colleagues, or friends—might be interested in this opportunity, please contact us via e-mail at publife@bc.edu.

Foreign Delegations *(continued from page 5)*

public schools. Among the topics covered were religious studies classes, religious holidays, expressions of faith by teachers and students, and public funding for religious schools. A lively discussion ensued about the difference between "religious instruction" and "instruction about religion." The women—all of whom were teachers and supervisors from the Ministry of Education—spoke of Saudi curricular modernization,

African Refugee Crisis *(continued from page 4)*

affected regions. Finally, protection of the rights of internally displaced persons likewise demands a response from neighboring countries, regional organizations, and the United Nations.

King spoke at a more practical level about the particular vulnerability of women in refugee camps. She pointed out how a "gender lens" might be used to address issues such as food distribution and camp security. But she also admitted the dangers of focusing on women's issues in this way; it might appear as a chal-



lenge to the traditional culture and prompt an unforeseen reaction. As she concluded: "there are no easy answers." ■

Intelligent Design *(continued from page 3)*

outside the bounds of law) and unfortunate (since it leaves these definitions open to future manipulation by judges and lawyers who might not be so conscientious). Finally, said Wexler, the decision also implied that religion and science are somehow mutually exclusive—something many scientists and theologians alike would contest.

A robust conversation brought many questions to the table about the

relationship between science and religion, and the challenges of teaching one or both in public schools. As one guest asked: if science is a process, not a conclusion, then wouldn't any subject that is scientifically examined—for example, the effects of prayer on health—be legitimate to teach in schools? No consensus was reached on an answer, of course, but the question spurred much thoughtful discussion. ■

their respect for all the Abrahamic traditions, and the moral challenges brought on by internet access in their country. They were disappointed to have learned earlier in their visit how few Americans travel abroad (at most, 30% of Americans have passports), and how little most Americans know about international affairs. One woman (speaking fluent English) expressed her belief that most of the distrust between

Christians and Muslims in the United States and Saudi Arabia is the result of a failure to educate citizens about world religions. In the United States this negligence, she argued, contributes to ignorance about Islam, Arab culture, and a dangerous conflation of religious extremism with Islam as a whole. It was an instructive point about a topic the Boisi Center continues to explore in its own events and publications. ■

Midterm Elections (continued from page 2)

sion of such conservatives added positive “cross-currents” within the Democratic Party. He envisaged a vigorous debate regarding abortion in the 2008 Presidential election.

Wolfe also agreed with much of what had been said, but raised two issues. First, he was not sure that the

country remained as closely divided as the previous two speakers claimed. He pointed out that the Senate turns over only a third of its seats each election cycle, and that capturing six of these seats was a Herculean task that demonstrated broad support for Democrats. More

Republican Senate seats will come into play in 2008, and the Democrats can therefore expect to consolidate their gains there—and indeed in numerous state elections as well—two years from now. Second, Wolfe argued that the election signaled a major repudiation of Karl Rove’s strategy to

appeal to the ardent conservative “base” of the Republican Party rather than its broad middle. Rove’s strategy, which once seemed to epitomize political genius, Wolfe noted, ironically may have doomed the GOP to the status of a mere “Southern party” rather than a true national coalition.

The discussion following the presentations focused on whether evangelicals would continue to be involved politically, and if so, in what capacity. All agreed that Democrats now face a huge challenge to produce results, not least with regard to the war in Iraq. The conversation ended on a hopeful note as Wolfe suggested that Deval Patrick’s victory in the Massachusetts gubernatorial race may have demonstrated to other candidates around the country that negative campaign advertisements are not a requirement for electoral success. ■



Staff Notes

Alan Wolfe is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life at Boston College. In



October his book *Does American Democracy Still Work?* was published by Yale; in November, Brookings Institution

Press published *Is There a Culture War?* (co-authored with James Davison Hunter). His recent articles on “Free Speech, Israel and Jewish Illiberalism” (*Chronicle of Higher Education*) and “Why Conservatives Can’t Govern” (*Washington Monthly*) were much-

discussed. In the Spring he will teach a class on “The American Culture War” (PO 358) in the political science department.

Erik Owens is Assistant Director of the Boisi Center and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Theology at Boston College. This fall he delivered lectures on religious



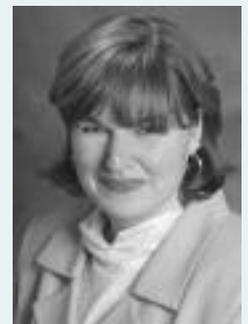
pluralism and civic education at the annual meetings of the American Political Science

Association and the American Academy of Religion. He also contributed a chapter on “Religion

and Civic Education in American Public Schools” to the forthcoming book *German and American Perspectives on Religion and Public Life*. In the Spring he will teach a theology course (TH 486) on religion and citizenship entitled “For God and Country?”

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 susan.richard.1@bc.edu.

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Calendar of Events (Additional Events To Be Announced)

January

30 – Boisi Center, 12:00 PM
The Role of Catholic Universities in American Public Life
David O'Brien, College of the Holy Cross

February

7 – Room TBA, 4:30 PM
Headscarves and Holy Days: Should the Law Make Exemptions?
• Leah Farish, Civil rights attorney, Tulsa, OK
• Marci Hamilton, Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University
• Jytte Klausen, Brandeis University

14 – Boisi Center, 12:00 PM
Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil
Emilie Townes, Yale Divinity School

28 – Room TBA, 4:30 PM
"The Theocons" in American Public Life
• Damon Linker, author, *The Theocons: Secular America Under Siege*
• Jorge Garcia, Boston College

March

15 – The Heights Room, 7:30 PM
6th Annual Prophetic Voices of the Church Lecture
Rev. Peter J. Gomes, Harvard University

28 – Boisi Center, 12:00 PM
Islam in Europe and the United States
Kishwer Falkner, Baroness of Margravine, U.K. House of Lords

April

3 – Boisi Center, 12:00 PM
Religion and Political Cartoons
John McCoy, McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College

October

25-26 – The Heights Room
Conference: **Gambling and the American Moral Landscape**
Eighteen distinguished scholars will discuss the pervasive influence of gambling from a wide variety of perspectives.