Center Seminar Series Examines Fundamentalism and Modernity

This spring, the Center for Jewish Studies is sponsoring its first interdisciplinary seminar series, "Fundamentalism: Religion, Political Order, and the Crisis of Modernity." The seminar examines the fundamentalist phenomenon both within individual cultures and religious traditions and comparatively across cultural lines. The political dimension of fundamentalism will be the topic of a conference, "Fundamentalism as a Political Force in the Middle East," to be sponsored by the Center in May (see page 4).

The seminar opened with a lecture by University of Virginia sociologist James Davison Hunter, "Towards a General Theory of Fundamentalism." Fundamentalism develops, in Hunter’s view, as a result of the confrontation between modernity and orthodoxy. Faced with "the modern world order, its rationality, its pluralism, its public private duality, its secularity," traditional religion has several options, one of which is to resist modernity. It is this posture of resistance, in contrast to the Amish withdrawal from society, for example, which characterizes fundamentalist groups.

What modernity represents for the fundamentalist is, in Hunter’s understanding, "history gone awry." The task of fundamentalism becomes, therefore, the restoration of history to its proper path. To illustrate his point, Hunter discussed Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and the paradigm for descriptions of fundamentalism, American Protestantism.

For certain nineteenth-century American Protestants, the favors bestowed by God on a right-believing society were threatened by evolution, ecumenism, and biblical criticism. Hunter explained the emergence of new Bible colleges, fundamentalist periodicals, and the establishment of the Christian’s Fundamentalist Association in 1919, as well as contemporary opposition to abortion, as attempts to redirect the nation and its history and restore God’s favor to the American enterprise.

Hunter described the Israeli religious Zionist movement Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful) as representing fundamentalism in Judaism. However, Gush Emunim differs from other fundamentalist groups in its belief that "history could go wrong." To Gush Emunim, the establishment of the state of Israel and its success in claiming the land are in accord with God’s plan for the Jewish people as Gush understands it. To give up territory "would counter-vene God’s will and represent a step backward in the messianic process of redemption" which Zionism represents and must, therefore, be opposed.

The other characteristics of fundamentalism enumerated by Hunter relate directly or indirectly to the central concept of righting history. These include orthopraxy, the connection of religious ideology and religious nationalism, and scripturalism (literal interpretation of sacred scripture).

In the February seminar, "Theravada Buddhism: ‘Fundamentalism Resurgence’ in Thailand, Burma, and Sri Lanka," Swarthmore Religion professor Donald Swearengin proposed to study Theravada Buddhism through the lens of fundamentalism both to illuminate religious and cultural developments in Southeast Asia and to examine the nature of fundamentalism and its usefulness as a "comparative, analytical tool."

Like Hunter, Swearengin sees fundamentalism as a modern phenomenon. According to Swearengin, fundamentalist movements in Southeast Asia developed to fill the ontological void created by the disintegration of the “traditional synthesis of religion and culture” under the pressure of colonialism and the introduction of Western culture and values. In their
Lawrence Hoffman Discusses Jewish Liturgy
With Faculty and Students

In two seminars in November, Lawrence Hoffman, faculty member and former director of the School of Sacred Music of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, introduced his ideas on the study of liturgy to Lehigh Valley faculty and students. Hoffman’s presentations, “In Search of Sacred History: Using Prayer to Tell Us ‘Who We Are’,” and “Looking for God on a College Campus,” drew on ideas from his pioneering study Beyond the Text. A Holistic Approach to Liturgy.

According to Hoffman, for most of its history the study of Jewish liturgy was dominated by philologists intent on reconstructing a prayer’s textual tradition. In contrast, insisting that “not everything in Judaism is literature,” Hoffman draws on anthropology, sociology of religion, and phenomenology (among others) to study liturgy as a performance enacted by the worshiping community which offers valuable insights into the identity of that community.

As performance, liturgy is “acted out rituals involving prescribed texts, actions, timing, persons, and things, all coming together in a shared statement of communal identity by those who live with, through, and by them.” Significant details about the Reform community, for example, can be garnered from the fact that the Friday night service appears first in the order of the prayerbook, that the prayerbook follows the English order and opens from left to right, and that the rabbi is sometimes referred to as minister. Details of the “choreography” of a worship service are equally revealing: how the congregation is seated in the sanctuary, when the congregation stands and sits, whether or not people kiss the Torah scroll.

Hoffman does not ignore the texts of individual prayers. Like the organization of the prayerbook and the choreography of worship services, prayer texts also yield significant knowledge about a community. For example, generations of Passover haggadot contain the “sacred myths” of Jews from widely different cultural and historical backgrounds. By “sacred myth,” Hoffman means “[t]he subjective and selective perception of our background that we choose to remember and to enshrine as our official ‘history.’ This mythic history is recited liturgically... for its power to galvanize group identity.” In his seminar, Hoffman examined medieval and modern formulations of the Passover prayer Dayenu to show what the variations in the prayer reveal about the identity of the Jewish communities who prayed them.

