

**BOSTON COLLEGE**

BOISI CENTER

-----  
AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

**Symposium on Religious Diversity and the Common Good  
Closing Keynote Address**

**E.J. Dionne Jr.**

marginalized, the needy,

in a later debate that year with Al Gore that he would never criticize anyone else "open expression of their faith," but I've decided that personal faith is private, and I will not discuss it with the public."

Alan Wolfe long ago described our peculiarly American confusion over religion and public life when he said, with perfect pitch, I think: "Two hundred years after the brilliant writings of Madison and Jefferson on the topic, Americans cannot make up their minds whether religion is primarily private, public, or some uneasy combination of the two."

But it is surely a legitimate public issue if a candidate's religious convictions will affect the way he will govern. Isn't that something all of us should want to know? "In principle," my friend Bryan Hehir told me at the time I always turn to Bryan for wisdom on hard questions -- "it's appropriate for a religious candidate to make known and explain his religious convictions. It leads to a richer and more informed public debate."

But like many at the time, I was deeply bothered by the way Bush made his Des Moines declaration. Unlike Bauer, Bush did not explain how Christ's teachings affected

So, by all means, let candidates be candid in sharing their religious convictions, and may the rest of us be respectful. But once candidates choose this path, they need to explain exactly why the information is relevant to whether we should make them president.

impose dual obligations. Each tends to be more congenial to one side of our politics than to the other.

On the one hand, it is entirely legitimate for religious citizens and politicians to bring their faith to the public square. This is an essential right to freedom of expression.

But pluralism demands that we -- citizens and politicians alike -- make these views intelligible to those who are not part of our own tradition and that we advance arguments that speak to the entire community. I may believe that my faith creates an obligation to the poor that includes action by government. In my case, I actually do believe that. But I

care coverage, because Jesus or Micah or Amos would say we should do so. We might well use Jesus or Micah to explain ourselves and to give our case power, poetry and the sanction of tradition. We might well challenge those inside our own tradition who disagree with us to square their own views with what the tradit





legalist, if he wants everything clear and safe, then Francis has  
must help us to have the courage to open up new  
areas to God. Those who today always look for disciplinarian solutions, those who long  
who stubbornly try to

recover a past that no longer exists they have a static and inward-directed view of  
things. In this way, faith becomes an ideology among other ideologies. I have a dogmatic

Thus is a thoroughly undogmatic universalism more  
interested in shattering barriers than erecting them, more interested in winning converts  
than in hunting heretics  
in the oldest of doctrines. An undogmatic universalism that sees God in every person  
that is the rock on which we can build openness, tolerance, ecumenism and a faith that  
proclaims that all us should be free at last, free at last, thanks to God Almighty.

Thank you.