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## International conference on Religions and Political Values

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Date: 26-28 November 2014

Venue: Lebanese American University – Byblos- Lebanon

*Conference in English and Arabic*

Adyan foundation in partnership with the Lebanese American University in Lebanon (Byblos) is organizing a two day conference on “Religious and Political Values”.

The conference will gather around 40 international scholars in political and social sciences, theologians from Islam and Christianity and policy makers.

### **Conference Concept**

At the conclusion of the Adyan international conference on Religion and Democracy in Europe and the Arab world held in November 2012<sup>1</sup>, and in the framework of political changes in the Arab world, scholars and participants emphasized the need for a paradigm shift in the role and participation of religions in the public domain, from an identity based one to a values based one.

Adyan’s International Conference for 2014 responds to this challenge by making “Religions and Public Values” its theme for discussion. The goal of the conference is to create a forum for different sectors of society to reflect on how to actualize definitions of political values and norms in Muslim and Christian discourse on the one hand, and to explore and promote dialogue about these values from different worldviews on the other hand. This exploration is meant not only from an interfaith perspective but also from a public and scholarly perspective, where religions are invited to operate a shift from a normative discourse, and to endorse a dialogical role as part of a diverse society.

In doing so, the Conference seeks to put recent scholarship in social and political philosophy in more direct conversation with social and political theology, in Christianity and Islam specifically, and to

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<sup>1</sup> Organized in Lebanon by Adyan, in partnership with the Lebanese American University (LAU), KAS and Missio.

confront both with questions and recommendations from leaders and policy makers active in the public domain.

## **Theoretical Framework**

1. Research on religion and politics has rapidly advanced over the last decade as scholars have attempted to explore and understand the “return of religion” to mainstream public politics. The recent experiences in the Arab world have also showed just how controversial and challenging the issue is for the foundations of peace, justice and social cohesion. In this framework, and in light of the different contexts of Arab and western societies, it is interesting to observe a common shift in scholarly research and discourse away from a general debate about whether public religious politics are compatible with liberal democracy and towards a wider exploration of how religious thoughts, public discourse and values actually impact liberal democratic life.

This shift has been most evident, perhaps, within debates on Islam and democracy. Evolving out of years of contentious discourse over whether Muslim majority countries could become democratic, much new scholarship has focused, instead, on the ways in which Muslim actors pursue their religious goals within, or in favor of, democratic environments. This shift mirrors in part an evolution in the way in which religious parties, actors, theologians and institutions talk about democracy. Recent empirical scholarship, for example, has charted the sustained commitment by religious individuals in the Muslim world to religious worldviews and, simultaneously, to liberal democratic politics (Tessler et al., Ciftci). Likewise, scholarship on “post-Islamism” (Bayat) has observed how Islamic religious associations, movements and parties have actively tried to promote both “piety and choice,” “religiosity and a democratic framework.” One also has to notice the opposite fact where for some other groups and parties, Islam is still politically interpreted and practiced in a more sectarian and hegemonic approach. The diverse evolution of the current political changes in the Arab world offers a wide range of examples that require critical analysis.

In Western scholarship, we can note the shift on the part of liberal political philosophy towards what Habermas has termed the “post-secular.” Rather than (simply) a sociological observation about the continued presence of important religious actors and institutions in what was understood to be the secularized west, Habermas and others (Wolterstorff, Taylor, March) have articulated a wider range in which religious insights and motivations might be necessary to strengthen the foundations and future of liberal democracy itself. For Habermas, on the one hand, the “hidden intuitions buried in religious traditions” might be brought fruitfully to bear on new political and social problems facing contemporary political life that secular reasoning alone has failed to come to grips with. In addition, scholars have argued that more openly recognizing the ways in which religious individuals invest themselves in the common good on the basis of their religious commitments might also help strengthen and make democracy more meaningful. This new approach of religion in the public sphere in western countries is nevertheless still at its beginning, and includes opposite and radical positions, varying from those claiming a new foundational or holistic approach for religion to those maintaining radical secular positions that deny any contribution to religion in the public life.

In this framework, many scholars of both Christian and Muslim societies have tried to articulate the multifaceted but familiar ways in which religious values impact the common good of the whole of their societies (beyond their particular religious communities and traditions), whether as a generator of flourishing associational life and social capital (Putnam and Campbell, Kucukcan, Ciftci); as a prophetic witness to the suffering and marginalized (West, March); as a voice for those without rights (Hauerwas and Vanier); as a moral guidepost for bio-ethics and ethics of life questions (Ratzinger, Faggioli, Casanova); as a promoter of development (Woodberry, Shah and Gill), religious liberty (Grim and Finke) and democracy (Philpott, Toft, Philpott and Shah); and as a critical ally for justice and peace (Appleby).

## 2. Conversation and Mutual Learning between Religious and Secular Reasoning

Even as they have highlighted the contributions that public religious values make to contemporary political life, many of these same scholars have also emphasized the deep “ambivalence of the sacred” (Appleby). They have stressed that religious values, by themselves, do not necessarily make for good politics, and they have recognized the recent roles that religious authorities, movements, and ideologies have also played in promoting violence (Toft, Grim and Finke), authoritarianism (Koessel), political polarization (Putnam and Campbell), sexual violence, and other forms of political and social domination.

