



## RELIGIONS & PUBLIC LIFE *at* THE KENAN INSTITUTE FOR ETHICS

**Interreligious Dialogue in the Post-Secular Age**  
Sunday, 23 April - Tuesday, 25 April

*In the twenty-first century, religion has made a surprising and powerful return, and has had major impact on public affairs, domestic and international alike. Scholars are still scrambling to understand the phenomenon's significance, and those concerned for the preservation of constitutional norms and civility have been searching for new forms of interreligious dialogue. Do we live in a post-secular age? Has the Weberian concept of modernity proved inadequate? Does postmodernity open new opportunities for religious dialogue? Scholars at five Israeli, European & American universities will be exploring these questions with a view to launching a long-term international collaboration that may result in the establishment of a new institute. The workshop will take place on April 23-25, 2017 at Duke University, a founding member of the group, with hospitality extended by the Religions and Public Life Initiative at the Kenan Institute for Ethics.*

**Papers and presentations: 15 minutes each**

**Conference website:** <http://kenan.ethics.duke.edu/religion/conference/>

### **April 23, Sunday**

*For early arrivals and interested parties:*

15:00 NCJSS with Kata Gellen: "Karl Emil Franzos *Der Pojaz: The Birth of German Jewish Modernism in East Galicia*" JHFC Seminar Room 240. Paper available. Write: Deirdre White [deirdre.white@duke.edu](mailto:deirdre.white@duke.edu)

17:30 Reception & Buffet at JHFC Gallery (if attending, contact: Deirdre White [deirdre.white@duke.edu](mailto:deirdre.white@duke.edu), Cc: [amber.diaz@duke.edu](mailto:amber.diaz@duke.edu))

### **April 24, Monday**

*All Sessions at The Kenan Institute for Ethics, the Ahmadiieh Family Conference Room (West Duke 101). Contact Dr. Amber Díaz Pearson ([amber.diaz@duke.edu](mailto:amber.diaz@duke.edu) | 919-660-3184) with questions.*

9:30 Opening Comments: Malachi Hacohen

## ***Panel 1: Canons Across Culture: Christian, Jewish, & Muslim***

Chair: Hilda Nissimi (Bar-Ilan):

Alexander Deeg (Leipzig): “Holy Scriptures in Interreligious Contexts and in Secular Societies”

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are often called *religions of the book* (Buchreligionen; cf. the Islamic term *People of the Book*; أهل الكتاب). *Holy Scriptures* play an important, albeit different role in their religious self-definitions (and in the self-understanding of different groups *within* these religious traditions which can be defined by the *factual canon* they use – which is never the whole Holy Scripture, but always a ‘selection’ of the canon [faktischer Kanon]).

One of the main characteristics of modernity might be called the *decanonization* of “Holy Scripture”, transforming it into just an ‘old text’ and rethinking it by historical-critical approaches. This movement leads to the other ‘modern’ phenomenon: the evolving of anti-critical, anti-modern, fundamentalist hermeneutic approaches. These developments can be discerned in different shapes in the three mentioned religious contexts. In my paper, I want to investigate these aspects by primarily reflecting on two dimensions of our present condition:

1. *Holy Scriptures in Secular Societies*: Classic secularization theories suggest that the ‘holy’ vanishes and disappears in the process of secularization. On the other hand, more and more people suggest that the phenomenon of the ‘holy’ remains vivid, and that even a new trend of re-enchantment of the world can be observed. By using insights of thinkers of the so-called ‘new phenomenology’ I discuss this aspect and try to rethink *holiness* as an *aesthetic* category.
2. *Holy Scriptures in Interreligious Contexts*: As we live in a permanent interreligious situation with growing awareness of the religion of the others, the perception of “Holy Scriptures” is also part of the interreligious situation (and dialogue) – yet much more research is needed to say something about the interrelationship of the notions and concepts of “Holy Scriptures” in the interreligious situation.

