JEWS, CHRISTIANS, AND MUSLIMS AS FAITH RELATIVES WITHIN THE SAME MONOTHEISTIC FAMILY

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Abstract: *Drawing on recent research on the interweave of the Qurʾān with Jewish and Christian interpretations of biblical traditions in late antiquity, the paper argues that the three involved religions have much more in common than what might separate them. The Qurʾānic revelation critically reflects, appropriates and contextualizes Jewish and Christian traditions. It situates itself into the same revelation history shared by Jews and Christians. The distinct differences of the three religions should be appreciated against the background of their broad commonalities. Taken into account the history of the origin of the Qurʾān in the first half of the 7th century and the content of this revelation attributed to the same God venerated by Jews and Christians, it is proper and socio-politically productive to conceive of Jews, Christians, and Muslims as faith relatives within the same monotheistic family.*

Key Words: Qurʾān, Torah, New Testament, Interreligious Dialogue, Conversion, Hermeneutics, Appreciation of difference

Introduction: Situating Theological Research on the Qurʾān

> The Christian does not need to pass through Judaism, and the Jew does not need to pass through Christianity, *and the Muslim does not need to pass through either of them, and visa versa,* to come to God.[1]

When studying theology in the eighties, I learned that only a few academic theologians in Germany and a growing number of church theologians began to realize and to take seriously the fact that Jesus and Paul were Jews and that they remained Jews. During my doctoral studies at Emory University in Atlanta, GA it became clear to me that Judaism had been misrepresented by Protestant theologians as a

[1] Quotation of Martin Buber translated and extended with a reference to Muslims (in italics) by the author of this contribution, cf. Karl-Joseph Kuschel, *Martin Buber – Seine Herausforderung an das Christentum* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2015), 5.

religion of work righteousness.[2] This insight began to dawn on theologians – with a very few exceptions – only after the Shoah[3], and it was gained by means of listening to Jewish scholars and their own representations of their faith traditions. After only two generations it has become common knowledge and it is a widespread conviction in churches now that Judaism and Christianity have much more in common than what might separate them.

What can be learned from this development is at least threefold: first, claims of spiritual superiority and to exclusive salvation seem to be a common ingredient of Christian faith communities; second, theologians of the institutionalized Protestant church in Germany have typically been quick in denouncing others as representing a form of work righteousness; and third, theological positions can change. These three motifs can also be observed with respect to the relationship of the church to Islam, in Germany and elsewhere.

Theological prejudices from a protestant perspective against Islam and Muslims are reminiscent of those that had been typically voiced against Jews in the last century. It was only after *and because of* the terrible experience of the Shoah that some theologians in the church and academia in Germany began to critically rethink their constructions of the Jewish faith. Only after realizing the effects of history of Christian anti-Jewish prejudice did Christian theologians attempt to take Jewish representations of Judaism seriously.[4] Today, learning a lesson from history with respect to Christian attitudes towards Muslims and their faith means listening *respectfully and in critical*

[2] Cf. George F. Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *Harvard Theological Review* 14 (1921): 197–254.

[3] I prefer to use the term Shoah (Hebrew, for destruction or catastrophe) to Holocaust (Greek for burn offering) as reference to the systematic killing of Jews during the Nazi-time in Germany.

[4] One of the first theologians to rethink and re-shape Christian-Jewish relations in Germany beginning in the 1960s was Heinz Kremers (1926-1988), cf. his *Juden und Christen lesen dieselbe Bibel* (Duisburg: Walter Braun Verlag, 1973); *Judenmission heute? Von der Judenmission zum ökumenischen Dialog* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1979. His and others' initiatives lead to the statement of the synod (1980) of the regional church in the Rhineland that eventually changed the assessment of Judaism within the church: Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland, *Zur Erneuerung des Verhältnisses von Christen und Juden* (Düsseldorf: Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland, 1980).

appreciation of mainline and moderate – and not minority extremist – Muslim representations of their faith.

In contemporary theological circles in Germany there is a growing awareness of the need to critically explore commonalities between the faith documents of Islam and Christianity, and a number of publications have come out in recent years in support of this intention.[5] Initiatives on the local parish and community level of cooperation between Muslims and Christians are, however, still in a nascent phase.[6]

Contemporary historical and philological research on the Qurʾān has shown a renewed interest in understanding the religious and cultural contexts of its origin.[7] It is increasingly becoming plausible that the

[5] With respect to Christian-Muslim encounters, cf. the book series *Im Judentum, Christentum und Islam* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), edited by Christfried Böttrich, Beate Ego, and Friedmann Eißler. The five volumes cover Adam and Eva, Moses, Jesus and Maria, Abraham, Elijah and other prophets. Arnulf von Scheliha, *Der Islam im Kontext der christlichen Religion* (Münster: Waxmann, 2004); Martin Bauschke, *Der Sohn Marias. Jesus im Koran* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2013); Susanne Heine, Ömer Özsoy, Christoph Schwöbel, Abdullah Takim, ed., *Christen und Muslime im Gespräch. Eine Verständigung über Kernthemen der Theologie* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagsgesellschaft, 2014); Klaus von Stosch, *Herausforderung Islam. Christliche Annäherungen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2016); Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Die Bibel im Koran. Grundlagen für das interreligiöse Gespräch* (Ostfildern: Patmos Verlag, 2017); Mouhanad Khorchide and Klaus von Stosch, *Der andere Prophet. Jesus im Koran* (Freiburg: Herder, 2018).

[6] One exception is the Lutheran parish of St. Georg-Borgfelde in Hamburg. Beginning at the end of the 1990s, this parish, located at the main train station, has developed cordial relationships to a number of mosques in the community. The church and various mosques engage in joint services for special occasions (e.g. regularly on Good Friday) or joint study trips especially for the youth of both faith communities, cf. Kay Kraack, "Die Rückkehr der Religion, Irritationen, Herausforderungen und Ressourcen," in *Transkulturelle Begegnungen und interreligiöser Dialog. Erkundungen und Entdeckungen im Anschluss an Werner Kahl*, ed. Uta Andrée, Ruomin Liu, and Sönke Lorberg-Fehring, SITMA, 11 (Hamburg: Missionshilfeverlag, 2017), 357-379.

