

Call for Papers: Reading is Believing? Sacred Texts in a Scientific Age

Academic Colloquium
The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion,
in collaboration with the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge
Venue: Clare College, Cambridge
26-28 March 2018

Confirmed speakers: Prof. John Barton FBA (University of Oxford); Prof. Salman Hameed (Hampshire College, USA); Dr Mark Harris (University of Edinburgh); Dr Shuruq Naguib (Lancaster University); Dr Colin Turner (Durham University).

Abstracts for short papers from any academic discipline are invited for this multi-disciplinary colloquium at the University of Cambridge.

Belief in divine revelation through scripture lies at the heart of both Islam and Christianity. Exegetes in these two religious traditions have long endeavoured to interpret their sacred texts in light of both their perceived divine origins, as well as their relationship to local cultures and contexts. From the late 18th century onwards, a prevailing emphasis on the power of human reason to make sense of the world around it led thinkers in both traditions to adopt new hermeneutical strategies in order to accommodate emerging avenues of knowledge. At the same time, traditionalists argued for more static exegetical models that resisted innovation and change.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, rapid developments in science and technology have raised questions for scriptural interpretation. These include, but are not limited to, issues surrounding medical and technological ethics, human identity within a Darwinian worldview, environmental responsibilities, and the existential possibilities posed by quantum realities. More broadly, widespread cultural changes have prompted Christians and Muslims to re-examine their scriptures on specific contemporary issues such as globalisation and human rights, gender and sexuality, and models of political and economic organisation. Furthermore, These various debates have emerged and developed in the context of changing authority structures, according to which – particularly in Islam - the qualifications required to interpret scripture have themselves been subjected to new interrogations and contestations.

This multi-disciplinary colloquium will examine ways in which the modern world has posed challenges to the scriptural traditions of Islam and Christianity, and will explore how exegetes and believers within each religion have responded. Although the focus is on the relationship of modern science to scripture, it is intended that the colloquium will also address wider themes and issues in the area of contemporary culture and exegesis. Placing the scientific questions within a broader framework in this way will enable fruitful cross-disciplinary conversations to emerge, and will further scholarly understandings of scriptural exegesis and its engagement with the modern world.

The colloquium will address the following core questions:

1. How are the challenges posed by the current scientific age reflected in the hermeneutical strategies adopted in the two traditions, Christianity and Islam?
2. In what ways does scriptural exegesis inform and shape responses to modernity in Christianity and Islam?
3. What epistemological questions arise from attempts to relate contemporary science to the scriptural traditions of the two faiths?

Scholars from any academic discipline are invited to submit a 250-word abstract for a 20-minute paper that addresses one or more of the colloquium's core themes outlined above. Comparative papers are welcome, but it is expected that most papers will address *either* the Islamic *or* the Christian tradition. Submissions should fall within one of the following three strands:

Strand A: Historical perspectives: attempts in modernity (broadly defined as the late 18th century onwards) to relate scriptural exegesis to challenging scientific, political and cultural questions of the day.

Strand B: Contemporary scientific developments: ways of reading scripture in light of specific challenges posed by 21st century science and technology. (e.g. developments in artificial intelligence, genetic engineering etc.).

Strand C: Sociology of sacred texts: perspectives from social science (including, but not limited to, sociology, anthropology and psychology) on the strategies employed by religious believers to negotiate tensions between the claims of religious scripture and contemporary scientific and cultural narratives.

Abstracts should be submitted to Dr Caroline Tee at ct500@cam.ac.uk by the deadline of 12.00 on 31 December 2017. Decisions on acceptance will be given by the end of January 2018. Travel (within the UK) and accommodation costs in Cambridge for presenters will be covered. Submitting scholars should indicate whether they wish their paper to be considered for inclusion in a volume of proceedings that will be co-edited by Dr Hilary Marlow and Dr Caroline Tee, and prepared for publication in 2018. Proposals should include the following information:

Full name

Institutional affiliation

Career stage (if PhD student then please state year of study and supervisor's name and email address)

This colloquium is connected to a research project entitled 'Science and Scripture in Christianity and Islam', housed at the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, St Edmund's College, Cambridge (<http://www.faraday.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk>). The project explores the engagement of professional research scientists of Muslim and Christian faith in the UK with their scriptural traditions, and considers the ways in which textual hermeneutics shape the relationship between science and religion. More information is available at:

www.sciencescripture.org

<https://www.facebook.com/ScienceandScripture/>

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