

An International Research Conference

Religious Renewal in Times of Crisis

April 23-28, 2023

Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Jerusalem

**Session hosts include – Shalom Hartman Institute, Pontifical Biblical Institute*

Conference Abstracts

Sunday, April 23, 2023 | Tantur Ecumenical Institute

Session 1 | 6:30-8:30 p.m.

The Philosophy of Renewal

Crisis and Renewal: From Mt. Fuji to Mt. Zion

Curtis Hutt, Associate Professor of Religious Studies (University of Nebraska at Omaha)

Across the globe and human history, gesturing to the past occurs in a seemingly infinite number of ways. It is not rare to encounter calls for renewal of or return to the past in the present, or in past presents. These take place across socio-historical settings, by the powerful and the oppressed alike. Those pursuing religious renewal of one sort or another are diverse and are usually grouped in keeping with their visions of the past. From ultranationalists hell bent on the destruction of “others” to social activists motivated by the lives of ancient religious leaders and communities, renewal of what has come before is basic. To borrow the African idea of Sankofa, manifest in the Asante Adinkra symbol of a bird reaching backwards to retrieve something that it has left behind, returning to the past is deeply rooted in our common faith that what has occurred in the past matters. Can this even be done though? What do we actually know about the historical past and who decides what “actually happened?” Today, as in the past, we are led by many sirens’ calls.

Following the work of the philosopher Edmund Husserl who wrote of crisis and renewal in early 20th century Germany, I assert that technically speaking renewal is largely impossible. So often we have no real idea of what has happened in the past. To cite Albert Schweitzer, the “past” is frequently little more than our reflections in the mirror. As a historian of ancient religions, I agree with Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi who famously argued that today only droplets of the past still remain.

Still, modest and careful returns to the past are not only with difficulty attainable but vitally important especially in times of great crisis. We need to learn from our mistakes. Ethical religious renewal, in addition to resting upon the historical sciences, relies upon what counts as a pragmatic need to look backwards that necessarily includes regret, sometimes repentance, and even the burden to forget.

Aging and Renewal

Nehama Verbin, Associate Professor of Philosophy (Tel Aviv University)

Contemporary Western culture views aging as an undesirable interim phase, devoid of meaning in-and-of itself that precedes dying. Old age is referred to as the “winter of our life,” an unfortunate phase, characterized by withering, deterioration and decline. In other words, aging is perceived as the antithesis of renewal. Jean Amery goes as far as to state that “[A]ging is no more of a normal process than rheumatism

...Actually, it is quite definitely a sickness, indeed a form of suffering from which there is no hope of recovery."¹

The purpose of my paper is to explore conceptions of aging that construe its relation to renewal in different terms. I shall focus on Maimonides and Kierkegaard and argue that for both, aging provides us with the opportunity to realize our selfhood more fully than we could have done before. In other words, aging does not merely provide each of us with the opportunity to renew our self but to become a self.

My paper has three parts. The first part focuses on our modern and post-modern relation to aging through Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Amery's reflections on the phenomenology of aging. The second part construes a Kierkegaardian conception of aging from his conceptions of happiness, suffering and sorrow and their manner of being defeated by faith. The third part construes a Maimonidean conception of aging from Maimonides' conception of human perfection and the body's predominantly negative contribution to its realization.

Al-Ghazali on the Crisis of the Religious Sciences and the Need for Renewal

Sobhi Rayan, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies (Al-Qasemi Academic College)

In this presentation, I aim to analyse the issue of doubt in the work Al-Ghazali and address it from a new philosophical perspective. This will shed light on the course of the process of scepticism and its important stations. I am trying to prove that doubt is an approach in critical thinking that aims to reach the truth of things, and it is a research method that accompanied Al-Ghazali from the beginning of his research until the end of his life, and not just a passing crisis that hit him at a specific period.

Al-Ghazali tried to rethink his received cognitive heritage and acquired sciences through imitation, sense, and reason. He is carrying out a process of critical review that would reveal errors in these sciences and establish them on certain knowledge. This entails a process of digging into the layers of accumulated knowledge to reach the truth of the original instinct, which is the certain beginning upon which he bases his knowledge.

Monday, April 24, 2023 | Shalom Hartman Institute

Opening Keynote | 10:15-11:15 a.m.

Understanding the Jewish Renaissance: Survival, Revival, and Renewal

Rachel Werczberger, Senior Lecturer of Anthropology (Hadassah Academic College)

At the end of the second millennium, a dazzling array of cultural initiatives, institutional modalities, and individual practices, grouped together under the labels “Jewish revival” and “Jewish renewal,” has emerged. From Chabad’s [Lubavitch Hasidism] global tactics of outreach into new social spaces, through alternative cultural projects that are often dubbed Jewish spirituality, to local, community-based educational activities, these enterprises are realigning the contours of Jewish identity, engagement, and affiliations of contemporary Jewish life. In fact, the trope of a Jewish revival has become both a descriptive category of an increasingly popular public and scholarly discourse across the globe and a prescriptive model for social action.

¹ Jean Amery, *On Aging Revolt and Resignation*, trans. John D. Barlow (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1968), 33.

In this lecture I will offer an anthropological perspective into the expanding range of Jewish revival(s) worldwide. I will show how projects of revival offer different articulations of the temporal and affective relations with the Jewish past and history and project them into the Jewish future. On one end of the spectrum, Orthodox forms of Jewish revival devise new ways to promote what they deem historically authentic Judaism and call for the revival of age-old traditions. On the other end of the spectrum, alternative renewal actors, such as the New Age styled Kohenet (priestess) institute, creatively define post-denominational religious and spiritual modalities. Focusing on dialectic notions of survival, revival, and renewal, and by drawing on ethnographic works, I will explore the ways these notions come into play in different modalities of Jewish religious revival – forward and backward looking.

