



“Political theologies of enmity: time and the other”

18-19 March 2024

University of Oxford

This interdisciplinary conference builds on the Political Theologies after Christendom conference, held at Oxford in 2022, which discussed the need for political theologies that answer for the role of religion in major atrocities: from the Holodomor to Holocaust and to Apartheid, the Yugoslav war, and Bucha. This conference will consider the temporalities of enmity across the Christian and other Abrahamic traditions: the shaping of time and the enmity in political theology, the repertoires that help political communities move beyond them, and ways in which communities move through the making and unmaking of enemies.

Time plays a significant role in the formation of both the self and other in the Abrahamic traditions. Time is a powerful way to distance the self from the other as backward or forward (Johannes Fabian), or to inscribe notions of difference (Sarit Kattan Gribetz), and to interact with history as both linear and cyclical (Mircea Eliade), nostalgic and eschatological (Jayne Svenungsson). Understandings of time tend to be culturally self-referential and evoking both religious and secular identifications with the sacred (Reinhart Koselleck).

Abrahamic religions have different conceptions of time and this informs ways in which neighbours turn into strangers, adversaries and enemies. Enemies tend to be “useful” politically, but narratives of enmity can also undermine the long-term potential for coexistence. Indeed, they can serve to justify the infliction of harm and violence. Conversely, the experience of victimisation and trauma may inscribe otherness in an enduring way, reverberating down the generations. The question is how political theologies can contribute to diffusing enmity, and what the wider resources are within theological traditions for doing so.

Papers and panel suggestions are invited from scholars in political theory, sociology, theology and religious studies, politics, history, anthropology, philosophy and law, and may refer to any of the categories below. Applications from early- and mid-career scholars are especially encouraged:

1. Conceptions of time and temporalities; nostalgia and the understanding of history
2. The self-other distinction and the sacred
3. Dehumanisation and rehumanisation of enemies; political othering in conflict and resources of cultural, religious, and ethnic belonging

4. The other as the enemy: experiences of first-, second- and third-generations
5. The self as the other's enemy: experiences of first-, second-, and third-generations
6. Trauma, healing, and the scars that last
7. One's sense of time in forced displacement
8. Capacity-building for reconciliation: experiences from across the world
9. Resources for local coexistence: the role of formal and informal civic leaders
10. Feminist political theologies and the transformations of enmity
11. Reconciliation in congregations: theological and liturgical resources

Please send a proposed paper title, short abstract (c.200 words) and short biography to marietta.vandertol@bsg.ox.ac.uk **by 15 November 2023**. Decisions will be released by 20 December 2023. Short conference briefs of ca. 1,500 words are due by 1 March 2024. The convenors intend to pursue collaborative publications after the conference. All submissions and papers should contain original work that has not been committed elsewhere. Please note that research involving human participants requires prior ethical approval from the delegate's home institution.

Associated events

In anticipation of the conference, the University Church of St. Mary the Virgin (Church of England) will host an ecumenical choral service on the afternoon of Sunday 17 March 2024, at 3.30pm. The University Church will also host a public lecture on 18 March 2024, starting at 5pm. No prior sign-up is required for these events.

A college dinner will be hosted at New College on the evening of Monday 18 March 2024 at 7.30pm. The dinner will be included as an optional item at registration and is open to speakers and attendees of the conference.

Logistics and Covid-19

The conference events will be in person at New College, Oxford. Participants will be able to book rooms at New College at reduced rates. We recommend that those traveling to the conference ensure they have been fully vaccinated against Covid-19 and take out travel insurance as necessary.

Funding and embedding

This conference is generously co-sponsored by the Huffington Ecumenical Institute of Loyola Marymount University, DAAD-Cambridge Research Hub for German Studies, and others. A limited number of subsidised rooms will be offered to speakers on the basis of need. Cost of travel will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and applicants must make a strong case that no other funding is available to them.

The conference is part of the project 'Protestant Political Thought: Religion, State, Nation', hosted at the Blavatnik School of Government, Oxford (previously at the Centre for Geopolitics, University of Cambridge). This project features a series of workshops and conferences, many of which have led to collaborative publications, including in *The Journal of the Bible and its Reception* (2021); *Religion, State, Society* (2022); and the *International Journal of Religion* (2021). For more information about the project, email Mariëtta van der Tol (marietta.vandertol@bsg.ox.ac.uk) or Sophia Johnson (srcj2@cam.ac.uk).