

New York Times
Magazine
contributor and
Foreign Policy
columnist

James Traub
focused his
comments on
the conflict in
Darfur, which
Wolfe argued
the West was
too hasty to call
“genocide.” On
the ground,
Traub said,
the Darfur
conflict clearly
combined civil

war and genocide, and a purely local and political response
would have been insufficient to stop the massacres.

Traub agreed that the world’s response to Darfur has
been a failure, but not because of the moral hyperbole
Wolfe criticized. Rather, the existing lack of international
support for large-scale military intervention was bolstered
by rhetoric from Sudan’s African neighbors that cast the
conflict as nothing more than a regional political dispute.

Martha Minow, Dean of Harvard Law School and author
of several books on post-conflict reconciliation, applauded
Wolfe’s analysis of political evil but questioned

9/11 REFLECTIONS

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks, the Boisi Center launched a special web-based project of reflection and remembrance for the BC community entitled 9/11 Reflections. Nearly 250 faculty, students, staff and alumni of the university contributed brief responses to the question, "What have you learned since 9/11?" The submissions are as diverse and profound as their authors, and we invite you to browse

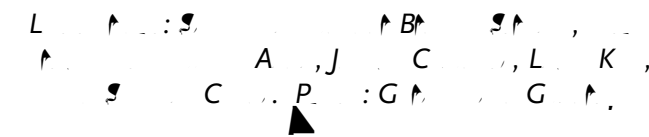
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Miroslav Volf, the Henry B. Wright Professor of Systemic Theology at Yale Divinity School and founding director of Yale Center for Faith and Culture, delivered the Boisi Center's 11th annual Prophetic Voices Lecture on March 14 to an eager audience on the topic of "Religious Exclusivism and Pluralism as a Political Project."

Political pluralism, Volf argued, exists when institutions protect the political rights of all people, regardless of their beliefs. Its converse is political exclusivism, in which an overarching vision of life (such as Saudi Wahhabi Islam or Soviet communism) is enshrined in political institutions and used to punish or repress those who do not share it. Religious pluralism is the theological claim that many religions can provide access to the divine along with effective avenues for human flourishing. It is opposed to religious exclusivism, whose adherents Volf described in three categories: "strong truth exclusivists" who view their faith as the only true faith; "weak truth exclusivists" who believe that their faith merely contains a more complete truth than others; and "salvation exclusivists" who believe that their faith alone can provide human flourishing and save souls.

Today, Volf said, religious faiths are primarily exclusivist and often politically assertive—and despite predictions to the contrary, they are growing. At the same time, globalization encourages interdependence and homogeneity,

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This year the Boisi Center was pleased to continue its Symposia on Religion and Politics, facilitated by Ph.D. candidate in political science Brenna R. Strauss. Composed of two groups—one for undergraduate and graduate students and one for BC faculty, alumni and staff—the symposia are an opportunity to discuss primary sources at the crossroads of American religion and politics.

This year the theme of both symposia was: Is God-talk a requirement in American politics? Participants discussed speeches from the founding to those of current presidential candidates, including speeches by George Washington, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama.

In two sessions over lunch in the fall, students wrestled with the role religious rhetoric may play in promoting civic virtue, and whether the United States can be said to have a civil religion. In the first session of the spring semester, led by STM graduate student Grégoire Catta, students turned more directly to the question of how politicians might reconcile their religious beliefs with their political responsibilities in a democracy. Reading FDR’s “Commonwealth Club Address” and Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society” speech, students next discussed what role the federal government ought to play in the lives of individuals. In the final session, senior Séamus Coffey asked students about the role of religious rhetoric in the campaigns and to reflect on what is at stake for women in the contraception debate.

Meeting over the same texts over breakfast, the faculty/staff/alumni conversation took a different direction. In the first session, Gregory Kalscheur and Annette McDermott contrasted the apparent deism of George Washington with John Adams’ emphasis on the sinful character of human

beings and God as the “Redeemer of the World.” In the second session, led by Bill Donovan, the conversation lingered on the meaning of FDR’s reference to the “Christian ideal” in his May 1941 speech “Proclaiming an Unlimited National Emergency.” Syed Khan led the following discussion, in which participants discussed ways in which the Catholic tradition is reflected in the speeches of Mario Cuomo and John F. Kennedy. The group plans to meet at least two more times this spring and summer to discuss federalism and public morality as well as speeches by the 2012 presidential candidates. ■

Interested in participating next year? We’ll post details on our web site (bc.edu/boisi) in early September, or you can email nichole.flores@bc.edu.

