

Georges Tamer (ed.), *The Concept of Revelation in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Key Concepts in Interreligious Discourses 1, Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter 2020, 214 p., ISBN: 978-3-11-042518-5

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This edited volume is the outcome of the Research Unit “Key Concepts in Interreligious Discourses” (KCID) at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. It inaugurates the KCID series, published by De Gruyter, which is dedicated to exploring fundamental theological concepts across the Abrahamic traditions. Drawing on the proceedings of a conference the volume brings together contributions by Frederek Musall (Judaism), Christoph Schwöbel (Christianity), and Asma Afsaruddin (Islam). Each author examines how the concept of revelation is articulated and interpreted within their respective traditions. The project is conceived not merely as an exercise in academic theology but as a dialogical engagement – an “archaeology of religious knowledge” (p. V) designed to deepen interreligious understanding and foster constructive theological exchange.

The anthology explores the concept of revelation across the three monotheistic traditions, thereby providing scholars of interreligious discourse and comparative theology with accessible, thematically unified material within a single publication. Admirable though the idea may be, at the time of writing this review, no scholarly evaluation had yet been published in English. Addressing this theme is particularly challenging: revelation lies at the very heart of religious belief, conveyed through sacred figures and, when committed to writing, enshrined in the foundational texts of belief systems. Within the Abrahamic religions, all theological reflection ultimately gravitates around both the content and the act of revelation – albeit with distinct emphases and interpretive accents in each tradition.

In Judaism and Islam, revelation is transmitted through a message received from God: directly to Moses (straight from God) and respectively to the Prophet Muhammad (through the mediation of an angel). In Christianity, by contrast, Jesus is not merely a messenger but the incarnation of the divine revelation itself. Although all three religions of revelation ultimately affirm a sacred message conveyed through a book,

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the theological constructions (or *canons*) that govern how the revelation is received and understood differ significantly. For example, in Islam, it is essential that the sacred message be dictated *directly* by God or conveyed through an angel, whereas in Christianity, the New Testament is regarded as divinely inspired rather than literally dictated.

Despite all these differences, all the authors stress that all three traditions affirm that revelation is a gift bestowed by the grace of God. Consequently, any claim to the exclusive possession of revelation would be theologically problematic, particularly for those who have experienced this grace. Revelation thus remains a pivotal locus of communion, for through revelation the believer comes to know the one God as the ultimate source of all existence.

The volume is structured in four main chapters: three contributions devoted respectively to the three Abrahamic religions, followed by an epilogue. The epilogue, co-authored by Georges Tamer, Katja Thörner, Bertram Schmitz, and Wenzel Maximilian Widenka (whose name, due to an editorial error, is omitted in the printed edition), offers a comparative reflection on the preceding essays. Although one might anticipate a uniform methodological approach across the volume, the chapters and the epilogue in fact differ notably in both tone and style.

Frederek Musall's contribution on Judaism (pp. 1–56) resists defining revelation dogmatically and questions whether it is appropriate to speak of a proper revelation in Judaism. Thus, his essay is not strictly theological, but rather dialogical, reflective, philosophical and anthropological (employing the *emic-etic* distinction which you don't find so often in the theological discourse). Musall surveys several narratives (that could be labelled as phenomenological, as opposed to dogmatic) that ranges from biblical semantics to rabbinic midrash, philosophical reinterpretations by Rosenzweig and Mendelssohn (the first to argue that "Judaism could and should not be defined as a 'revealed religion', but rather as a 'revealed legislation,'" [p. 9]), and modern theological responses to secularization.

The essay highlights the tension between revelation (as a singular historical event) and the ongoing revelatory process through interpretative tradition, up to the contemporary contexts when "revelation plays an even less important role... as ethno-national, political, cultural, or even humanistic ideological articulations and positions have opened up new alternatives of Jewish self-understanding" (p.12). In short, he underscores the tension between the fidelity to the Torah and interpretative challenges posed by modernity.

Notably, Musall emphasizes – in a structuralist vein – that the opposite of “revelation” is “concealment”, and he questions R. David Novak’s claim that revelation is “the most important doctrine for Jewish theology,” suggesting that confining revelation to a single text may be too narrow (p.5). He also critiques the reductive classifications of Judaism as a “revealed religion,” drawing attention to its discursive plurality and interpretive openness. The essay intentionality avoids a “systematic-theological inquiry,” favouring instead a “discursive polyphony,” which reminds the reader of the postmodern interpretative paradigms. Musall portrays revelation as multi-voiced, which does not have an ending point, emerging from the dialogue between God, text, and community. This could be potentially valuable in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

Another significant point concerns the shared Hebrew scriptures between Jews and Christians. Despite reading the same biblical texts, “they fundamentally differ in questions of canon,” and these differences “might lead to misunderstandings when being under the impression that Jews and Christians basically read the same biblical texts” (p. 1). Overall, the essay underscores the clear distinctions in the concept of revelation between Judaism and Christianity.

Christoph Schwöbel’s essay on Christianity provides a nuanced theological account of Christian revelation, distinguishing between its decisive event in Christ (the self-disclosure of God) and its ongoing reception through Scripture, tradition, and community. He points out that, to properly contextualize Christian revelation, it must be examined in “critical conversation with Judaism as the sister religion of Christianity and in critical engagement with the philosophical interpretations of reality.” This emphasis on Christianity’s dialogue with philosophical thought is a central and valuable element of his argument.

At the outset, Schwöbel reiterates the formula he first developed in *God. Action and Revelation* (Kampen: Kok Pharos: Kampen NL, 1992) according to which the structure of revelation for a disclosure event is: “The author (A) discloses in the situation (B) the content (C) for the recipient (D) with the effect (E)” (p. 114). This schema underscores the eventual nature of revelation, as an event *after* it has happened – it is not an abstraction.