[7] Cf. the following publications since 2004: Emran Iqbal El-Badawi, *The Qurʾān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, Routledge Studies in the Qurʾān (New York: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2014); *Jenseits der Tradition? Tradition und Traditionskritik in Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, ed. Regina Grundmann and Assaad Elias Kattan, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – Tension, Transmission, Transformation, 2 (Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015); Tilman Nagel, ed., *Der Koran und sein kulturelles Umfeld*, Schriften des Historischen Instituts, 72 (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2010); Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike. Ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010); Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx, eds., *The Qurʾān in Context. Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011); John C. Reeves, ed., *Bible and Qurʾān. Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality* (Leiden and Boston, Brill 2004); Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *The Qurʾān in its Historical Context*, Routledge Studies in the Qurʾān (New York: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2007); Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *The Qurʾān and Its Biblical*

Qurʾān reflects faith traditions that were widespread in the Arab peninsula at the beginning of the 7th century. These were in particular orally transmitted faith traditions of Jewish communities, on the one hand, and of Syrian Christian churches of both East ("Nestorian") and West ("Monopysite") Syrian confessions, on the other hand. With these traditions, the Qurʾān is closely interwoven. This becomes especially transparent when comparing the Arabic Qurʾān linguistically with Syriac-Aramaic Bible versions, apocrypha, and liturgical traditions and conventions of the Syrian churches.[8] This pertains especially to the poetic usage of rhymed, metrical verses which is a particular feature of the Syriac church tradition, which finds an analogy in the rhymed prose of the Qurʾān which is in need of further academic exploration.[9]

The following should be noted in order to avoid a simplistic, i.e. static understanding of traditions: First, Jewish and Christian narratives reinterpreting Biblical stories and figures in late antiquity are themselves ever evolving and interconnected. Second, in the Qurʾān these traditions are not simply repeated. They are critically appropriated and

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Subtext, Routledge Studies in the Qurʾān (New York: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2010); Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *New Perspectives on the Qurʾān. The Qurʾān in its Historical Context 2*, Routledge Studies in the Qurʾān (New York: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2011); Dietmar W. Winkler, ed., *Syrische Studien. Beiträge zum 8. Deutschen Syrologie-Symposium in Salzburg 2014*, Orientalia – Patristica – Oecumenica, 10 (Berlin: Lit-Verlag, 2016).

[8] Cf. El-Badawi, *Qurʾān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*; Edmund Beck (Hg.), *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de paradiso und contra Julianum*, CSCO 174, Scriptores Syri 78, (Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 1957); Sidney H. Griffith, "Christian lore and the Arabic Qurʾān: the 'Companions of the Cave' in *Sūrat al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian tradition," in *Qurʾān in its Historical Context*, 109-138; Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān* (Hertford: Stephen Austin & Sons, 1938); Alphonse Mingana, "Syriac Influence on the Style of the Kurʾān," *The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 11, no. 1 (1927): 3-24; Suleiman A. Mourad, "Mary in the Qurʾān: a reflection of her presentation," in *Qurʾān in its Historical Context*, 163-174.

[9] Cf. Sebastian P. Brock, *Sogiatha. Syriac Dialogue Hymns*, The Syrian Churches Series, XI (Kottayam/India: St. Joseph's Press, 1987); Sebastian P. Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, SEERI Correspondence Course on Syrian Christian Heritage, 1 (Kottayam/India: St. Joseph's Press, 1988); Johannes Koder, "Möglichkeiten biblischer Glaubensvermittlung der Byzantiner im Umfeld der Entstehung des Islam am Beispiel der Hymnen des Romanos Melodos," in *Koran*, 135-156; Ulrike-Rebekka Nieten, "Das syrisch-aramäische Troparion: Eine Gattung zwischen Psalm und Hymnus," in *Syrische Studien*, 341-349; Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Reading the Qurʾān as Homily: The Case of Sarah's Laughter," in *Qurʾān in Context*, 585-592; Harald Suermann, "Die syrische Liturgie im syrisch-palästinischen Raum in vor- und frühislamischer Zeit," in: *Koran*, 157-172; Martin Tamcke, "Die Hymnen Ephraems des Syrers und ihre Verwendung im christlichen Gottesdienst unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Josephtexte," in *Koran*, 173-195.

contextualized in particular situations of the Qurʾānic communication in the life of Muhammad and his followers. As such, these traditions had to be re-interpreted and maybe even translated into Arabic, for them to become meaningful and relevant to the addressed audiences of the Qurʾān. Third, the language of the Arabic Qurʾān had an effect on Christian translations of the Bible into Arabic.[10]

In this paper, I outline some basic continuities between fundamentals of faith as they come to expression in the Holy Scriptures of Christians and Muslims with occasional reference to the Jewish Scripture. I opt for a *critical appreciation of difference* on the basis of essential theological agreements and an identical religious tradition history. My approach to Islam is informed by the results of recent historical and religious studies on the interconnectedness of nascent Islam with Jewish and Christian traditions of late antiquity, as pointed out above, on the one hand, and hermeneutically by the work of the Talmudic scholar Daniel Boyarin, on the other hand.[11] In comparing the Pauline tradition with Jewish traditions of antiquity, Boyarin develops the concept of a critical appreciation of difference vis-a-vie any exclusivist attitude towards truth and salvation and towards others. In the present context, this is meant as an alternative approach to a widespread and common approach of an overt or covert condemnation of Islam by Christians. The attitude of a *fundamentally sympathetic* reading of the Holy Scripture of a different faith tradition is prepared to recognize, to acknowledge, to appreciate, and to accept *insights of truth* in the Qurʾān as a possibly enrichment with at times a corrective function

[10] Cf. Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic. The Scriptures of the* "*People of the Book*" *in the Language of Islam* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013). The very existence of the Arabic Qurʾān might have provoked an Arabic Bible translation in the first place. Interestingly, the Basmala appears as heading of Biblical books in some early translations. At times, even in the same Bible translation, the Basmala appears both in its Qurʾānic form and in a Trinitarian extended form, cf. the heading of Acts versus the heading of the Epistle of James in the following Arabic Bible from the middle of the 9th century: *Mt. Sinai Arabic Codex 151. II. Acts oft the Apostles. Catholic Epistles*, CSCO 463; Scriptores Arabici, 43 (Lovanii: E. Peeters, 1984) translated by Harvey Staal. Cf. p. 1: "In the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit, the one God"; p. 76: "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate."
[11] Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew. Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

with respect to the Christian tradition.[12] This might sound provocative.

The suggested attitude for interreligious encounter is, however, an attempt at theologically emulating the teachings and the freedom of Jesus of Nazareth who regularly transgressed boundaries and who could appreciate the faith of those outside his own faith community as exemplary. And, in fact, Jesus' general acceptance and occasional praise of those outside his own faith community, caused great irritation and frustration among some of his Jewish brothers and sisters.[13] Of course, these Jesus traditions as narrated in the four Gospels are always also informed by later, i.e. post-resurrection interpretations of the Christ event. The crossing of cultural, religious, ethnic, and national boundaries is, however, such a widely and diversely attestest typical attitude of Jesus in the Gospel tradition that it was most likely a historical feature of his life. In the Gospels of Luke and John, it is interesting that a number of times *Samaritans* feature as positive examples of a deep faith, as compared to some of Jesus' Jewish compatriots. Due to the closeness yet difference between Jews and Samaritans in antiquity, this constellation could serve as an analogy to the (power-) relationship between Christians and Muslims, and Jesus' attitude towards Samaritans could serve as an example for Christians meeting Muslims.

