Transformative Readings of Sacred Scriptures

Christians and Muslims in Dialogue

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Transformative Readings of Sacred Scriptures: Christians and Muslims in Dialogue

Edited by
Simone Sinn, Dina El Omari and Anne Hege Grung

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Transformative Readings of the Bible

Preface

Martin Junge

For us Christians the interpretation of the Bible is crucial since the stories, prayers and theological reflections in the Bible profoundly nurture our faith and our life in this world. One key dimension of the Reformation movement was the renewed focus on the Bible and its life-giving message. Martin Luther was a Bible scholar by training, and he stressed the importance of translating the Bible into the vernacular. He underlined that God's Word is a living word that aims at touching people's hearts so that they experience God's grace. Most renewal movements in the history of the church, be it pietism, popular Bible readings in base communities, or resistance movements in situations of oppression, find motivation and orientation in biblical texts.

Among Muslim scholars and within the Muslim community today, there is a vibrant conversation about the interpretation of the Qur'an. For Muslims, the Qur'an provides guidance for their relationship to God and to the world. Muslims recite Qur'anic verses when they pray and these support the Muslim community in daily life and at special moments. To learn verses of the Qur'an by heart is a key practice in Muslim spirituality, and Muslim ethics draw conclusions from the Qur'anic texts.

Christians and Muslims know full well that each text emerged in a specific context, and that each reading of the text takes place in a specific context. People of faith turn to their sacred scriptures in times of trouble and weakness as well as in times of joy and gratitude. People look at the texts when they seek guidance, and refer to them when they have to make major decisions.

The way in which we understand the texts is naturally informed by what is happening around us. As a Latin American, having grown up during times of oppression and massive violations of human rights, I remember

what it meant to read sacred texts against this specific sociopolitical context, and how that context informed the ways in which I approached, understood and read sacred texts.

The relationship between text and the diverse contexts is therefore one of the main topics in scriptural interpretation. In today's world, communication breakdowns seem to be the order of the day and communities that used to live together peacefully no longer manage to do so. Polarization, hate speech and extremism haunt our communities; violence or the threat thereof is frightening.

In the midst of this reality, the articles in this book, written by Christian and Muslim scholars, attest to the fact that dialogue is possible—dialogue within and between our communities about meaningful and responsible scriptural interpretation today. How do religious communities deal with those passages in their own sacred scriptures that condone, or even justify violence? How do we deal with "texts of terror" in our own scriptures? It is vital that together we try to discern, explain and learn to be accountable in more explicit ways to those key principles that inform our reading of sacred texts and help us to live in a shared world.

Important topics that currently trigger vibrant debates in our religious communities with regard to scriptural interpretation are the empowerment of women and the ecological crisis. If justice is not at the very center of how men and women interact with one another the world will never find justice and peace. Equally, justice needs to be at the center in how we relate to all of creation and the planet as a whole. Important interfaith activities have taken place in climate advocacy and we need to join hands in dealing with the significant challenges facing the human family.

The essays in this book were first presented at an international Christian-Muslim conference in 2016, which was organized by The Lutheran World Federation in collaboration with the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo, Norway and the Center for Islamic Theology, University of Münster, Germany. I would like to commend this publication to you; it is a clear sign that yes, dialogue is possible, yes, the world deserves strong contributions from religious communities and, yes, our focus is on transforming violence, oppression and injustice and live out the message of God's love, grace and mercy.

Introduction

Simone Sinn

Historically, the emergence of a discrete body of texts as "sacred scripture" has been closely associated with the formation of a distinct religious community. These sacred scriptures are of vital importance to the respective religious communities. For instance, as the Christian community recognized the biblical canon as authoritative scripture, the church and the Bible took shape. Equally, in Islam the recognition of the Qur'an as the authoritative scripture was crucial for the formation of the *umma*. These interrelated processes fundamentally connect the community to the text and vice versa.

These processes did not only occur when the communities came into being but continue to take place throughout the ages. Whenever Christians gather to listen to the gospel message, this constitutes the Christian community as church. Wherever Muslims gather to listen to the message of the Qur'an, there the Muslim community is alive.

Beyond this close relationship between a community and its sacred scripture, there have always been well distinct connections to other texts and other readings of the same texts and traditions. There is clearly a historical as well as theological interrelatedness between the Tanach, which Judaism refers to as sacred scripture, the Bible, which Christians regard as authoritative, and the Qur'an, which Muslims regard as the Word of God. These sacred scriptures did not emerge in isolation nor are they generally read in isolation. The reading of sacred texts can be used to distinguish and demarcate one's own community or to build bridges and establish a connection to other communities.

The interpretation of sacred scriptures is a contested field. Clearly the power of a sacred text can only unfold in its reading since the text needs a person and a community for whom the message becomes meaningful and relevant. Critical questions that many contemporary religious com-

munities struggle with include the following: Who has the legitimate right authoritatively to interpret sacred scriptures? What are appropriate approaches? What are suitable methods of interpretation? How is the notion of "sacredness" to be understood in the process of interpretation? Neither Christianity, nor Islam has one central authority that decides on these questions. Globally and locally interpretation is a polycentric endeavor--polycentric in terms of geographical diversity, various positions of influence and different approaches.

The essays in this volume contribute to debates on scriptural exegesis by proposing readings that take into account insights from the discourse on hermeneutics and interreligious dialogue processes. Christian and Muslim scholars from different contexts explore theoretical assumptions and interpret relevant texts from sacred scriptures, focusing specifically on "transformative readings." This implies that reading and interpreting sacred texts is not simply a matter of intellectually reconstructing the content of a text nor an act of immersing oneself into a preexistent tradition, but a reading that effects change by opening up new possibilities of knowing God and oneself and of being in the world.

This publication is divided into three sections. The first explores interpretative possibilities emerging when insights from other religious communities and other religious texts are taken into account. The various contributions look at the interaction and dialogue between texts, communities and scholars.

With reference to concrete examples of how interpretations shift over time, Oddbjørn Leirvik outlines how the concept of hell was reinterpreted in Christian circles, and how contemporary Muslim scholars deal with Qur'anic verses that condone violence. He identifies the "humanization of theological ethics" as a hermeneutical strategy that can offer transformative perspectives in contemporary Christian and Muslim interpretations.

Anne Hege Grung demonstrates that the humanization of theological ethics developed among scholars of Islam and Christianity can similarly be observed among the faithful in the communities. She analyses empirical data of a process where Muslim and Christian women together read difficult texts in the Qur'an and the Bible. The women in this interpretative community agreed that some texts from their respective traditions have the dangerous potential to be used in destructive ways. Hege Grung discusses the need for and possibilities of establishing forms of transformative hermeneutics through co-readings.

Analyzing historical developments, Stefan Schreiner explores the interwoven reception history between the Qur'an and the Bible. His starting point is the observation that many Qur'anic passages recollect texts and stories known from biblical and post-biblical Jewish and Christian sources

and he goes on to examine how scholars have interpreted the succession of revealed books and prophets. Schreiner's analysis clearly demonstrates that there is not only a historical correlation but a mutuality that is also theologically relevant for today's interpretation of the Qur'an and the Bible.