Palestinian Uprising
Is Topic of
Rekhess Lectures

“The Palestinian Uprising (Intifada): Impact and Repercussions” was the subject of lectures delivered in October and December by Dr. Elie Rekhess, the Berman Visiting Scholar at the Lehigh Valley Center for Jewish Studies. Speaking to audiences at Lehigh University and the Jewish Community Center in Allentown, Rekhess discussed the intifada, which began in the West Bank and Gaza in December, 1987, from the varying perspectives of the Israelis, Palestinians, PLO, and Jordanians.

In his presentation, Rekhess distinguished between the responses of the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza and those of the PLO. The uprising, according to Rekhess, has become a symbol of national reawakening for the Palestinians, restoring their pride and creating the nucleus of an independent local leadership.

Although the Palestinians see the uprising as a genuine expression of independence, some Israelis consider it to be a declaration of war. This disagreement notwithstanding, the uprising has negated the idea held by Israelis that the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza could continue indefinitely and that peace and security could be bought with territory.

Public opinion in Israel is sharply divided on the question of military versus political solutions to the uprising. Left-wing Israelis, including Arab Israelis, believe that a military solution is untenable, and favor negotiating with the Palestinians. Right-wing Israelis, on the other hand, see the situation as a basic conflict between Jews and Arabs over a single piece of land, a conflict which can only be resolved by having Israel control all the territory.

Like the Israelis, the Palestinians and the PLO, in Rekhess’s opinion, have not reached a consensus regarding their future course of action. A major question for the Palestinians is how to transform their military success into political action. Rekhess noted that while no PLO option for the West
Among his publications are "The Politization of Israel's Arab" in A. Harelven, ed., *Every Sixth Israeli* (1983); "Jews and Arabs in the Israeli Communist Party" in M. Eshman and I. Rabbinovich, eds., *Ethnicity, Pluralism and the State in the Middle East* (1987); "The Strengthening Relationship Between the Arabs in Israel and in the West Bank"; and numerous contributions to *The Middle East Contemporary Survey on the West Bank and Gaza*. Rekhess has recently lectured at the School for Advanced International Studies, the Johns Hopkins University, and at the University of Michigan’s Center for Near Eastern and North African Studies.
Conference on Fundamentalism in the Middle East Set for May

On May 7 and 8, the Center for Jewish Studies will sponsor its first national conference, "Fundamentalism as a Political Force in the Middle East." The conference, which will be held at Lehigh University, is the culmination of a seminar series on religious revivalism in modern society which explored fundamentalism cross-culturally and as a phenomenon in Buddhism, Judaism, and Protestantism (see page 1). The conference offers the opportunity to discuss the political impact of fundamentalism in the Middle East. Conference speakers will examine both the nature of fundamentalist groups in the Middle East and their impact on the political scene in the region.

Two sessions of the conference will be devoted to Jewish fundamentalism and two to fundamentalism in Islam. Speakers include Aaron Kirschenbaum, Caroline and Joseph S. Gruss Visiting Professor in Talmudic Civil Law, New York University School of Law (Department of Jewish Law, Tel Aviv University Faculty of Law); Ian Lustick, Professor, Department of Government, Dartmouth College; James Piscator, Associate Professor, Middle Eastern Studies, School of Advanced International Studies, the Johns Hopkins University; and Elie Rekhess, Philip and Muriel Berman Visiting Scholar, Lehigh Valley Center for Jewish Studies (Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies; Department of Middle Eastern and African History, Tel Aviv University). The sessions will be introduced and moderated by Center director Laurence J. Silberman and Muhlenberg Religion professor Alan Mittelman.

Interest in fundamentalism in the Middle East has grown with the increased influence of Islamic and Jewish fundamentalist groups in that region. In common with other groups worldwide, these movements are characterized in part by a strict adherence to religious practice, a literalist reading of sacred scripture, and an adversarial stance to certain features of modern life.

There is, however, disagreement over the applicability of a concept drawn from Western scholarship to the study of religion in the Middle East. Accordingly, some conference speakers will question the validity of applying the term fundamentalist to Judaism and Islam. Others, accepting fundamentalism as a valid classification for particular groups, will discuss the origin and development of these movements, their salient characteristics, and the similarities and differences between Jewish and Islamic fundamentalistic groups.

The conference will also examine the ways in which Jewish and Islamic fundamentalism, with their fusion of theology and politics, have influenced the evolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Topics to be discussed include: the "Islamicization" of the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza; the ways Islamic and Jewish fundamentalists view the "other"; and the relationships between Islamic fundamentalists, the PLO, and Christian Arabs and between Jewish fundamentalists, secular Jews, and left-wing Jewish political groups.

Seminar continued from page 1

various ways, these movements seek to restore the lost sense of individual, communal, and national identity by advocating a return to an original condition of "unity, certainty, and purity."

Sweater discussed two movements within Thai Theravada Buddhism which exemplify the fundamentalist program. Although strikingly dissimilar in their principles and practices, Wat ("the Thai term for centers of monastic and lay religious practice") Dhammakaya and Wat Santi Asoka seek to provide an authentic Thai-Buddhist identity for their adherents.

