

# THE FORENSIC SCRIPTURES CONFERENCE

## at The Riverside Church in the City of New York

### May 15-17, 2009

3-day theological consultation on **What the Qur'an Reveals About the Bible**, hosted by The Riverside Church in New York City, May 15-17, 2009, co-sponsored by Auburn Multi-faith Center, New York Theological Seminary, St. Andrew's Theological College in Trinidad, SnowStar Institute in Canada, The Jewish Publication Society, The Rumi Forum, New York Faith & Justice, Hofstra University, Graymoor Ecumenical & Interfaith Institute and Cascade Books, in a retrospective on *Noah's Other Son* and to launch *Forensic Scriptures* by Brian Arthur Brown, a book and manuscript used in recent Riverside study classes.

#### **Friday Evening Introductory Session - Isha'a Prayers, Social Encounter, Discussion:**

**6:00pm** Canadian Muslim womanist Raheel Raza leads Muslim Isha'a prayers in a mixed gender interfaith context with Qur'anic citations by Mahmoud Ayoub & Laleh Bakhtiar.

**7:00pm** Welcome reception, late registrations, finger-foods and beverages, several authors signing books, and complimentary copies of Cascade Books' *Forensic Scriptures* by Brian Arthur Brown.

**7:30pm** Welcome address by Rabbi Justus Baird: "Jews and Christians have interfaced dynamically on scripture for centuries and now a new dynamic in the scriptural family of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar extends the Judeo-Christian paradigm in reference to Islam."

**7:45pm** Conference organizers polled themselves internally to identify three of the world's leading scholar-theologians who might be the first to address issues raised in *Noah's Other Son* and *Forensic Scriptures*. Tying Walter Brueggemann, who is unable to attend on these dates, was **Max Stackhouse** of Princeton, editor of the 4-volume *God and Globalization*, author of the final volume, *Globalization and Grace*, and current President of the American Theological Society. **Mahmoud Ayoub** was considered by our Muslim scholars as "hands down" the *éminence grise* of Islam, in North America at least. He has taught at San Diego State University, University of Toronto, McGill, twenty years at Temple and is currently at Hartford Theological Seminary. Among his recent books is an Orbis Books' bestseller, *A Muslim View of Christianity*. The organizers were of the view that America's leading feminist scholar might be found among our renowned Jewish presenters at the conference, but those scholars chose to defer to the world famous doyen of feminist textual investigation and rhetorical criticism, **Phyllis Trible**, late of Wake Forest and Union Theological Seminary who had indeed planned to be at this conference.

These three leading scholar-theologians will be on stage together during the first evening, in conversation with the new Senior Minister of The Riverside Church, Rev. Dr. **Brad Braxton**, on the topic, "If the world cannot find peace until the religions achieve peace, what role could greater appreciation of each other's Scripture play in this process?" This conversation may link scriptural aspects of two dominant forces in the globalization of world cultures: new appreciation of women in Scripture and the rise of Islam in the West.

**8:30pm** Round table moderated by Brian Arthur Brown with Joy Abdul-Mohan, Chris Bullock, Henry Carrigan, Eleazar Fernandez, David Galston, Lisa Harper, KC Hanson, Daisy Khan, James Loughran, Lucinda Mosher, Indira Sinton, Ali Yurtsever and evening host, Eugene Melino, Riverside's *Study Guide* author for *Noah's Other Son* in paperback.

**9:15 – 9:30pm** Professor Kurt Anders Richardson presents a brief address to prime our Saturday symposia with reviews of the books *Noah's Other Son* and *Forensic Scriptures*.

### **Saturday Afternoon Symposium I, 1:00-2:30pm (Amplifying the book *Noah's Other Son*)**

**Qur'an & Hadith as the "New" Dead Sea Scrolls & the "New" Nag Hammadi Library.** This symposium is hosted by Riverside minister Rev. Robert Coleman and moderated by Brian Arthur Brown, with the panel of Mahmoud Ayoub, Amir Hussain, Hussein Rashid and Kurt Anders Richardson in discussion with James Christie, Elias Mallon, Judith Plaskow and Max Stackhouse. This conference is not a dialogue of mutual sharing, of which there have been many, but a program designed to allow leading Jewish and Christian scholars to pose searching questions to respected Muslim colleagues. Like the *Dead Sea Scrolls* and the *Nag Hammadi Library* over the last 50 years, in future years the Muslim Scriptures may yield valuable information about the Bible. From the Qur'an we may now receive answers to biblical conundrums, and from the Hadith we learn ancient Middle Eastern lore, including material omitted from and illuminating the biblical texts.

From the Qur'an and the Hadith we learn of Mary's parents and her priestly vocation under sponsorship by her uncle, Zechariah, details about the Bible's mysterious Sabeans, Noah's fourth son who drowned in the flood, the names of women unnamed in the Bible like Pharaoh's daughter, Potiphar's wife and the Queen of Sheba. We get another view of the *Gospel of Thomas* and Gnostic writings of interest in secular literature and the media, including what heterodox pictures of Jesus as the Messiah may have once looked like.