Session 2 | 11:15 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
Jewish Renewal in Times of Crisis

Shabbat According to Their Halacha: Worship Rituals and Secular Observance Amongst Jewish Israelis on the Weekend

Stav Shufan-Biton, Ph.D. Candidate, Sociology and Anthropology (Bar Ilan University)

Formally speaking, Saturday is the official day of rest for Jews in Israel, and one cannot emphasize enough its significance in the Jewish religion and culture. Religious Jewish sectors embrace the practices dictated by Jewish Halacha (observance laws), and are expected to adhere to them in a relatively homogenous fashion. However, those who define themselves as secular have a wider room for personal interpretation when it comes to the subject matter and practices that fill up their weekend. Despite the wider range for interpretation, my research shows that many Jews who call themselves secular nevertheless choose to fill up their Shabbat and weekend with similar activities.

In-depth interviews I conducted with religious and secular Jews in Israel reveal, amongst other things, that just as religious families hold a kiddush and festive dinner on Shabbat eve (Friday night) and sit down for a festive meal the following day, so do many secular families hold a festive meal together over the weekend – not necessarily on Friday evening but perhaps lunch (Hummus ritual). Furthermore, just as religious Jews endeavor to observe the command whereby one shall “refrain from any work”, so do secular Jews told me of their endeavors to reserve time on the weekend for reading and rest. In some cases, the rituals and worship activities performed by secular Jews coincide with traditional Jewish rituals, and in other cases they replace them.

In any case, these rituals demonstrate that contrary to the fears expressed by religious groups of the loss of the unique value of Shabbat due to increased secularism of the society – in reality the shabbat is also observed by secular people, in their own way, through alternative rituals that they adhere to on the weekend. These shared rituals also demonstrate how even secular people employ practices of distinction between sacred and profane, in accordance with Durkheim’s notion of religion, and therefore they too can be said to observe the uniqueness of the shabbat in their own way.

Renewal: Orthodox Jewish Women Changing the Face of Judaism

Peta Pellach, Director of Educational Activities (Elijah Interfaith Institute) and Senior Fellow (Kiverstein Institute)

Orthodox Judaism is that branch of Judaism which is committed to functioning within the framework of Halakhah (Jewish law), believing the mitzvot (obligations) to be Divinely ordained. It sees itself as

continuing the line of Jewish tradition. Historically, women were excluded from much of the religious ritual life but that is changing. Opportunities have opened up for women, breathing new life into Orthodoxy.

The first step was when a group of women, feeling the frustration of exclusion from full participation in prayers, founded the first women's Tefillah (prayer) group in the late 1960s. The idea spread rapidly and women's tefillah groups blossomed around the world.

At first, women relied on Rabbis (men) to guide them in how to remain within the bounds of halakhah in their new venture. Soon, women demanded and found avenues for learning for themselves. Demand created opportunity – more institutions of serious Jewish learning for women sprung up and some women's seminaries which had been teaching a traditional curriculum rethought their programs and began to teach subjects previously considered only the domain of men.

Since then, large numbers of Orthodox women have been given the opportunity to take up full-time Jewish studies, reaching the level of scholarship in Jewish law that qualifies them to become Rabbis. At the end of a committed process and achievement of scholarship, women wanted their learning to be recognised. Today, some of those women have taken the title "Rabbi" (or a version of it) and are leading Orthodox communities. This radically changes the face of Judaism

From Crisis to Renewal When Jewish Buddhists become Jewish Mindfulness teachers in the Global Jewish World

Mira Niculescu Weil, Post Doctoral Golda Meir Fellow (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Jewish Buddhist monks and practitioners are not naïve. Yet some of them see it as their task to contribute to working towards bringing peace in a region in perpetual crisis.

In the decades after World War II, when Westerners from the babyboom generations were flooding ashrams and Buddhist centers in Asia and in the West alike, a proportionally noticeable number of them were of Jewish descent. They were soon called the Jubus, or Jewish Buddhists.

The responses from Jewish families and religious leaders were strong, and Jews involved in Eastern meditation practices, in America as in Israel, were sent to cult clinics.

How then, has Mindfulness, a Buddhist-derived meditation practice, made its way to synagogues and Jewish schools today?

Jewish Mindfulness: a new hybrid Jewish spiritual practice based on the import of a Buddhist based meditation practice, mindfulness, and its recontextualization within a Jewish frame, may be one of the most successful movements in the current spiritual revival on the Jewish global stage.

Today, Jewish Mindfulness local groups can be found in almost every major city of the English-speaking Jewish diaspora in America, Canada, Australia, but also in England, Germany, and in Israel, while global Jewish religious organizations are promoting Jewish mindfulness retreats in person and online and training Jewish Mindfulness Teachers.

Analysis Jewish Mindfulness as an offspring of the phenomenon of the Jewish Buddhist can serve as a case to study how fringe phenomena born in times of crisis can foster Religious Renewal, including via unexpected forms of neo traditionalism.

Special Session 3 | 1:30-3:00 p.m.

Religious Renewal in Times of Environmental Crisis

Jewish Environmentalism in Israel: A Shared Movement?

