



# **NORMATIVE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS & THEIR AUTHORITY**

**Abstracts for the INIRE-Conference  
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# Alexander Deeg (Leipzig University)

## Sola scriptura!? Luther's Epistemological Revolution and the Question of Authority in Judaism and Christianity

Almost exactly 500 years ago and almost exactly at the place of our conference Martin Luther started to overthrow the traditional medieval authority structures in church (and society!). In the context of the Leipzig Disputation (27th of June to 16th of July 1519) he argued that *only* Scripture can be seen as authoritative – a principle which was later referred to as *sola scriptura*. It was an upheaval against traditional, theological, and hierarchical authorities and at the same time the starting point of a new theological epistemology.

But did Luther really bring Scripture in the role of a new authority? Or did he and the movement of the Reformation only replace the traditional hierarchical structures by the new hierarchy of the theologian and the pastor – of those who 'know' what Scripture means and says? This question will be asked and described as a fundamental question of religious authority in modernity and in present day societies. At the same time, Jewish rabbinical hermeneutics and their rediscovery in a post- or late-modern situation will be examined and brought into a dialogue thus claiming that constant *interruption* and *collaboration* are the consequences of Luther's idea and lead to a *creative authority of Scripture*.

# Alberto Melloni (UNESCO Chair for Religious Pluralism and Peace University of Bologna, The European Academy of Religion)

## The Historical Study of the Councils and the Issue of Normativity: Paradigm of Pluralism III–XXI Century

The Synod or Council is not part of the New Testament “institutions”: even if the primitive church created a myth of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, it is historically clear that a liturgical procedure of communion was in place since the 2nd Century and it was attested in more and more complex form from the 3rd Century on. After the Constantinian turn, the Council assumed a more universal character and its relation with the Senate protocol shaped its rules and functioning. However since its very beginning the Council raised an issue of normativity: the very creation of the category of “Conciliabulum” says that the problem to discard a Council and reject its decision was marking the history of the Church: Nicea II, Constance, Vatican II will be taken as samples for an analysis about reception as procedure and process granting a normativity to the Councils’ decision.

# Mustafa Abu Sway

## (Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque and Al-Quds University)

### The Recited *Qur'an* becoming a Written *Mushaf*

This lecture addresses the story of the Qur'an in the Islamic world-view, being a recited holy book, and how it was written down during the prophetic period. Subsequently it became a completely written mushaf, a codex, during the reign of Abu Bakr, the 1st Caliph, who lived for two years only after the death of the Prophet! After the death of Abu Bakr, this mushaf was kept with lady Hafsa, wife of the Prophet and daughter of 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab, the 2nd Caliph, who reigned for ten years. Then, during the time of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, the 3rd Caliph, unified copies of the Qur'an were made and distributed to major cities to the north. One copy was kept with 'Uthman himself.

The Qur'an was revealed between 610-632 CE. It began with a command for recitation/reading (i.e., *Iqra'*, Qur'an, 96:1). Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) asked specific companions, known as the transcribers of revelation (i.e., *katabat al-wahy*), to write it down. They wrote on various scattered objects including palm fronds and parchment.

The Qur'an continues to enjoy that status of being an oral tradition. "*Talaqqi*" (i.e., receiving the Qur'an orally) remains the traditional and only way to know completely how to recite it. While there are elaborate and well-served prints of the Qur'an today, they cannot be a substitute to the oral tradition that preserves how it is recited. Examples will be given and no knowledge of Arabic or the Qur'an is a pre-requisite.

# Mike Bazemore (Shaw University)

## The Medieval Making of “Normative Tradition” and Church Authority

During the central Middle Ages, Western Christian, Jewish and Muslim thinkers attempted to establish norms of religious practice and belief, embodied in an authoritative corpus of texts going beyond scriptures. Part of this process involved the delineation of proper belief and practice, leading to the designation of outgroups whose challenges to authority were instrumental in forcing Church leaders to formulate this canon. This paper will track the early formative stages of a medieval Western Christian canon, as they were evidenced in a series of early eleventh-century controversies: the appearance of “heretics” in Italy and Aquitaine around the turn of the first millennium, the heretical movement embraced by clergy in Orléans in 1022, and the Berengarian controversy over the Eucharist at mid-century. Response from Church authorities to these challenges reflect an increased concern with unity of belief and signal moves towards a new canon in a two-centuries long process of religious self-definition that would culminate in the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The decrees defined Christian dogmas and established guidelines of practice, grounding them in a textual tradition that incorporated the Scriptures, the Church fathers, and the pronouncements of ecumenical councils, allowing us to speak of a “Catholic” Church (at least in the areas owing religious allegiance to Rome).