Nicholas Adams reflects on the unusual and remarkable practice of scriptural reasoning, which requires that scholars suspend their expertise and reason together on the basis of the text alone. This is frequently experienced as a provocative requirement, perhaps because it puts into question the status of the scholar. Adams draws attention to this aspect of scriptural reasoning, argues that it sheds light on important features of the practice, and suggest that it accounts for certain successes and failures among particular groups of participants.

The report from a dialogical experiment with a multi-religious and interdisciplinary team of scholars in Hamburg concludes this section. Katja Drechsler and Thorsten Knauth outline the methodological approach and results of this empirical endeavor and suggest that at the heart of the dialogical hermeneutics is a balancing act of four fields of tension: one related to knowledge, another one to context, the third one emerging from the distinction between sacred and profane and the fourth to the opposing dynamics of trust and suspicion.

The second section focuses on transformative readings of the Qur'an. Safet Bektovic summarizes recent developments in Islamic theology in Europe. He discusses the legitimacy of the concept of a European Islam and European Islamic theology and explores contemporary dimensions and perspectives of Islamic theological thinking in Europe. He concludes by describing their relevance in relation to the everyday lives of Muslims and the training of imams in Europe and clearly shows how structures and spaces for education and research need to be created that allow for transformative readings.

Mouhanad Khorchide speaks out of such a space. Khorchide is convinced that the Qur'an is not a monologue and, consequently, explores the Qur'an as an "act of communication." He underlines that the Qur'an is at the same time thoroughly divine and thoroughly human. In order to deal with the hermeneutical challenges, Khorchide finds helpful insights in Paul Ricoeur's reflections on hermeneutics. As a Muslim theologian, Khorchide highlights God's mercy as the hermeneutical key to understanding the Qur'anic message.

Since constructive interreligious relations are often restrained by exclusivist religious truth claims, Sahiron Syamsuddin critically addresses such claims. He reinterprets Q 2:111–113, which is often used to legitimize an exclusivist perspective. Syamsuddin interprets the text by employing a classic twofold approach--first by establishing the original meaning of

the text and second by articulating its significance for the contemporary situation. He shows how these verses can be interpreted in inclusive, even pluralist ways.

In light of renewed reflection on gender relations, the creation stories in sacred scriptures are again the focus of attention. Dina El Omari describes insights of contemporary feminist exegesis of the Qur'an. Looking at key Qur'anic passages, she points out that God created men and women at the same time from the same substance and highlights that from this perspective men and women are equal partners. El Omari discusses theological debates related to the concept of the Fall and argues that this concept is not part of the original Qur'anic message.

Asmaa El Maaroufi reinterprets Qur'anic passages referring to animals in order to develop fundamental guidelines for animal ethics from an Islamic perspective. She identifies similarities and differences between human beings and animals, and outlines the relationship that both have with the Creator. El Maaroufi explores the Qur'anic terminology used for the relationship between animals and human beings and critically addresses a reductionist anthropology. She pleads for repositioning humanity within the cosmos, and to develop more sensitivity to the close relationship between human beings and their fellow creatures.

Naveed Baig's contribution on Islamic spiritual care concludes this section. He explains how Qur'anic verses may help people in pain and suffering to find coping mechanisms and outlines how tradition and orthopraxy are present in the way religious Muslim patients cope during times of crisis. There are also signs that traditional Muslim coping ideals are expressed in ways peculiar to the individual's personal situation during times of suffering and need and a "talking with God" that defines new ways of perceiving God and the images of God.

The essays in the third section focus on transformative readings of the Bible. Clare Amos takes the reader on a journey through the book of Genesis and demonstrates the shifting presentations of God. Traveling through the story of creation, the story of the flood, the stories of Abraham, of Jacob and of Joseph and his brothers, Amos argues that God's voice in and through the biblical text is dialogical. Furthermore, she points out that the different names of God reflect various aspects of God's relationship to humanity. Amos encourages an approach to the Bible that takes this sacred scripture as a dialogue partner.

Kenneth Mtata highlights that the power of sacred texts lies in their ability to offer a language for alternative reality. He underlines that in the biblical tradition God's communication is an invitation of love. Mtata interprets 1 Samuel 1-7 and shows how in these chapters nation building transitions from a theocratic to a monarchical model. These passages pri-

marily depict the catastrophic nature of divine silence but also point to its reversal. Mtata explores what led to the decline and how the nation was restored through God's agency and God's messengers. The new alternative reality is shalom, which is fully God's, yet through God's grace humans participate in the realization of shalom.

Marianne Bjelland Kartzow observes that people relate to the Bible not only as sacred scripture, but also as a cultural, poetic, scholarly and political text. She argues that the theories of intersectionality and othering provide relevant insights for biblical interpretation today. She identifies hermeneutical and epistemological models in the New Testament which, due to their destabilizing potential, offer a space for transformation.

According to Martin Kopp, climate change is one contemporary ethical challenge that leads the interpreter of the Bible to approach the texts with questions its authors ignored. Kopp poses the question how science, exegesis and theology can collaborate to generate meaning and discern God's will. He advocates for a renewed interpretation of the scriptures in the face of the ecological crisis, and points out that a renewed theology will lead to a transformed understanding of what it means to be a Christian in today's world.

The contributions in this publication address the issue of transformative readings at the epistemological as well as the methodological level. While addressing different aspects of transformation--the structural, communal and individual—all of them affirm the communicative and dialogical nature of sacred texts. Thereby the cliché that sacred texts are sacred because they stand "apart" from mundane reality is questioned. Rather, sacred texts are here presented as invitations to dialogue and engagement because they are a living, communicative source for human knowledge of God's agency in this world.

It is obvious that sacred texts unfold their transformative power when they speak to people's hearts and minds. In order to prevent harmful readings and foster live-giving interpretations ethical and theological discernment is called for. Both, scholarly expertise and the communities of faithful are needed for such discernment. On many contemporary issues such as gender justice, animal ethics, climate justice, exclusion and violence joint Christian and Muslim scriptural interpretation provides an important space for transformative readings. These shared interpretative spaces open new possibilities of understanding and mutually reinforce engagement.

Reading Sacred Scriptures
in Dialogue

Handling Problematic Texts: Ethical Critique and Moral Enrichment

Oddbjørn Leirvik

In the following, I will address the issue of "problematic texts" in the Bible and the Qur'an. I will try to identify some hermeneutical strategies aimed at tackling such texts—strategies applied by ordinary believers as well as by theologians. I will relate my discussion to the concept of hell in the Christian tradition and the way in which Sura 5:32 is dealt with in popular Muslim discourses about religion and violence. As for professional hermeneutical strategies, I will discuss the concepts of ethical critique and moral enrichment of sacred scriptures.

Which themes are put on the agenda in interfaith dialogue is a matter of discursive power in a given context. In her analysis of the work of a long-standing interfaith dialogue group in the Swedish city of Malmö, Anne Sofie Roald notes that some of the Muslim participants felt that the agenda was heavily influenced by liberal Christians—reflecting their social-ethical commitment to human rights, gender equality, social justice and ecological balance. Ethical issues outside the liberal agenda, such as alcohol consumption, were seemingly simply not taken into consideration for discussion. Furthermore, difficult theological issues—such as the question of heaven and hell—were completely ignored in a dialogue that was entirely "down to earth" in its orientation.[1]

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[1] Anne Sofie Roald, "Religionsdialogiska perspektiv: En fallstudie av en dialoggrupp i södra Sverige," in Mikael Stenmark and David Westerlund (eds), *Polemik eller dialog? Nutida religionsteologiska perspektiv bland kristna och muslimer* (Nora: Nya Doxa, 2002), 83–97.