The paper finally suggests the pre-modern Rabbinic hermeneutical model of *midrashic reading and re-reading, constructing and de-constructing* the ‘written’ and ‘oral Torah’ as a hermeneutic model of reading Holy Scriptures in post-modern times and interreligious contexts. This could be the case, as it combines meticulousness *and* imagination, and as it takes Biblical texts as starting points for creative interpretation *and* cherishes the sanctity of these texts.

Ari Geiger (Bar-Ilan): “From Exegesis to Polemics: Models for Interreligious Conversation about a Shared Canon”

Despite the severe hostility between Judaism and Christianity over the years, both religions share the Hebrew Bible (/Old Testament) as a common canon. Though differences in religious doctrine often dictate distinct spiritual interpretations of many sections of Scripture, both Jewish and Christian literal exegetes sometimes find themselves sharing identical exegetical tools and assumptions, leading them to similar explanations of specific biblical verses or passages. In my presentation I will present common exegetical methods and equivalent interpretations by Christian and Jewish commentators.

I will then present a proposal for a project investigating internal religious dispute, another common challenge faced by different religions. The project’s objective is to characterize the polemical rhetoric written in the context of controversies between different streams of one religion or between two (or more) religious figures from the same stream over specific issues.

Malachi Hacohen (Duke): “*Der Talmud Jude: The Talmud in the Judeo-Christian World from Late Antiquity to the Present*”

Throughout the first millennium, Christians remained unaware of the Talmudic discursive tradition. When they discovered the Talmud in the high Middle Ages, they thought the Jews had betrayed the biblical legacy, and the Talmud was burnt. Early modern Christian Hebraists were ambivalent about the Talmud, and it returned to feature prominently in modern antisemitism. Post-Holocaust Christian-Jewish dialogues have focused on the Bible but, in recent decades, academic scholarship has discovered critical rationalism, modern legal thinking, and religious hybridity in the Talmud. The Talmud’s unprecedented popularity in academic culture provides an opportunity for the Christian-Jewish dialogue to bring rabbinic Judaism into focus, and finally recognize the Jews as the people of the Talmud.

Ellen McLarney (Duke): “Freedom in Islam: Conceptualizing Justice in Egypt and Tunisia”

This paper looks at Islamic thinkers and writers' conceptions of freedom late 19th century and early 20th century, under the auspices of colonial rule in Tunisia (under French rule) and in Egypt (under British rule). I look specifically at the development of conceptions of freedom and justice within the frame of the Islamic intellectual tradition, as an antidote and a response to European conceptions of freedom, but also a vision of political self-determination in the age of modernity.

12:00 Noon Lunch (1 hour)

13:00 **Panel 2: Christian & Jew from Pietism to Liberalism**

Chair: Todd Weir (Groningen)

Doron Avraham (Bar-Ilan): ““Religion of the Hearts”? German Pietism and Judaism”

German Pietism was a religious movement that had spread throughout Prussia and other German states since the late seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth century. It aimed at the invigoration of the emotional nature of the Christian faith, especially within the Lutheran church, and hoped for its transformation into *Herzens-Religion* (Religion of the hearts). As such, Pietism challenged the orthodox doctrine of Lutheranism. At the same time the pietist movement – among its prominent members were Philipp Jacob Spener, Hermann August Francke, Gottfried Arnold, Ludwig von Zinzendorf – also contested Martin Luther's notion regarding the mass conversion of Jews. Unlike the late and radical ideas of Luther about the decreasing prospects of such conversion and the consequent need to punish the Jews, pietists held much more tolerant views in the matter. Indeed, many of them thought that respecting Judaism and Jews, improving their status, and forging better relations with them, might yield the result expected initially by Luther himself, namely, their mass conversion. However, a closer examination of writings and sermons of pietists shows that not few of them deviated from Luther's doctrine and believed that Jews should be tolerated and respected without necessarily expecting their conversion. The "Religion of the heart" they advocated took priority over dogma and theoretical-theological argumentations, thus turning the emotional aspect of religion into a platform that enables trans-religious cooperation. For these pietists, Protestants and Catholics could unite into one people, but at the same time they supported tolerance and freedom for Jews who love their God as the pietists do. In fact, some of the German pietists saw in Judaism the origin and inspiration for unconditional and sensual love



for God and man. Therefore, integrating Jews within society as people who worships God in emotional terms is possible as such love of the divine becomes common religious feature for Protestant, Catholics and Jews. In this sense, the trans-religious aspect of pietism seems to prefigure the more tolerant culture of the Enlightenment.