In any interreligious dialogue or trialogue, everyone involved should be aware of the particular contribution and the beauty of his or her own faith tradition. However, identity is not static, and a dialogue or even trialogue embedded in real relationships will inevitably lead to change. Therefore, a meaningful interreligious encounter requires attitudes of respect and appreciation towards the partners of a different faith, confidence in ones own tradition, and a readiness *to become partly constituted* by the faith of the partners. The history of competition, enmity, and suffering between the adherents of the Jewish, the Christian, and the Muslim faith make it difficult to accept such an attitude and approach towards the "other" believers. The insights into

[12] In interreligious dialogue, this attitude, of course, is required of both sides, cf. Fadi Daou and Nayla Tabbara, *L'hospitalité divine. L'autre dans le dialogue des théologies chétienne et musulmane* (Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2013).
[13] Cf. Mk 7:24-30 par; Lk 7:1-10 par; 10:25-37; 17:11-19; John 4:4-42.

the historical and theological interwovenness of the three monotheistic religions make it possible to explore agreements between them while not clouding differences. The need for co-existence of believers of these faith communities makes it necessary and meaningful in contemporary times to re-cover these continuities as spiritual resources for shaping peaceful and just societies.

An Outline of Some Basic Continuities and Differences

Ultimate Revelation of God's Will and Word

Comparing the Bible and the Qurʾān theologically is a problematic procedure from a scholarly perspective and it needs reflection. These Holy Scriptures bear a different significance in their respective faith communities. In a common Muslim perspective, the Qurʾān *is* the *ultimate* revelation of the word of God. For non-fundamentalist Christians, however, the word of God has *ultimately* been revealed in and through Jesus the Messiah (Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic = the anointed one; Greek: the Christ) with the biblical writings giving *witness* to this word of God. In academic theology it is uncontested that the biblical writings (Hebrew Bible and New Testament) were composed by various individuals and groups over a period that might span across 800 years. The authors were all Jews – some of whom believed in Jesus as the Messiah, in the New Testament – who believed in the one and only God, the creator, sustainer, judge and savior. Drawing on John 1:1-18, Jesus has been widely held from early Christian times throughout the centuries as the *incarnation* of the eternal word of God.

Even though Muslim believers generally tend to identify the divine word with the Holy Qurʾān in its written form – as the majority of Christian believers worldwide, especially in the global South, also do with respect to the Holy Bible [14] – it would be problematic

[14] Cf. Werner Kahl, *Jesus als Lebensretter. Westafrikanische Bibelinterpretationen und ihre Relevanz für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, New Testament Studies in Contextual Exegesis, 2 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 2007).

academically to conclude that the Qurʾān represents an example of an *inlibration* of the word of God,[15] for a number of reasons:

a) *Text-critically*: there has never been one and only written version of the Qurʾān which has come down to us in history with a number of variant readings with seven versions given canonical status;[16]
b) *Redaction-critically*: the Qurʾān as we have it in its canonical consonant form is the result of complex processes of redactions which came to their conclusion only after Muhammad, as seen in the composition and ordering of the suras and the phenomenon of Medinan additions in Meccan suras;[17]
c) *Theologically*: the written Qurʾān as an *immediate* expression of the word of God would be in danger of becoming deified, as seen in the inner-Muslim discussions on the eternity versus the createdness of the Qurʾān as word of God in the first centuries of Islam.

It would be more appropriate, with respect to the insider perspective of the Qurʾān with its particular conceptions of revelation (*waḥy* and *tanzil*),[18] to regard the Qurʾān as representation of an *intonalization* of the word of God. This accounts for the high value attributed to the recitation of Qurʾān among believers and it corresponds to the fact that "Qurʾān" itself means recitation. Presupposed here is the following scenario: the word of God had been communicated to Muhammad as excerpts from the "original" book which is with God (*umm al-kitāb*, lierally, "the mother of the book"), with the ensuing recitation by Muhammad of what he had perceived. His followers memorized Muhammad's recitations; they learned them by heart and reduced them to writing. The Qurʾān in its written form has served fundamentally as an assistance for memorization and oral recitation. The Qurʾān as

[15] This has been embraced in Germany by New Testament scholar Joachim Gnilka, *Bibel und Koran. Was sie verbindet, was sie trennt* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, 2004). This suggestion has convincingly been problematized and refuted by Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike. Ein europäischer Zugang* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2010), 163-168.
[16] Cf. Thomas Bauer, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität. Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen 2011).
[17] Tilman Nagel, *Medinensische Einschübe in mekkanischen Suren* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995).
[18] Daniel A. Madigan, "Revelation and Inspiration," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, Vol. IV (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 437-448.

book reflects with its limitations as written script the oral Qurʾān, which itself it a reflection of pieces of the divine book, which is with God.

In Christian-Muslim encounter, faith in the ultimate revelation of the word of God in and through its *incarnation* in Jesus Christ meets faith in the ultimate revelation of the word of God in and through its *intonalization* in the Qurʾān.[19] The Bible and the Qurʾān both reflect, and give *human* witness to the word of God.[20] They do so, however, to different degrees. The written Qurʾān is closer – historically and with respect to the means and process of communication – to the ultimate revelation it is related to (the oral Qurʾān as recited by Muhammad) than the Christian Bible in its two parts is to the ultimate revelation it is related to (Jesus Christ).

The Qurʾān as Linguistic Miracle

The Qurʾān scholar Navid Kermani has made a wider academic audience in Germany aware of the Islamic value of the recitation of the Qurʾān and its perceived linguistic beauty.[21] The memorization and recitation of parts of the Qurʾān in the original Arabic are virtues and every day experiences for Muslims. For example, the opening sura is recited by believing Muslims a number of times during daily prayers. The recitation of the memorized Qurʾān is deemed more important spiritually than reading and understanding the written text, which serves more like an aid to memorization and recitation. By reciting parts of the Qurʾān by heart, Muslims actualize the original revelatory experience of Muhammad. In so doing, a deep running dia- and synchronic relationship of all Muslims past and present is established and experienced communally and spiritually, in conjunction with the constantly refreshed memory of belonging to the merciful God, as the vertical relationship from which the believer lives, and from which

[19] Cf. Neuwirth, *Koran als Text,* 166: "Was also aufrechtzuerhalten ist, ist die Analogie der Logos-Verkörperung; im inkarnierten Wort Gottes im Christentum und im akustisch präsenten Wort Gottes im Islam."

[20] Also, the Qurʾān was *written and composed* by human beings.

[21] Navid Kermani, *Gott ist schön. Das ästhetische Erleben des Koran* (München: C.H. Beck, 1999.

believers attempt to shape horizontal relationships and communal structures in society.

