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No sooner did I return from a wonderful fall spent in Berlin than I hopped on a plane for Grand Rapids, Michigan. A long time ago – September 2001, that is –

Ecclesial Ethics in the Early Church

On February 24th, Francine Cardman, theology professor from Weston Jesuit School of Theology, spoke to an audience of Boston College faculty and students on the topic “Ecclesial Ethics: What Can We Learn From the Early Church?” Cardman noted that within recent studies of the early church, there is an increasing awareness of how social, religious and political issues play out in the evolution of faith and doctrine. This same approach, she believes, makes the historical study of the early church informative of the ethical issues that the contemporary church faces today.

Her presentation centered on three texts from the second century of the early Christian Church and how they raised discussions about issues of money, ministry and community. In the early church, the

ministry was largely made up of itinerant preachers and prophets with a local ministry only beginning to emerge. Because these itinerant ministers depended for their support upon the local community, there was much discussion in these texts about guarding against those false preachers and prophets who might exploit the community for profit. The more general issue raised was how to guard against the abuse of the community’s resources by the ministry. Embedded in this discussion were also larger questions of how to allocate the community’s resources among its various obligations, which included supporting the ministry, widows, and the poor.

This historical perspective, Cardman argues, illustrates how conflicts between the ministry and the community over their mutual

obligations and responsibilities to one another are nothing new in the history of organized religion and the Catholic Church. Rather, these ethical questions and conflicts were the place and means by which emerging ethical norms were raised, debated, and institutionalized. Therefore, the lesson for today is that we should not be afraid of these conflicts for they act as a way of clarifying our mutual responsibilities to one another if discussed openly and communally. It helps us see that conflict between community and ministry is both an inherent part of the relationship and also a part of the process that creates morals and meanings for the Church. Conversely, if those conflicts are covered up and stifled, we lose the benefits of those important insights into our collective moral meaning.

Findings from the Boston College Survey of Undergraduate Faith and Experience

Father James Fleming, from the Office of the University Mission and Ministry at Boston College, offered a presentation titled “Good and Faithful Service: Findings from the Boston College Survey of Undergraduate Experience and Implications for Religious Mission of Catholic Universities.” His March 15th, talk offered some preliminary findings from a recent survey of Boston College undergraduates. The survey, known commonly as BC-QUE, seeks to understand the kinds of activities that shape the



vocational and spiritual formation of undergraduates at Boston College. In particular, it tries to find out what experiences the students find most “meaningful” as they look back as seniors at the past four years. Among the many results that Fleming reports are findings that while a large proportion of students stop going to worship services once they enter college, reports on measures of spirituality increase dramatically, from 38% to 80%. Along with this, practices of prayer and medita-

American Protestants and the Doctrine of Original Sin

On April 13th, Andrew Finstuen, a graduate student in the History department at Boston College, presented work from his dissertation research in a talk titled "Hearts of Darkness: American Protestants and the Doctrine of Original Sin, 1945-1965." In his presentation, Finstuen discussed the intellectual discourse around the concept of human nature and sin as can be observed in the writings and speeches of Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich and Billy Graham and by examining the popular and specialized literature of that period. Although distinctive in their audiences, Finstuen argues that Niebuhr, Tillich and Graham are connected in their views of sinfulness. He believes that the doctrine of original sin played a larger role than previously thought among lay believers regardless of age, gender, denomination or education.



This argument offers a counterpoint to those who believe that the influence of theological worldviews, particularly among lay believers, declined among Protestants in the mid-twentieth century. Finstuen argues that these conversations about the role of sin in human nature helped ordinary lay Protestants to make sense of the cataclysmic events they were witnessing in their present lives including economic instability, depression, World War II and the beginning of the Cold War.

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Political Scientist from Tajikistan is Visiting Scholar at the Boisi Center

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Boisi Center hosts Visiting Scholar from Australia

On study leave from La Trobe University in Melbourne, Professor Rowan Ireland is spending April and May as a Visiting Scholar at the Boisi Center. At La Trobe, he teaches in programs on Latin American Studies, sociology of religion and development.

He has two projects at the Boisi Center. One is to complete chapters on the role of religion in residential associations in the shantytowns of São Paulo. This is for a book he is writing on the so-called "popular urban movements" in Brazil. The book is based on live-in fieldwork research over the last twenty years.

The other project is to engage in library research on the implications of increasing religious diversity for civil society in America. This is part of a study comparing patterns and consequences of increasing religious diversity in Australia, Brazil and America. In the three countries there is debate about whether the consequences involve the fragmentation and weakening of civil society, or its thickening, and the deepening of civic democracy.

In a rare moment in the cacophony of college life, over 600 students packed into Robsham Theatre on the evening of March 16th and sat in absolute silence. The only voice was that of Sister Helen Prejean, world famous anti-death penalty activist and author of

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The Boise Center held a lunchtime colloquium on April 27th with Stephen Burgard of the Northeastern University School of Journalism, whose topic was "The Press and Faith Based Politics." Burgard's talk explained why,

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