# Gert Pickel and Yvonne Jaeckel (Leipzig University)

## Declining support? Religious Traditions, Norms, and Practice in the Eyes of the Citizens

Beside all debates, secularization is further rising in the Western World. Nevertheless, the empirical evidence for secularization is accompanied by other processes in the religious field. One is the growing polarization between secularists and dogmatic religious people, one is the pluralization of religiosity, including Christians, Muslims and other members of religious communities. Religious norms and traditions are the most remarked indicators for secularization, beside religious practice.

The questions are: Is this true, if we look around – and especially in a comparison between Germany, USA and Israel (but also other countries in the world)? And if we answer this question with yes, why can we find this development and who is more responsive to it than others? The lecture tries to answer these questions by using different sources of survey data. Especially, attitudes related to religious norms are under research. The idea is that only if the citizens give support to statements about the acceptance of religious norms and traditions, these norms and traditions can be preserved. If not, religions have to think about changes in their norms or to rethink the communication of the norms inside and outside their members.

This includes the theological question, which norms are transferable over time – and which are not. First empirical results show, that a lot (not all) religious norms get declining support from the citizens in the Western world. It is not distance to religion, but a decline of interest in religion combined with the placing back of religion behind other parts of every day life that may explain this development.

# Zohar Maor (Bar-Ilan University)

## Holy Scriptures in a Secular Age: Canonization in Weimar Germany.

In my lecture I wish to explore a new concept of canonization, developed by Jewish and Christian thinkers in Weimar Germany. These thinkers confronted, on the one hand, the intense process of secularization, questioning canonization as such, and on the other hand, the popular post-liberal intellectual atmosphere, which aspired to re-introduce religion into modern life, albeit in non-traditional ways. One of the most intriguing responses to this ambiguity was Karl Barth's dialectical theology, renouncing the then acclaimed liberal theology and claiming God's transcendence and incomprehensibility. Faith is the product of spontaneous encounters with the transcendent God. Barth suggested canonization based on his "Word of God" theology. The undisputable "givenness" of the canon relates to the out-worldliness of the Word of God, interrupting human beings in their self-centered sinfulness.

Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Friedrich Gogarten and Eugen Rosenstock-Hussey were deeply inspired by Barth yet renounced his stance. They held that dialogue can bridge the gap between God and man, and accordingly suggested a "dialogical" concept of canonization. The canonization process is existential, grounded in the encounter between man's hearing and the Divine word. Unlike Barth, the Holy text is not "given", but created anew in that encounter. My lecture will focus on Gogarten's shift from a Barthian concept of the holy scripture to a dialogical concept.

# Mulayka Laura Enriello (ISA, Milano)

## Memory Passing On and Interpretation of Sacred Texts: An Educational Need

Believing in the Holy Texts is one of the six foundations of Islamic faith (Imân): Muslims have the duty to honour the sacredness of their own holy Book (al-Qur'ân), but also that of the Books of other communities of believers based on revelations of earlier times (Ahl al-Kitâb).

The paper will briefly discuss the role of the written canon and oral transmission of the Qur'ân, illustrating some examples of the different schools of interpretation and the importance of a correct approach to the sacred text both in its ritual and formative value. Based on a correct reading and interpretation of the Qur'ân, the main focus will be to debunk some common places which would associate Islamic doctrine to issues like violence, confessional exclusivism and abuses against other peoples and religions.



# Carina Branković (University of Oldenburg)

“Ich finde die Bibel komisch, weil: Things Go always wrong  
darin, ein wahres Bild unserer Existenz”:  
George Taboris and the Post-Holocaust Bible in Theater

The paper examines George Tabori's use of selected biblical stories and events in his play *The Goldberg-Variations* (premiered on June 22nd 1991 in Vienna/Austria). Tabori (b. 1914 in Budapest; d. 2007 in Berlin) was a writer and theater director, and a Jewish émigré who lived and worked in seventeen countries.

In *The Goldberg-Variations* the 'godlike' director Mr. Jay leads a new play in the Jerusalem city theater, retelling the most dramatic stories and events of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. As not everything runs smoothly while rehearsing on stage, Tabori deconstructs fixed perceptions and images of biblical stories in a scenic setting of improvisations and discussions. Mr. Jay as 'God' appears as a human God-figure, making mistakes. His assistant Goldberg, who is responsible for everything and has to play different roles, is, like Tabori himself, a Holocaust survivor, and the Holocaust's presence is palpable.

Tabori's biblical stories in the play reflect a post-Holocaust transformation in the canon's use. The paper tracks the entanglements of world and stage, Bible and theatre, and the motif of 'failure' in the shadow of the Holocaust.

