EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

December 2010
In 2010, the Rector of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem appointed a review committee to advise the University on ways “to address the spectrum of Study of Religions teaching and research at the HU”. The members of the review committee were Professor (Emeritus) Jan N. Bremmer, University of Groningen, The Netherlands (Chair), Professor Martin Goodman, University of Oxford, United Kingdom, Professor (Emeritus) Shaul Shaked, Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Professor (Emeritus) Harvey Goldberg, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The recommendations of the committee are based on the material provided in the Self Evaluation Report, further written materials, and complemented by an extensive number of interviews with staff and students. The committee met with the deans of the Faculties of Social Sciences and Humanities, the Head of the School of Philosophy and Religion, the Chairperson of the Department, the members of the Department, the chairs and members of relevant departments and institutes, the Vice-Rector, the Rector and the President. The committee also met separately with delegates of the Department’s students, graduates, and PhD students.

The Committee carefully considered several options for the reorganization of the study of religion within the Faculty of Humanities to counter its existing fragmentation and concluded that it is of paramount importance that one department be made responsible for providing focus and stimulus for the study of religion as a general human phenomenon as against the study of individual religions. At the same time, the committee believes that the Department must undergo drastic reconstruction to fulfill its mission. To this end, the committee makes a number of recommendations
which are summarized below. The newly reconstructed department should be able to articulate for its students, the university and the wider academic community the relevance of religious studies for the early twenty-first century.

Summary of the recommendations:

1. We recommend an extensive overhaul of the current Department of Comparative Religion, as this is the best way to guarantee the teaching and continuing research in religion at HU.

2. To avoid misunderstandings and unrealistic expectations about the contents and outcome of teaching and research as regards comparisons between religions, we also recommend changing its English name into ‘Department of Religious Studies’.

3. Given the current composition of the Department (basically a combination of Early Christianity and Indian Studies) and its focus on early periods of Christianity and India, we recommend a widening of its staff by joint appointments in contemporary Islam and Judaism, preferably with a demonstrable anthropological interest.

4. Before any restructuring of the Department takes place, it is essential that a new appointment is made of a charismatic and leading figure in religious studies with methodological and theoretical interests and a wide view of religion, preferably in the study of contemporary religion.

5. Given the impending retirement of current staff in the teaching of Christianity, we recommend maintaining at all times at least two positions in Early Christianity and, possibly, also one in Eastern (Byzantine or Syriac) Christianity.
6. In the immediate future, after the recent losses of two full positions in the study of Christianity, it is necessary to replace at least one of these positions with a position in Christianity. Notwithstanding the importance of the study of the New Testament in Jerusalem, it is also crucial to study later forms of Christianity, in particular modern or contemporary ones in Jerusalem.

7. We recognize that the current expertise in the Department in Late Antiquity would gain greatly by a specialist in Greek and Roman religion, but we do not see this as a priority. Such a specialist, if appointed, should be a joint appointment with the Department of Classical Studies.

8. Given the approaching retirement of most members of the Department, the new configuration of the Department we advocate will be partially realized by redefining the positions left vacant by staff as they retire.

9. In due time, the part of Indian Studies that focuses on Indian culture and literature should be moved to a different department.

10. Regarding the curriculum we strongly commend the move already made by the Department to incorporate Judaism and Islam in the B.A., but the incremental progress of the different tracks, in particular, the proper integration of language teaching into the courses for Islam, Judaism and Christianity needs to be ensured.

11. The curriculum must be presented in such a way to potential students that they can immediately see the wide range of teaching of Judaism and Islam available to them in the university.

12. In the B.A., proper attention should be paid to method and theory throughout the curriculum, but the comparative element should be kept to a minimum, as students
first have to acquire a satisfactory grasp of individual religions. This is different in the M.A., where comparisons should be an essential element of the study of religions.

13. In order to coordinate, facilitate and stimulate seminars, conferences and research projects in the study of religion within the university across the full gamut of the disciplines and, furthermore, to take full advantage of the unique position of Jerusalem within Islam, Judaism and Christianity, we strongly recommend the foundation of a new body to be called The Jerusalem Center for the Study of Religion and Society. Its head must be a charismatic, leading person in the fields of Islam, Judaism or Religious Anthropology, firmly based in the Department, academically but also administratively highly competent and willing to cooperate with scholars of varying disciplinary backgrounds; moreover, we strongly recommend that the selection of this crucial post be made by a specially appointed selection committee of international experts in religious studies. We expect that the proposed Center will greatly promote Jerusalem as an important center for the study of religion within the wider scholarly world.