The doctrine of hell as a hermeneutical challenge

In contemporary Christian theology, at least in the West, the images of heaven and hell have seemingly been abolished altogether, along with a rejection of the idea that non-believers and adherents of other faiths face eternal perdition. The Swedish theologian Kajsa Ahlstrand has suggested that interfaith dialogue has in fact contributed to this development, as part of a general "softening in inter-faith discourse."[2]

Along with the ethical turn in modern theology, the doctrine of eternal damnation—with its traditional images of hellfire—tends to be seen as entirely incompatible with an ethically responsible theology. For many, it is seen as a real stumbling block for the humanization of theological ethics.

But how can those who strive for a humanization of Christian theology sidestep the image of a tyrannical deity who throws unbelievers into a hell of eternal torture? Are not these conceptions a pivotal part of the Lutheran confessions (The Augsburg Confession, Article 17)[3] as well as of the New Testament message? And what hermeneutical strategy can be applied to defend the abolition of hell and related conceptions?

Back in 1953, the issue of hell was the topic of a heated public debate in Norway in connection with a radio broadcast in which the famous Inner Mission chief Ole Hallesby said:

> I'm sure I speak to many this evening who know they have not turned to God. You know very well that if you fell dead on the floor at this moment, you would fall directly into hell ... So how can you, who have not turned to God, confidently go to bed and sleep at night when you don't know if you'll wake up tomorrow in your bed or in hell?[4]

The speech was transmitted by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, which at that time had a monopoly. The speech was heavily attacked by the general public and also by some church leaders. Hallesby hit back by

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[2] Kajsa Ahlstrand,"Softening in Inter-faith Discourse," (2003), at http://www.emmausnett.no/ressurser/ahlstrand_softening.shtml

[3] "They also teach that at the consummation of the world Christ will appear for judgment and will bring to life all the dead. He will give eternal life and endless joy to the righteous and elect, but he will condemn the ungodly and the devils to endless torment." "The Augsburg Confession—Latin Text—Article XVII: Concerning the Return of Christ for Judgment," in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 51.

[4] Ole Hallesby, "Omvend deg – nå! (Helvetestalen)," Virksomme ord, n.d., at http://virksommeord.uib.no/taler?id=3982, author's own translation.

stating that "in the Gospel of Matthew alone, Jesus spoke eighteen times about eternal perdition. And in nine of these instances, he vividly depicted the torment in various ways." To quote but one of Hallesby's examples from the parable of the weeds in Matthew 13:40–43:[5]

> As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Or in Matthew 10:28: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

Hallesby's chief opponent, the liberal Bishop Kristian Schjelderup, declared that for him, the doctrine of eternal punishment in hell was not compatible with what he called "the gospel of love":

> Undoubtedly, divine love and mercy are greater than what is expressed through the doctrine of eternal torment in hell. The Gospel of Christ is the gospel of love ... For me, the doctrine of eternal punishment in hell does not belong to the religion of love.[6]

Of course, the Bishop did not deny that in the gospels Jesus does speak of salvation and perdition. But Schjelderup could not imagine that perdition would mean eternal torment—which in his understanding would be "in contradiction with the very spirit of the divine revelation we have received through Christ."[7]

Oddly enough, the question was eventually dealt with by the Ministry of Church Affairs (this was in the state church era), which concluded that Bishop Schjelderup's position was not contrary to Lutheran doctrine, thus abolishing hellfire by political decree.[8]

Bishop Schjelderup's approach has been the main hermeneutical strategy of liberal theologians with a "humanizing" program: to take the sting out of problematic passages in the Bible by subordinating them to a superior message of love, which is postulated as the very core of the gospel. Reading the scriptures in light of a postulated center—the crucified Christ—is also

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[5] Quoted from the New International Version.
[6] Kristian Schjelderup, *De evige helvetesstraffer og bekjennelsen* (Oslo: Forlaget Land og Kirke, 1954), 15, author's own translation.
[7] Ibid., 21.
[8] Ibid.

a pivotal part of Lutheran hermeneutics. As demonstrated by Anne Hege Grung in her analysis of a group of Christian and Muslim women reading problematic texts together, the hermeneutical doctrine of Christ alone is often popularized to imply that anything in the New Testament that does not conform to the individual believer's image of Jesus can readily be discarded.[9]

But exactly how, when scrutinizing the scriptures, do we come to the conclusion that Jesus and the gospels represent a "religion of love"? Must we not acknowledge that important parts of the New Testament (as well as dogmatic tradition) actually portray God as vengeful and a torturer? If so, there is no escape from submitting the gospels to a fundamental, ethical critique. For our own moral integrity, we simply cannot accept images of God that are associated with eternal torment in God's name. The doctrine of hell is morally unacceptable.

In passing, it should be mentioned that the idea of eternal hellfire is also heavily represented in the Qur'an, often by the formula "the inhabitants of fire" (aṣḥāb al-nār): "Those who disbelieve and deny Our messages shall be the inhabitants of the Fire, and there they will remain" (Qur'an 2:39).[10] The Qur'anic imagery of hell is abundant and terrifying and the idea of divinely ordained hellfire constitutes a shared hermeneutical challenge for Islam and Christianity. How can the images of hell be reconciled with the belief in divine mercy? Must we not suspend them on ethical grounds?

ETHICAL CRITIQUE OF THE SCRIPTURES

In the Christian context, the legacy of an ethical critique of the scriptures goes at least back to Kant who, in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, criticized the story of Abraham's readiness to sacrifice Isaac in light of the universal moral law.[11] The stories of Abraham's sacrifice constitute another shared hermeneutical challenge for Jews, Christians and Muslims and the idea of human sacrifice as a proof of obedience to God is of course deeply troubling from an ethical perspective.

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[9] Anne Hege Grung, *Gender Justice in Muslim–Christian Readings. Christian and Muslim Women in Norway: Making Meaning of Texts from the Bible, the Koran, and the Hadith* (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2015), 41–44.

[10] For wider Islamic traditions, see Christian Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[11] Nils Gilje, "Filosofisk teologi og religiøs erfaring, et kantiansk perspektiv," in Arve Brunvoll, Hans Bringeland, Nils Gilje and Gunnar Skirbekk (eds), *Religion og kultur. Ein fleirfagleg samtale* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2009), 60–75.

In the contemporary context, the Christian feminist theologian Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in a 1987 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature, summoned biblical scholars not only to take public responsibility for their choice of interpretive methods but equally "for the ethical consequences of the biblical text and its meanings."[12] Developing her argument, she located the ethical problem not only in the act of interpretation but in the authorial construction of the texts themselves:

> If scriptural texts have served not only noble causes but also to legitimate war, to nurture anti-Judaism and misogynism, to justify the exploitation of slavery and to promote colonial dehumanization, then biblical scholarship must take the responsibility not only to interpret biblical texts in their historical contexts but also to evaluate the construction of their historical worlds and symbolic universes in terms of a religious scale of values.[13]

Modern Christian theologians increasingly recognize ethical critique of the sacred scriptures as an unavoidable exercise in theological hermeneutics.[14] But how can we handle the unease we feel when faced with morally troubling texts? Should we suspend them in the name of a higher interpretative principle, or challenge the sacred texts on moral grounds?