The Arabic of the Qurʾān is perceived by believers as most beautiful. In this perspective, the beauty of the language and the poetic construction of the suras, whose verses all end in rhymes, are believed to supersede human ability.[22] As such, the Qurʾān is regarded in Islam as *the linguistic miracle* of the Muslim faith.[23]

The Biblical writings, in comparison, in their original languages, are *not* marked *generally* by poetic beauty as regards syntax structure and semantics. One encounters poetic language in some writings of the Hebrew Bible but certainly not throughout (Psalms and in some of the other so-called wisdom literature and interspersed here and there in the narrative and prophetic literature). The New Testament writings are almost devoid of poetic portions. These writings aim at conveying a message or a teaching. As such, the content matters, and not a poetic form of expression.[24] Interestingly, some translations of the Bible, and

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[22] Cf. Richard C. Martin, "Inimitability," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, Vol. II (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 526-536.

[23] A number of new translations of the Qurʾān are now available in German that try to do justice to its poetic form: Ahmad Milad Karimi, *Der Koran, vollständig und neu übersetzt* (Freiburg: Herder, 2009); Hartmut Bobzin, *Der Koran, aus dem Arabischen neu übertragen* (München: C.H. Beck, 2010); Hans Zirker, *Der Koran* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, [5]2016). While Karimi's translation attempts to make transparent the rhythm and the tension of the orally recited Qurʾān, Bobzin and Zirker present the ayat in the form of verses (without ending rhymes). Another attempt is: Werner Kahl, *Studienkoran. Vol. 1: Die frühmekkanischen Suren chronologisch angeordnet, reimschematisch dargestellt und textnahe übersetzt*, SITMA, 7 (Hamburg: Missionshilfeverlag, [2]2016). Here, the author tries to present the verses in a way that makes the Arabic rhyme schemes transparent. Cf. Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran. Band 1: Frühmekkanische Suren. Poetische Prophetie. Handkommentar mit Übersetzung* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011); Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran. Band 2/1: Frühmittelmekkanische Suren. Das neue Gottesvolk: „Biblisierung" des altarabischen Weltbildes. Handkommentar mit Übersetzung* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2017). The classical attempt at a poetic rendering of the Qurʾān in rhyme form by the famous poet Friedrich Rückert (died 1866), into German, remainded fragmentary: *Der Koran in der Übertragung von Friedrich Rückert* (Köln: Anaconda, 2012), originally published posthum in 1888.

[24] This even applies to the so-called Lord's prayer as it appears twice in the Greek Gospels, in two variations (Mt 6:9-13 and in an abridged version, in Lk 11:2-4). As the most recent scholarship on the linguistic features of the Revelation of John makes plausible, its author even intentionally seems to have included grammatical 'errors' in order to convey a message, cf. Stefan Alkier and Thomas Paulsen, "Der kommende Gott und die Götter der Anderen," in *Apollon, Artemis, Asteria und die Apokalypse des Johannes. Eine Spurensuche zur Intertextualität und Intermedialität im Rahmen griechisch-römischer Kultur*, ed. Alkier and Paulsen (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2018, 13-147, especially 25-47; Martin Karrer, *Johannesoffenbarung*,

especially of the New Testament, have substantially increased its poetic dimension. This holds true especially for the Syriac versions.

One and the Same God

The Qurʾān clearly states that Allah (Arabic for "the God"; Arabic speaking Christians and Jews also refer to God as "Allah"; cf. also Syriac-Aramaic, *alaha*) is the same God as the God worshipped by Jews and Christians. *Muslims* are those who *surrender* (participle of Arabic, *aslama*) to this one and only God. Abraham according to the Qurʾān is the prime example of a person surrendering to God, i.e., he is the role model of a Muslim because he refused to believe in the plurality of gods as worshipped by his father (Q 19:41-48 reflects a Jewish development of Jos 24:2-3 which itself is a development of Gen 12:1-4).[25] The disciples of Jesus can also be called Muslims (*muslimun*) in this sense in the Qurʾān (Q 3:52; Q 5:110-111).

An Emerging New Religion in a Critical Jewish-Christian Tradition

Muhammad in the Qurʾān is portrayed as a messenger (*rasul*), i.e. one sent by God (cf. NT *apostolos*) and as prophet (*nabi*) – the seal of the prophets in fact, i.e., the final and ultimate prophet – and also as a warner and admonisher. According to Muslim belief, the 114 suras of the Qurʾān were all revealed to Muhammad within a period of 22 years (610-632), first in Mecca and then in Medina. The recitation of the early Meccan suras especially, first by Muhammad and then by his followers, was aimed historically at convincing polytheistic or henotheistic Arabs, to accept the one and only God venerated by Jews and Christians. The fundamental message of the Qurʾān can be constructed as a message of *inclusion*: God in His mercy also turned towards the Arabs and invited them to accept Him and follow His

Teilband 1 (Offb. 1,1-5,14), EKK XXIV/1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), S. 95: "Offenbarungstexte sind demnach Werke eigener rhetorischer Qualität, deren Wert sich nicht mindert, wenn sie befremden. Im Gegenteil, Abweichungen machen darauf aufmerksam, dass Außeralltägliches enthüllt und dargestellt wird." While in Revelation it is apparent clumsiness of expression, in the Qurʾān it is poetically charged language that is intended to attract the attention of listeners.

[25] Cf. already Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (Bonn: Eigenverlag, 1833), 121-128: "Das Ganze ist dem Judenthume entnommen" (123). That this motif is already present in the Hebrew Bible, i.e., in Jos 24:2-3, seems to have escaped the notice of most scholars past and present.

commandments, without having to become Jews or without having to accept Christian doctrines pertaining to Christology and the Trinity (cf. Q 4:123-125). It is in this context that the figure of Abraham functions as a guarantor for the eschatological salvation of believers in God who are neither Jews nor Christians (cf. Q 3:65-85). Here Jewish and Christian exclusivist, and contradictory, claims to salvation are rejected and undermined, cf. Q 2:111-113: "And they said: 'None will enter the Garden unless he be a Jew or a Christian.' Those are their hopes. Say, 'Bring your proof, if you are truthful.' Nay, whosoever submits his face to God, while being virtuous, shall have his reward with his Lord. No fear shall come upon them; nor shall they grieve. The Jews say, 'The Christians stand on nothing,' and the Christians say, 'The Jews stand on nothing,' though they recite the Book."[26]

In the early years of his revelations Muhammad had not envisioned a new religion. Because of the exclusivist claims to salvation by Jews (only through conversion to Judaism could one become a member of the elect people of God) and by Christians (only if one believed in a particular Christological and Trinitarian concept could one become a member of the elect people of God) and because of their subsequent rejection of Muhammad's revelation was Islam (meaning *surrender* to God, not "peace") eventually conceptualized as a distinct religion in Medinan suras.[27] While in Mecca, Muhammad had shifted the direction of prayer from the Kaaba in Mecca towards Jerusalem. Only after conflicts with Jewish tribes in Medina, did he ultimately change back the direction of prayer towards the Kaaba (cf. *qibla* in Q 2:142-150).[28]

A Muslim Critique of Christological and Trinitarian Concepts

In some of the suras recited by Muhammad, Christian concepts of Jesus as Son of God or even God are rejected implicitly or, in Medinan

[26] Translation from Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *The Study Quran. A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015). Cf. also the comments to these and similar verses (Q 5:18; Q 62:6).

