

The Special Relationships of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as a Challenge for Comparative Theology

First CTE-Conference from September 1-3, 2024 in Bensberg

In the American context, most comparative theologians developed their field of research out of the encounter of Christianity and the Eastern religions. In centers of comparative theology in Europe, for example in Edinburgh, Leuven, Paderborn and Bonn, the focus shifted to the encounters of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This leads to different challenges because of the special relationships between these three religions. Judaism and Christianity seem to have developed themselves in the first centuries of the common era in a kind of twin birth which ties them much closer together than we thought in the past. Furthermore, Jesus and Paul have increasingly been understood within the Judaism of their times rather than only focusing on differences. Many Christian theologians developed Israel theologies to respond to this close relationship and to appreciate the importance of Judaism for Christianity. Some Jewish theologians responded constructively to this approach.

Recent historical research on the emergence of Islam suggests that Islam started as a believers' movement which, encountering the conflicts between Christianity and Judaism, sought to develop an inclusive vision for all three religions. This approach might provide resources for Muslims to create an Islamic theology of Judaism and Christianity which tries to articulate a similar way of appreciation like Israel theology in Christianity. Some Jews and Christians might modify their own theologies of Islam in a way that is responsive to this development. Christians continue to integrate concrete ways of learning from Rabbinic Judaism, and must reflect seriously on the limits and implications of shaping their theologies with the help of Rabbinic and Qur'anic insights. Jews might not only respond creatively to the Qur'anic challenge, but also to Christian appropriations of Rabbinic theologies.

In this conference, we discuss new approaches in the theologies of the three religions that study their special relationships. Thereby, two meta questions will be addressed. First, do these approaches necessarily entail an asymmetry due to the order of appearance of the respective religions? Second, how is approaching this special relationship different from approaching other religious traditions comparatively? Our conference in Bensberg will be the first step of a series of conferences held every two years in the beginning of September on Comparative Theology in Europe, 2026 in Edinburgh, 2028 in Leuven, 2030 in Paderborn and then at other European centers of Comparative Theology. The first conference in Bensberg will be a pre-read conference, which means that the contributions will be distributed three weeks beforehand in order to have more time for discussion and interaction at the conference. We will have one hour for each speaker and the discussion of his or her paper.

Schedule

Sunday, September 1

8 pm Welcome address and Conference Dinner

Monday, September 2

First Panel: Jewish Perspectives on Christianity and Islam

9-10 am Alan Brill (South Orange/New Jersey): Does Judaism treat Christianity and Islam differently than it treats Hinduism & Buddhism?

10-11 am Annette Boeckler (Bonn): A house of prayer for all peoples?! - Theological considerations about the others in modern Judaism

11:30-12:30 Benjamin Kamine (New York): Said Jacob in the Name of Jesus: Early Rabbinic Exclusion of Jewish-Christians from the Chain of Tradition

Lunch break

Second Panel: Christian theologies of Israel

2-3 pm Gavin D'Costa (Rome): Does a Catholic theology of Israel fail to engage with Israel as it sees itself?

3-4 pm Franca Spies (Luzern): Christian readings of the emergence of Christianity from, alongside or against Judaism and their systematic significance

4:30-5:30 pm Jan-Heiner Tück (Wien): „Der Messias kommt nicht“? Zur Ökumene messianischer Erwartung zwischen Juden- und Christentum

5:30-7 pm Review of the day: Marianne Moyaert (Leuven) Panel Discussion on Panels 1 and 2.

Conference Dinner

Tuesday, September 3

Third Panel: Christianity responsive to Islam

9-10 am Daniel Madigan (Melbourne): Supersessionists Superseded: the Qur'an's Critique of Christian 'Exaggeration'

10-11 am Anja Middelbeck-Varwick (Frankfurt): Christian Theology of Islam and Comparative Theology in Dialogue

11:30-12:30 Joshua Ralston (Edinburgh): Reading Polemics Irenically: History, Diatribe, and Christian-Muslim Comparative Theology

Lunch break

Fourth Panel: Islam responsive to Judaism und Christianity

2-3 pm Jerusha Tanner Rhodes (New York): 'Outsiders Within' in Conversation: Muslima Theology and Comparative Feminist Theology

3-4 pm Saqib Hussain (Los Angeles): How to Read the Gospels: The Qur'an's Approach to Christian Scripture

4:30-5:30 pm Muna Tatari (Paderborn): Whose truth? Ambiguity as a common category to approach truth claims within a theology of religions

5:30-6:30 pm Muhammad Legenhausen (Qom): Challenges to Understanding among Followers of the Abrahamic Religions

Conference Dinner

8-9:30 pm Review of the day: Catherine Cornille (Boston) Panel Discussion on Panels 3 and 4.

In the end of each day, reflections on the level of comparative theology on the contributions of the day will be brought in a panel discussion.