To me, moral or ethical critique is a more convincing hermeneutical strategy than just declaring that anything problematic in the scriptures can be obliterated by a postulated "religion of love" or "gospel of Christ." But we need to be clear about which ethical principles we apply in our critique and explain why we think that exactly these principles (or values) are trumping anything else in the sacred traditions.

Islam and violence

Whereas Christians (at least in the West) have a long history of being challenged in their beliefs in hell, Muslims face other types of challenges in public debates. There is little doubt that many Muslims share traditional

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[12] Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation," in *Journal of Biblical Literature* (107), 15.

[13] Ibid.

[14] See Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism. A Moral Critique* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); Heikki Räisänen, "På väg mot en etisk bibelkritik," in *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 65 (2000), 227–42; and Oddbjørn Leirvik, "Interreligious Hermeneutics and the Ethical Critique of the Scriptures," in Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Interreligious Studies. A Relational Approach to Religious Activism and the Study of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 105ff.

Christian views of heaven and hell, as numerous Islamic webpages with graphic descriptions of hellfire abundantly demonstrate. But it is not the symbolic violence implied in these images that captures critical attention from the general public. It is rather the question of real, and religiously legitimized, violence that dominates the discussion.

In current debates about religion and violence, Muslims are constantly confronted by isolated verses from the Qur'an such as the notorious "sword verse" in Q 9:5 ("kill the polytheists wherever you find them") or Q 8:60 which is also the motto of the Muslim Brotherhood: "Prepare whatever forces you [believers] can muster, including warhorses, to frighten off God's enemies and yours ..."[15]

Believers can contextualize these verses without too much difficulty by referring to the particular circumstances that may have prompted them, namely violent animosity against the first Muslims and their still-precarious situation after the emigration to Medina. To balance the same verses, Muslims may also mobilize much more peaceful passages such as the ubiquitously quoted "no compulsion in religion" (Q 2:256) and, not least, the following passage from Q 5:32: "If anyone kills a person ... it is as if he kills all mankind, while if anyone saves a life it is as if he saves the lives of all mankind."

If we look at the preceding literary context of the latter verse, we will find the Qur'anic version of the story of Cain and Abel, which is retold in a way that corroborates the apparent non-violent ethos of verse 32: "If you raise your hand to kill me, I will not raise mine to kill you. I fear God, Lord of all worlds" (5:28).

The problem with the subsequent verse 32 is the mid-verse reservation which reads, "If anyone kills a person – unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land—it is as if he kills all mankind." In my experience, this reservation is normally ignored (or concealed) when Muslims quote this verse in current discussions about religion and violence.

Judging by the following verse 33, the ignored reservation in verse 32 (which legalizes the taking of lives in certain circumstances) seems actually to be the point here:

> Those who wage war against God and His Messenger, and strive to spread corrup-tion in the land should be punished by death, crucifixion, the amputation of an alternate hand and foot, or banishment from the land: a disgrace for them in this world, and then a terrible punishment in the Hereafter ... .

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[15] The Qur'anic quotations are taken from *The Qur'an*, A New Translation by M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Another verse in the immediate literary context (verse 38) legalizes the cutting off of hands for theft.

So what is going on here, when the mid-verse in Q 5:32 is simply cut away and the problematic parts of the literary context are completely ignored? It seems that the Qur'an is being censored by well-meaning believers who are inclined to reinterpret the entire Book of God as a divine message of mercy. Much like the "Gospel of Christ" and "religion of love" invoked by Bishop Schjelderup, a postulated principle of mercy trumps anything in the sacred scriptures that is morally problematic for the modern mind (or for a Muslim human rights proponent). In his book, *Islam is Mercy: Essential Features of a Modern Religion*,[16] Mouhanad Khorchide, eloquently demonstrates the hermeneutical key of divine mercy.

But how should the complex relationship between non-violent admonitions and divinely sanctioned violence—be it the symbolic violence of hellfire or the terrifying reality of *hudud*-punishments—be addressed hermeneutically? Must one resort to a cut-and-paste strategy, so to speak, in the name of love?

The cut-and-paste strategy is not, of course, an acceptable hermeneutical strategy in learned circles. Some Muslim academics have responded to the need for a moral discussion of the scriptures by developing their own, congenial approaches to scriptural hermeneutics. A triggering factor has been that of gender-based violence.

Saying "no" to the text?

Amina Wadud's hermeneutical development in her struggle with Qur'anic texts that are felt to be problematic in relation to gender-based violence (especially the notorious verse 4:34, which seems to allow the husband to hit a disobedient wife), is interesting. Whereas in her 1992 book, *Qur'an and Women*, she tended to "save" the text by indicating alternative translations of *ḍaraba*,[17] in her later 2006 book (*Inside the Gender Jihad*), she emphatically says "no" to the text (or at least, its literal meaning):

> There is no way of getting round this one, even though I have tried through different methods for two decades. I simply do not and cannot condone permission for a man to "scourge" or apply any kind of blow to a woman ... . This leads me to

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[16] Kindle edition (Freiburg: Herder, 2014).

[17] Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman. Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999), 76.

clarify how I have finally come to say "no" outright to the literal implementation of this passage.[18]

This also has implications for Wadud's reasoning regarding the *hudud* (penal code) ordinances:

> This verse [4:34] and the literal implementation of *hudud* both imply an ethical standard of human actions that are archaic and barbarian at this time in history. They are unjust in the ways that human beings have come to experience and understand justice, and hence unacceptable to universal notions of human dignity.[19]

An ethical critique of sacred texts could hardly be spelled out more clearly, and that by a believer. Wadud also notes that the felt necessity to say "no" to Q 4:34 implies that "we finally arrive at a place where we acknowledge that we intervene with the text." Defending her hermeneutical strategy, Wadud claims that "the collective community has always manipulated the text in concert with civilizational or, better still, human development ... . We are the makers of textual meaning."[20]

MORAL ENRICHMENT OF THE TEXT: PART OF THE PROCESS OF REVELATION?

In her argument, Wadud leans partly on the reasoning of the Egyptian-American thinker Khaled Abou El Fadl. When criticizing violence and other problematic issues such as authoritarian structures, gender inequality and intolerance of other faiths, Abou El Fadl (like Wadud) does not stop at criticizing the interpretive tradition but also opens a critical, dialogical hermeneutics of the Qur'an. Abou El Fadl does not, however (like some Christian theologians), speak of an ethical critique of the sacred text, but instead introduces the notion of moral enrichment. Noting that the Qur'an repeatedly appeals to the moral sense of its reader by its reference to general terms such as "justice" (*'adl*) and "right" (*al-ma'rūf*), he suggests,

> ...the Qur'anic text assumes that readers will bring a preexisting, innate moral sense to the text. Hence the text will morally enrich the reader, but only if the reader

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[18] Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad. Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 200. Cf. Aysha A. Hidayatullah, *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 138–41.