Selected topics and readings from this year’s symposia

The Founding and Nation-Building

- Thanksgiving Sermon, John Witherspoon (ca. 1783)
- First Inaugural, George Washington (1789)
- Farewell Address, George Washington (1796)
- Proclamation of Day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer, John Adams (1798)

War and National Crisis

- Second Inaugural, Abraham Lincoln (1865)
- Proclaiming an Unlimited National Emergency, Franklin Roosevelt (1941)
- War Message to Congress, Franklin Roosevelt (1941)
- First Inaugural, Dwight Eisenhower (1953)
- “Evil Empire” Speech, Ronald Reagan (1983)
- State of the Union (“Axis of Evil” Speech), George W. Bush (2002)

Religion and the Politician

- Address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, John F. Kennedy (1960)
- Religious Belief, Public Morality, Mario Cuomo (1984)
- Call to Renewal, Barack Obama (2006)
- Faith in America, Mitt Romney (2007)

Election 2012 and the Contraception Debate

- Notre Dame Commencement, Barack Obama (2009)
- Contraception Policy Speech, Barack Obama (2012)
- Why I Vetted the Contraception Bill, Mitt Romney (2005)
- Remarks at CPAC, Mitt Romney (2012)
- Charge to Revive the Role of Faith in the Public Square, Rick Santorum (2010)
- Missouri Victory Speech, Rick Santorum (2012)

A M — , C A E A E

On September 22 University of Pennsylvania Law Professor David Skeel spoke at the Boisi Center about the life and work of William Stuntz, a close friend and long-time collaborator who passed away on March 20, 2011 after a battle with cancer. Stuntz was a distinguished and prolific law professor at Harvard whose humane sensibility and incisive analytic skills yielded innovative contributions to criminal law as well as Christian legal theory.

Stuntz is perhaps best known for his argument, expressed in the 2001 article “Pathological Politics of Criminal Law,” that criminal law is like a one-way ratchet that constantly tightens its grip with more and more crimes to enforce. He called into question the American legal system’s tendency to value procedural rights over substantive ones, pointing to its problematic obsession with privacy and its failure to address more pressing issues like the prevention of police coercion and violence. Skeel explained how Stuntz nearly single-handedly brought together analysis of criminal procedure and substantive criminal law, which were

previously treated as entirely separate domains (the one focused upon judicial opinions, the other on the philosophy of punishment).

Stuntz’s influence on Christian legal theory was equally as profound, said Skeel. Until the Harvard Law Review published Stuntz’s essay on the topic in 2003, no article from a discernibly Christian perspective had ever been featured in a prominent law review. In this breakthrough article, Stuntz remained critical of legal moralism, arguing that true Christian legal theory should be about humility.

Skeel closed his remarks by recounting how his friend’s faith permeated every aspect of life. Stuntz saw God in everyone else and treated them better than himself, said Skeel. A 2008 cancer diagnosis only strengthened his faith commitment, enabling him to view the pain as “a form of discipline from God.” Skeel’s heartfelt tribute to Stuntz’s rigorous intellect and devout Christian values moved many in the room to tears as it lifted up the memory of this exceptional man. ■

C A E A E — A

On November 16, Wheaton College English Professor Alan Jacobs delivered a lecture on the role that Western poets and novelists have had in shaping the faith of modern American Christians. Virtually absent until the middle of the twentieth century, this phenomenon emerged as individuals left cold by pastors, theologians, and lifeless liturgies sought a different kind of religious experience. While Jacobs regards the phenomenon as a positive thing for the future of Christianity, he notes that local churches need to think in constructive and creative ways about how to ease the transition of individuals who come to worshipping communities as the result of a literary experience.

