

# *The BOISI CENTER Report*

*Vol. 1 No. 2 The Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life May 2001*

[\*back\*](#)

## **Table of Contents**

[\*\*From the Director\*\*](#)

[\*\*Conference Examines Moral Aspects of School Choice\*\*](#)

[\*\*Lively Exchange on Bush's Faith-Based Initiative\*\*](#)

[\*\*Judge John T. Noonan Gives Address on the Value of Religious Liberty\*\*](#)

approach stems from the belief that it is important for a democracy to take into account the stories that people tell about themselves and their own condition. Americans have their own views about human nature, God's power, political authority, virtue and vice, the content of character, and individual responsibility. They will not, we can be fairly sure, express themselves with the brilliance and clarity of Socrates, St. Paul, or Immanuel Kant. But there is often something dignified and instructive about the ways in which people consider the conditions of themselves and their society. We live in a society where, for the first time, each individual has the freedom, as well as the challenge, of forging a moral life for themselves instead of following strict conventions. I document these struggles in my book. If the individual authors of these accounts do not always offer the examined life, they can and do offer the experienced life. Morality for them is not based on abstractions but on consequences. Because they live with the choices they make, their views are neither frivolous-nor frivolously adopted.

As we retire for the summer to our books and beaches, we look forward to engaging





Both Professor Glenn and Professor Shirley, who have worked directly with faith based organizations, saw churches as important sites for addressing the problems within their communities. Glenn, who spent several years overseeing the busing policies of the Massachusetts' Educational System, felt that government alone could not stimulate productive energies in inner city communities. Professor Shirley, who has worked with alliances between schools and faith based groups in Texas agreed, stating that religious groups can be effective in aiding social problems because individuals in poor communities truly believe that their religious institution is the one institution that they actually own.

While acknowledging the virtues religion in general might provide society, panelists also acknowledged the invitation that the proposal offered for religious discrimination. Wendy Kaminer pointed to the example of religious groups who under current federal law have set up independent-secular foundations like Catholic Charities to receive government funding, and argued that this current system has worked well without opening up further constitutional arguments, "If it isn't broke, why fix it?"

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **Judge John T. Noonan Gives Address on the Value of Religious Liberty**

On March 22, 2001, the Boisi Center welcomed church-state scholar and Appeals Court [Judge John T. Noonan, Jr.](#) as the third speaker in the Templeton Lecture series. Noonan offered remarks from his latest book, *The Lustre of Our Country*, on "why religious freedom is foundational for country and church."

Noonan argued that religious freedom remains the most basic freedom for believers and citizens alike, asserting that only religious liberty entails claims to authority that transcends the state, making it more fundamental than freedoms of speech or commerce. He noted that religious beliefs provide values that guide actions that are not always the values the governing elite favors-citing the abolition of slavery in the U.S., led by New England ministers who claimed that slavery was a "natural sin" that must be abolished.

Noonan outlined the views of James Madison and Voltaire in providing a history of religious liberty in distinct contexts. He recounted Madison's role in enacting the First Amendment and his conception of religious liberty as a "great barrier" to government invasion into the realm of conscience. Noonan contrasted this Madisonian vision of religious freedom with the French Enlightenment approach, which, he argued, amounted to "open war on the Roman Catholic Church in a Voltairian spirit!"

Turning to the present, Noonan conceded that court cases are easier to win on the grounds of freedom of speech than on religious liberty grounds, yet insisted that "religion can provide values in a way that mere speech cannot." On the process of deciphering which religious claims deserve protection by law in the various cases he hears, Noonan remarked, "you get to complete religious freedom step by step, not absolutely."

In response to a request from the audience, Noonan also provided an overview of theologian John Courtney Murray's legacy on helping



## Keynes

Skidelsky argued that Keynes would endorse several medieval laws against usury and avarice. Keynes believed that charging interest was justified only to the degree that the lender recaptured their lost "opportunity" cost for that money, but not in order to make large profits. Skidelsky also noted that Keynes felt inflationary measures were unjust. He equated instability in the value of money with injustice. Extreme inflation or deflation robbed hard-working individuals of the medieval notion of a "just price."

During the question and answer period, Skidelsky and several audience members discussed the de-coupling of ethics and economics, and how they could be reunited. To that end, Skidelsky advocates a return to a more liberal arts curriculum in the universities. He views the study of philosophy and especially history as a way to offset the over-specialization of fields like economics and business in general which have little room for ethics.

