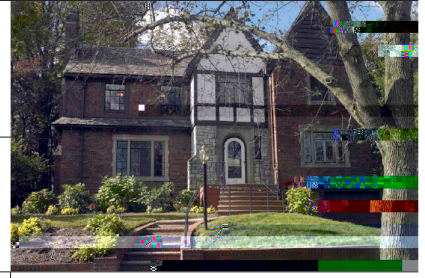


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# boisi center report



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from the director



ford, Mark and I launched an inter-institutional faculty seminar that met once a month, composed of faculty from both BC and Trinity College Hartford. We read widely and engaged each other on texts as diverse as the lyrics of some of Leonard Cohen's famous songs of the sixties and seventies (which turned out to be full of religious symbols and tropes), articles which compared church/state separation in Ireland and the U.S., belle hooks' reflections on teaching as a transgressive activity, and two chapters from Timothy Morton's wonderfully provocative *Hyperobjects: or, Life After the Screen*. The interchanges were rich and the "sides" that emerged during lively conversations had little or nothing to do with institutional affiliation (a happy realization). The "Marks Brothers" (as one participant referred to Mark Silk and myself) thoroughly enjoyed the conversations, and intend to continue the shared conversations next year.

Lastly, and by no means least in terms of time and energy exerted to get it on the ground, the Boisi Center initiated a new minor in the Morrissey College, called (unsurprisingly) "Religion and Public Life." Culling the names of talented freshmen and sophomores from colleagues teaching core theology and philosophy courses, students were individually invited into a six course minor, the required course for which is taught every spring semester by yours truly. We have, to date, seventeen minors, with three graduating seniors (off to Dartmouth, BC Law, and Officers' Training School at Fort Bragg). Each student's minor is worked out individually with the director, so each student

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**U.S.-VATICAN RELATIONS: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE FROM REAGAN TO BIDEN**

A series of events on U.S.-Vatican relations

The Boise Center's spring events commenced with a panel entitled, "U.S.-Vati-



On Thursday, March 4, the Center hosted an all-star panel of featuring E.J. Dionne (Brookings Institution), Massimo Faggioli (Villanova University), Bishop Robert McElroy (Diocese of San Diego), and Amy Uelmen (Georgetown Law) to offer “Three Pieces of Advice to President Biden from Catholics in the Public Square.”

Mark Massa, S.J., director of the Boisi Center, moderated the discussion and led by asking the panelists to offer their three pieces of advice. Dionne led by clarifying that Catholics who look at the president are doing so not as Catholics but as citizens. In that capacity, they are asking of him to focus on the virus, the economy, and taking care of jobs, education, and healthcare—a focus on real issues as opposed to culture wars, which would benefit the country and the American church. He continued by encouraging Biden to recast the conversation on family, which, understood through the Catholic lens, can influence much by way of social justice; to focus, with Pope Francis, on global poverty, climate change, human rights, and immigration; and to move toward more faith-based partnerships.

Faggioli encouraged Biden to be open to the U.S. bishops, challenging the minority of ideologues in the U.S. church and among the ranks of the bishops. Additionally, America should have something like a Jubilee, signaling human fraternity in line with Francis’s teachings, to address those things that cannot be met by policies. Finally, the church and the country should follow a “synodal path,” in which the president assures them his administration is not a reversal of fortunes, but will be about real healing.

Next, McElroy gave his advice, which

was, first, that Biden should reclaim patriotism from the “tribal mantra” of “America first.” Our aspirations are what constitute our patriotism, and the elements of that patriotism resonate with Catholic social teaching. Second, he urged Biden to remember that the fundamental moral challenge for a Catholic public official is not to align completely with Catholic teaching, but rather to use an authentically informed conscience to guide their decisions. And finally, he urged Biden to invite

ed five distinct moments in Hartford Seminary's history that explain how they have reached where they are: 1) From its beginning, Hartford Seminary held a traditional Protestant missionary perspective when teaching about Islam; 2) they then discovered a dialogue with Islam; 3) then they taught Islam and Islamic studies by and with Muslims; 4) they turned to the professional training of spiritual caregivers for Muslims; and 5) then the professional training of spiritual caregivers as Muslims. These shifts, he said, led to an interest in