Jacobs first took notice of the phenomenon during Fredrick Buechner’s visit to Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Jacobs was surprised to hear so many of Buechner’s fans tell the author, “I’m a Christian because of your books.” Recognizing this statement of faith as historically uncommon, he began searching for its origin, eventually tracing it to Fyodor Dostoyevsky, a writer whose prophetic witness was not contingent on his membership with the Church. The phenomenon evolved throughout the 20th century and flourished in the work of Simone Weil, C.S. Lewis and William Hale White. These and others whose diverse spiritual lives were inspired by literature (and who in turn inspired the spiritual lives of others) demonstrate, Jacobs argued, the modern desire to receive spiritual instruction indirectly (without being told we’re



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receiving it), and to embrace a religious experience without feeling vulnerable.

In a brief response to Jacob’s lecture, BC English Professor Judith Wilt argued that historical novels, science fiction, and detective stories are three additional genres of literature that sustain faith for many, including herself. Jacobs agreed, noting that these genres have great power because they give the least impression that they’re working on us in any spiritual or religious way. Their engaging conversation was quickly joined by members of the audience, who shared their own stories of spiritual engagement with literature, to the benefit of all. ■



A A D E A AB

On September 27 we invited reporter and photojournalist Scott Peterson, Istanbul Bureau Chief for the Christian Science Monitor, to discuss the



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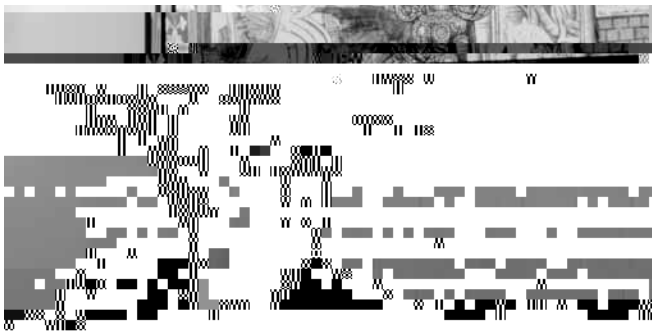




Boisi Center visiting scholar **Gregor Scherzinger** spoke on December 1 about the “minaret controversy” in his native Switzerland. Two years earlier, nearly 60% of Swiss voters had approved a national ban on the construction of new minarets in the country. Catholic and Protestant Church leaders voiced their disapproval, but often with disturbing ambivalence, defending religious freedom for Muslims while affirming the same Islamophobic stereotypes that referendum supporters employed. Since then, Scherzinger argued, religious groups have reflected on their complicity and some have re-committed themselves to interfaith support. ■



To discuss the hotly contested 2012 Republican presidential primaries, the Boisi Center invited Harvard historian **Jill Lepore** (right, above) and writer **Rebecca Traister** (left, above) to talk with Alan Wolfe at an April 12 panel. Their wide-ranging conversation pondered the impact of what Lepore called “the politics of righteousness,” mused upon the political impact of Mitt Romney’s Mormonism and Rick Santorum’s Catholicism, and predicted that the general election is likely to serve as a national referendum on the principle that government cannot be trusted to act effectively on behalf of its citizens. ■



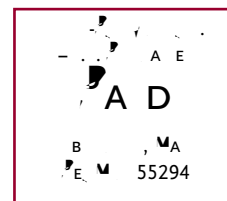
At a March 1 lunch colloquium at the Boisi Center, theologian **Christian Polke** of Hamburg University discussed the use of political power in the quest for religious meaning. Drawing upon comparative cultural theories to understand the revolutionary religious developments of the axial age—an era spanning the lives and religious movements inspired by Socrates, Sidhartha Gautama (the Buddha) and Confucius, among many others—Polke argued that early models of social and political thought continue to shape our understanding of political and religious diversity today. ■



Our final event of the year featured Boston College political science professor **Kathleen Bailey**, who spoke about the unique opportunities and challenges faced by BC’s Islamic Civilization and Societies Program. A large grant in 2009 from the U.S. Department of Education has helped to finance instruction in several additional languages, travel and research stipends for undergraduates, and a lecture series to enhance the intellectual community. As the program looks to build on its success, new sources of funding are needed to expand what has become a rigorous and well-regarded interdisciplinary undergraduate major. ■

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