Scholars of the “post-secular,” therefore, have vigorously promoted the need for public religious actors and institutions to be engaged in processes of mutual learning and, particularly, to take seriously the claims and fears raised by secular political reasoning about religious political values. Thus, in his celebrated dialogue with the German rationalist philosopher Jürgen Habermas, in which he called on religious actors to more fully bring their religious intuitions to bear on public life, Pope Benedict XVI also wrote that, “We have seen that there are pathologies in religion that are highly dangerous and that make it necessary to regard the divine light of reason as a tool, so to speak, a means by which religion must be purified and put in order again and again.” (2005: 267)

3. Today, we have the chance to witness an important number of relevant faith-based initiatives and contributions to such a “complementary learning process” of enhancing the order of the public life and the practice of living-together. One of these prominent examples is the Al-Azhar declaration on fundamental freedoms (2012). These initiatives require analysis from both theological and political perspectives and from a shared perspective where the two meet, in civil society, to build common understanding and fruitful collaboration.

The Adyan International Conference on Religions and Political Values, therefore, aims to reflect on the many empirical, theoretical, normative and theological questions raised by recent scholarship and practices in this field. It also aims to conduct this reflection in a spirit of “mutual learning,” between Muslim and Christian political traditions in a sustained conversation with secular and liberal insights and criticisms. We propose the following questions as starting points for papers and contributions towards this end:

- What set of political values do our religious communities, leaders and individuals promote? And in what order of priorities and why?
- How do we define “religious political values” in today’s context?

- Have these religious values evolved over the last two decades? Do they contribute to the common good of contemporary public life?
- How can a faith and revelation-based understanding of values be part of an open public and democracy-based discussion?
- Can religions contribute to the promotion of public values without controlling the norms of political life?
- What are the risks of bringing religious values into the public sphere? How can they be minimized?
- How can secular-based norms integrate faith-based values?
- Is the contribution of religions in public life based on the promotion of specific religious values or on the advocacy for a specific understanding of political values?
- What theological and spiritual resources do Muslim and Christian individuals and communities possess which might be brought more fully to bear on the dynamics and problems political life today?
- How do/can religious actors effectively promote these religious resources in such a way as to “speak to all men of good will”?
- What challenges do political and religious pluralism pose to Islam and Christianity today and how can they re-articulate the “common good” in pluralistic contexts?
- How might closer dialogue among Islam and Christianity foster a more meaningful religious contribution to the common public good?
- How can the recent advances in theoretical awareness of and engagement with post secular conditions help us articulate this new language by offering alternative conceptions of how and how far religion may participate in liberal democratic politics?
- On what political values can we build consensus between religions and secular political philosophy?

Adyan, here out of its spirit rooted in its home in Lebanon and the context of this moment of history, invites, in partnership with the Lebanese American University, scholars, practitioners, religious and political leaders to reflect on these themes together over a two day conference in Byblos-Lebanon. Adyan is convinced that the only way to advance and mature scholarship and religious understanding is to open up a broad, creative, interdisciplinary conversation, trusting in the fecundity of mutual reflection, discovery and learning.

## Languages

The conference will be held in English and in Arabic with simultaneous translation.

## Outputs

- A conference scientific report in English and Arabic.
- A publication of the acts of the conference in English and in Arabic.

## Scientific Committee

- Prof. Abdo Filali Ansari, Agha Khan University (UK/Morocco)
- Prof. Wajih Kanso, Lebanese University (Lebanon)
- Dr. Makram Ouais, Lebanese American University (Lebanon)
- Dr. Marwan Rowaiheb, Chair of Social Sciences, Lebanese American University (Lebanon)
- Dr. Michael Driessen, John Cabot University (Italy)
- Dr. Nayla Tabbara- Coordinator of Scientific Committee, Director of the Cross-Cultural Studies department (Adyan - Lebanon)

## Calendar

- July 10, 2014: Call for papers
- September 1, 2014: Abstract submission deadline
- September 20, 2014: Answer concerning acceptance of papers
- October 20, 2014: Final Program announcement
- November 1, 2014: Deadline of conference attendees' registration
- November 15, 2014: Submission of the full text papers
- November 25, 2014: Arrival
- November 26, 2014: Cultural visit and Opening ceremony
- November 27-28, 2014: Conference
- November 29, 2014: Departure

## Application Procedure for Speakers

- Kindly submit an abstract of ca. 300 words and a short biography of ca. 200 words before September 1, 2014, by e-mail to [conference@adyanvillage.net](mailto:conference@adyanvillage.net)
- Kindly submit the full paper (between 3000 and 4500 words) before November 15, 2014.
- Papers are accepted in either Arabic or English, simultaneous translation provided.

## Application Procedure for Attendees

Register before November 1, 2014, by e-mail to [conference@adyanvillage.net](mailto:conference@adyanvillage.net)

## Logistic and financial information

### Date and Place

- Venue: Lebanese American University, Byblos Campus, Lebanon:  
<http://www.lau.edu.lb/about/campuses/byblos/>
- Accomodation: Canari de Byblos Hotel <http://canaridebyblos.com/#s1>
- Cultural tour: 26 November 2014 (AM)
- Official Opening Ceremony: 26 November 2014 (PM)

- Conference days: 27-28 November 2014.

### **Logistics**

- **The program covers accommodation and transportation in Lebanon for all speakers**
- **The program does not cover international transportation (plane tickets and other)**
- Services do not include medical insurance
- Registration for participants (not speakers): 200 USD for international attendees, 125 USD for attendees from Lebanon.
- Registration fees cover : Conference bag and booklet, 2 lunches, 4 Coffee-breaks, WIFI internet access
- No registration fees for Speakers

For more information, go to <http://www.adyanonline.net/course/view.php?id=64> or contact: [conference@adyanvillage.net](mailto:conference@adyanvillage.net)