

PRESS RELEASE

The Wrathful God: Religious Extremism in Comparative Perspective

Emory University, March 3 & 4, 2008

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Emory University to Host Major International Conference on Religious Extremism

On March 3 - 4, 2008, Emory's Institute for Comparative and International Studies (ICIS) and Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding Initiative will bring together 21 outstanding scholars from the fields of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and other major world religions to examine religious extremism through a new comparative perspective. Organized by Professors Vincent J. Cornell of Emory University, Kurt Anders Richardson of McMaster University, and Shlomo Fischer of Tel Aviv University, this international conference will provide a forum for some of the most important writers and thinkers working in their respective fields. Keynote speakers include Bruce Lawrence of Duke University, David Novak of the University of Toronto, R. Scott Appleby of Notre Dame University, and Akeel Bilgrami of Columbia University.

During two days of intensive discussions, participants will examine extremist discourses in world religions and the factors that contribute to the related development of extreme worldviews. Special attention will be devoted to the monotheistic or "Abrahamic" traditions: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Extreme approaches to these religions appear to pose a unique potential for violence against religious "others" -- and challenge liberal ideologies of pluralism and self-determination. For comparative purposes, Hindu and Buddhist extremism will also be examined.

Is religious extremism a shared tradition across religious faiths? Is the God of extremism different from the God of mainstream religious traditions? Is it possible to be "critically orthodox" as an antidote to religious extremism without abandoning the central tenets of a tradition? Emory's "Wrathful God" conference will address these and other questions.

Conference co-organizer, Vincent J. Cornell, Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Middle East and Islamic Studies at Emory, notes that this conference grew out of discussions between Christian, Jewish, and Muslim scholars at their yearly conference at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem: “Studies of religious extremist texts at the 2005 session of this conference revealed a striking similarity in modes of discourse. At times, the discourses of these texts were so similar as to be virtually indistinguishable from each other.” The conference organizers thus suggested that religious extremism might be viewed as a tradition in its own right. The Emory conference will examine this hypothesis by comparatively considering key varieties of extremist discourse.

Professor Cornell adds, “Participants in the conference were invited because of their expertise in the study of religion, society, and religious extremism and because of their willingness to ‘think outside of the box’ in formulating new paradigms of analysis.”

As well as focusing on theological issues, participants will examine religious extremism from sociological and social-psychological perspectives – and from the perspective of technology and ideology. While at Emory, participants will also plan an edited volume based on the conference.

This event is free and open to the public; however, seating is limited. To view the conference schedule, paper abstracts, complete list of participants, and details, visit www.ICIS.emory.edu.

The Wrathful God: Religious Extremism in Comparative Perspective is sponsored by Emory University’s Institute for Comparative and International Studies (ICIS); Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding Initiative; Candler School of Theology; Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies; Department of Religion, South Asian Studies Program; the Tam Institute for Jewish Studies, and the Hightower Fund.

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