



Dear Woolf Friends,

It seems our world is becoming an increasingly unsettled place: Russia's invasion of Ukraine, global refugee numbers increasing to over 100 million, China is flexing its muscles, internally and externally, and peace between Israelis and Palestinians even further away: trouble spots all over the place. At home, we're adapting to (another) new PM, a new monarch; we're facing a financial crisis and massive energy bills, not to mention rising inflation and higher interest rates. There is turmoil; there is anxiety; there is confusion. There is, in one word, uncertainty.

Uncertainty is one of my teacher's favourite gifts. Or is it, he asked me?

One lesson I have learned from encounters between Jews, Christians and Muslims is that faith traditions are well equipped to tackle uncertainty. There's a rabbinic saying that life is a like a *galgal hachozet*, a turning wheel. When you're on top, it's worth remembering that it doesn't mean you'll stay there. And when you're down, that also doesn't mean you won't go up. Life is always changing and seeing the bigger picture helps manage the change. The key is to know how to act and react in different situations: up or down; negative or positive; in harmony or in conflict.

This can also be seen in the impact of healthy and unhealthy stress. Healthy stress motivates and leads to action; unhealthy stress consumes with negativity and paralyzes with worry. Remember the saying of Dean Inge of St Paul's (and Cambridge Professor of Divinity), "Worry is the interest we pay on our

Upcoming Events

15 - 16
November
Woolf Institute
Conference



16 November
Woolf Institute
Research Afternoon



22 November
The Quranic Notion
of the Soul and Its
Place in Science and
Psychology



22 November
Shared Sacred Space
and the Mosque in the
Medieval
Mediterranean



23 November
Interfaith Mixer



30 November
Edward Said and the



troubles before it comes due.” But, I ask, why pay up front?

One of the contributions made by the Woolf Institute is that when there is something we can do about the problem we spring into action and tackle the problem. For example, the *Woolf Diversity Study* (first published in 2020 and the second edition in 2023) helps us understand our neighbours better; our *Forgiveness* research project focuses on building for the future in tense, still post-conflict societies such as Bosnia and Northern Ireland; and the *Commission on the Integration of Refugees* aims to improve the refugee and asylum system for a society where everyone, including refugees, feels welcome and integrated.

Each of these, and the many other research projects at the Institute, brings together opposing views and diverse experiences to find common ground and offer practical (and credible) solutions. They present ways to live with uncertainty, not be paralysed by it. This won't lead to certainty; rather, it provides the tools to live with uncertainty. I'm reminded of a poem by Rumi, the 13th century Muslim mystic, who wrote:

*The moon whispers:
It's ok not to know
You were borne with wings to soar
The real question is:
Why do you remain huddled in your cage?*

Embedded in the memory of our faith traditions is the knowledge that we have the ability to handle the unknown and a curiosity about what we don't know. Together, they help us journey towards a safe uncertainty.

For those of us worrying about the future, take confidence in the Abrahamic faiths which accept the uncertainty of life but also provide the resilience needed to live and thrive in a hazardous and uncertain world.

Best wishes,

Dr Edward Kessler
Founder President, Woolf Institute

Edward Said and the
Study of Religion



1 December

William Kessler
Essay Prize
Competition



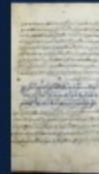
6 December

Reading Group:
Qur'an and Bible



13 December

Historiography and
Politics in the Late
Medieval Islamic
Mediterranean



16 & 17 January

Perspectives on
Judaism and Islam



8 February

London Research
Day



Woolf Institute Conference

Faith, Trust & Relationships

A two-day academic conference in Cambridge exploring harmony and tension between faith communities, people of no faith, and social, political and cultural environments.

TUESDAY 15 & WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2022

The Woolf Institute invites you to a two-day conference in Cambridge.

The conference will explore themes linking religious studies and subjects concerning faith, trust and relationships. We will examine how these themes (taken individually or collectively) create, or have created, harmony or tension between faith communities, between people of all faiths and none, or between people of faith and their social, political and cultural environments.

We define our terms broadly:

"Faith" is taken to mean any belief in or acceptance of doctrines of a religion.

"Trust" is taken to mean believing in or reliance on the honesty, reliability and ability of another.

"Relationships" is taken to mean connections between people, communities, or religious, social and cultural practices.

