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# The Boisi Center Report

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

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## *From the Director*



*Every other semester I teach a course called “The American Culture War.” Beginning with Robert Bork’s Slouching Towards Gomorrah, we look at the role moral and cultural issues such as abortion and gay rights have played in recent American politics. The students seem to like it. I love it.*

*This year I began by asking whether I would be teaching the course in the future. For when we began in January, it really did seem as if the culture war had come to an end. Iraq and the economy — these were going to be the issues in the presidential campaign. Finally, Americans seemed to have tired of hysterical charges and symbolic politics. They were going to focus on the real world.*

*And so what do we have now? Bittergate, Rev. Wright, charges of elitism, and precious little attention to Iraq and the economy. It seems I will be teaching this course for some time to come, with plenty of new material to add.*

*We do our part at the Boisi Center to examine these developments. Our panel on gay marriage was a big success: large audience, thoughtful conversation, plenty of passion along with gobs of reason. We had an equally successful panel discussion on what Americans owe the Iraqis. And, in conjunction with the Provost’s Committee on the Catholic Intellectual Traditions, we hosted John DiIulio, first head of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. John’s talk was wonderful, and he was accompanied, in song, by Boston’s Rev. Eugene Rivers. It was a terrific evening.*

*My biggest role in the presidential primaries ended when John McCain locked up the Republican nomination. Fascinated by Mormonism, I learned as much as I could about this faith, participated in conferences on the subject, and spoke to the media about Romney’s campaign. I do believe that he was to some degree victimized by religious discrimination within his own party; Southern Baptists continue to distrust Mormons, and a lot of Southern Baptists vote in the Republican primaries.*

*No doubt the election will be a major focus on our fall events. But as we start to think about our upcoming tenth anniversary (in the 2009-10 academic year) we will have a lot more on our plates this coming year as well. As always, nothing could take place at the Boisi Center without our staff. Besides the regulars, Susan Richard and Erik Owens, we had a terrific team this year and I thank them all: graduate research assistants John Crowley-Buck, Suzanne Hevelone and Hillary Thompson, and our webmaster Isabelle Martinez.*

*A final note: if you haven’t visited our web site ([www.bc.edu/boisi](http://www.bc.edu/boisi)) lately, I encourage you to do so. Not only has the home page been redesigned and refined, we have also posted a wide array of content (audio and video, photos, interviews with speakers, links to further reading, etc.) generated from nearly all of our events in the last two years. Just click on “resources” or “public events” on the main navigation area to browse by media type or date.*

— ALAN WOLFE

## REASSESSING GAY MARRIAGE

The Boisi Center's final event of the academic year brought a robust crowd on April 22 to a panel discussion on "Gay Marriage in Theology, Law and Politics." The panel took stock of the issue four years after Massachusetts became the first—and still the only—state in the U.S. to legalize gay marriage. Erik Owens moderated the vigorous discussion that followed the speakers' opening remarks.

William Stacy Johnson, a professor of systematic theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, began the panel by describing seven distinct theological approaches to gay marriage clustered into categories of "non-affirming," "welcoming and affirming," and "welcoming, affirming and ordering" viewpoints, the last being his favored position. Drawing upon his recent book *A Time to Embrace*, Johnson sought to dispel the simplistic rhetoric that allows one to be only "for" or "against" gay marriage, arguing instead that churches can move toward reconciliation on this issue only when they recognize the rich diversity of such perspectives within their faith communities.

David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values, argued that although heterosexual and homosexual relationships have equal value, marriage is an institution rightly reserved for one man and one woman. Marriage, he said, serves not simply the private romantic function of bonding two adults but also the more important public function of protecting and nurturing children, who have a natural right to be raised by their biological parents. Drawing upon recent social scientific data, he

cited an inverse correlation between support for traditional marriage and support for gay marriage, and argued that legalizing the latter would further diminish the pro-child core value of traditional marriage.

Cheryl Jacques, former Massachusetts state senator and former president of the Human Rights Campaign, contextualized the movement for gay marriage as part of the ongoing civil rights struggle in this country. Gays and lesbians, she argued, face discrimination today akin to past efforts to marginalize women, African-Americans, and other ethnic and religious minorities. Members of these groups simply want and deserve equality; they should have equal rights, not special rights.