Dr. Itay Greenspan, Senior Lecturer of Social Work and Social Welfare (Hebrew University) with Tanhum Yoreh (University of Toronto), Ophir Weinshal-Shachar (Ben Gurion University)

Faith-based organizations promoting an environmental agenda emerged in Israel in the last two and a half decades. These NGOs are rooted in, or guided by, Jewish values and Jewish traditions. The emergence of these NGOs coincided with two parallel processes: the professionalization of the environmental field in Israel as part of the development of contemporary civil society and the growth of new currents of Jewish renewal. While this myriad of organizational actors might share common environmental agendas and goals, they still come from very different, and often conflicting, theological frameworks (e.g., Renewal-Reform, Orthodox theology), a reality which poses a major hurdle to aligning a system of shared values. Our goal is to understand whether shared values that motivate environmental engagement exist among the different organizations and communities in Israel that work towards sustainable lifestyle solutions based on Jewish traditions. In this talk, we will share the story of Jewish environmentalism from an organizational perspective, as it has developed in Israel in recent years. We will present the results of a systematic empirical research conducted among Jewish environmental groups and group leaders in Israel, documenting their activities, rationales, the motivating values that inspire Jewish environmental engagement and course of action. Our analysis reveals that while Jewish religious environmental groups share certain unique features, they differ in theological worldview. This fragmentation is expressed in the language; unique values; vision; content, and patterns of action; that the various groups take with environmental issues. This fragmentation allows the expansion of environmental ideas among religious groups but constitute a barrier to the transfer of knowledge and collaborations, which makes the formation of a Jewish environmental movement less realistic.

Religiosity and Exposure to Natural Disasters: Coping and Identity

Shiri Noy, Associate Professor of Sociology (Denison University), Dr. Linda Thunström (Department of Economics, University of Wyoming), Dr. Harvey Whitehouse (Department of Anthropology, University of Oxford)

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that climatic difficulties, such as increased prevalence of natural catastrophes, will arise even with substantial efforts to reduce the increase in average global temperatures. Research suggests that religiosity (e.g., prayers, church donations, and attendance) increases in the wake of natural disasters as religion provides important coping resources. Additional scholarship points to an increase in preventive (problem-focused) measures with exposure to disasters. However, these adaptation strategies have been studied in isolation—it is unknown if religiosity and problem-focused solutions are complements or substitutes, and how that may differ across groups in society. We use survey data collected in 2022 from Americans in hurricane-affected states (Florida, Texas, Louisiana and North Carolina) to examine how Christian religious Americans cope with natural disasters. Our preliminary results suggest that religious activity is largely complementary to other coping mechanisms. We plan to also investigate how exposure to natural disaster as well as the importance of the natural disaster in the person's life (that is, whether respondents identified it as transformative) relate to religiosity, coping mechanisms, and life satisfaction. This research provides insight into how Christian Americans' religious beliefs, identities, and behaviors relate to their experiences of climate change and coping.

Session 4 | 3:15-4:45 p.m.
Islamic Renewal in Times of Crisis

Facing Jihad: Contemporary Muslim Perspectives on Inter-Faith Dialogue

Itzhak Weismann, Professor of Islamic Studies (University of Haifa)

In the past two decades there has been a proliferation of interfaith and inter-cultural events around the globe organized by Muslims or with a notable Muslim presence. Muslims have been relatively late in following the worldwide ecumenical movement heralded by the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago and re-invigorated after World War II by the Second Vatican Council of 1962-5. Only in the wake of 9/11 and the subsequent wave of terror attacks in both Western and Muslim countries did they begin to support dialogue on a large scale. The breakthrough came in 2007 and 2008 with the issuance of a public letter, "Common Word between Us," signed by 138 Muslim scholars and religious leaders inviting Christian colleagues to engage in dialogue, and with the interfaith and inter-cultural initiative of King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia that led to the foundation of a dialogue center bearing his name in Vienna.

The aim of my proposed talk is to present and analyze the ideas and attitudes of some major thinkers and activists who had laid the foundations for the new practice of interfaith dialogue in contemporary Islam. I argue that the effort to engage the Other is an integral part of the Islamic revival that began in the 1970s in general, and a response to the rise of Islamic violence toward non-Muslims and the Muslim themselves in particular. Drawing on Eickelman and Piscatori's concept of Muslim Politics (which refers to the competition and contest over the interpretation of symbols and control of formal and informal institutions within the general framework of Islam), I further maintain that "the Muslim politics of dialogue" seeks to empower Muslims through acceptance and integration into the globalized world, rather than through the jihadists' path of self-segregation and bloody conflict.

We will begin our presentation with an examination of the novelty of the concept of dialogue. The classical Islamic doctrine posed a dichotomous view that divided the world into dar al-Islam (the abode of submission to God) and dar al-harb (the abode of war against infidels). The relations between the two abodes was to be governed by a combination of da'wa – the call to Islam – and jihad – the struggle to impose its rule. Within the abode of Islam, members of other monotheistic religions, the people of the book, were entitled to protection (dhimma) so long as they accept Muslim rule and pay the poll tax. No such tolerance was shown toward apostates, who had to choose between repentance and death. In modern times, da'wa was increasingly turned inside, toward the Muslims themselves, in defense against westernization and secularization, while jihad was redefined as a total war against the hegemonic West. As against them dialogue – hiwar, which implies debating the other on equal basis and with mutual respect, was a theological novelty. As such, it required conceptualization, legitimization, integration into Muslim doctrine, and prescriptions for implementation.

The main part of the paper will be devoted to an analysis, and comparison, of the writings of the pioneers of the new discourse and practice of dialogue. The analysis will consist of detecting reinterpretations of the classical Muslim traditions concerning the non-Muslims, the modes and degree of acceptance of related modern concepts such as citizenship, human rights, equality and political participation, and the various forms of engaging with the Other. We will focus on seven figures, each operating in a different arena and representing a different type of engagement. Three of the figures come from the core countries of the Middle East: the Egyptian-born Islamist "global mufti" Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the Sufi-oriented Turkish Fethulla Gülen and the Iranian exile philosopher Abdolkarim Soroush. The other four have lived and worked in Muslim-minority environments: the Indian modernist (Ismaili) thinker Asghar Ali Engineer and reformist 'alim Wahiduddin Khan, the American-Palestinian academic and activist Ismail Raji al-Faruqi and the European-born public intellectual Tariq Ramadan.

