



## Supporting Research and Student Scholarships

### The Haifa Laboratory for Religious Studies

Celebrating religious diversity and fostering harmony among faith communities

In an era marked by rising religious tensions, extremism, and polarization, the world desperately needs initiatives that bridge religious divides and foster mutual understanding, cooperation, and respect among diverse religious communities. Fueled by a lack of dialogue and understanding between faith groups, conflicts rooted in religious differences continue to plague various regions around the globe, impeding social progress, destabilizing communities, and threatening global peace and security. Without concerted efforts to promote pluralism, the cycle of conflict and extremism will only perpetuate, hindering humanity's ability to tackle shared challenges and build a more harmonious global society.

Established in 2020, The Haifa Laboratory for Religious Studies (HLRS) has embarked on a mission to promote positive social and civic change through mutual respect and interfaith dialogue. Located in the city of Haifa, one of the world's most multi-religious cities, HLRS is uniquely positioned to model peaceful coexistence and religious pluralism on a global scale.



### Building Bridges, Countering Extremism

Rather than glossing over theological differences, the HLRS embraces them, amplifying conversations and building mutual respect through open and honest discourse. By aligning efforts with the shared values of various religious traditions, the HLRS seeks to counter extremism in all its forms, offering a compelling alternative narrative of inclusivity and unity.

Following the October 7<sup>th</sup> Hamas attack, HLRS emerged as the only organization able to unite over 60 representatives from Haifa's diverse religious communities for a crucial dialogue on maintaining the city's pluralistic identity.



## Our Unique Research Agenda

The HLRS stands out as a one-of-a-kind program in Israel and potentially the world, intersecting academic engagement with missions of social change during a challenging time for religious pluralism. Our core belief is that religious communities, despite their theological differences, can be powerful engines for social and civic change.

To further its important agenda, HLRS conducts interdisciplinary research to understand how religious pluralism can contribute to social cohesion in diverse societies. This includes studying the role of religious communities in promoting social solidarity, environmental concerns, education, and civic justice. The research aims to identify effective frameworks for driving social and civic change through religious collaboration.

## Six Pillars Informing Our Research

1. Global religious tensions and conflicts have persistently led to violence and instability. HLRS is **exploring how promoting inter-religious dialogue and collaboration** can foster peace and coexistence.
2. The rise of religious extremism and radicalization worldwide has become a significant global concern. HLRS is working to address this by **examining ways to bring religious communities together around shared values**. By promoting a spirit of cooperation and shared societies, HLRS offers a hopeful alternative to extremism.
3. With our world becoming more globalized and migration on the rise, people from various faiths and cultures are interacting more than ever. HLRS is researching ways to **build stronger relationships between these different faiths and cultures in our increasingly diverse societies**.
4. Addressing pressing global issues like environmental degradation, social inequality, and injustice demands collaborative efforts. HLRS is **studying how religious communities can serve as potential catalysts capable of mobilizing positive social change**.
5. Urban centers worldwide are becoming increasingly diverse, with people from various ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds living side by side. HLRS views the city of Haifa as a living laboratory to study religious dynamics and **create process models that can help other multicultural cities** facing similar challenges.
6. In an era of misinformation and polarization, there is a growing need for education and awareness about different religions and cultures. HLRS's programs are serving as living laboratories to **determine how education can play a role in foster greater understanding and cooperation** among different faiths and communities.





First Annual Symposium

## A Partial List of Our Current Programs

### **Multifaith Committees in Israeli Mixed Cities:**

In collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, the HLRS has facilitated discussions among religious leaders from Haifa's Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Druze communities. These meetings produced principles and practical measures aimed at preserving the city's rich social fabric.

**Interfaith Ambassador Program:** This innovative program provides fellowships to Israeli religious leaders from diverse backgrounds, equipping them with knowledge and skills to conduct multi-faith dialogue and initiate community-based interfaith activities.

**Graduate Student Cohort:** This annual fellowship program brings together an exceptional group of graduate students from various religious backgrounds, fostering academic exploration and dialogue on religious pluralism and inter-religious dynamics.

**Annual Symposium:** This public event brings together religious leaders, academics, and prominent figures to explore the role of religious communities in addressing global concerns such as environmental degradation, social inequality, and public education.

**Legal Forum:** This initiative addresses instances where religious and civil concerns overlap, providing a framework for researchers and legal practitioners to discuss matters of joint concern to Jewish, Muslim, and Christian judicial systems in Israel.

**Regensburg-Haifa Summer School on Multi-faith Education:** This annual summer school equips teaching-certificate students from Haifa and Regensburg (Germany) with the knowledge and skills to promote religious pluralism and multi-faith dialogue in educational settings.

## Future Plans

**Think-and-Do Tank** will bring together experts and scholars to research, develop best practices, and create solutions. By organizing conferences and workshops, the Think-and-Do Tank will share knowledge and advocate for policies promoting religious tolerance globally. This is especially important given the lack of similar organizations in the Middle East.

**Certificate Programs** are a way to educate a wide range of people about religious understanding and freedom. The programs will equip students with knowledge of various religions and conflict resolution skills. They will gain practical experience and build a network of colleagues, all while contributing to a more tolerant world. These programs will be offered online to reach a global audience.



**Historic agreement between the King Hamed Center for Coexistence in Bahrain and the Haifa Laboratory for Religious Studies**



(photo credit: Yossi Caraso)

**Prof. Uriel Simonsohn (Head of HLRS) and Prof. Mouna Maroun (Rector) welcome President Isaac Herzog to the University of Haifa**

### Academic Leadership

Professor Uriel Simonsohn (PhD, Princeton University) is the head of the Haifa Laboratory for Religious Studies. He joined the University of Haifa department of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies in 2013 after being a post-doctoral fellow of the Institute for Religious Studies at University of Leiden (2008-2010) and of the Martin Buber Society of Fellows at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2010-2013). Simonsohn is the author of *A Common Justice: The Legal Allegiances of Christians and Jews under Early Islam* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2011) and several essays on legal pluralism, conversion to Islam, religiously-mixed families, and women's religious agency.

### Request for Support

The Haifa Laboratory for Religious Studies is at a pivotal juncture, poised to expand our operations and promote religious pluralism, peace, and harmony. With a proven track record and unique approach, HLRS is making significant strides in fostering interreligious understanding and collaboration. Your support is crucial for advancing our important cause.

- **A gift of \$xxx will enabling HLRS to continue its impactful work and broaden its influence locally and globally.**

For further information about our programs, research team and public committee, please visit our website:

<https://rlglsb.haifa.ac.il/en/>