In addition to his work on Keynes, Skidelsky is also the author of numerous works on post-collectivization including, *The Road From Serfdom: The Economic and Political Consequences of the End of Communism*. His career in public life includes a stint as a counselor to former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and he currently serves in the House of Lords as a Conservative spokesman on the Treasury. He also serves as the chairman of the Social Market Foundation and is professor of political economy at the University of Warwick.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### Professor Lipset Presents Final Templeton Lecture

On Thursday, April 19, 2001 Professor Seymour Martin Lipset presented on "Religion, Class and Politics in the United States" as the final speaker in the Boisi Center's 2000-2001 Templeton Lecture Series. Professor Lipset, a renowned political scientist and sociologist, is the Hazel Professor of Public Policy at George Mason University and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford.

Professor Lipset's talk centered on religion and American exceptionalism, in particular the ways in which Protestant sectarianism has influenced American life. Lipset noted that "religion in America is qualitatively different from religion in the rest of the developed world." Focusing on the moralism characteristic of Protestantism, Lipset showed how this "exceptionalism" has influenced domestic and foreign policy. He cited domestic examples such as the abolition, civil rights, and prohibition movements being cast in moral terms. Moral purpose and language have also permeated U.S. foreign policy, Lipset argued, recalling President Reagan's "Evil Empire" language and the country's hesitations about doing business with China. Anti-war movements and conscientious objection are mostly American phenomena, he noted. "Americans always go to war because the other side is morally wrong in our conception," Lipset observed, in contrast to the interest-driven policies of most European nations.

Even with the continued rise of religious pluralism in the U.S., Lipset argued that these fundamental features have remained unchanged throughout American history. He noted, "While the U.S. is no longer entirely Protestant, major elements of Puritan values have

permeated and survived."

Responding to questions from the audience, Lipset spoke about the basic trends in religious and political affiliations. He noted a shift from certain religions generally voting within one party (Jews and Catholics voted Democrat and Protestants, Republican), to a link between religious and social conservatism that has split religious groups in their voting tendencies (the theologically conservative Jew, Catholic and Protestant alike voting Republican, for example).

Along with many other distinctions, Lipset is the only person to have served as president of both the American Sociological Association (1992-1993) and the American Political Science Association (1979-1980). A prolific writer, his major books include *Union Democracy*, *Political Man*, *Agrarian Socialism* and *The First New Nation*. His most recent publications are *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* and *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **Luncheon Colloquia Bring Boston Area Scholars to Campus**

Every other Tuesday during the semester the Boisi Center hosts an informal gathering of students and faculty to have lunch, get to know one another, and share insights on topics presented by an invited speaker. In addition to speakers from campus that included Dennis Shirley, Kay Schlozman, Arthur Madigan, and our own Alan Wolfe, this semester we were also fortunate to have a roster of speakers from the greater Boston area sharing their work with us. Christopher Winship, the chair of the sociology department at Harvard University presented his work on the 10 point Coalition in Boston, and on another occasion, his colleague Sidney Verba, Professor of Government at Harvard presented the latest findings that he and colleague, Kay Schlozman, have gathered on religious and gender differences in political participation. From the greater Boston area we managed to attract Jay Demerath from UMass-Amherst to discuss his forthcoming book on world religion and worldly politics, and John Schmalzbauer from the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, speaking on the religious backgrounds of noted academics and professionals. Lynn Davidman graciously agreed to commute from Brown University to share her ongoing research on secular Jews.

The Boisi Center is well started on its path to becoming a place where scholars from the Greater Boston area can gather to present their research and expect to receive constructive criticism of their ideas in a context that supports interdisciplinary conversation. Next semester we expect to host discussions on the work of Lisa Cahill, David Hollenbach, Nancy Ammerman, and Lucas Swaine among others. Please keep an eye out for our events on our website at [www.bc.edu/publife](http://www.bc.edu/publife) and to join our mailing list. If you wish to attend one of our colloquia, please don't forget to RSVP to Susan Richards at [richarsh@bc.edu](mailto:richarsh@bc.edu) to reserve a lunch!

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **The Boisi Center Staff**



[Alan Wolfe](#) serves as the director of the Boisi Center and is a professor of political science at Boston College. Professor Wolfe is the author or editor of more than ten books, including *One Nation, After All* and most recently, [\*Moral Freedom: The Search for Virtue in a World of Choice\*](#). Professor Wolfe is a contributing editor of *The New Republic* and *The Wilson Quarterly*. He also writes frequently for *The New York Times*, *Commonweal*, *Harpers*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Washington Post*, and other publications. Professor Wolfe has been a Fulbright Professor of American Studies at the University of Copenhagen. In addition to directing the Center, next year Professor Wolfe will be teaching a Political Science Honor's course in the fall - PO297 95 -1.11 Tall

[back](#)

*Copyright 2001- The Trustees of Boston College*  
*Last updated: June 6, 2001*  
[Comments/Questions?](#)