
The Boisi Center Report

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

VOL. 13 • NO. 2 • MAY 2013

From the Director



Perhaps the Spring 2013 events at the Boisi Center should be called the “poverty semester.” Two different panels were held on this most important of questions, both focusing on why, at a time when American politics is overwhelmed by questions involving morality, the increasing income inequality in this country has not gotten the attention it deserves. Our panel featured Susan Crawford Sullivan, William Julius Wilson, and Eric Gregory in one of the most in-depth discussions of the subject I have ever heard. All the presenters had fascinating things to say but given our focus on religion, Gregory’s efforts to talk in theological terms about the problem of poverty stood out. In addition, I chaired a similar panel organized by Mark Massa, S.J., dean of the School of Theology and Ministry, that addressed the question of how America’s religious communities should address the problem of poverty.

In line with this focus, our annual Prophetic Voices lecture featured America’s leading community organizer, Ernesto Cortés of the Industrial Areas Foundation. Ernie vividly explained what community organizers do, using biblical and religious references in ways that really caught the attention of the audience. This is our big annual event and we were pleased to see how enthusiastic the response was.

One of the more interesting activities in which I was engaged this past semester was a faculty seminar that dealt with ways in which faculty could present their work to larger, often not specialized, audiences. We had a literary agent, an editor at the Boston Globe, and a writer and former magazine editor speak with us. Carlo Rotello co-chaired the group with me and David Quigley, dean of Arts and Sciences, gave his strong support. This effort comes at a time when all facets of publishing are in some sort of crisis. There is also a strong feeling that universities need to be more responsive to society as a whole. This was a somewhat unique effort to fill both needs. We will continue next year.

Our lunches touched on many questions involving the young. Brooke Loughrin, a BC undergrad who was chosen to serve as the U. S. youth delegate at the United Nations, spoke about her experience. In addition, Meira Levinson of the Harvard School of Education talked about the importance of civic engagement on the part of the young. Her experience as both a school teacher and a scholar gave her talk special depth. Although not concentrating on the young, Erik Owens, my invaluable colleague, continued the education theme with a well-attended and quite lively discussion of how Turkish schools are dealing with the problem of religion.

Now it is on to planning for next year’s events, including a major conference on November 13, 2013, that will be part of Boston College’s 150th birthday celebration. It seems like the themes the Boisi Center was established to address continue to pose questions worth examination. We are grateful to Boston College for enabling us to do so.

— Alan Wolfe

Poverty and American National Priorities

On Tuesday, February 26, the Boisi Center convened three distinguished scholars from diverse perspectives to discuss the nature of poverty in the United States and the issue's place (or lack thereof) among American national priorities.

Renowned sociologist William Julius Wilson, the Lewis P. and Linda L. Geyser University Professor at Harvard University, opened the panel with an analysis of the relationship between race, ethnicity and poverty. While affirming President Barack Obama's call (in his 2013 State of the Union Address) for all young people to obtain a good education and solid job skills, Wilson lamented that today's high schools frequently fail to provide these benefits to black and Latino youths. Despite the sizeable gains that racial minorities in the United States have made in education, their high school graduation rates and college matriculation rates are still low. This failure of education—combined with a climate of industry restructuring, globalization, deregulation, de-unionization, and recession—has led to a decline of unskilled, decently paying jobs in America. In response, workers have been forced to reduce hours, take lower paying jobs, or even leave the work force entirely. This trend disproportionately affects blacks and Latinos, Wilson argued.

These occupational trends are deeply connected to residential segregation based on race, ethnicity, and class. Poor neighborhoods are moreover hit especially hard in recessions because of budget cuts and the resulting decline in the quality of public services. Wilson suggested that we ought to consider comprehensive, school-based job-building initiatives to mitigate or even correct these problems.