Hilda Nissimi (Bar-Ilan): “Joseph Wolff: Anglican Missionary, Ethnic Jew and Liberal Imperialist” Joseph Wolff (1795-1862), who was born a German Jew, converted to Catholicism and later to Anglican Protestantism, became a missionary to the Jews in an effort to convert them. Reports of his missionary efforts and his travels to find the Ten Lost Tribes made him a household name in England. Among many other Jewish communities, he met with the Jews of Mashhad, Persia – twice. The encounter between Wolff and the Mashhadi Jews provides a unique vantage point for shedding light on Wolff’s complicated identity politics. With Wolff as the focus, this paper aims to show how identities are negotiated and shaped by politics, in particular British empire building and its centrality to English national identity. For Wolff, the politics of identity was a complicated negotiation between ethnic origin, religion, and civil and national affiliation. It was conducted within a parallel arena where the English were also negotiating imperial aggrandizement, Christian fervor, and civil integration of non-Christians in their midst. Wolff’s writings attested to these negotiations of identity, participated in them, and helped construct them.

#### 14:15 ***Panel 3: Post-Holocaust Christian-Jewish Dialogues***

Chair: Zohar Maor (Bar-Ilan)

Carolyn Sanzenbacher (Southampton): “A Historiographic Challenge to Christian-Jewish Relations?” After seven decades of intensive research and debate scholars agree that, while there is no one sufficient cause of the Holocaust, there are necessary causes. One frequently advanced necessary cause is said to be the embeddedness of negative Christian teachings on Jews in western culture and society. It is also the case that one of the main categories of Holocaust bystanders was the Christian Church, which means that the agency of a claimed necessary cause appeared in every geographic schemata, overlapping in time and place in all axis, occupied, neutral, and allied countries, in both local and distant populations. These claims become all the more salient when faced with the fact that scholarship has also indicted the Church with a general silence during the twelve years of Nazi persecution and extermination of Jews. That this set of claims is being made by both scholars and leaders of the Church is a critical point to bear in mind when considering the historical-theological-dialogical conundrum of the current historiography on the Church and the Holocaust. As a complex problem stated simply, the post-war question of *how* the Holocaust could have occurred in a predominately Christian society provoked two lines of historical research, one of which focused on Christian attitudes *prior* to the Holocaust and, the other, on how Christian bystanders responded *during* the Holocaust. As this multi-disciplinary historiography developed, accumulative studies gave rise to scholarly indictments of the Church, on the one hand, and Church confrontation with historical anti-Jewish attitudes, on the other; and that, in turn, led to changes in Christian theology as well as impetus for repair of Christian-Jewish relations through inter-faith dialogue. The mutual dependency of these three areas of concern has remained self-evident and, as such, all are addressed in the same literature, each with a different aim. The historical aim is concerned with the historicity of Church attitudes toward Jews both prior to and during the Holocaust. The theological aim is

also concerned with past Church attitudes but it is predominately concerned with how the Holocaust affected (and affects) post-Holocaust Christian theology. The dialogical aim, which is an offshoot of the theological task, is concerned with how to move beyond the Holocaust in terms of repair and advancement of Christian-Jewish dialogue. Within this typically undifferentiated mix, it is not uncommon to find direct or inferential caution about ongoing historiographic attention to *past* theological attitudes of the Church, on the grounds that it will bear negatively on Christian-Jewish relations in the *present*.

