



## **Press Release – Summary of Hittin Institute Debates at the American University of Beirut**

**11:31 GMT, Monday, 22 June 2009**

London – The week beginning [18<sup>th</sup> May 2009](#) members of the Hittin Institute travelled to Lebanon to participate in debates and lectures at the American University of Beirut. The whole week entitled “Secularism on Trial” which included lively and productive discussion with academics and students, was very successful.

### **19<sup>th</sup> May 2009: Debate with Head of Philosophy Department Dr Bashar Haydar**

Senior researcher Hamza Andreas Tzortzis participated in the first debate of the week on “Islam or Secular Liberalism: which is the way forward?” with the head of the philosophy department Dr Bashar Haydar. Tzortzis started the debate by highlighting the need to transcend sound bytes and political rhetoric to facilitate a nuanced and frank discussion. Tzortzis presented a detailed response to Secular Liberalism, including:

- Secularism is invalid because it emerged as a result of specific historical problems.
- Secularism’s political ethics & morality are subjective and relative due to divorcing God, the transcendent conceptual anchor, from political realities.
- Its view of the self is ontologically false as secular philosophers had to create an individualist doctrine due to Catholic intolerance.
- It facilitates social fragmentation & decay due to its non-cohesive premise and values.
- Secularism creates political sectarianism.

Tzortzis presented Islam as a comprehensive system that facilitates social cohesion, welcomes immigrants and protects minorities, as well as creating financial stability through the distribution of wealth, thereby dealing with the cause of poverty.

Dr Haydar admitted he could not deal with all the points raised by Tzortzis and focused on what he termed, ‘Critical Liberalism’. He defended liberalism explaining that liberalism re-invents itself and is progressive, inasmuch that it adapts to contemporary problems.

The debate was filmed and can be viewed [here](#).

### **20<sup>th</sup> May 2009: Conference “Islam and Secularism: reconcilable?”**

Senior researcher Adnan Rashid led the conference entitled “Islam and Secularism: reconcilable?” with Hamza Andreas Tzortzis. Rashid delivered a lecture on the philosophical and theological incompatibility between Secularism and Islam. Rashid explained the origins and definitions of Secularism and showed how Islam and its intellectual tradition provide an alternative political and social paradigm that cannot be reconciled with the secular tradition. Tzortzis delivered a lecture on the internalisation of knowledge and experiences in a secular environment. Tzortzis used his personal experiences and knowledge of secularism to show how practically Islam and secularism are two different political frameworks with antithetical world views.

The question and answer session was lively and productive with many students and academics asking questions about Islam affording the presenters a chance to demystify keys aspects of the Islamic system.

## **21<sup>st</sup> May 2009: Debate “Does God Exist?” with Dr Bana Bashour**

Hamza Andreas Tzortzis debated Dr Bana Bashour on “Does God Exist?” Tzortzis started the presentation by responding to common atheistic and skeptical responses to the existence of God, including, the problem of evil, naturalism and epistemological questions. Tzortzis continued by detailing the cosmological argument and the teleological argument for the existence of God.

Dr Bashour presented Anthony Flew’s falsification argument to show that belief in God is non-falsifiable and therefore He doesn’t exist. Tzortzis replied that the argument provided by Dr Bashour was flawed because it presumes atheism. During the question and answers Dr Bashour changed the debate to epistemological questions about God. Tzortzis explained that there is a difference between ontological arguments and epistemological arguments, and the debate can’t be changed and his premises must be addressed.

### **Workshops & Lectures**

Throughout the week both researchers delivered workshops on Islam, politics and theology.

### **Conclusion**

The whole week was an unprecedented week with nuanced discussions and active participation from academics and students. Dr Bashour felt that the debate made her more interested in the Qur’an and Dr Haydar, while attending the God debate, agreed that there must have been a cause for the universe.

For media enquiries please contact: [info@hittininstitute.com](mailto:info@hittininstitute.com)

### **About Hittin Institute:**

The Hittin Institute is a research-based initiative that seeks to present Islam, Islamic history and heritage and shed indispensable light on the mechanisms of the Islamic system in its history and in both current and future applicability.

The Hittin Institute recognises the need for intellectual discourse in both the Western and Eastern hemispheres, and aims, in part, to bridge an understanding about the true dynamics of Islam; thereby promoting greater dialogue and understanding.