Susan Crawford Sullivan, associate professor of sociology at the College of the Holy Cross, discussed the role of religion in the lives of the poor, especially single mothers on welfare. Many poor women employ religious narratives

to interpret their suffering and see themselves as working with God to face their daily challenges. Despite high rates of religious belief, most poor women do not attend church regularly. Although churches are often seen as havens for the poor, the women in Sullivan's study explained that they frequently felt stigmatized by and unwanted in religious communities. This disconnect between the churches and the poor is particularly troubling, Sullivan claimed, because religious communities can potentially offer much needed spiritual, emotional, and material support to poor single mothers.

Princeton University theologian Eric Gregory concluded the panel with a powerful theological reflection on American national priorities. While equality does not require economic sameness, he argued, economic inequality often serves as a proxy for political inequality. The covert financial and economic prerequisites of our political process alienate the poor and serve as an intolerable form of systematic inequality. Our institutions and public policy reflect the character of our nation; what we value and what we accept or refuse to tolerate says much about who we are as Americans. Gregory questioned both the priorities of the state and the Christian church today, pointing to unfulfilled promises of freedom and justice. Few politicians today prioritize care for the poor, he argued, and the church is not much better. "Imagine a world," Gregory said, "where poverty was debated with only half the intensity of homosexuality in America and the Catholic Church."

Insofar as markets are structures created by humans, they can be changed by humans. To this end, Gregory closed with a call to replenish our commitment to poverty relief by recalling the deeper history of our interconnectedness. We must break the siren call of narrowly defined economic interest, he said, by bringing the wisdom of the Church back into the public sphere. ■



left to right: Eric Gregory, Susan Crawford Sullivan, William Julius Wilson and Erik Owens

Ernesto Cortés on Prophetic Action

Ernesto Cortés, co-director of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), delivered the Boisi Center's twelfth Annual Prophetic Voices Lecture on Tuesday, March 26, in the Heights Room of Corcoran Commons. Cortés is a nationally recognized community organizer and MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellow who has dedicated his public career to empowering poor and moderate-income communities. In the spirit of the Prophetic Voices Lecture series that has previously featured Miroslav Volf, Robert George, Sister Helen Prejean and Rev. Peter Gomes, among others, Cortés delivered a lively, engaging, and challenging presentation on the role of imagination in prophetic action.

In a display of rhetorical power and intellectual depth, Cortés spoke on topics ranging from community organizing principles to biblical prophetic traditions to theories of power that inform community leaders today. He regaled the audience with stories about the power of ordinary citizens to improve their lives and the lives of others through the pursuit of their collective self-interest. At first glance, he noted, self-interest and the common good appear to be incompatible concerns. While community advocacy is initially motivated by personal concerns, organizers will eventually identify issues that affect people beyond their own families and communities. In this way, the pursuit of self-interest can enhance the common good.

Cortés also emphasized the importance of the IAF's "iron rule": never do for someone what she or he can do for themselves. This rule, which Cortés also identified as the principle of subsidiarity, provides a foundation for promoting intermediate institutions such as broad-based community organizations as agents of political empowerment and societal change. While he emphasized the importance of intermediate institutions, he cautioned that subsidiarity ought not be interpreted as an excuse for larger institutions to neglect the needs of smaller communities in society.



Ernesto Cortés

Cortés's presentation was rich in references to the biblical prophetic tradition and its influence on community organizing. He interpreted the biblical prophetic narratives through the lens of the work of the IAF, emphasizing the importance of building relationships and framing issues as the basis of creating a just society. He also emphasized the significance of anger in the prophetic tradition. This anger, rooted in outrage over injustice, compelled the biblical prophets to critique institutional powers and to pursue change in their societies. These prophets inspire community organizers today by modeling societal engagement rooted in passion for justice.

Finally, Cortés discussed the importance of power and politics in community organizing. Citing IAF founder Saul Alinsky, Cortés argued that there can be no politics without compromise. Although conflict is an inescapable component of the IAF organizing model, Cortés emphasized the importance of building relationships that bridge political differences. Working with those who oppose one's own interest, he argued, is necessary to make political gains. It is through this challenging political process composed of relationship-building, social conflict, and political negotiation that community leaders are able to produce concrete improvements in their quality of life.

