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Sesquicentennial Symposium IWU to Host Conference on Religion and Universities in the 21st Century

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Religion, universities, and the 21st century are targets of a sweeping symposium, slated for next month, as part of Illinois Wesleyan University's yearlong 150th anniversary celebration.

The Oct. 25-26 conference--convened by Dennis Groh, university chaplain and professor of humanities and archaeology--will attract scholars and religious leaders from New England to California representing Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

The symposium's purpose, according to Groh, is to probe the role of religion in university life at a time when campuses are becoming more diverse in terms of cultures and religious faiths. "How are campuses responding to this changing university world?" Groh asks.

All of this stunning change, he added, is coming at a time when "the majority of the world's population is embracing religion and religion is playing an important role in people's lives across cultures" as a force that shapes "communal and personal empowerment."

Key Speakers

Principal speakers at the sesquicentennial symposium--The Role of Religion in the University of the 21st Century--include:

- o Rabbi Edward Feld, chaplain to the college and Jewish advisor at Smith College, and the Jewish Religious Advisor at Amherst College, which are both located in Massachusetts.
- o Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, the McArthur associate professor of African American studies and sociology at Colby College in Maine, and assistant pastor of the Union Baptist Church in Cambridge, Mass.
- o Robert Clark Gregg, the Teresa Hihn Moore professor of religious studies at Stanford University in California.
- o Sa'diyya Shaikh, a doctoral student at Philadelphia's Temple University.

Groh described the symposium's keynoters as "the most distinguished and experienced of professionals in a variety of religious traditions. Professor Gregg and Rabbi Feld, for example, have dozens of years of campus experience as university chaplains and scholars. Professor Gilkes is a prominent black women sociologist and a Baptist minister with an enormous scholarly background. And, Sa'diyya Shaikh is the first woman ever to present a sermon at the

opening fast of Ramadan in the mosque in Capetown." Ramadan is Islam's holy month of daily fasting from dawn until dusk.

"They know universities and various religious traditions," Groh added, referring to the conference's speakers, "as well as the liberal-arts environment."

Symposium Program

The symposium program is shaping up along these lines:

o Oct. 25--An 11 a.m. plenary session will feature Feld, Gilkes, Gregg, and Shaikh. Feld will keynote a 4 p.m. session, "What is Education For?" Gilkes will headline a 7:30 p.m. program, "And I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray? Religion and Cultural Discovery in the 21st Century."

o Oct. 26--Shaikh will be the featured speaker at a 4 p.m. session, "Islam(s) and the Politics of Representation: A Muslim Feminist Perspective." Gregg will keynote a 7 p.m. program, "Faith and Reason? Reason versus Faith? Unfaith and/or Unreason?" The symposium will end with a "summing up" by Groh.

All symposium sessions, which are free and open to the public, will convene in IWU's Evelyn Chapel, 1301 N. Park St., Bloomington.

Conference cosponsors are the University Chaplain's Office and the Student Senate Committee on Religious Life on Campus.

Groh expects that students, faculty, administrators, and people from the community will attend the symposium. He intends to publish the papers presented at the conference to give the ideas discussed wider distribution.

Edward Feld

Rabbi Feld has spent more than a quarter-century as a college chaplain, serving at the University of Illinois, Princeton University, and Smith and Amherst colleges.

His book on theological reactions to the Holocaust, "Spirit of Renewal: Finding Faith after the Holocaust," has been reissued in paperback by Jewish Lights Press.

Feld has taught at Princeton, Smith, the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. He has lectured widely.

A current project Feld is undertaking is a commentary on the Psalms.

He received degrees from Brooklyn College, Hebrew University, and the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Cheryl Townsend Gilkes

Gilkes--a Colby College faculty member and a church minister--has research, teaching, and writing interests focusing on African American women activists, social change and the contemporary black church, AIDS, and the sociology and roles of 20th-century African Americans.

She is the author of "If It Wasn't for the Women . . . Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Black Churches and Communities," which is forthcoming from Orbis Books.

Gilkes studied at Boston University's School of Theology and holds bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from Northeastern University. Last year, she was a fellow at the Institute for the Advanced Study of Religion at Yale University.

Robert Clark Gregg

Gregg served as the Dean of the Chapel and of Religious Activities at Stanford University from 1987-98.

He is a specialist in early Christianity and the Greek inscriptions of the Golan Heights. Gregg is the author or editor of four monographs and numerous articles.

A former fellow at Dumbarton Oaks, Gregg holds degrees from the University of the South, Episcopal Divinity School (Cambridge, Mass.), and a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania.

His current research involves the study of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim interpretations of the same sacred stories.

Sa'diyya Shaikh

Shaikh, an Islamic scholar, focuses on feminist hermeneutics (the study of interpretation of the scriptures) and women in Islam.

She has been widely honored, including receipt of a Fulbright Scholarship, an Andrew Mellon Foundation Scholarship, and an Islamic Academy Scholarship.

A South African, Shaikh received degrees from the University of South Africa, University of Natal-Durban, and the University of Capetown. Her master's thesis is titled, "Battered Wives in Muslim Society in the Western Cape: Religious Constructions of Gender, Marriage, Sexuality, and Violence."

Dennis Groh

Before joining the IWU faculty in 1996, Groh was a professor of the history of Christianity at the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill., from 1968-96.

He is a veteran of numerous archeological expeditions since 1965. Over the years, Groh has been involved in expeditions in Cyprus, Italy, Tunisia, and Israel. He was co-director of the Tel Nessana Archaeological Expedition of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev from 1991-93, and senior staff member and fine wares specialist for the Meiron Excavation Project of Duke University from 1976-86.

He is associate director of the Sepphoris Excavations of the University of South Florida. Sepphoris is located in Lower Galilee, four miles north of Jerusalem. It is the ancient site of a city built by Herod the Great, a city destroyed by a revolt and rebuilt by his successor, Herod Antipas. Groh has led IWU students on expeditions to Sepphoris.

Among Groh's academic interests are the history of Christianity, the New Testament, and classical languages.

Groh, a 1961 IWU graduate, is a former member of the university's Board of Trustees.

A widely published author, Groh also received degrees from the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and a doctorate from Northwestern University.

About IWU

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls more than 2,000 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts, and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium. A \$26 million library and a \$6 million student center are under construction.