We will start at 12:00 on 15 November and at 09:00 on 16 November

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

[CLICK HERE FOR THE CONFERENCE SCHEDULE](#)

Woolf Institute Research Afternoon

WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER 2022 @ 14:30 - 18:45

Join the Woolf Institute to hear from its multidisciplinary researchers from around the world. For one afternoon, the Woolf Institute research team will convene in Cambridge to discuss their research and propose ideas for the future.

On Wednesday 16 November, researchers will report on their work in a wide variety of fields. We hope that the research afternoon will offer a unique opportunity to evaluate and further develop our diverse research into contemporary religion and society.

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

[CLICK HERE FOR THE RESEARCH AFTERNOON SCHEDULE](#)

Tuesday 22 November @13:00

The Quranic Notion of the Soul and Its Place in Science and Psychology

By Dr Mehdi Nassaji



On Tuesday 22nd November Dr Mehdi Nassaji will be giving us a seminar talk entitled – ‘The Quranic Notion of the Soul and Its Place in Science and Psychology’.

This research seminar is in partnership with the Faraday Institute. Join us in Cambridge and online at 1pm UK time followed by Q&A.

By the 16th Century, the dominant view among Muslim scholars was that the soul is a material substance. It was a kind of heresy to believe that humans are compound creatures, made up of a material body and an immaterial soul. Influenced by some leading philosophers, things changed in the last 4 or 5 centuries, and the dualist understanding of the soul became widespread among Muslims. However, it seems that a careful examination of the Quranic texts related to the notion of the soul support neither the material nor immaterial views. I argue that the Quran has adopted a ‘functionalist’ approach to address the soul without saying anything about its nature. IF the Quran has the potential for this functionalist reading, then the Quranic notion of the soul equates with the notion of the mind in its functionalist sense, which is now the dominant view among scientists and psychologists. In functionalist theories, the nature of entities is not of interest, but the focus is on the entity’s functions. Suppose the Quran has adopted a functionalist approach to the soul without addressing its nature, in that case, the concept of the soul can be embraced by scientists and psychologists, and whatever scientists and psychologists find about the functions of the mind can be compatible with the functionalist reading of the Quran.

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER TO ATTEND IN PERSON](#)

[CLICK HERE TO WATCH VIA ZOOM](#)

WEBINAR 22 NOVEMBER @17:00

Woolf Institute and the Society for the Medieval
Mediterranean present:

Shared Sacred Space – Confronting Narratives of Conversion



The Woolf Institute together with the Society for the Medieval Mediterranean invite you to their webinar series.

The Mediterranean has been a theatre of both sharing and contesting sacred space between Christianity and Islam. While some shrines appear to feature syncretic devotions, other places see the symbolic conversion of the sacred space. Especially in contested territories between Christianity and Islam, religious power dynamics often cause mosques and churches to transcend their function as mere buildings. The transformations of Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque at the time of the Crusades, of Córdoba's Umayyad Mosque following the Reconquista, and of Istanbul's Aya Sophia, are famous examples that resonate until today. However, while popular narratives of the conversion of these edifices dominate modern scholarship, the archaeological evidence is often less straight forward. Focusing on aspects of their own research and examples from the Levant and Al-Andalus, this panel will discuss the extent to which these narratives ought to be nuanced, and how both medieval and modern communities have interacted with these sacred spaces.

Speakers are Dr Carmen González Gutiérrez (Universidad de Córdoba), Dr Hagit Nol (Université libre de Bruxelles), Dr Alejandro García-Sanjuán (Universidad de Huelva).

Chair: Dr Jan Vandeburie (University of Leicester)

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

INTERFAITH MIXER

Wednesday 23 November @18:00

WOOLF INSTITUTE | KC SHASHA SUITE



Undergraduate and graduate students are invited for a social mixer to get to know the different faith societies operating in Cambridge and learn about the

Woolf Institute mission and available facilities.

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

FAITH IN MENTAL HEALTH

Naked Reflections Podcast x The Woolf Institute

WE REFLECT ON THE SECULAR AND THE
RELIGIOUS APPROACHES TO MENTAL ILL
HEALTH AND FIND THAT THEY ARE NOT
MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE



What do people of faith think about the psychological and psychiatric approach to dealing with mental health problems? Is there a sense for some that one's faith, one's God should be enough to quell any inner turmoil? Jamilla Hekmoun and Danny Smith reflect on the secular and the religious approaches to mental ill health...

[CLICK HERE TO LISTEN](#)

COMING SOON

Naked Reflections Podcast x The Woolf Institute

THE NATIONAL HEALTH

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION](#)

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