

Presenter: Neil J. Kressel, William Paterson University New Jersey

Title: **“Assessing the Role of Islam in the Creation and Maintenance of Antisemitic Attitudes and Behaviors in Muslim Communities around the World: Empirical and Conceptual Issues”**

Panel: Psychology

The connection between religious belief and prejudice has been a major topic of interest for psychologists at least since Gordon Allport highlighted the relationship in his seminal 1954 volume, *The Nature of Prejudice*. As recent reviews of studies in the psychology of religion have concluded, however, this work overwhelmingly has dealt with Christian attitudes toward various minorities, including – notably – Jews (for example, in Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark’s 1966 classic, *Christian Beliefs and Antisemitism*). Almost nothing has been written on the connection between Islamic religious beliefs and prejudice.

Yet, in recent years, much empirical evidence has suggested the presence of significant levels of antisemitism among many Muslim communities across the globe. The extent of this Jew-hatred varies greatly from place to place, but usually exceeds the degree of antisemitism observed among non-Muslims. Many theories have been offered to explain the higher levels of antisemitism seen among Muslims. Some social scientists have objected to the way antisemitism has been operationalized in studies, while others have argued that antisemitic attitudes really tap hostility toward Israel. Yet, even among those who accept that the observed antisemitism is real, widespread, and intense, there have been intense debates about its origins. Most controversial has been the question of whether Islamic religious beliefs, practices, and traditions might in some sense contribute to the creation and maintenance of antisemitism.

This paper assesses that contention by examining several bodies of research: (1) empirical evidence concerning levels of antisemitism in contemporary Muslim communities, (2) historical evidence concerning the presence of antisemitism in Islamic religious history and theology, (3) scientific evidence concerning the current linkage between Islamic religious institutions and antisemitism, (4) psychological and sociological theories and empirical

studies addressing the origins of Muslim antisemitism, (5) research in the psychology of religion on the linkage between religiosity and prejudice.

On the basis of this evidence, I will attempt to construct a model showing the role played by Islamic religious beliefs, practices, and traditions in creating and maintaining antisemitic bigotry. One purpose of the model would be to suggest how interventions might disrupt the fertilization of bigotry and ultimately lead to better interreligious relations. I will also address the question of whether a parallel set of processes exist within Jewish communities with regard to Islam.

The essay concludes with a call for more extensive empirical research along the lines of Glock and Stark's *Christian Beliefs and Antisemitism* but addressing the way particular Islamic religious beliefs and orientations interact with other attitudes, behaviors, and circumstances to produce more or less tolerance for Jews.