The final speaker was Kerry Healey, who served as lieutenant governor of Massachusetts when the state supreme court legalized gay marriage in 2004. Had the legislature acted on the increasing public pressure to grant modest legal rights to gay relationships (e.g. regarding medical visits and inheritance), she noted, the state supreme court would not have intervened with a decree to sanction full marriage rights. This act of judicial activism went well beyond the incremental steps most citizens favored, and led to years of divisiveness and acrimony. Perhaps the most appropriate solution for church and state alike, she suggested, would be for the state to grant only civil unions (to heterosexual and homosexual couples). Marriage would then be the exclusive province of religious communities, which could define it in their own terms. ■



Left to right: Erik Owens, William Stacy Johnson, David Blankenhorn, Cheryl Jacques and Kerry Healey

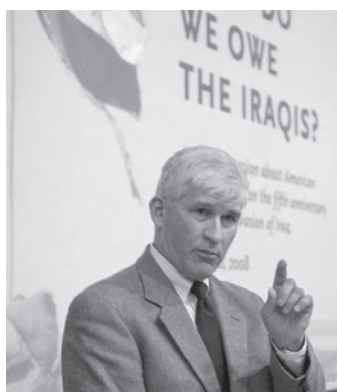
## WHAT DO WE OWE THE IRAQIS?

The Boisi Center marked the fifth anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq with a major panel discussion on March 18 about what obligations—if any—Americans now have to the Iraqi people.

Leading off the panel was distinguished just war theorist Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, a professor at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and Secretary of Social Services in the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston. Hehir began with a vigorous claim that because the United States chose to invade Iraq, rather than being forced by necessity to do so, it created for itself a number of moral and legal obligations. He surveyed various perspectives on how we could best discharge those duties (staying for the long term, leaving immediately, reducing our military presence, etc.), and closed with several general recommendations. American military presence should continue, he argued, only as long as it takes to raise an international force to replace it; we are responsible for maintaining a basic level of security for the Iraqi people in the meantime. Hehir also noted that the U.S. cannot effectively run both security and rebuilding efforts at the same time, so we should continue to fund the rebuilding effort but allow others to direct and manage it.



*Rev. J. Bryan Hehir*



*Andrew Bacevich*

tions in this context are thus simple: if our involvement in Iraq benefits Americans, we should stay; if it does not, we should leave. Because this war has been “a disaster”—it was unnecessary and misguided from the outset, he argued—that has cost Americans dearly, the president is

morally obliged to end the American military presence in Iraq. Bacevich noted that the U.S. does, however, have moral obligations to individual Iraqis directly harmed by the invasion and occupation. To acquit ourselves of these responsibilities, the U.S. should bear the cost of refugee camps that now shelter, feed, and provide medical care for thousands of displaced Iraqis in Jordan and Syria; it should admit large numbers of Iraqi refugees into the U.S.; and it should continue to fund the reconstruction of Iraqi schools, roads, hospitals and other infrastructure. However, Bacevich ended his remarks by saying he doubts these obligations to individual Iraqis will ever be met.

The final panelist was Rev. Paul McNellis, S.J., a member of the Boston College philosophy department. McNellis noted that the current American military presence in Iraq is in many ways a continuation of the first Gulf War. The fact that Saddam Hussein failed to abide by the terms of his 1991 surrender led to a dozen years of ineffectual UN sanctions and ultimately supplied the just cause for our current military operations. But more importantly, said



*The audience listens to panelists (left to right) Alan Wolfe, Bryan Hehir, Andrew Bacevich and Paul McNellis, S.J.*

McNellis, in failing to support the attempted Iraqi coup that President George H.W. Bush had personally encouraged, the U.S. directly contributed to the deaths of many thousands of Iraqis killed by Saddam in retribution. Our moral obligation to the Iraqi people derives from this failure to come to their aid, he argued, and the present military engagement must remain long enough to establish conditions of justice there. If we do not do it now, despite the many challenges and the unfortunate (though temporary) loss of Iraqi sovereignty, the results will be catastrophic for Iraq and the entire region.