A central concern of the essay is the articulation of revelation within a Trinitarian framework, discussed within the modern and contemporary theological setting (especially Protestant, as a turning point). Revelation, in the tradition of Luther and Calvin, is understood not merely as

knowledge *about* God, but as the very act in which God gives Himself to humanity (p. 86-90).

Of particular relevance to the overarching theme of the volume is Schwöbel's assertion that revelation necessarily includes and presupposes interreligious relations and dialogue: "Believing in God the Creator implies that the other faiths are not enemy territory, but belong to the one creation of God" (p. 134). From here, his theological reflection develops into an anthropology: humanity is essential "conversational"; human beings are "dependent on the communication with the creator", and find the meaning of its existence in dialogue with God and with one another (*idem*). Schwöbel's contribution is admirable, standing as a rigorous and well-structured example of theological scholarship.

Asma Afsaruddin's essay offers a historically and theologically nuanced account of revelation in Islam, emphasizing the Qur'ān's context, with an accent on the Prophet's life and the socio-political fabric of early Islamic society. She insists that the human-divine bond is particularly relevant for aspects of revelation (*wahy*). Although *wahy* is understood as an act of divine communication marked by intentionality, clarity, and transcendence, Afsaruddin insists that revelation should not be reduced to an abstract metaphysical claim. Rather, it is to be understood as an ongoing, communicative, and moral event.

A particularly compelling section of the essay examines the transition of revelation from oral proclamation towards textual canon. Afsaruddin notes that early Muslims exhibited "apprehension generated by the ascendancy of the *mushaf* (the written Qur'ān copy) over oral transmission" (p. 156). Over time, this shift sacralised the written word itself, transforming it into an object of veneration. In this process, the Qur'ān starts to be understood as Primordial Revelation, related to "the Preserved Tablet" (*al-lawḥal-maḥfūz*), which in turn is based on a "celestial archetype," which, according to Aṭ-Ṭabarī (*Tafsīr*) is protected from amendment and misrepresentation (p. 166). This opens avenues for varied types of interpretation, and raises the question of the nature of the Qur'ān (whether created or uncreated).

As in the previous essay, anthropology is inevitable. Revelation functions as *tadhkira* (reminder), calling humanity back to its original nature, which is prolifically connected with *fiṭrah* (the original disposition or innate nature of humanity) (p.176). Thus, even in Islam (often perceived as more rigid and exclusivist), revelation goes further than the revealed text. Through *al-ilhām* (inspiration), revelation remains a living, dynamic reality. Afsaruddin's contribution stands out for its rich historical

grounding and for showing how revelation in Islam – like in Christianity and Judaism – cannot be confined to a single moment or medium, unfolding across time interpretation and community.

The authors of the *Epilogue* (pp. 195-206) concentrate on the shared discursive methodologies and the challenges of conceptual transfer across confessional boundaries. However, certain remarks seem less appropriate for an academic publication. For instance, when referring to the “inimitable beauty” of the Qur’ān, the authors appreciate that “the linguistic beauty is seen as a stunning proof of the Qur’ān’s divine provenance and the perfection of God’s speech. No human being seemed to be able to imitate but one verse in such mastery as provided in the Qur’ān.” (p. 201) Similarly, they state that, “even modern thinkers still see the uniqueness of the text as a proof of its divine nature.” (*ibid.*) While such assertions may reflect theological positions held within the Islamic tradition, their presentation here lacks the necessary critical distance.

As a conclusion, the decision to bring together shared and divergent perspectives on revelation in the three religions of the Book, both in this volume and in the forthcoming series “Key Concepts in Interreligious Discourses”, constitutes an excellent initiative for the field of comparative theology and religious studies. The work is intended not only as an academic inquiry but as a dialogical engagement, designed to nurture inter-religious dialogue, aimed at fostering mutual understanding.¹ Although all the three traditions exhibit notable similarities, the volume avoids assuming that they hold identical views or that they are mutually exclusive. Regarding this latter point, while a brief overview of polemical traditions of exclusion might have enriched the analysis, the decision to downplay conflict is significant and commendable. It is a positive feature of the volume that the tension among these various forms of revelation are not overemphasized, especially in a world increasingly prone to reasserting difference and instrumentalizing exclusivist claims in public discourse, and not collective and theological sharing. Revelation, though distinct in form and content, ultimately concerns the same divine reality, and thus may serve as a theological foundation for transcending confessional boundaries. One could ask if God is in any spoiled by the process of revelation, or whether the presence or absence of revelation does not modify

¹ In this regard, see two related research projects on interreligious dialogue: Antoaneta Sabău, “Research Project on the Jewish-Orthodox Christian Dialogue,” *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 11, no. 2 (August 2019): 301-02; *Ibidem*, “Mystical Theology in the Muslim-Christian Dialogue, Chiara Lubich, André Scrima and Classical Persian and Arab Authors,” *Review of Ecumenical Studies* 12, no. 3 (December 2020): 562-63.

anything in its essence. Theologically, the answer is no. But it would have been good to see how revelation in specific moments in time has specific theological implications.

Such an approach contributes not only to comparative theological scholarship but also to the broader aim of fostering interreligious understanding. What God reveals is never identical to what humans and their religious traditions perceive; yet this very interpretive distance can serve as a space of encounter rather than of separation. It might have been beneficial to include an analytical table of contents (if not for the entire book, at least preceding each contribution), to guide readers navigate the material more systematically through the material. Nevertheless, the two useful indexes, one of persons and one of subjects, partially compensate for this omission.