During the lecture Cortés abandoned the podium and walked through the aisles of the Heights Room to engage his audience. His presentation inspired vibrant discussion on the role of faith and religion, gender, and electoral politics in community organizing work. ■

The Papacy after Benedict XVI

Less than a day before Pope Benedict XVI formally resigned as Bishop of Rome and head of the global Catholic Church, the Boisi Center co-hosted a major panel discussion of Benedict's legacy and the challenges he left to his successor. Boston College theologians Robert Imbelli, James Bretzke S.J., Mary Ann Hinsdale, I.H.M. and James Weiss shared insights, opinions and historical anecdotes on the forthcoming papal conclave, with Church historian Mark Massa, S.J., dean of BC's School of Theology and Ministry, moderating the spirited conversation.

Fr. Imbelli, a priest of the Catholic archdiocese of New York, began the conversation by examining the strengths and weaknesses of Benedict's papacy. Among the pope's strengths, Imbelli argued, was his loyalty to Vatican II's call for evangelization and his attempt to refocus the Church's social teaching upon Christological grounds. Imbelli also cited Benedict's brilliant writings on the mutually enriching relationship between faith and reason. As for the outgoing pope's weaknesses, Imbelli agreed with the conventional wisdom that the pontiff lacked the strong administrative skills and foresight necessary to manage Vatican affairs and the global church in the wake of the sexual abuse scandals.

Fr. Bretzke, who has studied and worked in many countries in Europe and Asia, examined Benedict's legacy from a cross-cultural perspective. Noting that neither John Paul II nor Benedict XVI were well-travelled prior to their elections, he hoped for a new pope who will be better grounded in a multi-cultural understanding of the Catholic Church. Bretzke also argued that the speculation and introspection that prevail in advance of a papal conclave provide a healthy service to the Church by drawing out many views of what the Church truly needs. Despite his optimism, Bretzke also reminded the audience that the

world should in some sense expect "more of the same"—*semper idem*, in Latin—from the Vatican because major changes are quite rare.

Fr. Weiss, an Episcopal priest, gave a brief history of papal conclaves while highlighting the unprecedented nature of this particular transition. He began his remarks by wondering, "What are the cardinals thinking?" He argued that there is a high level of distrust between the cardinals and the Curia, resulting from a general mismanagement of Vatican affairs during Benedict's papacy. As a result, he argued, the new pope's chief of staff may be as important as the pope himself if administrative reforms are to be effective. Weiss also noted that Benedict's early resignation meant that the cardinals have had more time than any of their predecessors since 1800 to deliberate prior to the conclave. As a result, said Weiss, "We know what they are thinking about, but not what they are thinking about it. No front-runner has emerged."

Sr. Hinsdale called Benedict's resignation a "progressive act," and expressed her hope that his departure will allow a greater voice for women within and outside of the Church hierarchy. She called upon Church leaders to make collegiality a core practice and reminded the audience that the Holy Spirit is working with and through all people. Hinsdale described previous popes as tremendous witnesses to the faith of the Church, but argued that real dialogue is needed with women in the church who do most of the groundwork for and with the faithful.

While none of the panelists (nor the packed audience nor any of the usual Vatican observers!) predicted Cardinal Bergoglio's election as Pope Francis two weeks later, their wisdom and vision gave everyone an excellent framework by which to reflect upon the new pontiff's leadership. ■



left to right: Sr. Mary Ann Hinsdale, I.H.M., Rev. James Weiss, Rev. Mark Massa, S.J., Rev. James Bretzke, S.J. and Rev. Robert Imbelli

From BC to the U.N.

For the first time in the Boisi Center's twelve-year history, on February 6 we hosted an undergraduate speaker at one of our headline events. We were delighted to hear BC junior Brooke Loughrin describe her experience as the first Youth Delegate in the United States' mission to the United Nations.