After these thought-provoking opening remarks, Alan Wolfe moderated a robust discussion among the students and faculty who packed the lecture hall. ■



## DI IULIO, SKEEL SPEAK ON CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Last year Provost Cutberto Garza selected Alan Wolfe to lead a two-year faculty seminar on “Ways of Knowing and the Catholic Intellectual Traditions,” as part of a broader university initiative to examine the Jesuit and Catholic traditions here at Boston College. In addition to its seminars, the Catholic Intellectual Traditions (CIT) program also hosts public events, two of which were co-sponsored this year by the Boisi Center.

At a February 6th lunch colloquium, University of Pennsylvania law professor David Skeel argued that the scope of Christian legal scholarship today is shockingly narrow, despite the rising influence of theologically conservative Christians. As Skeel defines it, Christian legal scholarship engages secular legal scholarship while presenting either a normative theory of law based on scripture or tradition, or a descriptive account of the relation of Christianity and law. He explained the dearth of such work in elite law journals since 1900 as the result of tensions between religion and higher education that began in the late 19th century and grew as American evangelicals retreated from public life. Skeel noted, however, that Christian legal scholarship has increased in recent years, especially with regard to questions of church and state, natural law, legal ethics and Christian legal history.

The Boisi Center’s second CIT event brought to campus John DiIulio, former director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and current professor of politics, religion and civil society at the University of Pennsylvania. On April 17 DiIulio presented a provocative and moving exhortation to service under the title: “Yes, God is Real: A Born-Again Public Intellectual Reflects on Catholic Faith in Reason and Community.” He began by recounting how he had lived most of his adult life as if the Catholicism he was born into had little relevance to his scholarly work. Tenured at Princeton just two years after receiving his Ph.D. at Harvard, he was renowned for his hard-hitting policy analysis of crime.

In the midst of a research project on the influence of churches on crime statistics in blighted neighborhoods, DiIulio met inner-city pastors whose churches provided an array of social services to all who needed them, regardless of race or religion. He was particularly moved by Benjamin “Pops” Smith, a Pentecostal pastor whose vast outreach efforts were motivated, Smith said, by the simple fact that God is real. When you know that God is real, said DiIulio, you act on behalf of the poor and hungry. At this point in his talk, DiIulio invited Rev. Eugene Rivers, prominent pastor of Boston’s Azusa Christian Community, to come forward. At DiIulio’s urging, Rivers sang the gospel hymn “Yes, God is Real” and commented about Rev. Smith’s importance in his own life.

Rev. Smith and others demonstrated, said DiIulio, that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20). In that spirit, DiIulio called the Catholic community at Boston College to “Do something for real”: help low-income residents decipher tax or food stamps documents; mobilize graduating seniors to teach—permanently—in inner-city schools; do “whatever else you feel like doing, deep down in your souls, for God’s family.” “That’s why God gave us faith in reason, and reason for faith,” he concluded. ■



John DiIulio and Rev. Eugene Rivers

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## AMERICAN MUSLIMS AND AMERICAN CULTURE

Since 2001 Boston College political science professor Peter Skerry has studied the social, political and cultural impact on the American Muslim community of the 9/11 terror attacks. On January 30 the Boisi Center invited him to speak about his research, which will be published in a forthcoming book.

Popular media culture today tends to focus on the international influences on the American Muslim community, but Skerry is primarily interested in domestic consid-

erations: how is the community affected by American politics, society and culture—and conversely, how does it affect American politics, society and culture? This relationship can be understood in two ways, he argued, which have important implications for the Muslim community’s assimilation into American culture. Understood as a racial minority, American Muslims (who are overwhelmingly non-white) become part of this country’s long history of racial discrimination. This would provide legitimacy for them (and their supporters) to draw upon the principles

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## FACULTY REFLECT ON THE PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES

The extraordinary level of interest in the presidential primaries and their unusual scheduling this winter prompted the Boisi Center to arrange a post-primary panel discussion featuring members of the political science faculty — Professors Marc Landy, Kay Schlozman and Alan Wolfe. Scheduled for Wednesday, February 13, eight days after “Super Tuesday,” the panel was envisioned as a recap of the election results and discussion of how the presumptive nominees engineered their triumph. Of course, while McCain had emerged as the clear Republican front runner, the Democratic nominee remained in doubt.