# Carolyn Sanzenbacher

## (University of Southampton, Parkes Institute)

### *The Unbroken Canonical Tradition: The Theology of Jewish Deicide in the Douay Rheims Bible*

Between 1545 and 1563 the Council of Trent convened in three separate terms to formulate official doctrinal responses to increasing Reformation challenges. The first theological problem on the agenda was defense of the Roman version of divinely revealed truth in the holy scriptures. By April 1546 the canon of texts had been formally fixed for the first time in Christian history, the Latin Vulgate had been declared the only authoritative version, the Catholic Church had been decreed as judge of their 'true sense', and Catholic communicants had been forbidden, on threat of anathema, to reject or interpret any part of the authorized version in a way that was contrary to accepted Church tradition. The two decrees embodying these rulings were to guide all authorized translations of the Catholic canon into vernacular languages. One of the earliest manifestations of the decrees was the decision to arm English speaking Catholics with a biblical translation that would refute the 'false' Protestant versions that were already in circulation.

When the authorized Imprimatur Douay-Rheims Bible appeared in 1610, it was complete with chapter descriptions and copious notes that instructed Catholics in the nuances of acceptable biblical interpretation, including a running commentary on the 'hidden meanings' of 'old' testament prophecies about Jews. Titles, descriptions, and verse commentary were juxtaposed with the actual scriptures so that in a very real sense the summaries of the ideas said to be contained in the Hebrew texts became a part of the scripture itself. Notes and descriptions accompanying the Psalms especially, each of which was said to be a storehouse of prophetic utterance by Christ himself, became a repository of Catholic biblical teachings on Jewish deicide and divine punishment of Jews – one that is still being published half a century after *Nostra Aetate* disavowed collective Jewish guilt for the crucifixion of Christ.

This paper will look at the development of these teachings as they translated from the Middle Ages to the pages of the current editions of the Imprimatur Douay-Rheims Bible.

## Hilda Nissimi (Bar-Ilan University)

### Canon Preserved – Meaning Changed? Rabbi Shlomo Mashiah and Zionist/Messianic Piyyut

In 1905 Rabbi Shlomo Mashiah, a Mashhadi mystic wrote a piyyut about Mashhadi suffering and the Jewish People's redemption. It was couched in messianic traditional language, however the terms have received political meaning in later Zionist organizations' publications. Mashiah's choice to immigrate to the Land of Israel, over more convenient commercial centers, after having been exposed to Russian nationalism and imperialism in Turkestan, and to early stirring of Iranian modern nationalism in Mashhad, provides a modern context for the piyyut. Thus, Mashiah's poem reveals an aspiration for a political entity in the Land of Israel that will encompass the Jewish dispersed people after their immigration to the Land. Therefore, the poem should be understood as a turning point in the transformation of a traditional – canonical language into modern meaning.

# Dirk Hartwig (Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities)

## Narrative Dialogues. The Quran and its Re-lectures of Biblical Traditions

To the non-Muslim reader familiar with Biblical literature, the Qur'an appears to be a book heavily loaded with biblical motives and materials. Judged exclusively from the perspective of the legitimate heirs of the Biblical tradition, Judaism and Christianity, the Qur'an manifests as a sole (subtext-based) "epigone". In opposition to such reductionist impressions, the paper will highlight the exegetical dynamics of the Qur'an within its milieu of origin, namely a contemplative space, where Arab pagans familiar with monotheist traditions of Judaism and Christianity, or even syncretists of these traditions, debated the antiquities of Biblical literature. As such, the Qur'an should be understood as exegetical in nature, comparable to other traditions of Late Antiquity, i.e. rabbinic Judaism, early Christianity. The Qur'an comments on the Biblical tradition, approving ideological standpoints, commenting upon difficult passages, negotiating meaning and identity, but also refuting supposedly "false" arguments and reputed "misinterpretations". Therefore, the Qur'an should be understood as exegetical in nature, being at par with the traditions of Judaism and Christianity, debating, affirming, rejecting and sometimes superseding its sibling's testimony. Read as a constant yet transient stream of tradition, a complex intertextual and cross-referenced web of traditions and interpretations, the reflects upon the events of a shared past.

# Malachi Hacohen (Duke University)

## Normative Tradition Without Canon: Rabbinic Authority, Talmudic Exegesis, and Post-Modernity

Rabbinic tradition is ill at ease with debates on canonicity, and antithetical to sola scriptura. While the Rabbis have insisted for two millennia on the heavenly origins of the Torah, they claimed, at the same time, the normative authority for interpreting them, based on the oral traditions, "The Oral Torah". Talmud and Midrash have rewritten the Bible over many times, and it is a misunderstanding to regard the Jews as the "biblical people", apart from the Talmud and its commentators. Medieval Christians responded to the Talmud with dismay, and burnt it as a heretical "second bible". Nineteenth-century Reform rabbis have sought to recenter Judaism on the Bible, and away from the Talmud, so as to facilitate Jewish integration in predominantly Christian societies. But in recent decades, literary critics and philosophers have found in rabbinic discourse a fountain of modern thinking and have normalized rabbinic approaches to canonicity and exegesis. Can rabbinic exegesis still claim normative authority in the postmodern age?

# Notes





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