This paper will discuss the conflicting implications of this complex literature by looking at the historiographic process of post-Holocaust scholarly indictments of the Church, examining the arguments for and against those charges, and isolating for discussion the cautioning argument that historiographic emphases on causal relations between Christian teachings and the Holocaust is one of the most pressing challenges to Jewish-Christian dialogue today.

James Chappel (Duke): “Friedrich Heer and the Limits of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue in the 1960s”

With *Nostra Aetate* (1965), the Catholic Church signaled the end of the long history of Catholic anti-Semitism. The Jews were no longer viewed as responsible, as a corporate body, for the murder of Christ, and the Church officially condemned all forms of anti-Semitism. This was without a doubt an important step forwards, putting to rest one of the most intractable obstacles to inter-faith dialogue. But did it go far enough? Some Catholics argued that it did not. *Nostra Aetate*'s gesture of gracious tolerance, they believed, occluded the vicious history of Catholic anti-Semitism and responsibility for the Holocaust. Friedrich Heer, a lay Austrian Catholic intellectual, was one of the most outspoken of these critics, and an investigation of his writings and activism in the years around *Nostra* show us the promises and limitations of Catholic-Jewish dialogue in the age of Vatican II and increasing Holocaust awareness. Heer tried to pave the way towards a more honest and open dialogue between Catholics and Jews, one that could only begin with a sweeping recognition of the depth of Catholic anti-Semitism. This confrontation, he believed, would not result in a condescending acceptance, but a full rethinking of what it means to be Catholic—in light of the Jewish genius, as he saw it, of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud.

16:00 Coffee break (15 minutes)

16:15 **Panel 4: Beyond Modernity? The Anti- and Post-Secular**

Chair: Noah Strote (NCSU)

Zohar Maor (Bar-Ilan): “Secularization Renounced: Buber’s Intellectual Transformation in Weimar”

Contemporary sociology of religion, interpreting what Jürgen Habermas has termed a post-secular world, is largely critical of the secularization thesis, associating modernization with a gradual demise of religion. The palpable religious regeneration in the periphery of Europe and more delicate and nuanced data on “secular” Europe convinced many that modernity indeed transformed religion, but had not obliterated it. Religion was individualized, subjectivized and de-institutionalized, yet continues until today to play a leading role in private and public life. Arguably, these changes are not significantly different in scope, magnitude and impact than past, pre-modern transformations, like the Reformation and the Jewish spiritual reorientation after the destruction of the Temple. Moreover, we can easily locate early antecedents to some

prominent modern religious makeovers, such as the medieval “disenchantment of the world”, ensuing from Muslim, Jewish and Christian scholasticism.

This shift in the sociological account of religion's place in modern societies, needs to be supplemented by a parallel shift in modern intellectual history. Broadly speaking, intellectual history of modern Europe – of Christians and Jews alike – has focused mainly on sociologists and thinkers who conceptualized religion in the modern age in terms of crisis, break of traditions, and degeneration. Thus, the scholarly interest in Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, Franz Kafka, and Gershom Scholem continues while other nineteenth and early twentieth-century intellectuals, who highlight the ongoing relevance and vitality of religion, are relatively neglected.

My lecture on Buber is part from a larger project, focusing on a circle of Christian and Jewish thinkers active in Weimar Germany, who opposed the secularization thesis, and it will venture to adumbrate the common traits of their sociological conception and religious thought, as well as their lively debates and disaccord. The circle includes Arthur Bonus (1864–1941), Friedrich Gogarten (1887–1967), Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1888–1973), Martin Buber (1878–1965) and Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929).

Buber’s shift from mysticism to dialogue in the wake of the Great War has been much-discussed; in my paper, I wish to shed light on a nearly unnoticed parallel shift; namely his rebuff of secularism. Buber’s dialogical thought presents the I-you relationship as necessarily religious, and the deterioration to an I-it relationship as a threat for religious and secular societies alike. Buber highlights the essentiality of “true” religion to social, ethical, political and even psychological issues. I will illustrate Buber’s adoption of the secularization thesis in his early, “mystical” phase, its renouncement in his later dialogical phase and its impact on his concept of religion in times of crisis.