[19] Wadud, op. cit. (note 17), 200.

[20] Ibid., 204.

will morally enrich the text. The meaning of the religious text is not fixed simply by the literal meaning of its words, but depends, too, on the moral construction given to it by the reader.[21]

A similar approach is taken by Ebrahim Moosa in a chapter about "The debts and burdens of critical Islam," published in the 2003 anthology *Progressive Muslims*. Moosa notes that a number of practices seemingly sanctioned by the normative sources have in fact been abandoned by modern Muslim sensibilities: "For a whole set of reasons, we no longer consider marriage to what our modern culture deems minors, corporal punishment and the death penalty to be acceptable practices."[22] Like Abou El Fadl, Moosa takes a step further—from historical contextualization towards a critical conversation with the sacred text itself, by suggesting that all kinds of "text fundamentalism" must be avoided and the critical response of the reader must be taken seriously—as part of "the process of revelation." Referring to indisputable patriarchal features of the Qur'an, he writes:

> It may be preferable to hear the Qur'an in its patriarchal voice but to understand it with the sensibility of an actor/reader/listener/reciter immersed in the process of revelation. It is that listener/reciter who discovers through her or his history, experience and transformed inner sensibility that gender justice, equality and fairness are a norm for our time and not patriarchy.[23]

What shines through in Moosa's reasoning, is an ethical hermeneutics focused on a reader's response. Involving the contemporary reader in the very process of revelation, he even formulates a theological hermeneutics characterized by interactivity. Criticizing those who exclusively seek authority in some founding text for failing "to engage the text in an interactive manner," he claims that:

> It is precisely such interactivity that transforms the human being who is ultimately the subject of revelation and who has to embody the qualities that combat patriarchy and endorse justice and equality … The truth is that we 'make' the norms in conversation with the revelatory text.[24]

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[21] Khaled Abou El Fadl et al., *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press. 2002), 15.
[22] Ebrahim Moosa, "The Debts and Burdens of Critical Islam," in Omid Safi (ed.) *Progressive Muslims. On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 122.
[23] Ibid., 125
[24] Ibid.

In the Islamic context, the approaches of Wadud, Abou El Fadl and Moosa break new ground in theological hermeneutics. Their way of reasoning can readily be applied by Christian theologians as well. Actually, their ideas of moral enrichment of the text and of readers being included in the process of revelation may be considered as more dialogical than the perhaps more monological concept of ethical critique. However, from a feminist theological viewpoint (cf. Wadud), it is crucial that the right to say "no" to the text is retained.

The humanization of theological ethics

However we name these hermeneutical strategies, their common horizon seems to be the humanization of theological ethics.[25] But we cannot, as Christian and Muslim interpreters, avoid explaining our normative positions. Where do we find those ethical principles with which we morally criticize or enrich the sacred scriptures? If basing our reading on a non-violent, humanistic premise, how did we reach this critical point of no return from divinely sanctioned injustice and violence?

In conclusion, I will suggest how Tariq Ramadan's 2005 moratorium could be read in this respect.[26] In his much-debated communication, Ramadan called for an immediate moratorium on the death penalty and *hudud* punishments in the Muslim world. Similarly, in 2001, Abou El Fadl had called for a "conscientious pause" regarding the applications of *hudud* ordinances, realizing that such a pause "might result in a faith-based objection to the textual evidence."[27] Returning to Ramadan, he explains that the intention behind his conscientious moratorium was to address

> ... the conscience of each individual, to mobilize ordinary Muslims to call on their governments to place an immediate moratorium on the application of these punishments and to call for Muslim scholars for the opening of a vast intra-community debate on the matter.[28]

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[25] Leirvik, op. cit. (note 14), 134–37.

[26] Tariq Ramadan, "An International Call for Moratorium on Corporal Punishment, Stoning and the Death Penalty in the Islamic World," 5 April 2005, at http://www.tariqramadan.com/spip.php?article264.

[27] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name. Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 93; cf. Wadud, op. cit (note 17), 200.

[28] Tariq Ramadan, "A Call for a Moratorium on Corporeal Punishment—The Debate in Review," in Kari Vogt, Lena Larsen and Christian Moe (eds), *New Directions in Islamic Thought. Exploring Reform and Muslim Tradition* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 165.

When reading Ramadan's call, it struck me that the guiding principle behind his moratorium was actually a theologically motivated concern for the vulnerable human being. Ramadan realizes that, in an imperfect world with asymmetrical power relations, severe punishments will regularly affect women more than men and the poorer and weaker members of society much harder than the wealthy and powerful ones. If we recognize this somber reality, says Ramadan, "it is impossible for us as Muslims to remain silent as irreversible injustice is done to the poorest and weakest members of society in the name of our religion."[29]

Muslim as well as secular Western reactions against the proposed moratorium proved its controversial character. Several critics said that Ramadan should have called for a full abolition of *hudud* punishments and not merely a "moratorium." The way Ramadan argues his proposed moratorium, however, gives the clear impression that his call is really meant for an indefinite period of time, probably for ever. For, from Ramadan's perspective, how can such punishments ever be justified when we know how the world works?

In my view, ethical concern for the vulnerable human being is clearly the implied premise for Ramadan's moratorium. I therefore take his call as an example of humanizing theological reasoning in Islam. In Ramadan's case, his application of the humane criterion in theological reasoning leads him to sidestep important aspects of classical Sharia–for the sake of the vulnerable ones. In tune with Emmanuel Levinas's face-to-face philosophical ethics, I would suggest that concern for the vulnerable human being is the common ground for any call for ethical critique or moral enrichment of the sacred scriptures.

A topic that remains for further dialogue is whether we see God as a vulnerable deity or whether we–on moral grounds–simply have to resist God's all-too-powerful authority.

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[29] Ibid., 163.

Transformative Hermeneutics in the Making through the Co-Reading of Biblical and Qur'anic texts by Muslim and Christian Women

Anne Hege Grung

Introduction

What happens when Muslim and Christian women come together in order to co-read the Bible and the Qur'an? Can establishing such forms of interpretative communities provide new resources for understanding and negotiating with our canonical scriptures? In this contribution, I will explore the complex hermeneutical situation that may arise when Muslim and Christian women read and discuss biblical and Qur'anic texts together. Drawing on empirical material established in a Norwegian context from an interpretative community of this kind, I will look further into how the participants' reading strategies and interpretation are situated between interpretative authority, ethical critique and moral enrichment of the texts and how the interpretative encounter between the readers from the two traditions shapes their understanding. This understanding moves between understanding and investigating the texts and interpreting and exploring the contexts represented in the group. The women in the interpretative community I studied agree that some texts from their respective traditions have the dangerous potential to be used in destructive ways. The need for and the possibilities of establishing forms of transformative hermeneutics through co-readings emerged from the group's work. But what does this transformation consist of and who and what will possibly be transformed? Is it the readers, the texts, the interpretative tools or communities in a wider sense that are object(s) of transformation?