[27] This problematic is reflected only in Medinan suras, chronologically first in Q 2:109-141. It is instructive to realize that from John of Damascus in the first half of the 8th century, via Cusanus in the middle of the 15th century to Luther in the first half of the 16th century and beyond until the 17th century and the dawn of enlighenment, Islam could be regarded by Christians as a *Christian heresy*, comparable esp. to Arianism and Nestorianism.

[28] Cf. Richard Kimber, entry "Qibla," in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, Vol. IV (Leiden: Brill 2004), 325-328.

suras, explicitly. This is a feature that runs through the whole Qurʾān, from Meccan to Medinan times (Q 19:30-35; Q 43:63-65; Q 4:171-172; Q 9:29-31; Q 5:17.72-75). Instead, Jesus the Messiah is perceived as *Son of Mary*. As such, he was – like in Luke 1-2 – born by a virgin through a command of God involving the divine spirit. In the Qurʾān, Jesus can be referred to as *al-Masīḥ* (e.g., Q 4:171). This seems to be a particular Qurʾānic Arabic rendering of the Hebrew or Aramaic word for Messiah, even though its possible meaning in Arabic remains unclear.[29] Jesus has been chosen by God, and he was a major prophet, messenger and servant of God (Q 4:171-172). The many miracles that he performed were not due to his own ability or any divine power within Jesus (as is claimed in most New Testament instances, but markedly not in Luke-Acts!),[30] but God himself *allowed* them to happen through Christ (Q 3:49; Q 5:110-111). In my understanding, it makes sense historically that the suras insist on a strict monotheism in addressing polytheist Arabs by rejecting any concepts – Christological or Trinitarian – of Christ that might have provoked a polytheistic or henotheistic or tritheistic misunderstanding of Christ as *biological* son of God, since Muhammad was concerned with the eradication of the traditional belief in multiple gods that were conceptualized in the ancient Arab cosmology as sons and daughters of God (Q 4:171; Q 5:17.72.75.116). These statements of the Qurʾān reflect mainline convictions of West-Syriac Christians in and around the Arab peninsula of the sixth and seventh centuries which pointed into the direction of an extreme glorification and deification of both Jesus, as God, and Mary, as *theotokos*, i.e., the one who gave birth to

[29] Cf. Nasr, *Study Quran*, 266-267 with references to interpretations in classical commentaries on the Qurʾān.

[30] Cf. my *New Testament Miracle Stories in their Religious-Historical Setting: A Religions-geschichtliche Comparison from a Structural Perspective*, FRLANT 163 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 226-228, with particular reference to Lk 7:11-17 and Acts 2:22. The fundamental closeness of the Qurʾān to Luke's Christological conception is yet to be explored in depth. It should be noted, though, that Luke – like Muhammad – also wanted to avoid a likely polytheistic misunderstanding of Jesus and of his apostles, among pagan addressees of the Christian proclamation. A case in point is Acts 14:8-18. That the Qurʾān shows a particular closeness to the Gospel of Luke as compared to the other Gospels, has also ben observed by Suleiman A. Mourad, "Mary in the Qurʾān: a reflection of her presentation," in *Qurʾān in its Historical Context*, 163-174; cf. 172.

God.[31] Despite this criticism of particular Christological and Trinitarian concepts, it should be noted that in the Qurʾān, as well as in Islam in general, both Jesus and Mary are held in highest esteem, explicitly contradicting a condemnation of these two figures in rabbinic and Talmudic Judaism (cf. Q 4:156-159).[32]

A Critical Appreciation of Jews and Christians in the Qurʾān

In the Qurʾān, the former revelations of God to the Jews (Torah) and Christians (Gospel) are generally held in high esteem. The Qurʾān is seen in line with these Holy Scriptures, with Muhammad as the final prophet (the "seal" of the prophets, cf. Q 33:40). Jews and Christians are *not* judged per se as "unbelievers" or, more appropriately and literally, as "those who cover up," i.e. "those who reject the divine message" (*kāfirūn*) – only some amongst them, i.e., those who do not believe in the one and only God (and the angels and the last judgment) *and* who do not do good deeds of justice. Fundamentally, Jews and Christians are to be respected as "People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*). Different portions of the Divine Book which is with God, had been revealed to Jews, Christians and to Muslims alike. Variations and contradictions of assessments of Christians (and Jews) in the Qurʾān are to be understood contextually, i.e., by taking into account the

[31] Franz Joseph Dölger, "Die eigenartige Marienverehrung der Philomariaten und Kollyridianerinnen," in *Antike und Christentum I*, ed. Dölger (Münster: Aschendorff, 1929), 107–142, had proposed with a reference to the anti-heretical writings of Epiphanias of Salamis of the fourth century, that certain sects that had moved into the Arabic world favored a glorification and deification of Mary, and that their beliefs were reflected in Qurʾān. Contemporary scholarship has clearly moved away from this suggestion and towards the premise that it was mainline Syrian Christian confessions and liturgies that are being reflected in the Qurʾān, cf. Suleiman A. Mourad, "Mary in the Qurʾān," 172: "Therefore, if one assumes that the Qurʾān does reflect the religious milieu of the prophet Muḥammad and his movement, then they were in contact with Christian groups who were using the Gospel of Luke or the Diatessaron, and the Protevangelium of James, among other sources. This, in my opinion, points in one direction: these Christian groups must have observed a mainstream type of Christianity and could not have been heretical Christians." Cf. the assessment of Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Reading the Qurʾān as Homily: The Case of Sarah's Laughter," in *Qurʾān in Context*, 585-592, especially 591: "There is reason to believe, then, that in its reference to Sarah's laughter the Qurʾān is participating in an interpretive tradition, prominent in the thought of Syriac Christian writers like Ephrem, according to which the annunciation to Sarah is connected with that to Mary."

