

## ***Sister Helen Prejean to Speak at “Prophetic Voices of the Church Lecture” in Spring***

**T**he Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life is pleased to announce that Sister Helen Prejean, internationally known author of the book *Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States* and perhaps one of the most well known spokespersons against capital punishment today, will give the fourth annual “Prophetic Voice of American Religion” lecture on March 16th, at 7:00 in Robsham Theatre on the Boston College campus.

Sister Helen’s perspective of the death penalty began to be shaped in 1981 when she began a prison ministry in New Orleans as part of her work with the Sisters of St. Joseph. During this time she became the spiritual advisor and pen pal of Patrick Sonnier who had been sentenced to die in the electric chair in Louisiana’s Angola State Prison for killing two teenagers. Her relationship with Sonnier, and the views she consequently developed on the issue of capital punishment lead her to write *Dead Man Walking*, a powerful and moving account of her experiences with the death penalty in the Louisiana prison system. This book was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1993 and made the 1994 American Library Associates Notable Book List. It has been a national and international bestseller and was number one on the New York Times Bestseller List for 31 weeks. It has since been translated into ten different languages. In 1996 the book was developed into a major motion picture starring Sean Penn and Susan Sarandon and received four

## Saudi Educators Visit the Boisi Center

On September 20th, 15 scholars and educators from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia visited the Boisi Center as part of a tour sponsored by the State Department to study issues related to “Religion and Public Education in the United States”. They met with Professor Patricia Chang to inquire about the role of religion and moral education in America’s schools and universities. The conversation, which was wide ranging and facilitated by interpreters, revealed a general curiosity about the religious landscape of America as well as more specific question about the role that Catholic universities such as Boston College play in public life. General questions included queries about the differences between Protestants and Catholics and whether Catholics or Protestants would be most open to inter-faith discussion. Questions more specific to Boston College included questions about how we get our funding (is it funded by the Catholic Church), whether we teach non-Catholic students, and how we get our students to be open minded towards other religions. There was great interest in what we teach students about other religions and especially the kinds of introductions we give to our students about non-Catholic religions. The group included scholars from a variety of institutions and a variety of ideological viewpoints within Islam emerged during the discussions.

The scholars included Dr. Mesfer Gormallh A. Aldomeny, Professor from the Islamic Education Department, Imam Mohammed Bin Saud Islamic University; Dr. Ahmed Abdullah Aldwihy, Assistant Professor from Imam Mohammed Bin Saud Islamic University; Dr. Abdulaziz F. S. Alfawzan ,Professor, from Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University; Dr. Abdulkarim Senaitan K. Alharbi, Professor, Islamic Education Department, Islamic University; Dr. Ibrahim Nasser M. Alhumood, Professor, Islamic Education Department, Imam Mohammed Bin Saud Islamic University; Dr. Zohair Ahmedali A. Alzazmi, Dean, College of Education, Umm Al-Qura University; Dr. Saeed Faleh M. Almaghamsi, Associate Professor, Department of Education, College of

Da'wa and Theology, Islamic University; Dr. Mohammad Sulaiman O. Alminayei, Associate Professor, Islamic Education Department, Umm Al-Qura University; Dr. Ali Abdulaziz Alshebel, Assistant Professor, Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University; Dr. Abdullah Mesleh M. Althamaly, Vice Dean, College of Sharia and Islamic Studies, Umm Al-Qura University; Mr. Abdulhakeem Dahash A. Altwijri, Educational Supervisor, Ministry of Education; Mr. Hussain Ali Baras, Curriculum Supervisor, Ministry of Education; Dr. Saleh Durwish H. Meamar, Dean, Madinah College of Teachers, Ministry of Education; Dr. Abdulrahman Jamil A. Qassas, Professor, Islamic Education Department, Umm Al-Qura University; Dr. Hasan Ayel A. Yahya Dean, Teachers College, Jeddah.

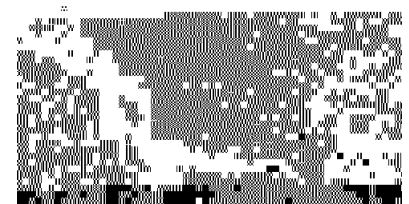
## Graduate Student Reading Groups

The Boisi Center invites proposals for interdisciplinary and inter-institutional graduate student reading/writing groups on themes related to the study of religion and public life. In order to facilitate interdisciplinary conversations we will offer limited support to reading groups in various forms. Proposals for support should include a brief outline of the group’s theme and reading list, a list of members, and a list of activities it would like the Boisi Center to support (e.g., bringing in speakers, photocopying, book subsidies). To submit a proposal or for further information, contact Patricia Chang at changpc@bc.edu.

## Thomas Groome Speaks on Handing on the Faith

On September 29th Professor Thomas Groome, Director of the Institute for Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry at Boston College spoke on the topic of “Handing On A Faith: The Challenges and Opportunities of our Time”. Groome’s comments reflected, although did not try to summarize, the Church in the 21st Century Conference on “Handing on the Faith” held earlier in September (see [www.bc.edu/church21](http://www.bc.edu/church21)). He outlined three challenges Catholics face in handing on the faith in contemporary American society: context, content and communication.