Todd Weir (Groningen): “Interreligious Dialogue: The Role of Secularists and Antisecularists”

The starting point of my paper is the observation that contemporary scholars of the “postsecular”, such as Charles Taylor and Talal Asad, largely agree that there is an intimate relationship between secularism and the secular. Yet, I find it important not to collapse the difference between secularists, i.e. those who have historically sought to insert a holistic, naturalistic worldview into the religious field, and secularity, which, following Taylor, is now often referred to as the “immanent frame” of Western modernity. My paper asks what bearing this distinction between secularism and secularity can have on our understanding of interreligious dialogue. To answer this question, I propose to examine historical participants in interreligious dialogue from four quadrants: secularism, the secular, antisecularism and the antisecular. Let me give here a few observations that I will discuss in fuller detail at the conference:

1. **Secularists** (or protosecularists) were often the central proponents of interreligious communion whether in literary imagination (e.g., *Nathan the Wise*) or in social movements (e.g., the Ethical Culture movement).
2. An acceptance of **the secular** by Christians and Jews in the 1950s and 1960s correlates to the willingness of many at that time to contemplate theological convergences and new relationships.
3. **Antisecularism** was a key motivating factor in the growth of the international ecumenical movement in the first half of the twentieth century.
4. **Hostility to the secular** may allow for dialog between fundamentalists of different faiths.

Abdeslam Maghraoui (Duke): “The Limits of Post-Secularism: The State and Muslim Communities

in France”

I will argue that the French variety of secularism - or *laïcité* - is too exceptional and ideologically loaded to permit a conversation in the framework of post-secularism, where faith and reason could presumably coexist. I justify this argument by drawing on the French notion of *laïcité* in political discourse, France's history of immigration, and recent social empirical research. At the center of France's problematic secularism is a major contradiction: the state attempts to "assimilate" descendants of North African immigrants by casting them as "only Muslims," and society excludes them by casting them as "only banlieues dwellers."

*18:15 Dinner*





## April 25, Tuesday

### 9:00 **Roundtable 1: Interreligious dialogue in a Postmodern Age – the State of the Field**

Moderator and Responder: Alexander Deeg (Leipzig)

Presentation: Zohar Maor (Bar-Ilan): The State of the Field

G. Viswanathan. 1998. "Chapter 2: A Grammar of Dissent" in *Outside the fold: Conversion, modernity, and belief*. Princeton University Press, 44-72.

D.B. Ruderman. 2015. "Towards a preliminary portrait of an evangelical missionary to the Jews: the many faces of Alexander McCaul (1799–1863)." *Jewish Historical Studies*, 47(1): 48-69.

P. Bergen. 2017. "A Jewish Take on Pluralism." *The American Interest*. (<https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/01/11/a-jewish-take-on-pluralism/>)

10:30 *Coffee break (15 minutes)*

### 10:45 **Roundtable 2: Secularization Beyond Weber – the State of the Field**

Moderator and Responder: Malachi Hacohen (Duke)

Presentation: Todd Weir (Groningen): The State of the Field

Purpose: to enquire what new conditions of possibility the "postsecular" provides for interreligious dialogue. To this end I thought we could read short pieces by two of the seminal theorists of the postsecular (J. Habermas and Ch. Taylor) together with critical responses.

J. Habermas. 2008. "Notes on Post-Secular Society." *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25(4): 17-29.

Ch. Taylor, 2007. "Chapter 15: The Immanent Frame" especially section 4 (pp. 550-556) in *The Secular Age*, Harvard UP.

Maria Birnbaum, 2015. "Exclusive Pluralism: The Problem of Habermas's postsecular argument and 'the making' of religion." In Trevor Stack; Naomi Goldenberg & Timothy Fitzgerald (ed.), *Religion as a Category of Governance and Sovereignty*. Brill, 182 - 196.

12:15 *Lunch (1 hour, 15 minutes)*

13:30 **Planning Session – Where does the international collaboration go from here?**