In this symposium we will also revisit the practice of Scriptural memorization and recitation, long discarded by many Christians and Jews as "mindless repetition without meaning," explore newer disciplines like rhetorical criticism, and consider Muslim experience with the power of words. Jewish Shabbat liturgy will be offered in a mixed gender interfaith context by Rabbis Julie Roth and Justus Baird, with Cantor Eric Meyers.

### **Saturday Afternoon Symposium II, 3-4:30pm (Amplifying the book, *Forensic Scriptures*)**

**Islamic Texts Respectfully Examined by Creative Employment of Critical Methods.** This session is hosted by Dr. Arnold Thomas of Riverside, moderated by Brian Arthur Brown, with a panel of Mahmoud Ayoub, Laleh Bakhtiar, Amir Hussain and Hussein Rashid in discussion with Adam Gregerman, Judith Hauptman, Rod Hutton and Fred Weidmann. Just as the Documentary Hypothesis ascribes multiple sources to the Torah without questioning the divine origins the revelations to the writers *per se*, these symposia raise no question about the angel Gabriel's presentations to Muhammad as being from Allah – who, in the Muslim view quoted stories God had given to Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and Haniffs, recorded faithfully or in garbled versions.

The Qur'an may be seen as a template of scriptural production from the last major culture to spring from the ancient culture of today's Middle East in which reliable information about scriptural development has never disappeared from view. To illustrate the model, Muslims believe Muhammad was illiterate. Many chapters or surahs of the Qur'an may have been written down by the women of his household, led by Hafsa, who was entrusted with preservation of the Qur'an and transmission of it to the world. The Hadith presents conversations of the Prophet as recorded by his Companions, both male and female, prominently including another wife, Ayisha. Recognition that such materials may have been penned by women does not rely on secondary sources or conjecture. Islamic primary sources, under rigorous re-evaluation by Islamic scholars today, may have the potential to reveal whole new paradigms that can now also be applied to the Biblical text.

### **Saturday Evening Symposium III, 7:30-9:00pm (Further amplifying *Forensic Scriptures*)**

**Muslim and Other Women as Purveyors and Transmitters of Abrahamic Scripture.** Riverside's Desirée Baxter as host, moderated by Brian Arthur Brown: Lalah Bakhtiar, Ellen Frankel, Carol Meyers & Phyllis Tribble on rhetorical criticism; Joy Abdul-Mohan, Lucinda Mosher, Raheel Raza, and Indira Sinton with a reflection by Adam Gregerman.

Women have been household scribes in tent complexes and palaces of socio-religious potentates in what is today called the Middle East. If the tent complex of Muhammad is a recorded example, why not consider the palace of King David or the Jerusalem home of St. James? Queen Noor, an American wife of King Hussein of Jordan, recently wrote this way for the Hashimite monarchy, and this female role can be observed in tents of Bedouin leaders.

Women in leadership faced situations similar to women in compounds of illiterate Afghan warlord-parliamentarians, who, in irony they scarcely recognize, depend on educated wives, both foreign and Afghani, for computer literacy. Skeptics suggest there is no biblical evidence for this female role, but the powerful influence of educated foreign wives in courts of Solomon, Ahab and others is well documented. Influences of aristocratic Jewish women might not be much less, even if anonymous in the biblical culture. This throws a whole new light on assumptions about certain writers of Scripture who have hitherto been judged by norms relating to Western women, whereas we are still learning of the roles of biblical and Muslim women. Even if psalms were composed by King David, there is not a scrap of evidence that he personally wrote any of them down.

Likewise, Proverbs “from the lips of Solomon” may be from the pens of his wives and sisters, like one who could have written the Book of J. Similarly, the Book of Ruth comes from the royal household’s family memory of David’s great grandparents, Chronicles corrects the records of Samuel and Kings to the liking of David’s “household,” and both Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs might be reviewed to consider who did the actual writing. Pushing this envelope to norms attested by the Qur’an, we might find that if the New Testament “Q” came from a scribe in the household of St. James, it was probably by his wife, and The Epistle to the Hebrews may well have come from Priscilla in the household of a wealthy businessman, Aquila. We should look for similar patterns in anything in the Scriptures that is anonymous, even Job, with the prominence given to his daughters, or Esther, the story of well-connected women in high places. Twentieth century scholarship established that peasant Bible women had stories, songs and prayers. We may be able to now recognize anonymous literature coming from a class of educated aristocratic women.

#### **Sunday Morning Final Plenary: 9:00 – 10:30 am (Consideration of where to from here)**

**Scriptures of the Family of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar and the “New Ecumenism” of World Religions.** Breakfast followed by a round table on public uses of shared Scripture of the Abrahamic traditions and how may be used together in public and the future of this family tradition as a distinct element in the wider “new ecumenism” of world religions. Moderated by Brian Arthur Brown, with publishers Ellen Frankel, K.C. Hanson, Laleh Bakhtiar & Henry Carrigan, Professors Christie, Hutton, Irvin and Weidmann, and public interest interlocutors Ali Yurtsever, Lisa Harper, David Galston, Daisy Khan and Chris Bullock.