Appointed in 2012 for a one-year term, Loughrin attends international conferences, connects with young people through social media and commutes to New York City frequently—all while managing her heavy course load as a Presidential Scholar at BC. Loughrin said she has been deeply inspired by her encounters with young people during her travels to India, Iran, and Tajikistan, and is keen to promote youth involvement in international politics. Over fifty percent of the world's population is under the age of thirty, yet youth often have little influence on international decisions that profoundly affect their lives. Through the Youth Delegate program, Loughrin joins representatives from forty countries committed to giving the world's young people a voice at the UN.

During U.N. General Assembly Week in September 2012, Loughrin spoke on panels and attended meetings alongside prominent international leaders including



Brooke Loughrin

Hillary Clinton and Bill Gates. She was even able to address the full General Assembly on behalf of American youth. Although the world's youth face major challenges today—education and employment among them—Loughrin expressed optimism for the future of her generation. She announced that the U.S. Youth Delegate program will continue next year, a sign of the program's success in improving American youths' involvement in UN discourse. She encouraged eligible young people to apply to serve as the youth delegate in future years. ■

Closing the Civic Empowerment Gap

American public schools are charged with educating children so that all are capable of full participation in the economic, political and civic life of our nation. Broadly construed, this is the civic mission of schools, and it encompasses (and requires) the traditional ends of education for literacy and numeracy. Unfortunately, civic education is frequently shunted aside in schools today even as schools continue to put more emphasis on high-stakes testing and evaluation.



Meira Levinson

The result, argues Harvard education professor Meira Levinson in an important new book, *No Citizen Left Behind*, is a profound “civic empowerment” gap that is every bit as profound, shameful, and anti-democratic as the academic achievement gap targeted by the federal No Child Left Behind program.

Levinson spoke at the Boisi Center on February 27 about the root causes of the civic empowerment gap and how a civic education rooted in what she calls “action civics” can turn the situation around. Action civics de-emphasizes (but does not entirely reject) old-school requirements to memorize lists of presidents or facts about Congress, and focuses instead on teaching young people to “do civics and behave as citizens” in their local communities. Drawing upon her years as a middle school teacher in Atlanta and Boston public schools, Levinson described specific civic projects her students undertook and the sense of empowerment they earned from relatively small victories such as gathering signatures on a petition that convinced the city council to repair streetlights or clean up a local park.

Action civics also supports a new way of teaching American history that students in disadvantaged communities can relate to, one that speaks of struggle and oppression as well as uplift and liberty. Levinson argued that American history demonstrates the power of collective action, a profound point that marginalized young people (i.e. individuals) today can take as a call to find common ground, promote the common good, and slowly close the civic empowerment gap that plagues our country. ■

What Is Liberation Theology?

Liberation theology is a significant movement in Christian theology that seeks to understand God through the eyes of the poor and marginalized, yet its contours are often misunderstood by opponents and proponents alike. Roberto Goizueta, the Margaret O'Brien Flatley Professor of Catholic Theology at Boston College, aimed to clarify the tenants and implications of liberation theology during a Boisi Center lunch colloquium on Tuesday, March 12.

Liberation theology, Goizueta explained, is rooted in early Latin American theology, though it was not explicitly articulated until the mid-twentieth century. According to Goizueta, Vatican II and Catholic Social Teaching catalyzed liberation theology in Latin America by clarifying the social mission of the Catholic Church. Indeed, Catholic teaching and liberation theology share some fundamental principles, including the importance of the common good and dignity of the human person. Still, liberation theologians have been criticized by the Vatican's Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) for promoting unorthodox theology and radical social commitments. The movement has also been subject to criticism that the claim of God's preferential love for the poor does not affirm the universality of God's love for all humankind. According to Goizueta, however, these theological claims are compatible: If God's love and grace is free and equitable, then God must make



Roberto Goizueta

a preferential option to protect the poor from oppressive social conditions. Liberation theology, then, calls Christians to accompany poor and marginalized people in the struggle for justice; there is no liberation of the poor without friendship with the poor.

