

Bees and honey have long played a role in religious traditions and mythology around the world. For example, religions from Hinduism to the Yoruban religion use honey in offerings to gods. According to Greek mythology, Apollo's gift of prophecy was granted by bee-maidens. In Christianity, the bee symbolizes wisdom, for bees turn the dust of flowers into the gold of honey. The Prophet Muhammad recognized and recommended the healing properties of honey. Honey and apples are eaten together at the Jewish Rosh Hashanah as a wish for a sweet new year. The Promised Land in the Hebrew Bible is known as "a land flowing with milk and honey," a metaphor often repeated, most recently in a play tracing the path of refugees to Germany (*Dorthin wo Milch und Honig fließen* by Rosi Ulrich).

That honey and bees have had such a significant role in so many religions should come as no surprise. Honey has been sought after by humans since the Stone Age, as attested by a cave painting in Spain. For millennia, honey was the only sweetener we had. Furthermore, bees are essential for the pollination of all flowering plants, including fruits and vegetables, as well as plants used to feed cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, giraffes, bonobos, elephants, etc. Hence, bees provide us and the rest of nature with an irreplaceable service.

Yet now, these animals are dying out due to monoculture and pesticides. Should they disappear, we will lose a significant portion of our cultural and religious heritage as well as much of our nutritional base. This loss will have catastrophic consequences.

Our one-day conference will bring together religious scholars, historians, nature conservationists and activists for an intellectual 'cross-pollination' of ideas and provide us with a comprehensive understanding of what bees and honey have meant to us for millennia. Religious scholars and historians will explore the changing role, function, symbolism and use of bees and honey in religious traditions or historical epochs, exploring the significance of both to much broader cultural issues. This humanistic investigation will be complemented by scientific contributions that explain how bees live and behave. Finally, activists are invited to tell us what we can do to save the bees - and ourselves.

The conference will take place on Thursday, Sept. 6, 2018, from 9 am to 5 pm, at the Melanchthon Academy in Cologne. It is part of the Religious Week of Nature Conservation in Cologne and its Environs (Sept. 2-9, 2018). (For a schedule of events, check the website for the Abrahamic Forum e.V. in April at <http://abrahamisches-forum.de/>).

Please submit a 600-word abstract and selected literature list for a twenty-minute lecture by April 30, 2018 to Dr. Carrie B. Dohe, Philipps University of Marburg, dohe@staff.uni-marburg.de.