#### **Sunday Morning Christian Worship Service: 10:45 am-12:15 pm**

**Public Worship Service.** (Led by New York Theological Seminary President Dale Irvin) 1,000 Muslim and Jewish guests at Riverside, Cantor Eric Meyers, Muezzin Sheikh Ahmed Dewidar and Leo Thorne, representing the American Baptist Church, hosted by Brad Braxton with Brian Arthur Brown preaching. The official book launch of Forensic Scriptures at 12:30 pm follows the worship service.

### **40 Presenters, Responders, and Lead Participants in this Conference**

**Joy Abdul-Mohan** Principal of St. Andrew’s Theological College (Presbyterian) Trinidad  
**Mahmoud Ayoub** Islamic interfaith specialist and author, Hartford Theological Seminary  
**Justus Baird** Multifaith Center Director, Auburn Presbyterian Theological Seminary  
**Laleh Bakhtiar** Acclaimed translator of *The Sublime Qur’an* and works about *The Hadith*  
**Desirée Baxter** Member of The Riverside Church and Faith and Justice representative  
**Brad Braxton** Interfaith scholar & Sr. Minister The Riverside Church, host congregation  
**Chris Bullock** Baptist pastor, NAACP, civil rights, justice, prison reform and interfaith activist  
**Henry Carrigan** Assistant Director and Senior Editor at Northwestern University Press  
**James Christie** Dean of Theology, University of Winnipeg, United Church of Canada  
**Robert Coleman** Minister for Mission and Social Justice at The Riverside Church  
**Sheikh Ahmed Dewidar**, Imam of ISMM Surat al Qaf Surat al Muminun Surat al Zumr  
**David Galston** Brock University chaplain and a Director of the SnowStar Institute of Canada  
**Adam Gregerman** Jewish Scholar in Residence, Institute for Christian & Jewish Studies

**K.C. Hanson** Editor-in-Chief, Cascade Books, professor and author on Biblical society  
**Lisa Sharon Harper** Executive Director, New York Faith and Justice and author  
**Judith Hauptman** JTS *Rereading the Mishnah: A New Approach to Ancient Jewish Texts*  
**Amir Hussain** Author of *Oil and Water*, Interfaith Professor, Loyola Marymount RC University  
**Rod Hutton** Professor of Old Testament / Islamic Studies, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus  
**Dale Irvin** Professor World Religions, President NY Theological Seminary, Riverside member  
**Eleazar Fernandez** UCC official rep., Prof., United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities  
**Ellen Frankel** Author, CEO and Editor-in-Chief of the Jewish Publication Society  
**Daisy Khan** Executive Director, American Society for Muslim Advancement  
**James Loughran**, Director, The Graymoor Ecumenical and Interfaith Institute  
**Elias Mallon** Catholic ecumenist and Franciscan interfaith educator, scholar and author  
**Carol Meyers** Duke University, archaeologist and biblical consultant on household life  
**Eric Meyers** Archeologist at Duke University and synagogue Cantor.  
**Lucinda Mosher** Interfaith consultant, author: *Belonging and Faith in the Neighborhood*  
**Judith Plaskow** Feminist Theologian, Past President of the American Academy of Religion.  
**Raheel Raza** Author of *Their Jihad, Not My Jihad*, a Director of the SnowStar Institute  
**Hussein Rashid** Professor at Hofstra University, independent scholar, founder of islamicate.com  
**Kurt Anders Richardson** Abrahamic Scripture specialist at The University of Toronto and Qom  
**Julie Roth** Executive Director of The Princeton Center for Jewish Life / Hillel  
**Indira Sinton** Canadian Poet and Leadership & Organizational Development Consultant  
**Max Stackhouse** President, American Theological Society & author of *Globalization and Grace*  
**Susan Switzer** New York Theological Seminary and Riverside Church member  
**Arnold Thomas** Minister of Education, The Riverside Church  
**Leo Thorne** Associate General Secretary, American Baptist Church, Riverside Church member  
**Phyllis Trible** Wake Forest & Union Theo. Seminaries, Past Pres., Society of Biblical Literature  
**Fred Weidmann** Auburn New Testament Professor, formerly Riverside staff member  
**Ali Yurtsever** Professor, researcher and President of the Rumi Forum, Washington, D.C.

**Walter Brueggemann** introduces our moderator in a Foreword to *Forensic Scriptures*:

“I have been glad to be introduced to Brown’s work. I am only at the beginning of my attention to the Qur’an, and I suspect it is the same for many people whom Brown addresses. I have no doubt that a greater critical familiarity with the Qur’an is an urgent enterprise among us. I have the glad impression that Brown is a responsible, reliable teacher who can help us find access to these texts. It will be important in time to come to be engaged with our Muslim colleagues; and in order to do that, some understanding in the subject is important. Brown’s work will be an important resource for that coming task. I thank Brown for sharing his work with us and wish him and his readers well in moving discussions forward to a new space where Jews, Christians and Muslims may begin to share the fruits of their separate scholarships.”