Groome began by describing the assumption that the postmodern context offers many challenges to an American Catholicism that is no longer isolated in Catholic ghettos and can no longer rely extensively on the socializing influence of parish institutions such as schools, CYO’s, altar societies etc. to convey the



*Continued on page 4*

## Boisi Center Hosts Richard Chacon, Deputy Foreign Affairs Editor of the Globe

Taking a break from his studies as a Nieman Fellow at Harvard, Richard Chacon, Deputy Foreign Affairs Editor of the Boston Globe came to Boston College on October 12 to address a lunch seminar at the Boisi Center. His topic was "Religion, Foreign Policy and the Media in a Post 9-11 Context" and his remarks centered mainly on the challenges that the media faces in reporting global events since 9-11.

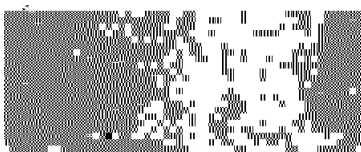
In Chacon's view, prior to the destruction of the Twin Towers, much of America's foreign policy focus was still influenced by an east vs west and communism vs. democracy mindset. Since the fall of communism we struggled to define where our foreign policy priorities lay and consequently were slow to get involved in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Haiti. The attacks of 9-11 produced shock, anger and a search for explanations and the simplest explanation that could be found was in religion.

Whether or not the religion explanation is a useful one, Chacon believes that some adjustment to current media coverage is still required. On the one hand, conversations are often too quick to skip over a deeper understanding of the goals and motives of the religious mind and reduce explanations to economic and political inequality. On the other hand he also feels that the Globe and other media outlets get too caught up in demonizing small religious minority groups, neglecting the larger majority which might be moderate. As a corrective, he pointed to a recent in-depth analysis of moderate Islam submitted by the Globe's Jerusalem bureau chief.

Chacon also spent time talking about the appalling lack of resources devoted to global issues in most media corporations. The Globe has six full time foreign staff

reporters which is relatively small for a regional paper. Two are in Baghdad, one is in Johannesburg, one is in Jerusalem, one is in Beijing and one is in Bogota. As the emphasis in foreign policy has moved from an east/west axis to a north/south axis the role of the foreign correspondent has also changed dramatically. When Chacon covered Latin America he used to cover 40 countries. Correspondents in these positions are now asked to develop a thematic expertise as well as covering a regional specialty. Yet despite the thinness of resources on the ground, economic constraints are making it harder for newspapers to financially justify supporting foreign bureaus, meaning that places like Dallas and Houston no longer offer first hand coverage of global issues and rely instead on the AP, Reuters or NY Times wire services. This means a narrower range of stories and styles dominating our media content.

Chacon's perspective has been shaped by his role as the Boston Globe's deputy foreign editor since July 2001 where he helps coordinate the paper's international news coverage. Prior to this he served the Globe covering Latin America, higher education and Boston politics. Chacon has also served as an editorial writer for New York Newsday, where he specialized in cultural affairs, local politics and sports between 1992-1994. In 1992 he served as deputy media director for the 1992 Democratic National Convention, and as a speechwriter in the New York City Mayor's office. Chacon is currently a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University, where he is studying the relationships between religion, public health and the shaping of American foreign policy around the world.



### Student Paper Competition

The Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life is proud to announce an annual competition for the best student paper (Graduate and Undergraduate) on a theme related to the activities of the Boisi Center.

This year the theme of the paper competition is Religious Freedom or Religious Tolerance?. Papers are welcomed from any disciplinary background and must address the distinctions between religious freedom and religious tolerance and the issues this

raises. Possible paper topics can address how religious freedom is being defined in America's domestic or foreign policy, whether freedom or toleration is being espoused in various political arguments both in the US and abroad, and whether the distinction is important. Papers should include an abstract of no more than 100 words on a separate page, and run no more than 2000 words in length excluding figures and bibliography. Three copies of the paper, plus a cover

letter should be submitted to the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life, 24 Quincy Road, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467 by April 1, 2004.

The winning essay will receive a prize of \$200 for the undergraduate competition and \$400 for the graduate competition.

Questions can be directed to Professor Patricia M.Y. Chang at the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life. 552-1861 or changpc@bc.edu.

On December 2, Collen Griffith, Faculty Director of Spirituality Studies at the Institute for Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry at Boston College, reflected on the changes that have been made in contemporary Christian thought since women began to enter the seminaries in large numbers in the 1970's.

Griffith began by pointing out

was also presented as an opera written by Terence McNally, premiering in San Francisco in October 2000.

Sister Helen's work can truly be described as prophetic. In the past twenty years almost all of the mainstream religious bodies in the United States have spoken out against the death penalty including the Catholic Church. For the previous 1500 years the Catholic Church had supported a states right to punish criminals, including punishment by death. But in 1997, reversing 1500 years of

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↳ “Religion and aging: Findings from a sixty-year longitudinal study”

**Michele Dillon**

Sociology, University of New Hampshire 12-1:15pm  
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

↳ “Local Islam Gone Global: The Roots of Religious Militancy in Egypt and Its Transnational Transformation”

**James Toth**

Sociology-Anthropology, Northeastern University 12-1:15pm  
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

↳ Topic: “TBA”

**Francine Cardman**

Weston Jesuit School of Theology.  
12-1:15pm  
24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

↳ 1 “Good and Faithful Service: Findings from the Boston College Survey of Undergraduate Experience and Implications for the Religious Mission of Catholic Universities”

**James Fleming**

Lynch School of Education and Office of University Mission and Ministry  
12-1:15pm

24 Quincy Road, The Boisi Center

↳ “Dead Man Walking: The Journey Continued”

**Sister Helen Prejean**

Sisters of St. Joseph  
Robsham Theatre 7-9:00pm