[32] Cf. Peter Schäfer, Jesus im Talmud (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, [2]2010).

particular historical situation of a distinct verse – what has been called in Islamic tradition the "occasions of revelation".[33]

Theological Commonalities

All three monotheistic religions have in common as the *center* of their faith and belief system the following conviction: the appropriate human answer to God's mercy and favor is believing in the one and only God and doing good (cf. the *double commandment of love* in Mark 12:28-31; Deut 6:4-5 and Lev 19:18; Q 2:25: "Proclaim good news to those who believe and who do good"). All of them also speak of an eternal judgment of God by which people will be rewarded or punished for their deeds on earth. In the Qurʾān, the numerous and strong references to eternal reward and punishment have the function of motivating the addressees of the suras to turn towards God and to change their way of life. Both aspects of the final judgment find close motif parallels in Syriac Christian documents of pre-Islamic times.[34]

All three religions also share the same essential *Gospel*, i.e. Good News (Arabic *bushra* in both the Qurʾān and Bible, cf. Christian Palestinian Aramaic, *b^{e}surā*) or divine truth. This Good News consists in God's *merciful* turn towards mankind, accepting people universally in spite of their short-comings and inviting them to return to God. In Early Christianity, Jesus as the Messiah was perceived as the ultimate salvific figure exemplifying in his life and effecting – this is how his death on the cross was interpreted – universal reconciliation. By believing in *this significance of* Christ, people "accept to have been accepted" by God, in the terminology of Paul Tillich, and by this belief they respond positively to God's move towards them in and through Christ. In Islam, God's revelation in and through the Qurʾān takes on a similar universal significance: Beginning with the Arabs but

[33] Cf. Andrew Rippin, entry "Occasions of revelation," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, Vol. III (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 569-573.

[34] As for the motif of eternal hell fire, cf. e.g. chapter XXVI of the Syriac Didascalia Apostolorum of the 3rd century; Hans Achelis and Johannes Flemming, *Die syrische Didaskalia übersetzt und erklärt* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1904), 144-145 and 316-317. For the reward in paradise with a combination of wine and virgins, cf. Paradise Hymns 7:18 of Ephraem the Syrian, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de paradiso und contra Julianum*, CSCO 174, Scriptores Syri 78, ed. Edmund Beck (Louvain: E. Peeters, 1957), 29; and the comments in Tor Andrae, *Mohammed. Sein Leben und Glauben* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1932), 72.

eventually including all of humanity, God's mercy shows in the divine initiative to send the Qurʾān as reminder of God's existence and mercy and as admonition for a corresponding ethic to mankind, who are free to accept or "to cover up", i.e., reject (*kafara*) the gift of God's revelation. Interestingly, the Qurʾān is not only considered as bearer of Good News (Q 17:9), but – like Jesus Christ in the New Testament – also as Good News in and by itself (Q 16:89.102; Q 27,1-2; Q 46,12)!

The Good News, as witnessed in the New Testament and in the Qurʾān, aims at overcoming any human attempt at excluding people from their being accepted by God. Inclusion into God's universal family or community especially requires social equality. In fact, in all three holy books the *justice* of God is emphasized. The justice of God pertains not only to the last judgment but also – and especially so – to *social organization* in present times, as in the critique of economic injustice especially in the early Meccan suras. God's election for salvation *precedes* any human effort. Due to divine justice, human injustice will be punished, and good deeds of justice will be rewarded – the former in an equal manner, the latter abundantly.

In the contemporary theological discourse on the relationship between the justice and the mercy of God among Muslim theologians teaching at German universities, there is a debate on the relationship between God's justice and mercy. For Katajun Amirpur, justice is the most important attribute of God and *the* hermeneutical key for the interpretation of the Qurʾān.[35] According to Mouhanad Khorchide's theological interpretation of the Qurʾān, the justice of God is ultimately subject to divine mercy.[36]

Divine Predilection for the Excluded and Marginalized

Significantly, the revelations to the prophets in the Hebrew Bible, in and through Christ and to the New Testament apostles, and to Muhammad were initially directed predominantly to people who experienced and suffered religious and social exclusion and who were

[35] Katajun Amirpur, "Justice as hermeneutical key for the interpretation of the Qurʾān," in: Missionsakademie an der Universität Hamburg, ed., *Justice as Hermeneutical Key for the interpretation on Bible and Qurʾān*, TIMA 11 (Hamburg: Missionshilfeverlag, 2016), 63-65.

[36] Mouhanad Khorchide, *Islam ist Barmherzigkeit. Grundzüge einer modernen Religion* (Freiburg: Herder, 2012).

disregarded and ill-treated by those in power. In the Hebrew Bible, the subjugated people of, and in, Israel are addressed (cf. Israel in Egypt and then the weak states of Israel and Juda, continuously being threatened by foreign super powers like Assyria, Egypt, Babylonia, Persia, the Hellenistic Empires and the Roman Empire). According to the Gospels, Jesus turns especially to the sick and suffering and the non-Jews in Israel (those who were excluded from salvation from prevalent Jewish doctrine). Muhammad's message from its beginnings aimed at social justice and at implementing rights for like orphans, widows, and slaves in the context of Arab tribal communities.

Distinct Emphases

While having fundamental beliefs and values in common, all three holy books display distinct emphases:

The election and continuing salvation of the people of Israel in the Hebrew Bible; Israel is being warned not to give in to other gods and to establish a just society, including a just treatment of strangers, the poor and the weak – in the context of the Ancient Near East.

The inclusion of those excluded from the people of Israel into the universal family of God in the New Testament; this had been exemplified in the ministry of Jesus. To Paul and other believers in Jesus as the Messiah/Christ, the cross and resurrection *signaled and effectuated* God's predilection for the outcasts and despised all over the world. According to this understanding, it needed the sacrificial death of the Son of God at the cross to establish a divine relationship to all of humanity by purifying everybody once and for all.[37] In the New Testament, the focus is on the *individual's* acceptance of the one and only God and on a change of individual behavior. The early Christians

[37] In the Qurʾān, the fact of the crucifixion seems to be denied, and this is how the passage Q 4:157-159 has been generally interpreted in Muslim traditions. According to these traditions, Jesus was elevated by God to God before his death, by-passing his crucifixion. The exact meaning and implications of the passage, however, remains controversial. A close reading of the verses in their immediate context suggests, however, that the main thrust of the argument is against the *claim of Jews* to have killed Jesus, the God-sent prophet. The subtext of the verses in the Median Sura 4 which was most likely written around 625 and which reflects Jewish attempts at removing Muhammad, might be the message that the enemies of the Muslims in Medina will not succeed in their endeavours, the same way their plans had failed at killing Jesus.

expected the Kingdom of God to be established shortly. They had no interest – and power – to shape human society. In the meantime, however, they attempted the establishment of just and transcultural communities of believers from various cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds (cf. Acts 2:37-47; 4:32-37; 11:19-30).[38] In early Christian interpretation, the Christ event provided for a universal inclusion of all of humanity into the elect people of God. As such, it was seen as the realization of the promise of a universal covenant of God with humankind, as promised to Abraham (Gal 3:28-29). This interpretation of the death of Jesus at the cross and of his resurrection by God gained significance during the spread of the original Jewish belief in Jesus as the Messiah, amongst former polytheists of the wider Greco-Roman world in the first two centuries.

The inclusion of the Arabs (and eventually of all of humanity) under the call of God and the establishment of a Muslim *state* integrating all Arab tribes, in the Qurʾān. Also Presupposed here is the individual's decision to believe in God and to live according to divine commandments. The Muslim society to be established is marked by a reign of justice.