Left to right: Marc Landy, Kay Schlozman and Alan Wolfe

Braving the torrential rain, a large contingent of Boston College students filled the Fulton Debate Room. Schlozman opened the panel by noting that she is a professor, not a pundit, so she focused on providing historical context for the arcane primary system that has perplexed so many voters, young and old alike. Wolfe and Landy, both active pundits, traded good-natured and entertaining jabs from the left and right. All three panelists discussed the effect of last year’s American military “surge” on McCain’s bid, the role of anti-Mormon sentiment in the demise of Romney’s candidacy and the massive missteps of the Giuliani campaign.

Although unable to predict for the large, hopeful audience of Boston College undergraduates the eventual Democratic nominee, the professors provided context and discussion of the Clinton and Obama candidacies. They discussed the looming questions of whether the United States is ready for either a black or female president, and whether race or gender would prove to be the greater handicap to electability. (The consensus: gender remains the greater handicap.) Due in part to the success of the post-primary panel, the Boisi Center is planning a significant panel discussion following the general election in November 2008, by which time — unlike in 2000 — we hope the election will actually be over. ■

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## MORMONS, MITT AND AMERICAN POLITICS

On February 14, just a week after Mormon presidential candidate Mitt Romney ended his campaign, the Boisi Center hosted a lively discussion on Mormons in American politics. Our guest was Clayton Christensen, a distinguished professor at Harvard Business School and prominent member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). Christensen described the growth of the LDS Church from Joseph Smith’s divine encounter to the present day, and placed the Mormon experience in the context of American religious history. He spoke eloquently about his experience as a Mormon, and his understanding of the LDS Church’s position on the intersection of religion and politics.

Christensen argued that all Christians, and particularly Mormons, should act on their obligations to “love thy enemy” and care for the poor, widowed and orphaned; and furthermore that they should encourage elected officials to do the same as they make public policy. Mormons have unique political and moral insights to offer as a result of

their missionary work, which puts them in direct contact with a wide array of peoples and cultures around the world. Restricting these insights by setting limits on the role of religion in the public square is a mistake, he said, both because it improperly limits the most basic civil liberty we have (i.e. religious freedom), and because religious communities are often the best sources of civic virtue in society.

A lively discussion followed, ranging from Mormon theology to business ethics to presidential primaries. To hear Christensen’ opening remarks or read his interview with Erik Owens, please visit our web site. ■



Clayton Christensen

## JUST SCHOOLS

What's at stake for American democracy when the politics of recognition is the driving force behind American education? How has this focus on difference affected the ability of schools to promote equality? And how much civic educational impact do schools actually have? Faculty and graduate students packed the Boisi Center's seminar room in late February to hear distinguished Harvard law professor Martha Minow speak about these and other issues, all of which she addresses in her book-in-progress entitled *Just Schools*.

*Brown v. Board of Education* banned racial segregation in schools on the grounds that it violated the principle of equal protection under the law, but disagreement on the precise meaning and implication of equality has confused subsequent school reform efforts, Minow argued. What does equality mean, for example, for the burgeoning ranks of public schools tailored to students with particular identities or needs: single-sex schools; charter schools organized around Arabic or Hebrew languages, or African-American culture; schools for gay, lesbian and transgendered youth; or religious schools funded with public vouchers? To answer this question, Minow distinguished between two forms of equality: individual equality promises each person the equal opportunity to thrive, while group equality focuses on

the equal respect owed to diverse cultural groups. Schools are more likely to foster individual equality, she argued, if they share a common mission and seek to promote at least minimal common values. Common values and missions are undercut, however, if promotion of group equality produces balkanized schools whose internally homogeneous student populations never learn to interact with one another. Alas, Minow noted, current data is unclear whether trends toward group equality and decentralization of school governance actually foster social segregation.

Minow closed by challenging the commonly held view that school reform can ultimately enable widespread social reform. Hence the dual meaning of the title *Just Schools*: schools should foster justice, but reformers should remember that they are merely schools, and can't solve all our social ills. ■



Martha Minow

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## THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF STEM CELL RESEARCH



Ole Isacson

Isacson discussed the trajectory of his research and the ways in which ethical considerations have informed or determined research paths in the stem cell research community.

