



Fall 2013 was an especially gratifying time for us here at the Boisi Center.

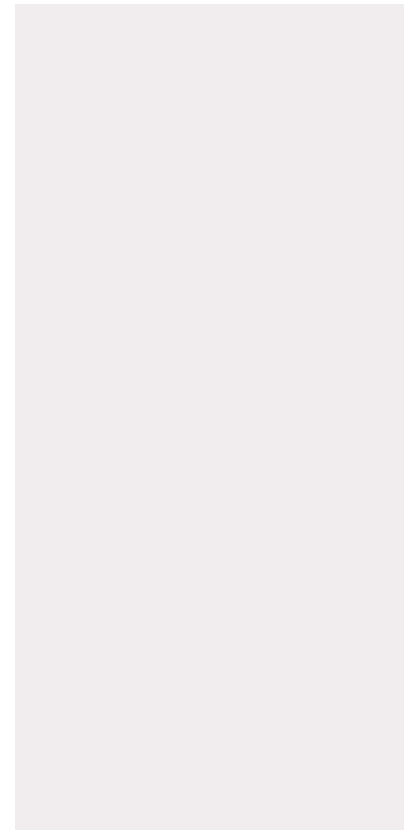
Most importantly,

we held a major conference in support of the sesquicentennial celebrations at Boston College, on the theme of religious diversity and the common good. Outstanding scholars such as Reza Aslan, Laurie Patton, Randall Kennedy, Jonathan Sarna, and Marie Grifth appeared during the day-long event, which featured a keynote address by E.J. Dionne. The evening session, which focused on institutions that work for the common good in the Boston area, brought together the leaders of the Boston public schools, Boston Public Library, the Islamic Center of Boston, Harvard's Memorial Church, and the Health and Social Services division of the Catholic Archdiocese. We were thrilled to be assigned such an important event in BC's history, and to do our part to celebrate the century-and-a-half accomplishments of this institution.

Our "regular" events were also terrific this semester. We were especially pleased to host Mary McAleese, the former president of Ireland, as well as her husband Martin. Their moving account of the Irish peace process was fascinating from beginning to end. (I encourage everyone to read the transcript or listen to their presentations, which are available on our web site.) Other lunch talks were given

by Drew Christiansen, S.J., who has been working on the tradition of nonviolence in Catholic social teaching; and Jonathan Trejo-Mathys, who is working on a book extending the Kantian and Habermasian traditions in moral philosophy to the international community.

During the term I was also able to finish, and send to my publisher (Beacon Press), a book on which I have been working for the last three or four years. Now entitled



On November 13 the Boisi Center organized the university's national academic event of its sesquicentennial celebration, on the theme of Religious Diversity and the Common Good. The daytime portion of the conference, open to the public and well-attended by an audience that filled the Heights Room throughout the day, featured thirteen distinguished scholars from the fields of history, sociology, law, government, theology and religious studies. They were divided into two panels, entitled "Historical Trajectories 1863-2013" and "Contemporary Issues and Approaches," followed by a keynote address by journalist and professor E.J. Dionne. A private dinner for religious, civic and academic leaders closed with a panel discussion on "Working for the Common Good in Boston" that featured diverse leaders of influential local organizations. A summary of each session follows here; speaker biographies and complete transcripts, along with photographs and audio and video recordings of the entire event, are available at [bc.edu/boisi-rdcg](http://bc.edu/boisi-rdcg).

Boisi Center associate director Erik Owens opened the conference with introductory remarks on the fundamental tension between unity and diversity, and the problem of the common good it reveals. "Is there such a thing as the common good?" he asked. "In what might it consist, when we disagree on so many things about what is true and good, and what it takes for individuals and communities to flourish?" Though religions and politics have provided answers to those questions for thousands of years, the focus that day was to assess how we have done and what we have learned in the past 150 years—the Boston College era—and where we might be headed.

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alent in situations where one religious tradition cannot meet its needs alone and requires the assistance of another. Nancy Ammerman affirmed the value of similar small-scale interactions between people of different faiths, stressing that relationships formed in pursuit of one or more mutually held goods is essential to bridging diversity, while cautioning that this process cannot operate within an “enclave mentality.” As a concrete example, Reza Aslan touted the success of Interfaith Youth Core’s commitment to shared community action, suggesting that the experience of cooperation would be more fruitful than dialogue alone, and he referenced the ways in which public challenges to one religion’s freedoms—like the legislative attempts to ban Sharia law—often garner the support of other religious groups. Randall Kennedy added a helpful voice of realism to the conversation, questioning excessively optimistic notions of the common good that ignore its sometimes ideological uses by majorities to oppress minorities and insisting on the need for some boundaries to diversity in the name of the common good. Audience questions dealt with intentionality in interreligious dialogue and how schools could provide non-academic avenues for bridging religious diversity.

Echoing themes from the second panel,

E. J. Dionne argued in his keynote that collective action for the common good is the best way to connect across religious differences. If religious adherents should be able to contribute to public life in a diverse society, he said, the fact of pluralism imposes dual obligations upon them: to tolerate the rights of others to express their beliefs in public, and to explain one’s own convictions in an accessible, rather than parochial, fashion. Dionne cited the success of “civil rights Christianity,” which brought faith commitments to the public square, as proof that such engagement need neither obliterate distinctiveness nor devolve into relativism. He expressed a fear, however, that exclusively political engagement might

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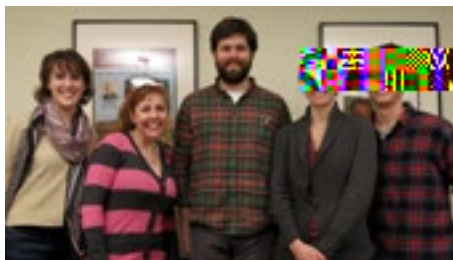
Former Irish President Mary McAleese spoke to a packed room at the Boise Center on October 29 about her decades of peace and reconciliation work as well as her historic fourteen-year presidency, which ended in 2011. Irish presidents are heads of state, not government, a fact that allowed McAleese to embrace the pastoral dimension of the position. She used her office to promote respect for the claims, and wounds, of Irish Protestants



**MANDELA: LONG WALK TO FREEDOM**

The fourth annual Boisi Center Symposium on Religion and Politics is examining religious diversity and the common good this year, in conjunction with the November 13 sesquicentennial conference (see pp. 2–3). A group of graduate and undergraduate students meet each month

at the Center to discuss the virtues and challenges of religious diversity in a liberal society. Discussions center around each session's readings—comprised of primary texts, essays, and articles—and also incorporate the expertise and knowledge of the students in the room.



Readings have thus far examined historical and contemporary religious demographics as well as the tradition of free exercise of religion in America. Next semester we will examine religious freedom and tolerance from a comparative theological perspective, look at different approaches to religious freedom.

Participants in the Boisi Center's 2013-2014 Student Symposium on Religion and Politics. Pictured are graduate students Yael Hungerford, Kate Jackson, Chris Conway, Stephanie Coriglino, and Cooper McCullough (l to r). Not pictured are undergraduates Catherine Larrabee, Ben Miyamoto, Catherine Putko, and John Wiley.

Nonviolent Campaigning for Nuclear Disarmament  
Joseph Gerson, American Friends Service Committee