Short-Comings of Believers in God in History

While the salvific message of God in all three monotheistic traditions originally was revealed to the excluded and subjugated ones by those in power, the message of inclusion was transformed in history into claims of superiority and of exclusive salvation. Believers of any of the three monotheistic religions throughout history have regularly failed to live up to expectation. Injustice reigned in Israel, violence and the quest for political power reigned amongst Muslim leaders from the very beginning (three of the first four caliphs were murdered by Muslims), and Christians in power after Constantine from the 4th century on, began to persecute people of other faiths throughout history, including minority Christians with variant confessions and traditions like those represented by the Oriental churches. This development is especially remarkable for the church, since a number of New

[38] Cf. Werner Kahl, "Migration in the perspective of Early Christianity," in *Reforming Theology, Migrating Church, Transforming Society. A Compendium for Ecumenical Education*, ed. Uta Andreé et al. (Hamburg: Missionshilfeverlag, 2017), 170-177.

Testament writings put the strongest emphasis on the love of enemies, forgiveness, and suffering injustice without retaliation.

The holy books of Jews, Christians, and Muslims have often been misused throughout history by aggressors to ultimately legitimize their dehumanizing treatment of others in order to serve their own power ambitions. In this respect, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim extremists past and present – excluding others not only from eternal salvation but also from life itself – have not differed from one another.

To sum up

Jews, Christians, and Muslims are representatives of the *same* monotheistic tradition. They belong to the same *narrative of memory* with each religion trying to (re)-constitute God's covenant with Abraham embracing all of humankind.[39] The younger religions began as divinely inspired attempts at actualizing and purifying the older religion(s) in new contexts. These new contexts with their different cultural conventions and societal needs shaped the respective message. Each younger religion sees itself in continuity with the Holy Scripture of the older ones, and it assesses the earlier Scriptures from the perspective of the most recent revelation which is regularly regarded as ultimate.

The following chart is meant to make transparent the inner understanding of the Qurʾān according to which it should be seen in a fundamental yet critical continuity with Torah and the Gospels, and their interpretations by Jews and Christians. The Qurʾān constitutes a historically-diachronic relationship with Abraham for Muslims, i.e., those who surrender to the same God who had revealed his will formerly to Jews and Christians. All three faith communities claim to depend on an ultimate revelation. From this perspective, the interpretations of the former revelations of God among the "older" believers appear to be in need of revision and improvement.

[39] This is a central thesis in Daou and Tabbara, *L'hospitalité divine*.

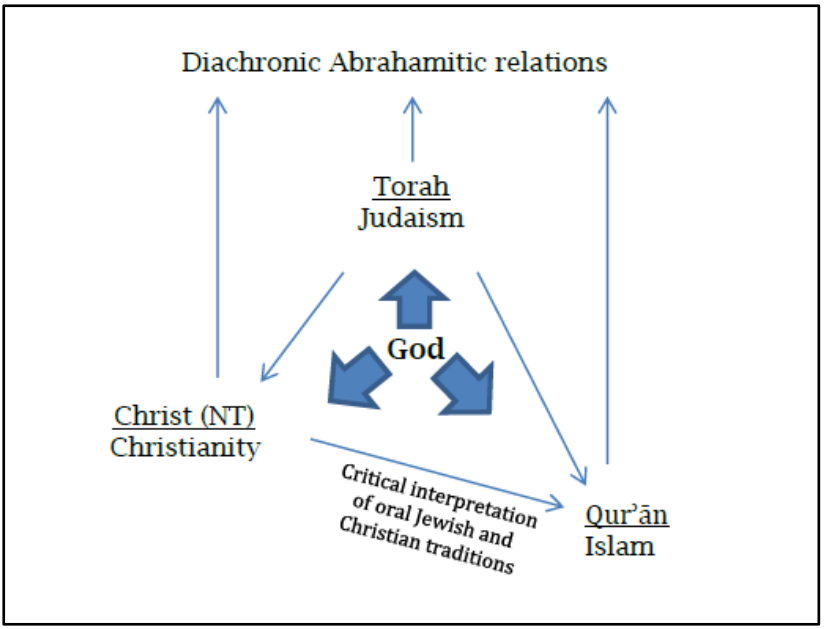

Chart: Relationships between claims of ultimate revelation within one broad monotheistic religious tradition

The Appreciation of the Partners in Interreligious Encounters

In my understanding, Christians can also accept and honor Muhammad as prophet in a similar way they accept and honor the Jewish prophets of the Old Testament, i.e., critically. They can read the Qurʾān with *critical* appreciation and with an openness for having their faith deepened by the interreligious experience – *as* Christians, i.e., their criterion for appropriating the Qurʾān should be the *Gospel* in and through Jesus Christ. Christians from this reading perspective might explore how far "Gospel" is reflected in the Qurʾān, or to put it differently: which verses of the suras can be upheld and appreciated also from a Christian perspective as *signs*, as they are called in Arabic (*āyāt*), pointing to the ultimate truth of the one and only God which transcends all human endeavors at circumscribing it.

Aspects of Gospel from a Christian perspective can especially, but not exclusively be seen in the early Meccan suras.[40] Muhammad, through his recitations of the Qurʾān, extended the Good News of the one and only God, whose relationship to his creation is one marked by utmost mercy, initially to all the Arabs – and then beyond – in a way they could understand and accept. S*urrendering* to God includes the emulation of His mercy and goodness in daily life situations, as is also presupposed in Christianity. Therfore, a good Christian is always a "Muslim," in the sense of surrendering to the will of God. The same holds true for Jews.

In many suras, the Gospel, i.e., the Good News of God who turns mercifully to all of humanity, becomes transparent. As in the Bible, we also find in the Qurʾān passages that cloud this fundamental message (e.g., Q 5:33; Q 9:5). In many of these instances, a historical contextualization of these passages makes clear that the Good News was at times compromised in concrete crisis situations reflecting all too human ambitions. However, these extreme positions are embedded in a major stream of convictions reflecting the Good News of the merciful God. For example, with respect to the aforementioned Qurʾānic passages, the harsh proclamations at killing enemies are balanced by the surrounding verses.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims today are reminded by their holy scriptures that they should strive for an emulation of God's universal mercy and justice in their lives. They do so in the context of distinct value and knowledge systems that are markedly different from the ancient contexts reflected in their holy books. Believers are challenged and encouraged to bring to expression within their present times and under changing conditions the meaning of the Good News as fully as humanly possible.[41]

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[40] Cf. Kahl, *Studienkoran*. Cf. also a similar attempt in the 15th century at discovering aspects of Gospel in the Qurʾān by "sieving" it in this regard, by Nicolai de Cusa, *Cribratio Alkorani*. *Sichtung des Korans. Lateinisch-Deutsch*, Vol. I-III, edited and translated by Ernst Hoffmann, Paul Wilpert, and Karl Bormann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1993).