In the conclusion, we will try to assess the impact of these pioneers on the contemporary Islamic scene and, more particularly, their potential in confronting and containing jihadi violence in the name of Islam. Based on my own participation in some major interfaith meetings and on interviews with various religious leaders, I will detect traces of interfaith discourse and practice in various Islamic movements such as the Salafis, the Muslim Brothers and the Wasatis, as well as in related initiatives of governments such as the Saudi one, traditional institutions like al-Azhar and public intellectuals at large.

The Relationship between the Islamic Movement and the State of Israel

Sobhi Rayan, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies (Al-Qasemi Academic College)

The Arab society in Israel is facing fundamental problems, and in the near future, these may turn into fateful ones that threaten its existence and dissolve its ties. As a result, the idea of emigration has started occupying the minds of the younger generation. These problems include violence and crime, land and housing, as well as other issues that are not less important than these two central issues, which are their consequences, such as poverty, employment, education, and others.

The need for a new approach to solving these problems is based on considering society to be the basis and purpose of political action. Society is closer in its construction and social relations to the natural innate nature (fitra) of the human being, which consists of a set of values and ideals, that contribute to the moralization of political action and to its rescue from the scourges of ownership and possession. This puts society at the center of political attention at the expense of the party that occupies the central position in politics in general. This bias aims to empower society at both material and moral levels in order to be able to meet life challenges and life developments. This empowerment has to meet both material and moral requirements alike. Paying attention to one side is not enough for empowerment. Therefore, work needs to be done to support and build both sides. Attention to urban infrastructure is not more important than the internalization of moral values; moral values are the origin from which urbanization branches.

This new approach opted for a policy of influencing the Israeli Government's policies with the aim of lifting the injustice and systematic discrimination it has practiced against the Arab society for decades. This approach has adopted a way towards supporting the government coalition in return for great achievements for Arab society. The United Arab List became a part of the government coalition but not part of the government. Thus, it does not bear all its sins, and it is aware of its limited impact on public policy. This does not prevent it from exercising its moral role in alleviating injustice and advocating for the oppressed" as much as she could, which was an unprecedented bold step in the history of politics and the Arab parties in Israel.

Tuesday, April 25, 2023 | Shalom Hartman Institute

Morning Keynote | 10:00-11:00 a.m.

Religious Renewal as a Modern Phenomenon

Yaakov Ariel, Professor of Religious Studies (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

For long decades, scholars had considered decline in religious commitment to be a habitual consequence of modernization. Many had therefore reacted with surprise when vigorous movements of religious renewal appeared on the scene during the 1960s-1970s. To the alarm of those holding secular views, such movements have made their mark on political agendas and cultural norms. This had been evident not merely in non-Western societies, but also in veteran modern nations, especially the United States. During the 1960s-

1980s, America had witnessed an unprecedented resurgence in young people seeking spiritual meaning and communal affiliation. Millions have joined new forms of Evangelical and Pentecostal, or charismatic groups. Others chose Westernized versions of East, South, or South-East, Asian traditions. Others created religious communes in both agrarians and urban settings, some of them neo-Pagan. Judaism too produced renewal movements, mostly of Neo-Hasidic nature, which corresponded and exchanged with its Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Moslem counterparts, and like them attracted members of the Baby-Boom generation.

Israeli society of the post 1973 war has also witnessed a spiritual revival, which manifested itself in movements of return to tradition, as well as a proliferation of New Religious Movements. These included various Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Moslem, Native-American and other groups, some of them, such as Messianic Jews, neo-Hasidism, and Scientology, strongly influenced by the American scene. Like in America, such groups drew on disappointment from modernist ideologies, including Socialism, Communism and Zionism. Turning away from modernist hopes and modes of thinking into spirituality and the re-adoption of the super-natural have brought a few thinkers to relate to the new development as post-modernity. It has signified a rejection of the premises of modernity from within modernity by those who have experienced and found it lacking, or on the edge of catastrophes.

Session 5 | 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Christian Renewal in Times of Crisis

De-colonizing Interreligious Dialogue

John Munayer, Director for Education and Dialogue (Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue)

The interreligious movement has been shaped by three key events: The World Parliament of Religions in 1983, Second Vatican Council in 1962-1965 and 9/11. Thus, the interreligious movement is situated in a Western narrative and framework. In addition, the rise of the interreligious drive in the West has also coincided with European colonialism and North American imperialism. As a result, many assumptions, methods, structures and positions of power within the field of interreligious dialogue are dominated by white-Western norms and individuals. Even after the end of colonialism, systems of dominance that transcend time and space, also known as coloniality, are the driving force behind many interreligious initiatives worldwide. Likewise, these influences are true for many interreligious programs and organisations in the context of Palestine and Israel. Unfortunately, and because of the existence of coloniality within the interreligious movement worldwide and in the Holy Land, many initiatives fail to address core issues relating to identity, history, authenticity, justice and the imbalance of power that exists in numerous contexts. For this reason, this paper will attempt to highlight a number of problems within the interreligious movement in connection to coloniality and argue that interreligious dialogue in many places around the world, and in the Holy Land specifically, need to be accompanied by values and processes of decoloniality. I hope to spark a difficult conversation with my fellow interreligious academics and activists in order to improve our work and promote justice, reconciliation and peace.

