

**Frederick Krantz: REMEMBERING A GIANT OF JEWISH
SCHOLARSHIP**

isranet-publications

Blog, June 10, 2015

<https://www.isranet.org/blog/frederick-krantz-remembering-giant-jewish-scholarship/>

As the old adage has it, deaths come in threes, something sadly borne out recently in the world of Jewish historical scholarship and Israel-related political advocacy. First came the passing of the remarkable Israel scholar Barry Rubin, then of the superb Churchill biographer, Holocaust authority, and historian of Israel Martin Gilbert, and now, suddenly, of our time's greatest student of the nature and history of antisemitism, Robert Wistrich.

I was away at sea recently and initially unaware that Robert, author of the recent, magisterial *The Lethal Obsession: Antisemitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad* (2010), had suddenly been taken from us at the today relatively young age of 70. He was in Rome, where he was about to address the Italian Senate on the growing dangers of an Israel-centered and Islamist-influenced global antisemitism.

Head of the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Journal for the Study of Antisemitism, he was descended from a Polish-Jewish family, born in Kazakhstan in 1945, raised in London and educated at Cambridge and the University of London, where he took his doctorate.

He worked initially at the Institute for Contemporary History and the Wiener Library, with Walter Laqueur, and received tenure at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1982. A scholarly polymath, Robert published a large number of books and articles on a vast range of subjects, from modern Austrian- and German-Jewish history and politics, Leon Trotsky, and Theodor Herzl, to socialism and the Jews, and key studies on the Nazis and Nazism.

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His work on antisemitism blossomed into the path-breaking *The Longest Hatred* (1994), which tracked antisemitism from its beginnings in pre-Christian Greek and Roman times through early and medieval Christianity, and down into the early modern and modern periods and of course, the Holocaust, with final chapters on the post-1945 and contemporary periods, and the impact of Israel. He was also instrumental in transforming the book into a powerful nine-hour British-American television documentary of the same name, which was shown first on the BBC and then across Europe, including Germany, and North America (PBS), extending the impact of his work to an audience of millions.

Robert also played a key role on the International Catholic-Jewish Historical Commission, set up from 1999-2001 by the Vatican to examine documents pertaining to the problem of Pope Pius XII's relation to the Holocaust, generally and in Italy. And he supported withdrawing from the project when complete access to the existing documentation was not provided by the Church.

I knew Robert Wistrich for over a quarter of a century, and was honored by his presence at a number of CIJR conferences, not least the major International Conference on the New Global Antisemitism I organized here in Montreal, held jointly with Federation-CJA in 2004. There Robert-with Natan Sharansky and in the company of superb students of Jewish history and antisemitism like Alvin Rosenfeld, Ruth Wisse, and Bat Ye'or, among others-delivered an incisive portrait of contemporary Israel-centered antisemitism and its new Arab-world Islamic component.

His remarks-in the guise of a Keynote address-were also a powerful and eloquent call to arms, to devote all our energies to opposing the new antisemitism.

Robert was one of the giants in this crucial area of study, whose remarkable oeuvre justifies placing him in the pantheon of the truly great scholars, from Jules Isaac, Marcel Simon, and Leon Poliakov, to Jacob Katz, Haim Ben-Sasson, and Louis

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Feldman. He understood that his was a field, and a historical reality, which was still, unfortunately, very much alive, one paradoxically re-energized by the very Zionist success of a miraculously reborn democratic Jewish Israel. And he saw his intellectual and scholarly work, including the strenuous series of talks and lectures he delivered to major events and audiences around the world, as a key part of the unending effort not only to keep alive the memory of antisemitism's victims, but also to rally all people of good will to defeat a resurgent movement seeking first to delegitimize, and then to destroy, the sovereign Jewish state.

Robert concluded his remarks at the 2004 International Conference in Montreal by citing how traditional themes of antisemitism and Judeophobia today are feeding into an Islamist-inspired apocalyptic contemporary antisemitism, which asserts—reflecting the revival of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion—that aggressive and bloodthirsty Jews, now reinforced by the state of Israel, "are at the root of so many of the crises of the world, such that sixty per cent of Europeans say Israel is a great danger to world peace". And, given that "it is unlikely that this situation will improve a great deal on its own", fighting it will "depend on the ability of the Jewish people to mobilize all of its resources, and that includes obviously all of its cultural and intellectual and moral, as well as its political and financial, resources" in order to counter-act the new antisemitic offensive.

Citing the Biblical story of Purim, Robert concluded by noting that, "based on our tradition and our heritage, it is possible even in the most adverse circumstances for the Jews to triumph over their enemies, by determined action, by political action, and by the conviction that they have no other choice. Purim is a reminder to us of what we are obligated to do, and of what we are able to do. We can turn the tide".

May his memory, and his example, be a blessing to us all.

(Prof. Frederick Krantz, Director of the Canadian Institute for Jewish Research, is

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editor of the Daily Isranet Briefing. Persons interested in Robert Wistrich's presentation at the 2004 New Global Antisemitism Conference, and/or in the Conference itself, can contact CIJR at yunna@isranet.org)