[41] Cf. Mahmoud M. Taha, *The Second Message of Islam* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987).

The three monotheistic religions share fundamental beliefs. Each one of them is based, however, on a particular, *ultimate* revelation: the revelation of God's covenant with the People of Israel through Moses; the revelation of the Gospel in and through the cross and resurrection of Christ; the revelation of God's word and will in and through the Qurʾān. From the perspective of any one of these three religions, the ultimate revelations of the other two sister religions could be appreciated as *relatively* valid revelations. These other revelations can stimulate, challenge, inform, and partly re-constitute one's faith which is grounded in a particular monotheistic tradition. For example, the Muslim rejection of classical Trinitarian and Christological conceptualizations in antiquity (cf. Q 112) could – and should – provoke a critical reflection of the strengths and weaknesses of these difficult and often misleading and confusing formulations of the Christian faith.[42] Any *biological* understanding of Jesus as "Son of God" is to be categorically rejected, both theologically and from a New Testament perspective. It might prove to be more appropriate from a New Testament perspective, and more plausible in the Western world to move into the direction of a Trinitarian understanding with reference to "modes of divine activity or appearance" or "modes of divine being."[43] This might in particular be of help for dialogue or trialogue within the monotheistic faith family. From here, e.g., Muslims could be challenged and asked for equivalent concepts, especially with regard to the Qurʾān as the word of God – as has been controversially discussed in Islamic theology of the first centuries – and the relationship and communication between God and humanity.

The belief in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and the salvific significance attached to the Christ event as effecting universal reconciliation, the theological concept of the compassionate God, the strongest emphasis on divine and human forgiveness, and the love even of the enemy are features that are *essential* to the Christian faith. It should be noted that some of these motifs also feature in the Qurʾān, and also in the Jewish Holy Scripture, and this could serve as a point

[42] Cf. Georg Langenhorst, *Trialogische Religionspädagogik. Interreligiöses Lernen zwischen Judentum, Christentum und Islam* (Freiburg: Herder, 2016), 317-319.
[43] "Seinsweisen," cf. Wilfried Härle, *Dogmatik* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1995, 384-408; and Karl Barth, *Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes. Prolegomena zur Kirchlichen Dogmatik*, Die Kirchliche Dogmatik, vol. I,1 (Zürich: Zollikon, 1932), 367-403.

of close contact, for exploring and deepening common tenets of faith.[44] In interreligious dialogue, Christians would have to insist on – and not relativize – the *centrality* of these features for *their* faith and try to communicate their significance and meanings in plausible and relevant ways.

Interreligious dialogue between Jews, Muslims, and Christians should be neither exclusivist, inclusivist, or simply pluralistic. It should be guided on all sides by an awareness of the basic commonalities while not clouding but appreciating difference. The attitude towards the other sister religions should be one of *critical appreciation*, motivated by an openness for mutual learning and deeper understanding of God's revelations for shaping just societies. This procedure requires a *Good News hermeneutics* – at least from a Christian perspective – according to which the Holy Scriptures are to be read critically while they are being appreciated contextually. The Christian criterion is the meaning of Gospel. Of course, what might exactly constitute "Good News" in the monotheistic faith traditions, remains a matter of debate. Even though we do not "have" or hold the Good News in our hands – not even unambiguously in the New Testament but only brought to expression by a variety of narratives and statements – its meaning range can at least be circumscribed. In my understanding, Gal 3:26-29 brings to expression an essential feature of Gospel, i.e., an inclusive faith community ruled by equality and justice as appropriate responses of believers to the preceding divine inclusion of all into the elect people of God brought about in and through Christ: "For you all are sons (and daughters) of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as much as you were baptized into Christ, you have put on Christ, be it as Jew or (gentile) Greek, be it as slave or free person, be it as male or female. For you all are one in Christ Jesus. But since you are of Christ, it follows that you are the offspring of Abraham, (i.e.) heirs according to the promise."[45]

[44] This holds true also with respect to the command to love one's enemies, cf. Q 41:34.

[45] Translation: W.K. My translation differs from other translations in verse 28: The usual rendering of *ouk evi* "as there is not" is problematic and unrealistic, and it would imply the erasure of difference which would be contrary to Paul's argument which is based on an appreciation of

According to my theological understanding that is informed by Paul Tillich's and Karl Barth's theologies, I do not regard a conversion to any of the other two sister religions as *necessary* for salvation, if one were to take serious the claims of each of these faith communities that the *same* God has been revealed in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, albeit in different contexts and modes. Theologically speaking, Jews, Christians, and Muslims do not need to convert in order to come to God because God has already come to them all. However, conversion can become an urgent need for spiritual and emotional development or even survival in one's own biography and therefore should not be denied.

Q 5:48 provides an understanding of the relationship of divine revelations to Jews, Christians, and Muslims that could serve as guideline for interreligious dialogue: "We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming [all] the Scripture that came before and protecting it: so judge between them according to what God has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you (2nd person singular). We have assigned a law and a path to each of you (2nd person plural). If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about."

Taking Q 5:48 as orientation, I propose an understanding of the three now distinct faith communities as variations of the one and only religion of God, according to which God created them to allow for a competition for goodness amongst their adherents. Interfaith dialogue is only meaningful if it helps translate the divinely revealed values of mercy and justice *for all* in society.

Conclusion

In order to do justice to Islam, Christians need to take serious the Muslim claim that Muslims – according to the Qurʾān – believe in the *same* God as do Jews and Christians, and that Muslims see themselves

difference over against any claims to superiority and salvation because of ethnic belonging or status. Christ does erase the claims, not the involved identities.

in the same broad monotheistic faith tradition with the two older "religions." Of course, also Muslims are expected to accept and to critically –from the perspective of Qurʾān – appreciate Christian and Jewish representations of their respective faith.

In my opinion, Christians cannot opt for a common tradition and belief in the same God and claim to have the same foundation in God's covenant with Abraham and the same hope with Jews, *and deny such with Muslims*! The realisation of the long history of a distortion of the Jewish faith in church and theology and the insight gained from the Christian-Jewish dialogue after the Shoah should inform the Christian-Muslim dialogue today. With Islam being the second largest religion in Germany, it is time to engage in serious interfaith dialogue and concrete encounters with Muslims – not as strangers of a different religion but as cousins in the same broad monotheistic faith family.[46]

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[46] Bertold Klappert, in an instructive contribution uses the metapher of a "common way" and recommends a model of a "neighborhood of religions" in order to describe the trialogue between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The term "neighborhood of religions" indicates the historical and theological closeness of the three faith communities under discussion, cf. B. Klappert, "Abraham eint und unterscheidet. Begründungen und Perspektiven eines nötigen 'Trialogs' zwischen Juden, Christen und Muslimen," in *Bekenntnis zu dem einen Gott?*, ed. Rudolf Weth (Neukirchen: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2000), 98-122.