Tracing his interest in “seed” or stem cells from his graduate work in Sweden in the late 1980s, Isacson not-

ed the long history of such research, from World War II era medics who treated soldiers' wounds with skin grafts from pigs, to the late twentieth century development of cloning procedures. His own recent work involves the use of a new procedure to generate induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells that (like embryonic stem cells) can grow into any type of cell for use in genetic therapies but (unlike embryonic stem cells) do not carry the potential to develop into a complete human being. These iPS cells have been hailed by some politicians and ethicists as the answer to moral objections to embryonic stem cell research. But Isacson cautioned against restricting ongoing research into embryonic stem cells. Even though his team has generated iPS cells that produce dopamine — an important step in the search for a cure for Parkinson's Disease — he warned that scientists do not yet know how iPS cells differ from embryonic stem cells, or how to control the genes they express. It may yet turn out, he said, that these new cells are not as medically helpful as is hoped. ■

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## IMMIGRATION CHALLENGES THE SCANDINAVIAN WELFARE MODEL

Scandinavian countries are deeply committed to egalitarianism and offer some of the world's most generous social welfare programs. But their recently burgeoning "new immigrant" populations present great challenges to national unity around these core principles. On April 10 Boisi Center visiting scholar Grete Brochmann, professor of sociology at the University of Oslo, discussed her research on the dilemmas of the contemporary Scandinavian welfare state.

Immigrants have made their way to Scandinavia for centuries, but in the 1970s Sweden, Denmark and Norway each instituted immigration reforms designed to stem the flow of workers then flooding domestic labor markets. As a result, most immigrants since that time have come to Scandinavian countries as refugees or asylum-seekers from non-European countries, or to be reunited with family members who were refugees. Approximately ninety percent of these new immigrants are unskilled.



*Grete Brochmann*

Once admitted into the country, immigrants receive nearly identical welfare benefits as citizens. The core principle behind this policy is the belief that equal rights promote social integration.

The present challenge for Scandinavian societies, said Brochmann, involves balancing principles of equality and pluralism. Can Muslim immigrants from outside Europe integrate into Norwegian society without losing their distinctive identity? This has become an important political issue, but one that Brochmann believes can be addressed without abandoning the egalitarianism that in many ways defines Scandinavian culture. ■

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## AMERICAN MUSLIMS AND AMERICAN CULTURE

and practices of the 1960s civil rights movement against racial discrimination. Understood as a religious minority, however, American Muslims could look to American Jews and Catholics for common cause, since both of those communities have largely overcome their initial historical experience as targets of severe discrimination in the U.S. Skerry found the parallel with Catholics to be the most compelling. Indeed, like Catholics, American Muslims do not fit neatly into either liberal or conservative political categories in this country. While American Muslims have generally welcomed liberal/progressive efforts to protect civil rights and religious freedom, they tend to have deep reservations about the liberal social agenda. The political loyalties of this important group are thus up for grabs in a critical election year. ■

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**ALAN WOLFE** is director of the Boisi Center and professor of political science. This semester he published essays in *The*

*Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, *Boston Globe*, *Washington Post* and *World Affairs*, and appeared on the NPR program "On Point," along with Martin Marty and Daniel Philpott, to discuss "Religious War, Religious Peace." He also moderated panels at Harvard and Boston College, and delivered lectures at Boston University and elsewhere. In the Fall he will teach the seminar "Religion and Politics" (PO351).



**ERIK OWENS** is assistant director of the Boisi Center and adjunct assistant professor of theology. This semester

he delivered a paper on educational pluralism at the Philosophy of Education Society annual meeting and responded to a paper on antebellum American schools at Bentley College. With Alan Wolfe, he is editing *Gambling and the American Moral Landscape*, forthcoming from Baylor University Press in summer 2009. In the Fall he will teach the seminar "For God and Country: Thinking about Religion and Citizenship" (TH486).



**SUSAN RICHARD** has served as the Boisi Center's administrative assistant since 1999. In addition

to being Alan Wolfe's assistant, she serves as office manager, administers the budget and grants, and updates the Center's web site. A graduate of Johnson and Wales University, she also plans the Boisi Center's many events. If you would like to attend these events, particularly the lunch colloquia, please email her at [richarsh@bc.edu](mailto:richarsh@bc.edu).