Evangelical Discontinuity and Liberation Theology: The Case of “Christ at the Checkpoint Young Adults”

Marah Sarji, Ph.D. Student (Princeton Theological Seminary)

In June of 2021, the Christ at The Checkpoint Young Adults movement [CATCYA] issued its Statement of Repentance and Hope [SRH] following the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah and the Unity Uprising, calling the Christian leaders and the churches in Palestine to repent, to reject Christian Zionism, and commit to action towards justice. Throughout the following year, the CATCYA movement

adopted the gospel of liberation inspired by Black Liberation Theology and held monthly activities to stand in solidarity with oppressed communities of Palestine, through visits and financially supporting those most vulnerable like women and peoples with special needs.

Through this case study of renewal in evangelicalism in Palestine, we learn first about the politics of liberation within the evangelical community. Second, the approach to political activity challenging the occupation and more substantially, challenging the Western influences in the evangelical church such as Christian Zionism and coloniality in Palestinian Liberation Theology. Third, the communal aspect of renewal is deemed central to the CATCYA movement. Lastly, the break with a colonial faith where Christianity first emerged and adopting an imagined Palestinian Christian past connecting to the first church.

Through this paper, I will discuss the generational conflict which arose from the SRH and challenging current power dynamics within the Palestinian Christian community. While the older and younger generations hold unto the notion of “The Kingdom of God”, their understanding of how a Christian should politically act differs especially regarding internal criticism of evangelical conduct. Furthermore, I will discuss how through the generational conflict, the CATCYA movement experienced a discontinuity with evangelicalism and realignment of faith by reorganizing evangelical ways of political conduct, priorities, relationships, tenets of faith and sewing a connection to an imagined primordial Christian Palestinian past connecting to the first church. Thus, based on my ethnographic fieldwork, I will discuss how through communal organization and activity the CATCYA movement shifts its focus towards using Palestinian sources and experience as a first step to doing theology.

Keynote | 1:30-2:30 p.m.

“A Natural Act of Vengeance”: The Crisis of the Liberal Order and the Rise of Fundamentalist Judaism in Israel

Tomer Persico, Research Fellow (Shalom Hartman Institute) and Rubinstein Fellow (Reichman University)

The crisis of Liberal Democracy is embodied in the rise of anti-liberal populism. While global trends offer shared characteristics over different regions, the proposed paper will strive to examine the local grounds and forms that anti-liberal populism has taken since 2019 in Israel, through exploring the general causes for the rise of populism at this time, followed by an analysis of its application within Israeli Jewish society and politics.

Israeli Jewish society has experienced seismic shifts in its identity since the 1990s, with both the erstwhile secular socialist Zionist identity and the Religious Zionist Kookist identity fragmenting, leaving increasing liberalization and a space that would be occupied by different forms of privatized Judaism and a shift towards ethnonationalism. The latter has mutated in recent years into a populist movement, infused with traditionalism and in correlation with a “shtetlization” of the public sphere, i.e. an unraveling of Israel’s republicanism toward a more contested, tribal, less liberal political arena.

My presentation will address the rise of populist and fundamentalist Judaism from the crisis of the liberal order. From the anarchical “Hilltop Youth” to violent, Romantic Neo-Hasidism and on to the current Finance Minister expressing his desire to “wipe out” a Palestinian village, I will attempt to show the various forms of Jewish religious extremism that have coalesced over the past twenty years, and to analyze the ideational modes and social structures of these developments.

Session 6 | 2:45-3:45 p.m.

Interfaith in Times of Crisis

Theorizing the Abrahamic: From the Abraham Accords to the Religion(s) of Abraham

Rev. Dr. Kurt Anders Richardson, DTh, (University of Toronto and Abraham's Bridge)

The Abraham Accords brokered by Israel and Saudi Arabia (though not-yet-signatory), represent a major political and cultural shift for the Middle East. Adding to this breakthrough is the very recent normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran brokered by China. The "Abrahamic Axis" made up of Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, and others pending, now exists as a signaling a new religious environment in the Middle East. The Middle East is no longer the domain of US occupation having stepped back to encourage Israeli (i.e., Jewish) / Saudi (i.e., Muslim) leadership. Perhaps, in the near future Lebanon (i.e., Christian / Muslim), will join the Abrahamic Axis. When that happens, the promise of the "Abrahamic" will begin to achieve practical expression. We know that each of the three religions inhabit social / political worlds that draw heavily from common scriptural principles and symbols which are extensively overlapping and mutual understood. What then is the "Abrahamic" from which and into which the "Abraham Accords" are attempting to generate a new basis of interfaith collaboration?

This paper will concentrate on three aspects of the Abrahamic in this context: 1) Tanakh, Evangelium, and Qur'an in conversation; 2) Abrahamic faith and reciprocity; 3) Abrahamic cosmopolitanism. My approach is contrastive and ultimately prescriptive. The root to the Christian dimension is through Lebanon, the only Arab Christian tradition on national scale. Charles Malik is the exemplar cosmopolitan.

Thursday, April 27 | Pontifical Biblical Institute

Session 7 | 10:15 a.m.–12:15 p.m.

Religious Renewal in Times of Crisis

Holy Sepulchers and Holy Nails: Journeying to Jerusalem in Medieval Milan

Martina Saltamacchia, Professor of History (University of Nebraska at Omaha)

In eleventh- and twelfth-century Europe, an unprecedented geographical and spiritual expansion of Christianity accompanied rapid economic growth and political development. With this spiritual awakening came a new religious fervor, best exemplified in the practice of participating in a pilgrimage, an ancient devotion that acquired a central prominence in medieval religiosity. The prime pilgrimage destination was the Holy Land. Thousands of Christians every year visited the biblical sites to gain spiritual enlightenment and healing, and to see with their own eyes the *ipsissima loca*, the places of the incarnation and resurrection.

