





**T**he Boise Center's first event of the academic year 2010-2011 brought three distinguished panelists—David Hollenbach, S.J., Mahmood Mamdani, and Alan Wolfe—together before a

pluralism," an acceptance that different forms of government were appropriate to different contexts.

Second, the encounter with Hebraic sources upended the traditional view that mandatory redistribution of wealth is anathema to a healthy republic. Studyingndedst3S0(h)20(e)20(a)20(l)20

# student symposium

This fall the Boisi Center launched its inaugural Student Symposium on Religion and Politics. Composed of a select group of undergraduate and graduate students, this non-credit reading group provides an opportunity to explore important and enduring questions about the relationship between religion and politics in America. This year, facilitated by Boisi Center graduate research assistant (and Ph.D. candidate in political theory) Brenna McMahon, the discussion is framed around the question: *How American?*

During the fall 2010 semester, symposium participants met three times over lunch to discuss readings from the founding, civil war, and civil rights eras of American history. At the first session symposium participants considered Thomas Jefferson's understanding of the purpose of government (as expressed in the Declaration of Independence, among other documents) and James Madison's views on religious freedom (in "The Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments"). During the second session, led by Soo Jin Cho (A&S '13), the group examined the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark 1879 opinion (in *Reynolds v. United States*) on the "good order" of a society and the extent to which marriage—polygamous or not—is within the purview of government to control.

In the third and final session of the semester, the group read speeches by Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy as well as a selection from Abraham Joshua Heschel's "Religion in a Free Society." Led by Emily McCormick (A&S '11), the participants explored the tension between separation of church and state and the role of religion in calls to justice. Participants also asked whether one needs to be seen as religious in order to be president of the United States, and what the content of that religion need be. Next semester the participants of the symposium will explore evangelicalism in America and current issues such as Islam in America, marriage, and religion in public schools.

In light of the strong level of interest we received in the symposium from students and non-students alike, this spring the Boisi Center will host a concurrent symposium on the same themes for interested faculty, staff, and alumni. This group will meet over breakfast on five Friday mornings from 8:30-9:30 at the Boisi Center. The application deadline for this new symposium is January 20. For more information, including readings from the Fall semester, please visit [bc.edu/boisi](http://bc.edu/boisi) or contact Brenna McMahon at [mcmahobe@bc.edu](mailto:mcmahobe@bc.edu). ■



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# damon linker's religious test

“Our saints will not be statesmen,” began Damon Linker, “And our statesmen will not be saints.” This provocative and perhaps dispiriting claim underlay Linker’s remarks at our November 11 “Author Meets Critics” panel as well as his new book, entitled *Religion in the Public Square* (W.W. Norton, 2010). Linker is a contributing editor (and frequent blogger on religion, culture and politics) at *The New Republic* and a senior writing fellow in the Center for Critical Writing at the University of Pennsylvania. He was joined by two critical readers of his book, Patrick Deneen from Georgetown University and Mark Silk of Trinity College in Connecticut. Erik Owens moderated the conversation.

Linker’s book title refers to the phrase in Article VI of the U.S. Constitution, “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” In his opening remarks, Linker embraced the constitutional ban on formal religious tests, which he said means that no citizen must belong to any particular religious group or hold any particular religious beliefs in order to be eligible for office and also that no person can be excluded from higher office for the same reasons. The constitutional ban, he said, “is a lynchpin, along with the First Amendment, of religious freedom in our country.”

Still, Linker argued, the religious beliefs of our political leaders are important to voters because they impact the leaders’ decisions and decision-making processes. As a



result, an *im* religious test properly exists in politics, and Linker’s goal is to shape its contours by explaining how and why religious beliefs matter in a pluralistic democracy. His book offers six “political commandments” about religion and politics that he believes responsible elected officials should uphold (and responsible voters should seek in their candidates). They include admonitions to embrace religious freedom for all, put the Constitution above other authorities, honor scientific knowledge, be humble about knowing God’s will, disclaim consensus on sexual issues, and reject intolerance couched in radical atheism.

Critic Patrick Deneen, associate professor of government and the Markos and Eleni Tsakopoulos-Kounalakis Professor of Hellenic Studies at Georgetown, welcomed the call to take the religious beliefs of our leaders seriously. But he argued that Linker’s political commandments would necessarily apply to all citizens, not just candidates or elected leaders, and would therefore reduce the religious freedom he claimed to seek. Focusing his remarks on Linker’s conception of liberal society, Deneen bemoaned the exclusion of religious conservatives from the center of politics at a time when their values of community, fidelity and faith are needed to counteract the widespread moral indifference of political liberals.

Mark Silk, professor of religion in public life and director of the Greenberg Center for Religion in Public Life at Trinity College, also supported the premise that voters should question candidates’ religious beliefs. He worried, though, how the political commandments would be employed in practice and whether the exercise would be fruitful for political discourse.

Linker responded to both critics by clarifying his earlier portrait of liberal society and describing in more depth the contexts in which his own religious test should be employed. Audience members leavened the discussion with a number of excellent questions before time drew the lively discussion to a close. ■



**T**hough the Presidential Succession Act—the law, last revised by Congress in 1947, which delineates the order of accession if the President is killed or incapacitated while in office—is rarely a



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## spring 2011 events

### **Conference:**

#### **Toleration and Freedom: The U.S. Experience in Context**

March 25, 2011, 9am-5pm

Abdullah An-Na'im, Noah Feldman, David Hall, David Hollinger, Benjamin Kaplan, Stuart Schwartz, Susanne Sreedhar, and Jay Wexler.

Location: Boston University Photonics Center Colloquium Room, 8 St. Mary's Street, 9th Floor. Co-sponsored by the BU Institute for Philosophy and Religion.

### **Panel:**

#### **Women and the State of American Feminism**

### **Lunch Colloquia:**

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#### **Climate Change and Christian Ethics**

Willis Jenkins, / /  
February 3, 2011

#### **The Limits of International Human Rights Law in the U.S. Constitution**

Hiroshi Nakazato, //  
February 16, 2011

#### **The Legal and Religious Status of Women in Nigeria**

Hauwa Ibrahim, /  
March 23, 2011

#### **New Imaging Technologies at the End of Life: Promises and Ethical Challenges**

Andrea Vicini, S.J., //  
March 30, 2011

#### **The Risk of Civil Society: Voluntary Associations and Political Stability in Ancient and Modern Thought**

Yonder Gillihan, //  
April 14, 2011

#### **Last Best Hope: International Lives of the U.S. Civil War**

David Quigley, //  
April 28, 2011

*Other events to be announced ...*