

As part of its minor in Religion and Public Life, the Boisi Center offers occasional events to undergraduate students to enrich their experience in the program. On March 16th, the Boisi Center hosted author and journalist, Mustafa Akyol, for a lunchtime conversation on his work.

A Turkish Muslim, Akyol has written for Hurriyet Daily News,

On February 3rd, the Boisi Center hosted a webinar entitled, "Race and the Religious Right: White Evangelicals, White Supremacy, and Their Consequences." Organized in an effort to explore the origin and motivations of the Religious Right, the event was centered around recent scholarship that argues that the Evangelical movement was founded and currently stands for the perpetuation of white supremacy. The panel featured Randall Balmer of Dartmouth College, Anthea Butler of the University of Pennsylvania, and Adrienne Jones of Morehouse College. Susannah Heschel of Dartmouth College served as the moderator.

Particularly relevant to the conversation

were the recent publications by6 (l)TJ14.487 0 Td(-)Tj-14.487 -1.316 Tds0.5 (h (a)-7.7 (, B9 (l)5(e)-1.4 (a B)8.6 (u)9.2 (t)-11.5 (l) (r)-35.7 (a)-18.4 (t)-.

On April 4th, the Boisi Center's director, Mark Massa, S.J. hosted a conversation between Nancy Ammerman and José Casanova, two distinguished social scientists of religion and longtime col-

On March 1st, the Boisi Center hosted a webinar conversation between Abdullah bin Hamid Ali of Zaytuna College, Sahar Aziz of Rutgers University, and Omid Safi of Duke University, on the topic of “Islam in the United States: Issues of Race and Diversity” and centered around Aziz’s recently published book, *The Racial Muslim: When Racism Quashes Religious Freedom*. The conversation was moderated by Ann McClenahan, the special volunteer assistant to the director at the Boisi Center.

Aziz began the conversation by explaining the genesis and structure of her book. The idea of American treatment of Islam as a race was inspired by the 2011 NYPD campaign of mass surveillance against Muslims, which, it was argued, could be considered a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by targeting specific religious communities (a form of “discrimination”) as a program that receives federal funds. To make that case, however, Islam had to be understood and treated as a race more than just a religion. While the exploration of this alleged violation was restricted because of the confidential nature of national security matters, at the very least, Aziz argued, the U.S. value of religious freedom seems, in light of this, to stop at the mosque’s or masjid’s door.

Ali responded to Aziz’s book, noting that the book seems truer for the pre-Trump

era in America as it does not adequately address changes in racial and religious tensions in recent years. He also noted that Aziz implies that the racialization of Muslims effectively began—or at least substantially increased—after 9/11, but there was significant historical racialization of Muslims before the 21st century. Aziz responded by suggesting the use of critical race theory as a foundation for bringing about a new perspective on the racialization of Muslims, particularly focusing in on intersectionality, but Ali found this suggestion potentially divisive and questioned if religious teachings might be a more effective framework.

Safi noted that he found the strengths of Aziz’s argument in her exploration of the legal histories as well as her focus on the experiences of the Arab Muslim community. He expressed a desire to see conceptions of the ‘Arab’ and the ‘Muslim’ disentangled in the text, since a majority of the worldwide Muslim community is not from the Middle East. And he showed a brief video of Malcolm X speaking, re-

mind the audience of one of the most notable—and notably non-Arab—American Muslims.

Aziz described the challenge of recognizing commonalities between African American Muslims and non-African American Muslims while also not ignoring the multitude of experiences that those communities do not share. She noted that African American Muslims are often racialized, or perceived, as Black instead of Muslim. Her book therefore attempts to focus on those who are perceived primarily as Muslim. And it is to this last point that Aziz also observed that she sees the turning point in which Islamophobia finally began to be considered a problem equal to racism in the Muslim travel ban under Trump.

Ali and Aziz concluded the conversation by discussing the challenges inherent in critical race theory. Safi added final thoughts on the concept of whiteness, as less of a phenotype than a problematic structure of power and the inverse of the conversation about blackness.

FACULTY-GRADUATE STUDENT SEMINAR

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2 | Graduate students presented insightful papers on political and religious activism and change.

On February 26th, the Boisi Center hosted its 2nd Annual Graduate Student Conference, “Religious Activism and Political Change; Political Activism and Religious Change.”

At the heart of the conference was the relationship between religion and politics. While the relationship between the two has been intimate from the nation’s founding, daily that relationship can change from a peaceful coexistence to an acrimonious contention. At times, religious groups have blessed soldiers as they marched off to war, while at other times they have prophetically denounced our nation’s involvement in such violence. In return, the political groups have constricted religious practices to protect vulnerable populations, while they have also provided greater protection for corporations to claim religious exemptions from perceived government imposition. Throughout U.S. history, activism in the religious or political sphere has worked to shape and reshape the other—sometimes for better outcomes and sometimes for worse.

An interdisciplinary set of papers were presented on the role of religious and political activism and their influence on each sphere. Presenting students represented nine different institutions from

across the country.

The papers explored a plethora of interesting topics: the conflict between American identity and Christian identity; the method for Christians to discern their political engagement, using the thought of René Girard, Bernard Lonergan, Thomas Aquinas, and John Lewis; the influence of Father Sergio Torres on North American liberation theologies; the role of the natural law in the Civil Rights Movement; the insights of liberation theology for Christian churches in areas with high homicide rates; and the theological underpinnings of clergy political activism.

The featured respondents who offered

feedback on each paper included Erick Berrelleza, S.J. (Santa Clara University), Jeannine Hill Fletcher (Fordham University), Ken Himes, O.F.M. (Boston College), Mark Massa, S.J. (Boston College), and Dan McKanan (Harvard Divinity School).

The award for the Best Student Paper, generously funded by the Dean’s Office of the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences at Boston College, was given to Danny Ballon-Garst of Emory University for his paper, “Ambiguous Assertions: Que(e)rying Black Religious Responses to the AIDS Crisis.”

An all-around successful day, we look forward to our 3rd annual conference!



FACULTY SEMINAR

During the Spring 2022 semester, the Boisi Center continued hosting a monthly dinner seminar for faculty on the topic of “Capitalism.” Convened by Frank Garcia from BC’s Law School and Jim Henle from Harvard, the group included

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Karina Kavanagh graduated this spring from the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences, double-majoring in International Studies and English with minors in French and Religion and Public Life through the Boisi Center. She will spend her summer in Costa Rica to complete her yoga teacher training, after which she will

2022

The Boisi Center is committed to creating opportunities where scholars, policy makers, media, religious leaders, and the community can connect in conversation and scholarly reflection around issues at the intersection of religion and American public life. We at the Boisi Center are hard at work planning a fantastic fall 2022 schedule of events.

Please keep in touch with us and look for an announcement about the schedule in late summer/early fall.