Yet, pilgrimages to Jerusalem were abruptly halted by the same event that contributed to its growing popularity, the Crusades (1098-1291). Over the span of two centuries, nine armed expeditions from Europe repeatedly clashed against the Muslims in the Levant, precipitating the region into a chaotic instability that rendered perilous and impractical the journey to the Holy Land.

The paper explores the response of medieval Christians to this state of affairs, and how their devotion towards Jerusalem in this time of crisis ended up impacting religious architecture in Italy, and especially in Milan, with the recreation of the architecture of the Holy Sepulcher and the veneration of relics from the Holy Land.

The faithful could pray and meditate on the passion, death and resurrection of Christ by visiting one of the many Holy Sepulcher churches proliferating in northern Italy, such as the church of San Sepolcro in Milan,

founded in 1030 and described by Leonardo da Vinci as the “true center of Milan”; the Complex of San Pietro in Consavia in Asti, with the circular church built between 1110 and 1130 in imitation of the Rotunda of the Holy Sepulcher; the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher in the town of Acquapendente in Lazio, a popular medieval destination for cripples seeking miraculous cures from contact with a blood-stained stone said to come from the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem; or the Oratory of the Holy Sepulcher in Borgo Sansepolcro, a town near Florence founded by two medieval pilgrims coming home from the Holy Land and carrying a stone from the Holy Sepulcher, just to name a few.

Indeed, the Crusaders’ pillages in the Levant infamously brought home an abundance of relics that soon filled the European cathedrals with body parts of the first apostles, objects pertaining to the Virgin Mary, and instruments of the Passion of Christ. Those who could not undertake the arduous journey to Jerusalem and touch the material evidence of the truthfulness of the Gospel could journey to the local shrines and venerate these holy fragments that from Jerusalem had traveled close to their villages. It is likely within this context that the Sacro Chiodo, purportedly one of the nails from the cross of Christ, arrived in Milan, soon becoming the preeminent relic of the city.

Through the material evidence of local recreations of the Holy Sepulcher and relics like the Holy Nail, this essay illustrates the impact of the devotion to the Holy Land in a time of crisis on the religious architecture and spirituality of medieval Milan.

Religion in Museums: Religious Objects between Disenchantment and Enchantment in Leningrad and Marburg

Konstanze Runge, Curator (Ikonenmuseum Frankfurt)

In two of the world's oldest museums of religion, similar religious objects were exhibited with very different curatorial intentions at the end of the 1920s and in the course of the 1930s. In the crisis ridden period between the two world wars, and under the conditions of Stalinism in the Soviet Union on the one hand and the rise of National Socialism in Germany on the other hand, the museum founders employed religious objects into their exhibition narratives. How did they contextualize the sacred objects in order to educate the museum visitors about their notion of religion? A reconstructive analysis of some early exhibitions, based on a wealth of archival sources such as photos and museum documents from Leningrad and Marburg, sheds light on the curatorial practices oscillating between disenchantment and enchantment of religion.

Disenchantment and enchantment, however, did not only extend to the re-/presentation of religious objects in exhibition contexts, but transcended them. In view of the atheist threat in the young USSR, Rudolf Otto was particularly concerned to convey the value of religion per se in his exhibitions. In the Soviet Union, the struggle with religion was to be based on its exploration, and the anti-religious museums were among the most important institutions, in which the population was to be enlightened in this sense. But why did the anti-religious campaigners and Marxist scholars insist on the use of authentic religious objects to convey their narrative?

In times when Russian authorities try to eradicate Ukrainian cultural memory and heritage, my paper looks back to the experiences during the Cultural Revolution, when religious memory was heavily reshaped and people were alienated from their own traditions and heritage.

Counteracting Enemy Images

Kristian Steiner, Associate Professor in Peace and Conflict Studies (Malmö University)

Enemy images are powerful ingredients of political rhetoric with the aim of denigrating or dehumanize adversaries for a wide range of purposes, most commonly to legitimate violent conflicts and to mobilize a population. In their most simple function, they establish powerful imaginations of existential antagonisms, an unbridgeable divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’ fuelled by fear.

This presentation is part of a book project on enemy images. The book, which will become a textbook, will deal, among other topics, with how enemy images arise, their consequences, and why people accept them. This presentation is based on a chapter discussing how enemy images can be countered and how people of faith can contribute to this endeavour.

Neither individuals nor collectives will be immune to the influence of enemy images. Still, we can mitigate the influence of such constructs and knowing how is essential knowledge in peace and conflict studies and for peace seeking believers. There is little research or academic literature specifically on the counteraction of enemy images. What we will do in this chapter/presentation, is to, with some precaution, draw from research discussing counteraction of prejudice, scapegoating and stereotypes. We will also discuss system justification theory, peace journalism, and literature on media literacy.

Keynote | 1:15-2:15p.m.

Using and Abusing Cultural Historical Narratives in the Context of Toxic Religion

Rev. Dr. Gary Mason, Founder and Director (ReThinking Conflict)

This proposal would like to explore the topic as highlighted in the title above. I would intend to explore this topic using several approaches, in a geographical location namely, the N. Irish space and also the USA. Secondly, exploring what I define as using toxic religion, in the context of using and abusing cultural heritage and memory.

Firstly, I would explore this concept in the northern Irish conflict, a conflict in which I have been involved for over three decades as a religious actor and academic practitioner. Exploring, how certain forms of theology and its implementation and interpretation have led to the theological assassination of the “other” as well as the dehumanising of the other person. Northern Ireland has been described as a sectarian cockpit. A number of years ago I spent two years as part of a working party on sectarianism, the working party defines it as such:-

“Sectarianism is a complex of attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and structures in which religion is a significant component, and which (i) directly, or indirectly, infringes the rights of the individuals or groups, and/or (ii) influences or causes situations of disruptive conflict.”