Goizueta also distinguished Latin American liberation theologies from those in the United States. Latin American liberationists emphasize the struggle of the poor; U.S. liberationists emphasize marginalization based on race, culture, and language. Liberation theology can contribute to U.S. public life, Goizueta asserted, by making the preferential option for the poor a necessary component for promoting the common good. ■

Cosmopolitanism and Constitutional Law

On Thursday, April 11, Vlad Perju, director of the Clough Center for Constitutional Democracy and associate professor of law at Boston College, joined us to discuss his recent work on cosmopolitanism and constitutional law. He began by outlining the ways in which globalization has led to some international legal convergences among, for example, bills of rights and approaches to the issue of "open standing." Nations that share the same basic constitutional principles are more likely to interact peaceably with one another, he argued, because they open a door for further exchange of democratic ideas and institutions. This in turn makes it more likely that these nations will incorporate elements of international law in their domestic constitutions.

Drawing upon the theory of cosmopolitanism Immanuel Kant detailed in his famous essay "Perpetual Peace," Perju argued that constitutional convergence can support the creation of a cosmopolitan order. Kant's theory rests upon three propositions: that all nations should have republican constitutions; that republican states are more likely to embrace a non-coercive supranational

federation; and that these states are more likely to behave hospitably towards their neighbors. Since republics share the values of equality and self-government, these states can more peaceably interact, thus creating a dynamic exchange of ideas for domestic constitutions.

In the wide-ranging discussion that followed, audience members queried Perju about the state of international law in American jurisprudence, the future of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's efforts at constitutional reform, and the perceived weaknesses of Kantian cosmopolitanism today. ■



Vlad Perju

Religion and Education in Turkey

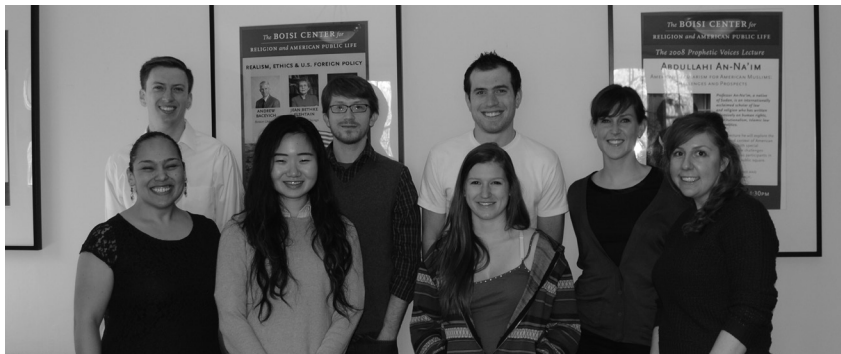
Turkey and the United States provide fascinating points of comparison with regard to the role of religion in public life, and particularly the role of religion in each nation's educational landscape. Drawing upon current research as well as fieldwork from a recent trip to Turkey, Boisi Center associate director Erik Owens spoke about recent educational and constitutional reforms in Turkey on April 17 at the Center's final lunch colloquium of the year.



Erik Owens

Turkey's government was strongly—even stridently—secular for eighty years, but in the last decade Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has championed a series of major reforms to make the state and its schools more accommodating to the religious beliefs and practices of its citizens. Several of these reforms have broadened the influence of Imam Hatip schools, public vocational schools originally created in the 1920s to train religious leaders in state-sanctioned forms of Sunni Islam, but which now feature a broader curriculum focused on religious, moral and civic leadership. All Turkish schools provide civic education and require recitation of an ethno-nationalist pledge of allegiance. But the five percent of Turks (including the Prime Minister) who are Imam Hatip graduates form a cohesive network of citizens who embrace and endorse a religious conception of Turkishness at odds with the previously dominant secularism. This shift toward greater accommodation of religion is occurring as Turkey enjoys a booming economy and increased stature in regional and global affairs, a fact that makes Turkey a key country to watch as its Arab neighbors seek stability amidst revolutions and wars.

