

Zishan Ghaffar/ Klaus von Stosch

Theology of Prophecy in Dialogue

A Jewish-Christian-Muslim Encounter

Conference at the university of Paderborn 8/23-8/25/2021

The Qur'anic approach to prophecy challenges Jewish and Christian perspectives for a variety of reasons. First of all, the Qur'an seems to have some concrete features of prophets in mind that are not completely coherent with the Biblical tradition. Moreover, it is the selection of prophets within the Qur'an that is idiosyncratic and confusing from Jewish and Christian perspectives. On the one hand, some of the most important Biblical prophets, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, do not appear by name in the Qur'an. On the other hand, Biblical figures who are called prophets are not recognized as such in the Bible. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for example, are more properly considered as patriarchs in the Bible, while David and Salomon appear in the Bible as kings rather than prophets.

However, the selection of the prophets in the Qur'an might be explained by considering the Qur'anic dialogue with Rabbinic literature and with the Syriac *Mêmrê*, especially from Jacob of Sarug. The Qur'an is obviously deeply intertwined in interreligious debates in Late Antiquity and our understanding of the historical meaning of the Qur'anic intervention still has to be deepened in light of this dialogue. Hence, one basic aim of our conference will be to promote a historically situated understanding of Qur'anic prophetology. This includes not only textual elements of the Qur'anic proclamation but the contextualization of the prophetic figure of Muhammad within the wider political and religious developments of Late Antiquity. We will thus ask how major historical events and political developments (such as the Roman-Persian war) shaped the Qur'anic concept of prophetology in general, as well as its understanding of eschatology and apocalypticism in particular.

Even with a better historical understanding of the development of Qur'anic ideas, Christianity is still confronted with the challenge of the content of the Qur'an's account of prophetology. The Qur'an seems to react to the typological readings of the prophetic figures in the preaching of the church fathers and to establish prophetology as a kind of counter-discourse to Christology. Many Christians today are aware of the fact that the typological reading of the prophetic literature can easily be understood in a supersessionist way. Hence, the Qur'anic typological reading of the Biblical tradition is not only a challenge for the Christian tradition, but might also be understood as a call for a new understanding of the role of the prophets.

There is currently no systematic theological attempt in Christianity to develop a prophetology that takes account of the proprium of Christian theology alongside the insights of Israel-theology on the intrinsic value of prophecy. Yet a Christian prophetology of this kind should be able to draw on the potential of prophetic accounts to broaden the Christian view of Jesus Christ. It is, of course, clear from the perspective of Christian doctrine that Jesus is the fulfilment of all humanity and prophecy. However, as conditional beings humans will never come to an end with the recognition of the unconditional and therefore must assume that there are many dimensions of Jesus Christ that they have not yet caught up with in their Christologies – and probably never will catch up with. There will always be aspects in the accounts of the prophets that Christians have not yet recognized in Jesus

Christ, which nevertheless represent God's Word to them. If Jews articulate why they challenge the Christian reading of Christ as fulfillment of the prophetic figures of the Bible, Christians might be able to learn from these interventions to rebuild Christology in a non-supersessionist way.

If Muslims present the Qur'anic way of reading the prophetic tradition as non-supersessionist model, Christians might be inspired to reframe their typological interpretations. The Qur'anic approach to prophetology can therefore be extremely helpful for the current debates on a reorientation of the Christological reading of the Old Testaments, because it could provide ideas on how to maintain the specificity of the prophets within a typological approach. At the same time, such approaches could make visible the ways in which typological discourses can function without a promise-fulfillment scheme. Conversely, Muslims might learn from the Jewish and Christian understandings of the prophetic tradition how to understand their own tradition as a constructive partner within a discourse with Judaism and Christianity.

Our conference wants to be the first step of a larger research project that attempts to arrive at a better historical understanding of Qur'anic prophetology. Our three aims are to: 1) reframe Muslim prophetology based on a close reading of the Qur'an in dialogue with Christian and Jewish texts from Late Antiquity, 2) develop a Christian prophetology responsive to the Qur'anic interventions and to the Jewish critique of the typological reading of the prophets, 3) explore constructive Jewish readings of the prophetic tradition for Jewish thought today.

The conference aims to generate an advanced level of dialogue and exchange of ideas. It is therefore modelled as a workshop in which all speakers are invited to submit their papers four weeks before the conference. All participants of the conference will be asked to read the papers in advance. At the conference, all speakers will have 60 minutes for the presentation and discussion of their papers and will be asked simply to provide a brief summary (15 minutes) of their findings. A Ph.D. or postdoctoral student will open up the discussion by providing an initial set of comments (5 minutes). Finally, we will have 40 minutes for a general discussion of each paper. After the conference, all papers will be invited for publication for a book, to be published with Brill.