THE TEXTS AND THE GROUP OF READERS

The texts we worked with in the group were the Hagar narratives from both traditions as they occur in Genesis and the Hadith and two prescriptive texts from the New Testament and the Qur'an: 1 Timothy 2:8–16 and Sura 4:34. I will not reflect further on the interpretative work on the Hagar texts here, but concentrate on the prescriptive texts and how the readers dealt with them together. Let me cite both of the texts before I continue:

1 Timothy 2:8–15:[1]

> I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands with-out anger or argument; also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

Sura 4:34:[2]

> Men are in charge of women,[3] because Allah hath made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then, if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High, Exalted, Great.

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[1] The text read and distributed in the group was from the Norwegian Bibelen, 1978 edition in *bokmål*, The Norwegian Bible Society.

[2] The text is from Muhammad M. Pickthall, and Marmaduke William Pickthall (eds), *The Glorious Qur'an: Text and Explanatory Translation* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1996, first edition 1984). The text read and distributed in the group was from the Norwegian version of the Qur'an, *Qur'anen*, transl. by Einar Berg (Oslo: Universitets forlaget, 1980). In the Norwegian version Sura 4:34 is numbered Sura 4:38.

[3] In the Norwegian version of the Qur'an that was read in the group, "in charge of" is translated into the Norwegian word *bestyrelses autoritet*. This could be translated as "executive authority" and has different connotations in Norwegian than the word "supporter" has in English. In the later discussion the Arabic word *qiwama* from the Arabic Qur'an is brought up and discussed.

Thorough exegetical work on both of these texts, including historical context, linguistic and semiotic analyses and all the other work biblical and Qur'anic exegesis includes when interpreting these texts, have been conducted by several exegetes. Some have also worked comparatively with the texts on a textual or theoretical level. But studies of how readers affiliated with the Christian or Islamic faith and religious practice interpret and make use of the texts in their religious practice is less studied, and this includes processes of co-reading Christian and Muslim canonical texts. Projects connected to the practice of scriptural reasoning and Lissi Rasmussen's study, "Diapraxis and Dialogue between Christians and Muslims," are significant exceptions.[4] To study how insiders and believers interpret and read their canonical scriptures as part of their religious praxis may provide valuable insights both from a lived religion perspective and from a more traditional theological perspective. To study the dynamics of co-reading of canonical scripture with people from two or more religious traditions present may generate knowledge about interreligious co-existence and negotiation on a shared interpretation of the texts' context, which the readers may share.

I study the texts cited earlier through the comments of the readers of the texts and through the interaction between readers coming from the different religious and cultural traditions. The participants in this co-reading came from different cultural backgrounds, including Christian women readers whose backgrounds were partly East African and Middle Eastern to avoid a complete overlap between Christian and Norwegian backgrounds. Among the Muslims, a majority had a Pakistani–Norwegian background, but one woman had an Iranian–Norwegian background. The readers' religious affiliations included Sunni and Shia Muslims as well as Lutheran and Roman Catholic Christians. The highly diverse religious and cultural backgrounds of the readers contributed varied significant interpretative or hermeneutical insights on how the texts are used and read in different contexts and how they can be interpreted in light of cultural and geopolitical settings when readers tease out the meanings of the texts through conversations. The differences also contributed to how the readers interpreted their encounters, in particular in regard to establishing and articulating challenges from various perspectives. I pursue two questions. (1) What are the challenges of the texts for the readers in this study? (2) What are the challenges of the Muslim–Christian mixed cultural encounter when reading the texts and discussing them with regard

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[4] David Ford and C. C. Pecknold, *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), and Lissi Rasmussen, *Diapraksis og dialog mellem kristne og muslimer: i lyset af den afrikanske erfaring* (Diapraxis and dialogue between Christians and Muslims: In light of the African experience) (Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 1997).

to their respective contexts? Before I explore these questions, I will look into how the readers positioned themselves as readers and what kind of interpretative authority they claimed to possess as individuals and as a group. After I have discussed these questions further, my presentation will move on to address questions on establishing a transforming hermeneutics: Why, how, and where, connected to what and to whom?[5]

The group originally consisted of ten people, but mostly between five and eight people participated in our six meetings lasting for three–four hours each. In the group, the work on the texts started with someone reading the texts aloud. Usually, a Christian read the biblical text and a Muslim read the text from the Qur'an or the Hadith. From the beginning, the readers established themselves as having a right to read and interpret the texts. The challenge was the extent to which they viewed their interpretations as being seen as authoritative for fellow-believers and communities. The women in the group did not consider themselves as religious leaders as such and none of them held formal positions as leaders in their respective religious communities. What they had was knowledge about and experience of struggling with their respective texts and engagement with the meaning of the texts. Some had received formal education in their religious tradition; all had been playing responsible roles in their faith communities or in interreligious or intercultural dialogues.

Ethical critique and moral enrichment of the texts

The Christian women felt that they were granted authority in their tradition itself. This was particularly the case with the Lutheran women–whose conviction could be expected on the basis of Lutheran biblical hermeneutics. They interpreted this authority as being, according to the concept proposed by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, the obligation to read and interpret Christian canonical scripture with an ethical perspective and to practice an "ethical critique of the texts."[6] Schüssler Fiorenza laid this obligation on biblical scholars rather than on "ordinary" readers of the Bible. She reasoned that scholars have a responsibility for what they legitimize and

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[5] For a more thorough and substantial presentation of the methodology of the study, including a presentation of the readers, the working methods of the group and the conversations, you can consult Anne Hege Grung, *Gender Justice in Muslim-Christian Readings. Christian and Muslim Women in Norway Making Meaning of Texts from the Bible, the Qur'an, and the Hadith* (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2015).
[6] Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation," in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988), 3–17.

convey to new generations and to believers and that texts having messages that are evaluated as unethical should be openly criticized. When the group critiqued the text from 1 Timothy, the Christian readers dismissed the text as "unchristian." They were deeply worried about the text's (and its related Pauline authority's) potential to convey a message of oppression of women and they claimed that all Christians, including women, were saved through divine grace, not through childbirth. They called on what they perceived as the original message of Jesus to support their evaluation of 1 Timothy and declared it to be contradictory to Jesus' teachings.

The Muslim women were more concerned about the need to increase common knowledge of the text and its context among their fellow Muslims and, in particular, Muslim leaders and the *ulama* rather than to state their own interpretive authority. On several occasions, they mentioned that women and women's experiences should be included in interpretative work with the texts at all organizational and scholarly levels. But if they did not articulate their authority, they actively participated in the group. Regarding their interpretation of Sura 4:34, they showed how alternative interpretations of the concept *qiwama* were possible. Instead of connecting it to male authority, they cited Islamic feminist scholars such as the late Fatima Mernissi to show that this concept could well be understood as the principle of the strong helping the weak—regardless of gender. They also discussed the part of the Sura concerning abandonment and physical punishment of a disobedient wife. They were not ready to compromise on the authority of the Qur'an as God's revelation and had no alternative exegesis to provide to the immediate content of this part. Instead, they added their own moral judgments on the contextual understanding of this verse and broadened the perspective. First, they agreed that mental pressure and physical punishment were equally harmful and constituted a transgression of a person's boundaries that should be protected. Secondly, they argued that the Sura could be understood as a limitation of the violence permitted in a marriage: harmful violence and killing were clearly not legitimized, in fact forbidden, in the text. And lastly, they stated that they would recommend divorce rather than performing or accepting an act of violence whether major or minor. Unlike the Christian women, they criticized not the text itself but its interpretations and offered new perspectives and contextual knowledge. Abou El Fadl's concept of "moral enrichment of the text" seems very suitable here: the idea—as a principle grounded in the Qur'an itself—that the reader of the Qur'an not only has the possibility but also the responsibility to enrich the Qur'anic text with her own moral universe.[7]

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[7] Khaled Abou El Fadl et al. (eds), *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

After presenting the main interpretative work in the group on these two texts very briefly and having connected it to the two hermeneutical concepts of "ethical critique" and "moral enrichment" of the texts, which Oddbjørn Leirvik explores in a greater depth in his contribution in this volume, I will now turn to other hermeneutical concepts that could be used to analyze the group's work on the two texts and which may be examples of hermeneutical transformative tools.

