

Center for Pastoral Education of the Jewish Theological Seminary

Call for Papers

**Charles H. Revson Foundation Workshop:
"The Stranger at Our Gates:" Jewish Perspectives on Political and Religious Issues of Identity**

**Co-sponsored by the Louis Finkelstein Institute for Religious and Social Studies
Monday, April 23, 2012**

Globalization has increased mobility and international collaboration, and facilitated the creation of transnational entities such as the European Union. At the same time, however, definitions of national identities have become more rigid. In the United States as well, there has been steadily increasing concern with questions of identity and citizenship. The dichotomy between "citizens" and "aliens" (whether "documented" or not) is ever apparent in debates about immigration policy, especially in arguments about access to public services such as education and health care.

Part of the increased attention on "who belongs" is caused by the overall global economic down-turn. But the roots go deeper than "mere" economic considerations: The basic questions are: what normative principles define the rights of entry and access? What principles inform (or should inform) the criteria for membership and group identity? Since policy decisions in these areas often are moral decisions rooted in religious or quasi-religious arguments, it is important to examine how the public debate is informed by the underlying religious premises: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have much to say about the politics of inclusion and exclusion.

This workshop, a portion of a day-long conference devoted to issues of identity, will focus on the contribution of the Jewish experience to the debate about those issues. Jews have played the roles of both "self" and "other" in various times and places from the biblical period to the present. While Jewish law is protective of the rights of "strangers," they may be met with suspicion nevertheless, and regarded as a threat to ethnic/religious identity and group solidarity.

We invite papers addressing questions including but not limited to:

What can Jewish self-reflection contribute to a clarification of America's moral options? Can "otherness" be acknowledged and national identities preserved without recourse to either isolationism or relativism?

What role do "others" play in the formation of national identities and democratic societies? What might modern Jewish thinkers such as Levinas and Buber contribute to the discussion?

How does Judaism speak to the obligations of a modern democratic society towards those living within it, whatever their citizenship status?

Individual presentations will be 30 minutes in length, allowing time for questions and discussion. Short papers will be circulated before the workshop to give ample time for discussion among participants. Those interested in participating should apply by submitting a title, a short abstract (600-800 words), and a brief bio with your

institutional affiliation by email to Rabbi Ute Steyer at utsteyer@jtsa.edu by no later than November 20. Applicants will be notified about acceptance by December 7.

For more information about the conference and workshop, please contact Rabbi Ute Steyer at utsteyer@jtsa.edu or 212-678-8807. For general information about the Center for Pastoral Education and the Jewish Theological Seminary, please visit <http://www.jtsa.edu/CenterforPastoralEducation.xml>

Organizing Committee:

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Alan Middleman, Director of the Tikvah Institute for Jewish Thought and professor of Jewish Philosophy

Shuly Schwartz, Irving Lehrman Research Associate Professor of American Jewish History and Walter and Sarah Schlesinger Dean of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies at JTS

Mychal B. Springer, Director of the Center for Pastoral Education and the Helen Fried Kirshblum Goldstein Chair in Professional and Pastoral Skills

Ute Steyer, Research and Program Manager of the Center for Pastoral Education

Burton L. Visotzky, Appleman Professor of Midrash and Interreligious Studies and Director of the Louis Finkelstein Institute for Religious and Social Studies