

## University of Haifa

The Senate of the University of Haifa, by virtue of the authority vested in it by the constitution of the University and in accordance with the recommendations of the President and the Executive Committee

hereby confers upon

**David Nirenberg**

the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy, Honoris Causa**

In recognition of his groundbreaking research excellence and outstanding academic leadership, undeterred from questioning what already exists and is familiar, and offering new insights, founded on knowledge and research; on his analysis of the complexity of relations between Christians, Muslims and Jews in the multicultural society of the Middle Ages, helping to understand the problematic situation relevant to our times; on his recognition that the future lies in understanding the past and interdisciplinary research, a cause that the University of Haifa has also championed; and on his true friendship with Israeli academia and the State of Israel.

Conferred in 1 Sivan 5776/June 7, 2016  
Haifa, Israel



**Ami Ayalon**

Chairman of the Executive Committee



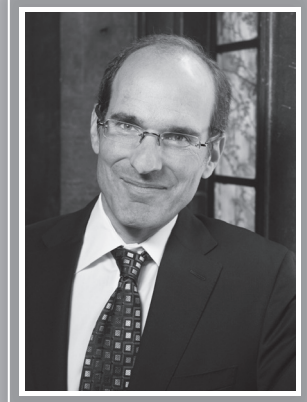
**Amos Shapira**

President



**Prof. David Faraggi**

Rector



## PROFESSOR DAVID NIRENBERG

David Nirenberg was born in 1964 in New York. His parents had left the Argentine for the United States to study mathematics, and his early childhood was spent in various places in the United States and Italy, following the academic careers of his parents, until the family settled in Albany, New York.

Nirenberg received a bachelor's degree in 1986 from Yale University, where he began studies in molecular biology, economics, and a number of other fields before discovering history, and in particular the history of Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities in medieval Spain. After graduation he worked as a financial analyst in mergers and acquisitions at Morgan Stanley before once again hearing the call of history and entering graduate school. He completed his MA (1989) and his PhD (1992) in the Department of History at Princeton University.

The first research task he set for himself was to understand the relationship between Jews, Muslims and Christians in the Middle Ages as a resource to gaining an understanding of the present. His dissertation on the subject evolved into his first book: *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (1996), which was widely acclaimed and won numerous awards, including the Herbert Baxter Adams Prize in the 1999 Book Awards of the American Historical Association. The book criticized the dichotomous view that had prevailed until that time about relations between religions in the Middle Ages (as either a "Golden Age" or a persecuting society), and offered an explanation of the presence of intra-societal conditions that produce tolerance or violence, and how the potential for these conditions is to be found in every society. The book's influence was significant, and historians, sociologists and anthropologists used his findings as the basis on which to explore and explain other mixed societies throughout history.

Another central theme in Prof. Nirenberg's research deals with the Jewish foundations of Christianity and Islam, and of the ways that Christian and Islamic cultures have made use of Jewish culture to define themselves. His most important book on this subject is *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, in which he describes the attempts of great and powerful cultures throughout history (starting in Ancient Egypt via Nazi Germany and through to 1948) to overcome Judaism, and how they positioned this as one of their more important tasks: "Anti-Judaism should not be understood as some archaic or irrational closet in the vast edifices of Western thought. It was rather one of the basic tools with which that edifice was constructed", he claimed in his book. Hence, the book presents a broad new interpretation of the course and meaning of Western civilization as a whole.

Prof. Nirenberg has headed many centers and programs, including the Humanities Research Center at Rice University, the Leonard and Helen R. Stulman Program in Jewish Studies at John Hopkins University, and others. Since 2006 he has been a permanent member of the prestigious "Committee on Social Thought" at the University of Chicago.

Between 2011 and 2014, Prof. Nirenberg headed the Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, a one-of-a-kind entity that he founded in order to put research in the humanities and social sciences into collaboration with other fields of research in order to address complex questions and problems. This collaboration, across disciplines, has resulted in some surprising outcomes – e.g., joint research by economists and anthropologists leading to the enrolment in government health insurance of about 30 million Indians living in poverty, and through to collaboration between art historians, physicists, and engineers on the restoration of contemporary art made out of non-traditional materials.