Schedule

Monday, August 23	
10 am	Opening addresses and introduction to the conference (Zishan Ghaffar)
Panel 1) Rabbinic Concepts of Prophetology	
10:30-11:30 am	Charlotte E. Fonrobert (Stanford): <i>Rabbinic Perspectives on Prophecy</i> Response: Cordula Heupts (Paderborn) (Moderation: Ghaffar)
11:30 -12:30 am	Holger Zellentin (Tübingen): <i>"For he was Close to the Empire": Rabbinic Perspectives on Jesus and Idolatry from Babylonia to Palestine</i> Response: David Maayan (Boston College) (Moderation: Ghaffar)
Lunch break	
2.00-3.00 pm	Elisa Klapheck (Paderborn): <i>Female Prophets as Challenge for Prophetology</i> Response: Vahid Mahdavi Mehr (Paderborn) (Moderation: Aghaei)
3.00-4.00 pm	Catherine Hezser (London): <i>From Lawgiver to Prophet: The Transformation of the Image of Moses in Late Antiquity</i> Response: Elizaveta Dorogova (Paderborn) (Moderation: Aghaei)
Coffee break	
Panel 2) Qur'anic Concepts of Prophetology	
4:30-5:30 pm	Fatima Tofighi (Qom): <i>False Prophets in the Qur'an</i> Response: Muhammad Haghani Fazl (Paderborn) (Moderation: Aghaei)
5.30-7 pm	Angelika Neuwirth / Dirk Hartwig (Berlin): <i>Educating Adam through Prophecy - Adam and Satan - fatefully coupled antagonists in monotheist tradition</i> Response: Shiva Tojjar (Tehran) (Moderation: Aghaei)
Conference Dinner	
Tuesday, August 24	
9-10 am	Saqib Hussain (Oxford): <i>The Function of David, Solomon and Job in Q 38 and within Qur'anic Prophetology</i> Response: Nadia Saad (Paderborn) (Moderation: Dockter)
10-11 am	Zishan Ghaffar (Paderborn): <i>Muhammad as a prophet of Late Antiquity: The anti-apocalyptic nature of Muhammad's prophetic wisdom</i> Response: Ana Davitashvili (Tübingen) (Moderation: Dockter)
Coffee break	
11.30-12.30 am	Ali Aghaei (Paderborn): <i>Solomon and Ashmedai: Intertextual Relationship between Early Muslim Exegesis and Rabbinic Tradition</i>

	Response: Ahmed Husic (Paderborn) (Moderation: Dockter)
	Lunch break
2 – 3 pm	Nora Schmidt (Heidelberg): <i>Body and Wisdom. The Prophecy of Joseph in the Qur'ān</i> Response: Charbel Rizk (Paderborn) (Moderation: Haghani Fazl)
3 - 4 pm	Suleyman Dost (Toronto): <i>The Arabian Characteristics of Muhammad's Prophethood</i> Response: Mohammad Ali Tabataba'i (Tehran) (Moderation: Haghani Fazl)
	Coffee break
4.30-5.30 pm	Reza Akbari (Tehran): <i>Taking a Narrative Approach for Understanding Prophethood in the Holy Qur'an</i> Response: Nasrin Bani Assadi (Paderborn) (Moderation: Haghani Fazl)
5.30-6.30 pm	Ghassan El Masri (Erlangen-Nürnberg): <i>The Eschatological Kerygma of Islam: Notes from the Qur'an</i> Response: Abdul Rahman Mustafa (Paderborn) (Moderation: Haghani Fazl)
	Conference Dinner
Wednesday, August 25	
Panel 3) Challenges for Prophetology within the Framework of Comparative Theology	
9-10 am	Muna Tatari & Klaus von Stosch (Paderborn): <i>The Qur'anic Mary as an Impulse for Prophetology</i> Response: Saida Mirsadri (Paderborn) (Moderation: Heupts)
10-11 am	Christian Blumenthal (Bonn): <i>The Epistle of Jude: A (largely unknown) Literary Testimony of Early Christian Prophecy of Judgment in the New Testament</i> Response: Cornelia Dockter (Paderborn) (Moderation: Heupts)
	Coffee break
11.30-12.30 am	Final Discussion (Klaus von Stosch)
	Lunch

The conference will be funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the federal ministry of research in Germany (BMBF).