

Center for the Study of Conversion and Inter-Religious Encounters

Prof. Chaim (Harvey) Hames, Director

<http://in.bgu.ac.il/en/csoc/Pages/default.aspx>

Framework and Mission

The Center began operating in May 2013 as part of the Israeli Centers of Research Excellence (I-CORE) program established by the Government of Israel to strengthen the long-term positioning of Israel's academic research by offering new academic positions and promoting research collaborations between researchers from different institutions. The research effort is led by BGU, with the collaborating universities being Bar-Ilan University, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, The Open University of Israel, and Haifa University. The mission of the Center is to examine religious conversion from a broad variety of perspectives (historical, cultural, psychological, sociological, phenomenological, legal and more) with the intent of comparing and understanding the process of conversion and its effects on different religious communities and on issues relating to individual and communal identities.

Activities

The main thrust of the Center's activities will be the creation of an open access database that will register as many records of conversion from one religion to another as possible from the early Middle Ages until the early Modern Period. The database will cover as much biographical information as is available, including the place and date (or approximate date) of conversion, the age of the convert, and the motives for conversion. It will include descriptions of the process as recorded in the sources and information on former and present religion, career and professional status before and after conversion, familial ties and connections with other converts, and reaction to the conversion. Finally, it will list works written by the convert and works that refer to the convert, record the languages used by the convert, and provide a bibliography of all the available primary and secondary sources. All the materials written in languages other than English will be translated into English so that the database will be useful for those without the linguistic training necessary to read the primary sources. The Center will also prepare a textbook on conversion (Readings on Conversion: Judaism, Christianity and Islam),

which will comprise translations of a broad variety of primary sources over time, space and themes.

Special Events

The Center holds bi-weekly seminars (details of which can be found on the Webpage of the Center). At the end of May 2014, the Center will host an international conference Texts of Conversion, the first of a number of international conferences that will draw leading scholars from around the world whose research interests are focused on mass and individual conversions.



Prof. Chaim (Harvey) Hames

Prof. Chaim (Harvey) Hames is Chair of the Department of General History and Director of the Center for the Study of Conversion and Inter-Religious Encounters. He studies medieval and modern religious polemics, interaction and dialogue, and Jewish, Christian and Muslim mysticism. Hames was a senior researcher on the ERC Starting Grant (2008-2011) of Alexander Fidora (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), which focused on the translation of Latin texts into Hebrew, and is currently senior researcher on Fidora's ERC Consolidators Grant, dealing with the medieval translations of the Babylonian Talmud into Latin. At present, he is also working on the first complete translation of the four gospels into Hebrew funded by the Israel Science Foundation (ISF). Hames has authored four books, edited three collections, and written over 30 articles.