Caution: "The texts may be dangerous—handle with care"

After the two texts were read aloud for the first time, the readers immediately shared their first general reactions to them. One of the Muslim participants referred to the texts as "dangerous" if they were used to legitimize the oppression of women. One of the Christian participants said they were dangerous if they were not interpreted in a skilled manner. Other aspects of the texts' potential to produce destructiveness were also indirectly mentioned: they were seen as potentially misrepresenting the religions if they were "misused," that is, if they conveyed an image of women or of the relationship between women and men that was in conflict with what the readers understood as the core or original message of the Christian and Islamic traditions. They were all confident that their traditions' original message was one of gender justice. In many ways, this was the key hermeneutical platform that they all shared in principle in what could be described as a practical diversity.

Establishing inter-subjective time between the readers and between readers and texts

Some reactions to the texts may be characterized as an attempt to place them in a different period and thus to establish a distance to them. The view that the texts reflected a different time with another cultural and social view of women was particularly present among the Christian readers with a Norwegian background. Others in the group pointed out that the distance between different realities for women was not only a matter of different periods of time but also of different spaces/places, as in differing cultural and geopolitical contexts. Experience of and knowledge about contemporary places outside the Norwegian context were included in the conversation and thus broadened what was seen as the significant context in which to consider the texts in hermeneutical work.

To use the concept of time—more precisely historical evolutionism—to establish distance to other humans has been explored and criticized by the social anthropologist Johannes Fabian.[8] Originally criticizing his own discipline for how research objects tended to be defined by anthropology's colonial past, his reflections are also useful in this context. Fabian posited a need to establish what he called an "inter-subjective time"—in his case between the researcher and the object of research—in order to establish "coevalness." Fabian claims that created and acknowledged "coevalness" is a necessity because such shared time is necessary to create a space of "inter-subjective time" in which communication is possible.[9] Without acknowledged "coevalness," communication will not happen because one of the subjects (or both) has distanced themselves from the other through temporal categorization. Inter-subjective time, which makes communication possible and counteracts the establishing of hierarchies between cultures, groups of people—and, I would add, religious groups—needs to be established and appears automatically as a result of a decisive act in which a shared present is acknowledged. We may speak of inter-subjective time between people, but can we also speak about inter-subjective time between a text and a reader? If we aim to transform texts or their meaning, there is no access to the text other than from the readers' presence. To enter into an act of transformation requires engagement, not distance. This would be valid for human encounters with both texts and other humans.

What about the actual time gap between biblical and Qur'anic texts and their readers? Can we impose our time on the texts? The cultural theorist Mieke Bal introduces the concept of "bold anachronisms" in which she argues that our only access to history (including historical texts) is from the present.[10] She warns that we should not assume that we have a full overview over other cultures, other religions or other historical times. This means that our reading will always be anachronistic. Rather than trying to avoid this (which she anyway thinks is impossible), we should read in a skilled manner, knowing which interpretative elements we use and where we situate ourselves. For Bal, to engage with "bold anachronisms" is the only way to take the past seriously. This means that when our group readers criticize, dismiss, reinterpret or add perspectives to the texts from 1 Timothy and Sura 4:34, they are taking the texts seriously.

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[8] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

[9] Ibid., 30f.

[10] Mieke Bal, *Loving Yusuf: Conceptual Travels from Present to Past* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

The discussions on the prescriptive texts in this Muslim–Christian co-reading opens up space for discussion on present challenges, thanks to the inter-subjective time established between the readers and between them and the texts. The readers also engage with what post-colonial feminist theologian Kwok Pui-Lan calls "diasporic consciousness" through negotiating meaning between different contexts, cultures and religious traditions and between the past and the present.[11] Kwok also states that it is necessary to emphasize the interpretative work done by "ordinary readers" of the Bible in order to create a broader interpretative community and knowledge basis for interpretation.

Seeds of transformative hermeneutics

In the group's work on 1 Timothy and Sura 4:34, the hermeneutical strategies I have described are used to formulate at least two direct aims for transformation: (1) to make these two texts less dangerous for women; and (2) to establish an interpretative relation, including the exchange of knowledge between the readers across their religious and cultural affiliations (and possibly to communicate this knowledge outside the group) in order to establish a shared present. The latter aim was most evident when the Muslim readers introduced their alternative interpretation of *qiwama*. When the word was explained as referring to the concept of the duty of the strong to support the weak rather than to legitimize the husband's authority over his wife, the surprise and relief of the Christian readers was written all over their faces. This not only transformed their view of this piece of the Qur'an, but it also reinforced their view of their Muslim co-readers as necessary and valuable human resources of knowledge about the Qur'an.

What is the object of transformation and who does it involve? One aspect of transformative hermeneutics is to question the authority to interpret. Questions of interpretative authority over canonical texts are actually negotiations of interpretative power concerning who can decide on a text's meaning and under what circumstances. In the Christian and Islamic traditions in which the canonical texts traditionally hold a significant position, this authority is salient for how religion is lived. The Qur'an has a different status in Islam than the Bible in the Christian tradition. This is reflected in the teachings and the authoritative religious practices in the two traditions. Another question may be how much this is reflected among "ordinary," non-scholarly, readers. The group of readers in my study and

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[11] Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2005).

in particular the Muslims were very clear in their call for transformation of interpretative authority. At the same time, they concentrated their criticisms on other readers rather than on the Qur'anic texts themselves. They claimed that "women must be included" in the ongoing interpretations of texts and practice at all levels.

In Muslim–Christian co-readings, your own text is being read by someone from a different religious tradition and you read the other person's text. The exchange of questions and knowledge that this generates may transform the personal relationship between the participants and point to mutual challenges. The main challenge for the Christian readers in the group was to understand the contexts of other Christians living in different religious and cultural circumstances than their own, and to learn about their Muslim co-readers and about the Qur'an as a living text. In this way, the texts also transformed the human encounter into hard, engaged hermeneutical work. Opening up for mutual critique, self-criticism and self-reflection in the process of reading and discussing the texts contributed to establishing inter-subjective time, making communication possible. This was perhaps the most significant promise of transformation.

THE INTERRELATEDNESS OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES: THE QUR'AN AS AN INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

Stefan Schreiner

Whoever studies the Qur'an encounters passages that refer to or even resemble biblical and/or post-biblical, Jewish and/or Christian traditions on almost every page.