Sectarianism, both religiously and culturally draws on the past and certain historical and theological narratives that become that person’s interpretive keys for their life experience. In using and abusing cultural heritage and memory, we become guilty of a selective remembering, instead of a deep remembering. This presentation will suggest ways to create spaces, particularly religious spaces that are used for a deep remembering and acknowledgement of how religion can use and abuse cultural heritage. As the French historian L. E. Goff suggests, "Memory only seeks to rescue the past, in order to serve the present and the future."

Secondly, and geographically I would like to explore the rise of Christian Nationalism and White Supremacy in the United States, looking at what some scholars are defining as a white American folk religion, which is drawing heavily on the past, but also using and abusing cultural heritage. Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, highlight this in their book “Taking America Back for God,” they suggest

that Christian nationalism is a cultural framework, a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives and value systems. It idealises and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life. So in reality Christian nationalism is an argument about identity, and a superior identity at that. This identity argument very easy slides into the concept that “God is on my side.”

Most conflicts have three components to them, land, identity and religion, all of these aspects can be prevalent in the mentality that uses and abuses cultural heritage and toxic religion for domination of one group over another.

There are parallels between sectarianism and racism. Each relies on an ideology of superiority, and greater ‘entitlement,’ of one group over another. The processes by which racism and sectarianism operate can also be similar, escalating upwards through a ‘pyramid of hate’ from name-calling to violence, and feed on common factors such as a sense of entitlement, insecurity, media distortion, a culture of violence and territorialism.

As part of my conclusion, I would like to suggest that sacred space in all our traditions could be used in dealing with these contested narratives, both politically, theologically and culturally. I would hope as part of the group discussion that people from various geographic locations would see some of the similarities in their spaces and the two spaces, namely Ireland and the US that I have highlighted. As a South African scholar highlights -

“Reconciliation is no cheap matter. It does not come about by simply papering over deep – seated differences. Reconciliation presupposes confrontation. Without that we do not get reconciliation, but merely a temporary glossing over of differences. The running sores of society cannot be healed with the use of sticking plaster. Reconciliation presupposes an operation, cutting to the very bone, without anaesthetic. The infection is not just on the surface. The abscess of hate and mistrust and fear, between black and white, nation and nation, rich and poor, has to be slashed open.”

So in addressing, how we use and abuse cultural heritage in developing these destructive narratives, can we realise that as one commentator suggests that reconciliation cannot be cheap. Reconciliation involves the recognition of the interdependence of our histories. Reconciliation entails the appropriation of each other’s history, through which each empowers the other to be free. Through the reconciliation of memories a new identity is born.

Session 8 | 2:30-4:30 p.m.

Islamic Renewal in Times of Crisis

Religious Revivalism and Political Power in the Muslim World: Is There a Democratic Alternative?

Ramazan Kilinc, Professor of Political Science (University of Nebraska at Omaha)

Revivals in religious identity worldwide have had varied and dramatic effects on domestic, regional, and international politics. The rise of Islamic revivalist movements led to transformative events in the Muslim world. From the start of the late 19th century, Muslim revivalist movements emerged and engaged with modernity in varying ways. When secular nationalist politics gained ground in most of the Muslim world, the Islamist movements went underground or were marginalized. However, starting in the 1970s, Islamists gained ground in several Muslim contexts and became holders of or contenders for political power. The rise of Islamist revivalism dramatically influenced politics in the Muslim context. Islamists' engagement with pluralism created mixed results and questioned their compatibility with liberty and democracy. In this paper, I examine Islamist movements and their engagement with democratic governance in Muslim-majority countries. I discuss how religious revivalist movements transform the political field in Muslim-majority

countries and the debates on religion, secularism, and democracy. I specifically ask if Islamist revivalist movements are deemed to ascertain illiberal authoritarianism or if they can offer a democratic alternative. I compare the experiences of Islamists to identify the conditions under which religious revivalism leads to authoritarian or democratic outcomes. The study aims to identify religious, social, and political conditions influencing the engagement between religious revivalism and political power. Specifically, it attempts to answer if there is a democratic alternative in the religious revivalist movement's relationship with political power.

Renewing Islam in a Time of Crisis: Democracy and Tyranny in the Post-WWI Moment

Simon Wood, Associate Professor of Classics and Religious Studies (University of Nebraska at Lincoln)

I examine a selection of Rashid Rida's essays on democracy, tyranny, and sovereignty, published from 1918 to 1924. My paper hinges on events that contributed to and/or exemplified a sense of crisis that pervaded the Muslim Middle East early last century: WWI; the establishment of Mandates; abolition of the Sultanate in 1922; and abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924. The last event, effected by a secularizing Turkish Republic, signposted and formalized what had long been evident: the era of Middle Eastern Muslims as powerful peoples on the world stage whose futures were primarily shaped and informed by ideas drawn from their own traditions had come to an end. Rida (1865-1935) was an influential Syrian Islamic reformist who published many essays on how Islam could be revitalized in light of such developments. I examine some.

I draw attention to what seem to be startling shifts and inconsistencies in Rida's postwar work as he strove and struggled to articulate and implement strategies that could empower his "community" as a sovereign entity. These shifts are seen both in the figures he embraced, ranging from an American President to a Saudi monarch, and in the shape of community whose interests he advanced. He variously emphasized his identity as a faithful Muslim, Syrian, Arab, Easterner, and "religiously committed person," where he identified more with certain Christians than with some of his coreligionists.