Abdullah also noted how Muslims have internalized racism. He recognizes that many of the masjids are ethnically centered. Because the masjid helps assimilate new immigrants, the ethnic homogeneity is understandable. However, the problem is that it can become a place to “hide” from the rest of American society—an immigrant society, no less. Beyond this, he also sees cultural limitations in the running of masjids. Many imams do not know how to transition from masjids in their own country to the nonprofit form they take in the U.S., which would provide them greater benefits.

Mir added that there is still an ongoing lack of Islamic literacy in the U.S., giving as examples the times she has been questioned about her ordination status or gender. She does acknowledge, though, that this is all rapidly changing. She said that the further facilitation of this shift requires a focus on art, music, and literature because, through these channels, Muslims and non-Muslims

begin to expand their worldviews—lived religion is influential.

Grafton reflected on Mir’s comments, arguing that, while the U.S. has made advances, the country is still led by Christian-centric structures. Even with chaplains in the military, they are asked about ordination and denomination or the M.Div., which are Christian matters not relevant to either Jews or Muslims. This discomfort will continue, Grafton added, until the system begins to reflect religious diversity, which requires getting persons of different

religious affiliations into positions of leadership. He then returned to third spaces. He said that when the mosque (or church or synagogue) is not doing what the faithful need it to do, they will make their own space or find their own places or people to grapple with those questions and struggles and act. COVID has allowed those spaces to take off—Zoom and social media have normalized the gathering of new groups. Though DeLong-Bas warned that when that access is unavailable to certain communities, they can become even further marginalized.

of the Israeli Embassy to avoid this topic so as not to impact America’s support of Israel. However, Heschel was firm in his conviction that complacency was not an option: “In a free society, some are guilty; but all are responsible.”

Heschel was invited to the Second Vatican Council at which he was consulted during the drafting of *Nostra aetate*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions. Joining German Cardinal Augustin Bea—who had been suspected by the Jews of being sympathetic to the Nazis—Heschel urged that the document not include any language regarding the conversion of the Jews. In the second draft, such language was included, which led to Heschel’s trip to Rome to appeal personally to Pope Paul VI to

Given the number of major figures Heschel met with, Massa asked S. Heschel what it was like to grow up in such a house. She noted that it was a remarkable experience, but of all those who thank her for her father's work, those associated with the Civil Rights Movement are most grateful.

Asked about where Heschel's voice would be today in both contemporary social issues and the Jewish community, Doblmeier noted that Heschel was a prophet never afraid to speak directly to issues and, he believes, that Heschel would be involved with immigration at the border as well as Black Lives Mat5 (h gB6 (e)-5.2 (l)5..6 (t 1 Tf6i10C)8.6 (er)13.9 (d)1.1 (e)-5 ((e)-9.5 (v5B)9.a)14.9 (j)8[(t)1.9 (. S)9.5 (h)7.6

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She offered some examples of “good” platforms or the good use of existing social media platforms such as Wikipedia or mutual-aid platforms (neither of which are advertisement based, and the information is still universally available) as well as the way Twitter and Facebook are used in new and egalitarian ways by marginalized groups in particular faith communities. These examples show how platforms can be non-monetized yet universally available, or how platforms can be molded to be more virtuous.

Karanovich turned a bit beyond the documentary to the implications for religion, focusing in particular in the way social media has impacted the Catholic church. Noting that polarization is not new, he stressed that most average Catholics have not even engaged in theological conversations that lead to such disagreement. However, he observed, social media has changed that. Pre-social media, the “theologian” most often trusted by the faithful was the parish priest—theology was local. But as social media grew and platforms increased, more individuals and organizations joined them, and the theological conversation expanded to include more voices but with a different tone.

While mainstream Catholicism

## fall 2021 events TBA!

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