Wat Dhammakaya, the most successful new religious movement in Thailand, has much in common with the national government policies of the 1960's and 1970's which "promoted Buddhism as a vehicle for national integration"; the movement has strong government support. As a movement, it shapes an identity for its followers around a simple moralistic message and a simple religious practice. The movement's message is conveyed through its charismatic leaders, its sophisticated use of the media, its influence in Buddhist Student Associations throughout the country, and, most of all, at its impressive Wat (see photograph). The Wat, the hub of a network of lay

centers associated with provincial monasteries, attracts thousands of people for the celebration of major Buddhist festivals. Its simple, elegant design sets it apart from the elaborate design of traditional Thai Buddhist temples.

In contrast to Wat Dhammakaya, Wat Santi Asoka, working outside the mainstream, is a radical sectarian movement indebted to Theravada Buddhism's "forest tradition." This communitarian and egalitarian movement preaches a strict moral code characterized by vegetarianism and rejects the "materialistic hedonism" of contemporary Thai society. People living in Santi Asoka centers must follow a demanding daily regimen of work and study. Santi Asoka is also more "radically critical" of Thai society than is Wat Dhammakaya. It opposes violence in the media and in sports, advocating instead a non-competitive, non-Western lifestyle.

The seminar will continue with a lecture by Gerald Bildestein, Visiting Pew Professor at Gratz College and Hubert Professor of Jewish Law at Israel's Ben-Gurion University, on the subject of "Jewish Fundamentalism: the Religious and Political Issues." The final presentation will be given by Susan Harding of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan, currently at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, who will discuss "The Born-Again Tele-scandals."

Alan Mittleman (Religion, Muhlenberg College)

Professor Mittleman's translation from the German of an essay by Richard Chaim Schneider, "Compelled to Defend Israel," appeared in the November-December, 1988, issue of *Present Tense.* His contribution to a symposium on the Williamsburg Charter, "Toward a Post-Separationist Public Philosophy," appeared in the Winter issue of *This World.* Mittleman served, with Susannah Heschel and Nechama Askenazi, as judge for the Joel H. Caviar Book Award of *Present Tense* magazine in the category of Jewish thought.

Harriet Parment (Modern Foreign Languages, Lehigh University)


Ilan Peleg (Government and Law, Lafayette College)


Elie Rekhess (Berman Visiting Scholar, Lehigh Valley Center for Jewish Studies)

See article on page 2.

Robert Weiner (History, Lafayette College)

In 1988, Professor Weiner presented "On Interviewing French Jews: The Case for Oral History," at the meeting of the Western Society for French History at UCLA (to be published in the meeting's proceedings) and "Jewish Identity in France Since 1945: An Overview," at the French Historical Studies meeting at the University of South Carolina. In March, 1989, he was Scholar-in-Residence at Temple Beth-El in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where he spoke on "French Jewry Since the Revolution."

Chaya Weissler (Religion Studies, Lehigh University)


### 1988-89 Jewish Studies Courses

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The Lehigh Valley Center for Jewish Studies Newsletter is made possible by a grant from The Philip & Muriel Berman Foundation.
SPRING SEMESTER PROGRAMS

SEMINAR: “FUNDAMENTALISM: RELIGION, POLITICAL ORDER, AND THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY”
James Davison Hunter, Dept. of Sociology, University of Virginia
“Towards a General Theory of Fundamentalism”
Donald Swearer, Dept. of Religion, Swarthmore College
Gerald Bildstein, Visiting Pew Professor, Gratz College; Hubert Professor of Jewish Law, Ben-Gurion University, Israel
“Jewish Fundamentalism: The Religious and Political Issues”
Susan Harding, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton; Dept. of Anthropology, University of Michigan
“The Born-Again Telescandals”

LITTauer LECTURE IN JEWISH STUDIES
Arthur Hertzberg, Professor, Department of Religion, Dartmouth College; Senior Research Associate, the Middle East Institute, Columbia University
“American Jews and Israel in the Second Year of the Palestinian Intifada (Uprising).” Cosponsored with the Littauer Foundation.

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Prof. Robert Weiner, Dept. of History, Lafayette College
Prof. Chava Weissler, Dept. of Religion Studies, Lehigh University
Prof. Arvids Ziedonis, Jr., Dept. of Foreign Language, Muhlenberg College

FIFTH ANNUAL WALLENBerg TRIBute
Richard Rubenstein, Dept. of Religious Studies, Florida State University
“Living Ethically in a Post-Holocaust Age.” Cosponsored with Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Jewish Federation of Allentown, and Muhlenberg College (including Hillel, Catholic Campus Ministry, Lutheran Student Movement and Muhlenberg Christian Fellowship).

JEWISH STUDIES STUDENT SEMINAR
Katrinina von Kellenbach, Visiting Instructor, Lehigh University
“Now After All These Years,” screening and discussion of the German documentary.


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