

International Conference

Revelation and Interpretation – Legal Interpretation of Religious Texts

New York, September 11-12, 2012

Religions and religious legal systems base their beliefs, practices and norms of behavior on canonical texts which typically claim to have originated in revelation or in other forms of divine inspiration. This kind of legitimization is entailed with a process of interpretation of the canonical texts, and sometimes generates a creation of a comprehensive hermeneutic system. In this conference we want to focus on legal interpretation of religious texts, in order to explore the characters and methodologies of such interpretation whether within a particular tradition or on a comparative basis between different traditions. We are also interested in exploration of similarities and differences of legal interpretation found in religious vs. secular legal frameworks.

Here are some of the questions that we hope will be addressed:

1. What are the presuppositions regarding the text and its language that allow and enable interpretation? Does religious interpretation assume a special quality of divine language (for example: a language that is very precise or a language that is multi-layered and may hold multiple meanings)?
2. What form of interpretation is considered by each tradition to be most appropriate for canonical texts, a literal and formalistic approach or purposive and substantive one?
3. Should legal interpretation of religious texts purport to reconstruct the original meaning of the text or should it be creative or pragmatic in order to respond to the needs of contemporary reality?
4. Does religious interpretation require a certain interpretive authority? Are there certain preconditions for a person to become an interpreter of the sacred text or can any member aspire to become an interpreter of such texts?
5. Is interpretation vested in a centralized authority or formal institution or is it open to the local community? To the devout individual?

These and similar questions will be discussed in an international conference that will be held at the NYU School of Law on September 11-12, 2012. Submissions are invited on the themes outlined above. An abstract of 600 (max.) words should be sent to jls@biu.ac.il no later than March 15, 2012. Please indicate academic affiliation and attach a short CV. The conference committee will consider all the abstracts and will notify applicants of papers acceptance by April 30, 2012. The participants will be required to submit their papers by August 15, 2012.

The final version must be no more than 13,000 words (footnotes included). Papers will go through a refereeing process and the successful ones will be published in the new Journal of Law Religion and State.