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Call for Proposals

Claiming History - The Role of Historical Reasoning in Religious Conflicts

International Conference, 24-25 October 2019, Rome

History is full of examples of religious conflict and strife. From the struggle of Christians with pagan cult, the Arab conquest and the Christian Crusades to the Reformation and the Israel-Palestine conflict of the 20th and 21st century, human experience can easily be described in terms of religiously motivated hatred and violence. At the same time, religion also has the potential to overcome differences and create bridges even in the midst of great misery and war, motivating, for example, care for minorities such as asylum seekers or otherwise socially impaired or marginalized individuals and groups. Furthermore, the mediating role of religious pressure groups in conflict situations can make important contributions to peace building processes.

Religion has thus been described either as one of the primary causes for violence and war or conversely as a facilitator of peace. These are well-established narratives that inform our debate about the benefits and shortcomings of 'acting in belief'. But what role does history, and more specifically historical reasoning, play in conflict situations? Is history contributing or even amplifying religious conflicts or, on the contrary, acting towards peaceful solutions? The conference wants to draw attention to these questions by focusing on three distinct fields of interest:

- First, the enquiry will focus on the role of historical reasoning for emerging religious movements in their emancipation process – in what way did or does the past lend credence to religion and how did or does the formation of and departure from tradition affect claims to religious truth?
- Secondly, attention will be paid to history as an argument for religiously motivated destruction – to what ends is the past to be obliterated and what are the ideological grounds that inform such course of action?
- Thirdly, history can equally act as coping strategy – how does or can historical reasoning contribute towards the unravelling of religious conflicts and what role does history play in concrete peace building processes?

The Keynote address will be held by **David Nirenberg**, Deborah R. and Edgar D. Jannotta Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago. David Nirenberg is one of the world's leading scholars of the history of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim relations. His publications include *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (1996, new edition 2015), *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (2013), and *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Medieval and Modern* (2014).

Applications

The conference invites contributions from different fields of research and expertise, notably but not necessarily limited to the study of religions, archaeology, theology, history, and peace and conflict studies. A complementary goal is to establish a dialogue between scholarly approaches to religious conflicts and the practical fieldwork of religious movements, non-governmental activist groups and other peace building initiatives.

Interested researchers and research groups should direct their paper proposals to sophie.caflich@theol.unibe.ch or adrian.braendli@istitutosvizzero.it. The proposal should comprise an abstract of the planned presentation (max. 300 words in English or Italian) along with the short bios of the speakers (max. 100 words). The proposals will be considered by the organising board in terms of their quality and relevance for the conference programme. The submission deadline is 31 January 2019. A notice of acceptance will be communicated by the end of February.

Practicalities

Successful applications will be granted a place on one of the conference panels with the possibility to present their projects and/or research in front of an expert audience comprising both academics and activist groups. Accommodation and catering (for the duration of the conference) will be covered by the organisers. Additional expenditures are at the expense of the participants.