Religious, Political or Public? What is the Legitimacy of Ra'am to Join the Coalition?

Nohad Ali, Senior Lecturer (Western Galilee College) and Senior Research Fellow (Samuel Neaman Institute for National Policy at Technion University)

Since the elections to the first Knesset in Israel, every vote for the Arab parties meant a vote for the opposition. It was apparently a natural, normal and even normative thing. This situation was a kind of broad consensus in Israel. Arab parties - with a national, religious or secular agenda - accepted the situation. Israel's governments - right, left, national unity, religious, ultra-Orthodox - have also accepted the situation. Everything was true until the elections of the 24th Knesset. Not anymore. The United Arab Party (Ra'am), which is a party with a religious-Islamic agenda, decided to change the rules of the game and expressed a desire to participate in the coalition. This was marked by not supporting the coalition from the outside, but being an integral part of the coalition.

The decision stunned the general public in Israel and the Arab public in particular. I will discuss the question of the legitimacy of this controversial move: Religious, political or public? What is the legitimacy of Ra'am to join the coalition?

Session 9 | 4:30-6:00 p.m.

Christian Renewal in Times of Crisis

Restoration and Millennial Expectations in Barclay's Mission to Jerusalem (1851-1862)

Rev. Dr. Paul A. Williams, Associate Professor of Religious Studies (University of Nebraska at Omaha)

Protestant Christian missionary movements of the 19th and 20th centuries were optimistic about the prospects for their own specific versions of 'Christianity.' With the formation of the American Christian Missionary Society (ACMS) in 1849, the 'restoration movement' (including Alexander Campbell's Disciples of Christ), attempted to take their domestic success in the United States to an international level. As the first international missionary of the ACMS Dr. James T. Barclay went to Jerusalem in 1851. On the one hand, his plan to convert Jews and Muslims his understanding of Christianity did not produce statistically significant results. On the other hand, his medical skills gave him access to a range of sites and social niches, and he left a literary and visual record of his discoveries and his insights into the history of this city - past, present, and future. In the history of Christian missionary efforts, the varying degrees of success and failure in their evangelization objectives often distract commentators from the extraordinary range of unintended consequences (e.g., cultural, social, political economic). Although the restoration movement is an example of a modestly successful renewal movement, their global ministries had a faltering start in Jerusalem. This paper examines Barclay's missionary and literary work, as well as millennial expectations, in its historical context, and it concludes with an assessment of its implications for understanding and explaining religious renewal movements in times of crisis.

On the Use and Abuse of Cultural Heritage-The Case of Evangelical Palestinians

Jack Munayer (World Council of Churches – Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel)

Palestinian Christians are a minority in both Israel and the Palestinian Occupied Territories, comprising around 2% of the population. Despite their small number, Palestinian Christians play an important role when it comes to the battle of narratives and advocacy around the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict. This is particularly true for the Evangelical Palestinians, who have (relatively speaking) a larger contact with Western Evangelical Zionists and by extension influential actors within Israeli society.

It is because of their unique position that Palestinian Christians have cultivated a great interest for colonial powers. Consequently, they have been subjected to exploitation; with their cultural heritage used and abused for oppressive agendas that fragment Palestinian society. Some Palestinian Christians have failed to resist the seduction of power, wealth, status that colonial powers offer and have become colonial tools which has caused great debate within broader Palestinian society. Other Palestinian Christians have embraced the colonial ideologies and are implementing similar oppressive structures within their own internal community, which erases some of its unique cultural heritage.

This presentation shall discuss a number of examples over the past few years of incidents, conferences and figures that have raised questions over the use and abuse of Palestinian Christians by external actors. Furthermore, the presentation will also discuss its impact on broader Palestinian society and its potential risk for inter-religious relations. Lastly, the presentation will call for an open and frank discussion on the renewal of Palestinian Christian cultural heritage in light of its vulnerability to exploitation.

Leonard and Shirley Goldstein Lecture on Human Rights (6:00-7:00pm)

Cosmic Justice: Desacralizing Human Rights in the Holy Land

Reza Aslan, Professor (University of California, Riverside)

For a great many Jews, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been viewed through the lens of the historical-cum-mythological battles fought by the Israelites against God's enemies in the Hebrew Bible. It is a cosmic worldview shared by a large number of Palestinians, who frame their struggle for resistance against Israeli occupation as a conflict not over land or territory but over identity and dignity. And, of course, many Christians, especially in the United States, cast the very existence of the State of Israel in starkly cosmic terms. When material conflicts between opposing political ideologies are explicitly defined as metaphysical conflicts between cosmic forces of good and evil, what role can their be for a robust human rights regime?

Optional Tour for Conference Participants

Wednesday, April 26 | 10:00-11:00 a.m.

Nine Quarters of Jerusalem

Matthew Teller (Journalist)

In Jerusalem, what you see and what is true are two different things. Maps divide the walled Old City into four quarters, yet that division doesn't reflect the reality of mixed and diverse neighborhoods. Beyond the crush and frenzy of its major religious sites, much of the Old City remains little known to visitors, its people overlooked and their stories untold. Matthew Teller's "Nine Quarters of Jerusalem" (Profile Books/Other Press, 2022) lets the communities of the Old City speak for themselves. Ranging through ancient past and political present, it evokes the city's depth and cultural diversity. In this talk, Teller features the Old City's Palestinian and Jewish communities, but also spotlights its Indian and African populations, its Greek and Armenian and Syriac cultures, its downtrodden Dom Gypsy families and its Sufi mystics. It discusses the sources of Jerusalem's holiness and the ideas that have shaped lives within its walls. It is an evocation of place through story, led by the voices of Jerusalemites.