

Polemics and Prophethood in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

Perhaps the quintessential issue that has divided the scriptural monotheisms has been the authority of scripture. If God is all-knowing, all-powerful and all-good, why would God reveal different scriptures that appear to convey conflicting messages about the divine will? The usual response of religious thinkers has been to reject the scripture of others while exalting one's own – only one's own conveys the true and undistorted will of God. But because others claim the same, that only *theirs* conveys the true and undistorted will of God, a rationale must be found for rejecting their claims. Various rationales of rejection have been developed over the centuries, one of the most common being the critique of the *vehicle* of prophecy: If the prophet is false, then his message must be false as well. Surprisingly, this issue has yet to be carefully studied in the academy, so it is “the problematic of prophecy” that is the topic for this conference. Particular emphasis will be put on rival perceptions and strategies of mutual delegitimization deployed in Jewish and Muslim texts, lesser known in Western scholarship.

International conference, May 14-16, 2018
University of Zurich, Rämistrasse 59, 8001 Zürich, RAA-G-01

Organized by the Sigi Feigel Visiting Professorship for Jewish Studies and the Department of Religious Studies, University of Zurich; Prof. Dr. Reuven Firestone, Prof. Dr. Christoph Uehlinger, Sarah Werren, lic.phil.

Conference Program

Monday, May 14

16:00 Welcome (Dean and/or Department Chair)
Reuven Firestone

Session A: The Problematic of Prophecy in the Scriptural Monotheisms

Chair: Christoph Uehlinger (University of Zurich)

16:15 – 17:00 **Holger Zellentin** (University of Cambridge): *Prophecy: Divine Assault on the Human Tradition in Islam, Christianity and Judaism*

17:00 – 17:45 **Reuven Firestone** (University of Zurich): *How to “Diss” a (False) Prophet: Protecting Religion by Rejecting God’s Messengers*

17:45 – 18:15 Discussion

18:30 Apéro riche

Tuesday, May 15

Session B: “First is Best”

Chair: Sarah Werren (University of Zurich)

8:30 – 9:15 **David Berger** (Yeshiva University, New York): *Prophecy, Law, and Messianism: Judaism’s Identification and Assessment of Prophets in its Encounter with Christianity and Islam*

9:15 – 10:00 **Daniel J. Lasker** (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beersheva): *Verification Prophecy and Interreligious Polemics in the Thought of Saadia Gaon and Judah Halevi*

10:00 – 10:15 Coffee/Tea Break

Session C: “The Best is Saved for Last”

Chair: Farida Stickel (University of Zurich)

10:15 – 11:00 **Rana Alsoufi** (University of Lucerne): *The Seal of Prophecy in Islam and its Repercussions on Muslims’ Perceptions of Divine Prophecy*

- 11:00 – 11:45 **Ruggero Vimercati Sanseverino** (Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen): *“And have We not raised high your renown?” (Qur’an 94:4) – Muslim Discourses of the Eminence of the Prophet Muḥammad and their Meaning and Function in Contemporary Islamic Thought*
- 11:45 – 12:15 Discussion
- 12:15 Lunch

Session D: Comparative Prophethood

Chair: Ulrich Rudolph (University of Zurich)

- 13:15 – 14:00 **Stefan Schreiner** (Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen): *Moses – the Father of all Prophets vs. Mani and Muḥammad – the Seals of the Prophets: On the Development of an Apologetic-Polemical Concept*
- 14:00 – 14:45 **Lejla Demiri** (Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen): *“Closest to the Best Should be Better Than the Rest”: A Medieval Muslim Assessment of the Prophethood of Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad*
- 14:45 – 15:00 Coffee/Tea Break

Chair: Monika Amsler (University of Zurich)

- 15:00 – 15:45 **Iqbal Abd El-Raziq** (Tel Aviv University): *“The One with the Mantle” – Dhū al-Kifl in Early and Classical Muslim Sources: An Etymological Examination*
- 15:45– 16:30 **Pim Valkenberg** (The Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.): *Polemics with People of Scripture in the Qur’an: Jewish and Christian Objections to a New Scripture and a New Prophet – and the Qur’an’s Replies to these Objections*
- 16:30 – 17:00 Discussion
- 19:00 Conference Dinner

Wednesday, May 16

Session E: The “Problem of Purity”

Chair: James Weaver (University of Zurich)

- 9:00 – 9:45 **Hamza Zafer** (University of Washington, Seattle): *The Prophet and the Patriarch: The Axial Tension in Qur’anic Narrative*
- 9:45 – 10:30 **Younus Mirza** (Allegheny College, Washington D.C.): *The End of the Isra’iliyat: How Modern Abridgements of Tafsir Ibn Kathir Remove Jewish Material*
- 10:30 – 10:45 Coffee/Tea Break
- 10:45 – 11:30 **Liran Yadgar** (Yale University, New Haven): *Ibn Kammuna’s Position on Prophecy and His Christian and Muslim Opponents*
- 11:30 – 12:00 Discussion
- 12:00 Lunch

Session F: Innovations in Argument

Chair: Daniel Barbu (Universities of Bern and Geneva)

- 13:30 – 14:15 **Robert Chazan** (New York University): *The Innovative Turn in Thirteenth-Century Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics*
- 14:15 – 15:00 **Barbara Roggema** (Ruhr-Universität Bochum): *False Prophets or False Followers? The Idea of Conspiracy in Interreligious Kalam*
- 15:00 – 15:30 Coffee/Tea Break
- 15:30 – 16:15 **Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau** (Université de Strasbourg): *“He Is Demon-Possessed:” Evangelic and Qur’anic Argumentative Bases for Traditional Defense of Prophetical Authority*
- 16:15 – 16:45 **Christoph Uehlinger** (University of Zurich): *Convergences, Dead Ends, and Dilemmata – with an Opening on Secularism and Modern (Western) States*
- 16:45 – 17:30 Final Discussion
Concluding Words (Reuven Firestone)