

THEOLOGIES RESPONSIVE TO ISLAM—INTEREST GROUP

Topic: Sin and Salvation in Muslim-Christian Theological Conversation
Convenor: Daniel A. Madigan, Georgetown University
Moderator: Daniel A. Madigan, Georgetown University
Presenters: Sandra Toenies Keating, Providence College,
Christian S. Krokus, University of Scranton,
Kee-Fook (Edmund) Chia, Australian Catholic University

This panel was the second step in a planned three-year process that was introduced prior to the talks of the individual speakers. A fuller explanation of the group's aim can be found in the proceedings of the 2012 Annual Convention.

In her paper, Sandra Keating outlined some of the texts in the Qur'an that provide the foundation for the Islamic understanding of sin and its origin. The story of the creation of human beings and of the refusal of Iblis (from Gk *diabolos*) to bow to the humans in obedience to God's command is told seven times in the Qur'an. It is Iblis who commits the first act of disobedience, thus bringing disorder into God's creation. Though it is not explicit in the Qur'anic text, it could be argued that it is he who is responsible for the disobedience of Adam and his wife. Their sin is presented as individual and it does not have an effect on successive generations. Whereas Adam and his wife beg forgiveness and receive it, Iblis refuses to submit to God's command and makes a vow to lead His favored humans from the straight path. This alternative version of the story in Genesis 2–3 has profound implications for understanding the relationships among the created order, human beings and God, as well as the nature of sin, the role of law and the community in addressing violations of God's commands.

Over the centuries, the commonalities and differences between the two versions of the stories of the first sin have given Muslims and Christians a shared cosmology on which to build a common society, and at the same time have been the source of great tension. Yet the centrality of sin for both religious communities makes it a significant point of engagement for a mutual theological understanding between Muslims and Christians.

In the context of response to Keating's paper, Christian Krokus summarized some of the classic Islamic critiques of doctrines related to the Christian understanding of sin and redemption. He then offered a brief response in three parts. First, he took the Islamic critiques seriously by assuming the reasonableness, and even the correctness, of them. Second, from within the Christian tradition he recommended theological approaches that might best explain the doctrines both to Christians and Muslims. For example, in relation to sin he recovered the distinction between original and personal sin, and he advocated for an Augustinian-descriptive approach that gets to the reality named by sin rather than the means by which it is thought to be transferred. In relation to redemption he recommended Bernard Lonergan's concept of the Law of the Cross as a way of demonstrating that redemption is a universally available reality that nonetheless requires the participation of the redeemed. Finally, he probed the Islamic tradition for analogues to the Christian understandings of original sin and redemption, focusing on the

Qur'an, on Farid al-Din 'Attar's *Conference of the Birds* (1177 CE), and the writings of Fethullah Gülen (b. 1941).

Edmund Chia explored what it means to do Christian theology interreligiously, which in his native Malaysia means taking seriously not only the questions raised by Muslims but also other religious visions. Questions such as how the progeny of the first parents can inherit their sins; why God is so unforgiving of the sin of Adam and Eve; how the death of an innocent man can wipe away the sins of others; or how a prophet of God can be abandoned to die a horrific death—all these questions feature prominently in the Christian-Muslim dialogue. Tempered by the questions of the Chinese religions in which Chia was also brought up, they become at once magnified as well as relativized. He suggested that a prerequisite to dialogical engagement is that we presume each tradition to be internally coherent, with teachings consistent within its own theological system. Doctrines and assertions, therefore, have to be kept in the realm of theology and not history and treated as faith claims rather than empirical claims. With that he addressed some of the underlying concerns of the Muslim's questions, taking the lead from Mahmoud Ayoub, who insists that "If Muslim-Christian dialogue is to be meaningful, it must go beyond the letter of scriptures, creed, and the tradition."

Discussion ranged widely over questions of theological method as well as particular issues of the theology of salvation. Is it actually possible to separate theology and history as Chia was suggesting, since both Muslim and Christian traditions are affirming particular historical moments in which the Word of God has been spoken in a defining way? There was no agreement on the question of whether the theological engagement of Christians with Muslims is unique or whether it is can be understood as one particular type of comparative theology more broadly understood.

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