

Friends:

It's been a busy and exciting spring here at the Boisi Center. We've been energetically engaged sponsoring programs and speakers in the midst of the "winter that wouldn't go away"

(and spring is still just out of reach). But the energy generated by both our speakers and our audiences have kept the chill out of the air.

Our two faculty seminars – one focused on "What Does Citizenship Mean Today?" and the other focused on prophetic theologian and writer Thomas Merton – brought together faculty from various departments (political science, African American and African diaspora studies, history, creative writing, philosophy and theology) and from various schools within Boston College (the Law School, the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences). The lively conversations they generated over lunch (the "Citizenship" seminar) and dinner (the "Merton" seminar) allowed faculty to exchange ideas with colleagues they seldom have an opportunity to listen to (and in our best moments, debate with), breaking through the kinds of silos academia is famous for sponsoring these days. Both faculty seminars have thus proven exciting and engaging on a number of levels, and the Boisi Center will continue to sponsor inter-disciplinary faculty seminars next year.

Our lecture series brought in a range of interesting and provocative scholars: Candida Moss, from the University of Birmingham in the UK, inaugurated our annual Wolfe Lecture (named, of course,

Mara Willard, assistant professor of religious studies at the University of Oklahoma, delivered a luncheon colloquium at the Boisi Center on the topic of “Catholic Afterlives.” Willard is currently a visiting scholar at the Boisi Center, where she has been advancing her research on the so-called “Crisis in the Church” of 2002. The latter is a book project that considers how initiatives for ecclesial reform in response to the clergy sex abuse scandal were conditioned by the practices and cultural shifts of post-war Catholicism. Her March 27 lecture, which served as a forum for scholars to deliberate the paradigmatic prospects and challenges of her scholarly enterprise, addressed one principal query: What cultural identities, social affiliations, and aesthetic preferences persist among Catholics who leave the Church?

Willard began by foregrounding the theological origins of her study as well as defining terminologies related to her project. One such origin is the outdated framework in the study of religion. Sociologists and anthropologists have customarily evaluated the growing body

of Catholics that no longer claim a connection to the Roman Catholic Church through a lens of “institutional loss.” This understanding, Willard stressed, neglects post-affiliative roles (e.g., “alumni” and “veteran”) and evokes “Catholic afterlives.” Another origin is the post-Vatican II biblical encyclicals on birth control. However, Willard dates her personal interest to the outbreak of the Boston clerical sex abuse crisis of 2002.

Willard then outlined her research methodologies for her book project on “Catholic afterlives.” She intends to explore not just the reasons for disaffiliation, but also what she calls “gifts and sorrows of Catholic afterlives.”

These include pilgrimage, the arts, community service, and academic scholarship—all practices and identities of those who had been formed as Catholics.

During the question-and-answer session, participants raised some issues for Willard to consider in her book project. Some referred to the “stickiness” of the Catholic faith. Others highlighted that departure from the Catholic faith does not necessarily indicate hostility, but could also reflect a lack of spiritual nourishment. Others urged Willard to consider the behavior of “after-lifers” as transformed or at variance from Catholicism versus as persistently Catholic activities, while yet others stressed the salience of gender, class and sexuality as confounding variables for “after-lifer” aesthetics.

More information, recommended reading, 8.7 (r)

2017-18



For the last event of the 2017-18 academic year, the Boisi Center welcomed Lisa Sowle Cahill (Boston College), Massimo Faggioli (Villanova University) Rev. J. Bryan Hehir (Harvard University), and Nancy Pineda-Madrid (Boston College), for a panel discussion on the state of the papacy and Pope Francis's relationship with the American Catholic Church. Guided by questions posed by director Mark Massa, S.J. and members of the audience, the panelists discussed the successes and shortcomings of Pope Francis's papacy, how the Vatican has functioned since his election, and questions about gender and the role of women in the Catholic Church. Early in the discussion, Hehir proposed three characteristics of an effective pope. He maintained that he must be an excellent pastor, a solid administrator, and a smart diplomat. Accordingly, Hehir praised Pope Francis for largely succeeding in these three categories. He said that Pope Francis's ability to connect with Catholics worldwide demonstrates a "magnetic quality about him." Most important, Francis has appointed professionals to advise him on financial and economic questions, having recognized that this is an area

his papacy needs external support. Hehir also commended Pope Francis for travelling to a range of countries around the world and for lifting up the lives of the people he interacts with.

Furthermore, Cahill and Pineda-Madrid explained how Francis' use of

Starting in fall 2017, Boisi Center

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