

Mystērion: The Theology Journal of Boston College

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Inaugural Editor's Note

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When I first arrived at Boston College, I never thought that I would study theology. During my college application process, I learned that Boston College was a Jesuit, Catholic university with certain core requirements in philosophy and theology, but I—like many other students at Catholic colleges and universities across the United States—initially viewed these courses as mere graduation requirements. Fortunately, however, I decided to enroll in Boston College's foundational course in philosophy and theology, Perspectives on Western Culture, during my first year. Not only did this course initiate a long process of discernment about my academic interests and goals, but it also made a profound impact on my life outside of the classroom.

Taught by a doctoral graduate of the Theology Department, my Perspectives on Western Culture section brought together a small group of first-year students from around the country to study classic texts in philosophy and theology. We did not know one another on our first day of class, but we would soon embark on a year-long inquiry into one of the perennial questions of human existence: What does it mean to live a good life? I cannot recall exactly how many students were in my Perspectives section, but, at every class meeting, it became increasingly clear that the different life experiences, religious dispositions, and academic interests that we all brought to our assigned readings would contribute to the long-term impact of the course on our college experiences.

Even amidst COVID-19, Boston College's Perspectives Program endured. In part due to my favorable experience in the course, I subsequently enrolled in one of the Theology Department's spring undergraduate electives—Religion and American Public Life. Taught by Mark Massa, S.J., Professor of Theology and Director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life, this course helped me to better appreciate the continued importance of questions about God, self, and society, even in what some (perhaps correctly) believe is a secular era.

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Given the intellectual and personal formation that the Perspectives Program and Massa's introductory elective helped facilitate, I declared a double major in history and theology by the conclusion of my first year. Since then, I have taken numerous courses in both the History and Theology Departments at the intersection of politics, religion, and the law that have broadened my academic horizons and prompted me to grapple with questions about my own faith and position in our hyper-plural society. Indeed, when I am now asked about particularly profound aspects of my Boston College experience, I often credit my first-year theology courses with setting me on a path that has allowed me to deepen my Catholic faith and approach my responsibilities to society with a new frame of reference.

I have chosen to begin this inaugural editor's note with a personal reflection because it truly represents the experiences and values that inspired this journal's establishment. Boston College is a proud inheritor of the Jesuit, Catholic intellectual and spiritual traditions, but I have always found life at the University to be marked by respect for those of other religious beliefs, an honest desire for truth, a willingness to engage in dialogue about important issues in our lives, and a commitment to the service of others. Insofar as these values undergirded this journal's establishment, they so too should be the values that guide it in the future.

Volume I, Issue I of *Mystērion: The Theology Journal of Boston College* features essays from undergraduate students at Boston College, Fordham University, and Princeton University that address important (and difficult) theological questions. Among other topics, this inaugural issue explores the relationship of feminist theology to American religion, the historiography of the now-infamous Salem Witch Trials, the role of prayer and language in the human experience, the Catholic Church's evolving position on questions of church and state, and how comparative theology can help us better understand human suffering and liberation.

Like my first-year theology courses, this inaugural issue of *Mystērion* brings a diverse array of perspectives to bear on questions that have challenged even the most renowned theologians. In doing so, it is my hope that *Mystērion* inspires more students to spend time thinking about the questions of human existence that impact us all—no matter

who we are or where we come from—and to share with others the insights we have gleaned for ourselves. We may not always be right, but it is critical that we continue to challenge the ideas of our time and of times gone by so that we can come to an ever-more-full understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

This process of inquiry, reflection, knowledge production, *and knowledge sharing* is precisely what Fr. Michael Himes—a long-time Boston College theology professor and the inspiration for this journal’s name²—encouraged members of the Boston College community to embark upon so eloquently in his 2009 ‘last lecture’:

What is the last and what is the definite message that has to be said? Well, I think it’s this. It is a statement that I’ve spoken about many times, preached about many times, [and] prayed about many more times than that. [It is] a statement which appears repeatedly in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It’s the statement of Jesus that if you hold onto your life, you lose it, but if you give your life away, it becomes everlasting life.³

And the thing I wish for you is that sometime in your life, you get a chance to say to people who mean an enormous amount to you, what it is that has been truest in your own life ... because it is at a moment like that you know that everything you gave away has been given back in spades.⁴

This journal would have never been established without the tireless support of the Boston College Department of Theology and its students. For their helpful guidance throughout this last ‘launch year,’ enormous thanks are due to Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies Jeffrey Cooley; Michael P. Walsh, S.J., Professor of Bioethics Andrea Vicini, S.J.; *Mystērion’s* Graduate Advisors, Grace Agolia and Tiffany Lee; and *Mystērion’s* Editorial Board and Communications Director. Finally, thanks are also due to *Mystērion’s* authors, current and future, whose work has the potential to positively impact and inspire those who come across these pages.

² “About the Journal,” *Mystērion: The Theology Journal of Boston College*, last modified January 2021, <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/MYST/about>.

³ Michael Himes, “A Last Lecture,” filmed 2009 at Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, video, 2:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hs3UCUqy8cg>.

⁴ Himes, “A Last Lecture,” 51:50.