A passionate discussion period followed Owens's talk, highlighting the expertise of theologians and political scientists as well as the lived experiences of several Turks, Armenians and Kurds in attendance. ■



Participants in this semester's **Student Symposium on Religion and Politics**. Back row: Conor Kelly, Thomas Greene, Sam Kent, Yael Levin. Front row: Nichole Flores, Soo Cho, JoAnne Kassel, Kate Jackson. Not pictured: Gregoire Catta, Roy Y. Chan, John James Lilos, Sarah Slater.

The BOISI CENTER for
RELIGION and AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

Contact Info

24 Quincy Road
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467

Tel: (617) 552-1860
Fax: (617) 552-1863
Email: publife@bc.edu
Web: www.bc.edu/boisi



Boisi Center Staff

ALAN WOLFE
DIRECTOR

ERIK OWENS
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

SUSAN RICHARD
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

NICHOLE FLORES
GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT

CONOR KELLY
CONFERENCE RESEARCH ASSISTANT

KEVIN DURAZO
JOANNA KASSEL
MARY POPEO
SARAH SLATER
UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANTS



Advisory Board

NANCY TATOM AMMERMAN
BOSTON UNIVERSITY

MARY JO BANE
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ANNA GREENBERG
GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH

REV. J. BRYAN HEHIR
HARVARD UNIVERSITY;
ARCHDIOCESE OF BOSTON

REV. J. DONALD MONAN, S.J.
BOSTON COLLEGE

OURIDA MOSTEFAI
BOSTON COLLEGE

CULLEN MURPHY
VANITY FAIR MAGAZINE

KAY L. SCHLOZMAN
BOSTON COLLEGE

THE BOISI CENTER FOR RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

Boston College
140 Commonwealth Avenue
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467
U.S.A.

non-profit org.
u.s. postage
paid
boston, ma
permit 55294

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Follow us on Facebook (facebook.com/boisicenter) and Twitter ([@boisi_center](https://twitter.com/boisi_center)) to stay abreast of Boisi Center news and events. For complete information and resources on all our events, including audio and video recordings, transcripts, interviews, photos, bibliographies and more, visit our website, www.bc.edu/boisi.

Staff Updates

Undergraduate research assistant (RA) **Kevin Durazo** will graduate in May with a B.A. in Theology and Philosophy. After working at the Boisi Center through the summer, he will move to New Haven, Connecticut, to pursue a Master of Arts in Religion (ethics concentration) at Yale Divinity School.

Graduate RA **Nichole Flores** is completing her dissertation on aesthetics and justice as a Margaret O'Brien Flatley Fellow in the Theology Department at BC. She plans to defend her dissertation during the next academic year. In August she will join the theology faculty at Saint Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire.

Undergraduate RA **JoAnne Kassel** will graduate in May with a B.A. in Political Science and minors in Philosophy and International Studies. She will begin the summer by spending a month in Peru to film a documentary on the country's mining conflict. In July she will travel to Vietnam to teach English for the remainder of 2013.

Associate director **Erik Owens** recently published an article on Christian realism and Barack Obama's foreign policy in the *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*; this

summer he will complete articles on the concept of the common good in political theology, and on church and state in educational philosophy. A newly appointed member of the American Academy of Religion's Committee on the Public Understanding of Religion, he will chair a jury in May that will award the AAR's annual prizes for best in-depth newswriting on religion. In June he will join a group of international relations scholars for a study trip to Israel.

Undergraduate RA **Mary Popeo** is a rising senior, majoring in International Studies. She will continue her work at the Boisi Center next academic year. This summer she plans to travel to Japan for a research project and is hoping to intern at a governmental or non-profit organization.

Undergraduate RA **Sarah Slater** will graduate in May with a B.A. in History and minor in Hispanic Studies. She plans to study Portuguese this summer in preparation for her Fulbright-funded program to teach and study in Brazil starting in March 2014.