When, almost two centuries ago, Abraham Geiger (1810–1874) raised the question, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentume aufgenommen?* in his dissertation,[1] he inaugurated a new discipline in the study of the Qur'an and Islam, whose main objectives were, and still are, to identify all possible Jewish and Christian "sources" of the Qur'an. Since then, an entire library has been written, reaching its peak with Heinrich Speyer's (1897–1935) book,

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[1] Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentume aufgenommen?* (Bonn, 1833; Leipzig: Kaufmann, ²1902; last reprints: Berlin: Parerga Verlag, 2004; Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2010 [= Gorgias Theological Library, vol. 40]); English, *Judaism and Islam: A Prize Essay*, transl. F. M. Young (Bangalore, 1896; Madras: M.D.C.S.P.C.K. Press, ²1898; last reprint: London: Forgotten Books, 2012). Cf. Johann Fück, *Die arabischen Studien in Europa* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1955), 174f., and the articles published in Dirk Hartwig, Walter Homolka, Michael J. Marx and Angelika Neuwirth (eds), *"Im vollen Licht der Geschichte." Die Wissenschaft des Judentums und die Anfänge der kritischen Koranforschung,* Ex Oriente Lux—Rezeptionen und Exegesen als Traditionskritik, vol. 8 (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2008), esp. Aaron W. Hughes, "Contextualizing Contexts—Orientalism and Geiger's *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentume aufgenommen* Reconsidered," ibid. 87–98.

Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran.[2] Without going into further detail,[3] it is worthwhile noting that, whereas Jewish scholars were eager to prove that Judaism and its biblical and post-biblical writings were the first and foremost "sources" of Muhammad's inspiration, Christian scholars tended to prove exactly the opposite, namely, that Muhammad was deeply rooted in, and indebted to, the legacy of oriental Christians; accordingly, they did not spare any effort to identify the Christian "sources" of the Qur'an. Over the almost two centuries since Geiger's book, Jewish and Christian scholars alike were, and sometimes still are, convinced that they can trace almost every verse of the Qur'an back either to a Jewish or a Christian "source."[4]

Until today, the relationship between the Qur'an and the Bible has remained subject to debate in Islamic studies, but the agenda and objectives have changed.[5] Today, it is not so much the quest for the so-called actual or alleged "sources" of the Qur'an that scholars are dealing with, but the search for an answer to the question about the character and meaning of the relationship between the Qur'an and the Bible; that there is a relationship between them is obvious and cannot be overlooked. The Qur'an and the Bible are connected, and this connection is not a one-way street; on the contrary, the connection between the two scriptures appears to be a mutual

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[2] Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Gräfenhainichen: C. Schulze und Co., 1931; reprint Hildesheim/Zürich/New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1961; [3]1988; on this book, see Franz Rosenthal (1914–2003), "The History of Heinrich Speyer's *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*," in Hartwig et al., op. cit. (note 1), 113–16.

[3] Cf. the literature cited in Stefan Schreiner, "Der Koran als Auslegung der Bibel – die Bibel als Verstehenshilfe des Korans," in Hansjörg Schmid, Andreas Renz, Bülent Ucar (eds), *"Nahe ist dir das Wort…" . Schriftauslegung in Christentum und Islam*, Theologisches Forum Christentum—Islam (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2010), 167–83 = in Stefan Schreiner, *Die jüdische Bibel in islamischer Auslegung*, ed. Friedmann Eißler and Matthias Morgenstern, Texts and Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Judaism, vol. 27 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 1–18, note 1.

[4] Johann Fück's critical résumé "Die Originalität des arabischen Propheten," in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 90 (1936), 509–25 = in Johann Fück, *Arabische Kultur und Islam im Mittelalter. Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Manfred Fleischhammer (Weimar: Herman Böhlaus Nachf., 1981), 142–52, reflecting hundred years of scholarship after Geiger's dissertation, is more than worthwhile reading still today.

[5] Cf., e.g., Schreiner, op. cit. (note 3); furthermore, Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext,* Routledge Studies in the Qur'an (London/New York: Routledge, 2010); Gabriel Said Reynolds (ed.), *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context* (London/New York: Routledge, 2008); Gabriel Said Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qur'an = The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, vol. 2, Routledge Studies in the Qur'an, vol.12 (London/New York: Routledge, 2011); Corrie Jonn Block, *The Qur'an in Christian–Muslim Dialogue. Historical and Modern Interpretations*, Culture and Civilization in the Middle East, vol. 38 (London/New York: Routledge, 2013; [2]2016).

relationship that can be described as an interrelatedness. Indeed, the Qur'an and the Bible are intertwined in a very specific way.

Repeatedly, the Arabian prophet is instructed *wa-ḏkur fī l-kitābi,* "to remember or to mention the book,"[6] that is, to bring to mind the memory of people, individuals as well as nations, who received the revelation beforehand and to recollect and retell their (hi)stories. The prophet is even instructed "to remind" (*ḏakkara*) his audience of the fate and destiny of those who went before and "to admonish" (*ḏakkara*) his audience to be aware of what those people experienced *fa-ḏakkir innamā anta muḏakkir:* "So admonish [them], because you are an admonisher" (Sura 88:21). Similarly, the Qur'an is described as a "book of remembrance" (Sura 38:1: *ḏū ḏ-ḏikr*), as a book "endowed with all that one ought to remember," according to Muhammad Asad's (1900–1992) interpretation,[7] and nouns which denote precisely that[8] are repeatedly applied to the revealed message that the Qur'an conveys: *ḏikr* (Sura 7:63.69; 12:104; 38:87; 68:52; 81:27), *ḏikrā* (Sura 6:69.90; 11:114.120; 74:31), *taḏkira* (Sura 69:48; 73:19; 76:29), as W. Montgomery Watt (1909–2006) has already rightly observed.[9] Time and again, the Qur'an refers to and draws upon already existent traditions, and (hi)stories.

While the study of the Qur'an already uncovers the presence of biblical and/or post-biblical traditions, it should be noted, however, that the Qur'an hardly quotes any biblical or post-biblical text literally.[10] In most instances, it presents the texts and stories that have parallels in biblical and/or post-biblical Jewish and/or Christian traditions in versions that are clearly different from their biblical or post-biblical counterparts. Nowhere is the Qur'anic rereading of a biblical and/or post-biblical text based on a written document, a written Arabic translation of the Bible or the like. And it cannot be otherwise, because at the time of the writing of the Qur'an, no written Arabic Bible translation existed. Whenever the Qur'an "remembers" biblical or post-biblical texts and stories, it draws on what could be called "free-floating oral traditions" that circulated among Jews and Christians living on the Arabian Peninsula, as Sidney H. Griffith has rightly pointed out.[11]

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[6] See, e.g., Surah 19,16.41.51.54.56; 38,41.45.48; 46,21.

[7] Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān* (Gibraltar/Dublin: Dar al-Andalus, 1980; ²1992), 694.

[8] Muʿğam alfāẓ al-Qurʾan al-Karīm, 2 vols (Cairo: *Mağmaʿ al-luġa al-ʿarabīya*, 1409/1989), I, 433 s.v. ḏ-k-r.

[9] W. Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān,* Islamic Surveys, vol. 8 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 144f.

[10] See, e.g., Angelika Neuwirth, "Psalmen—im Koran neu gelesen (Ps 104 und 136)," in Hartwig et al., op. cit. (note 1), 157–89.

[11] Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic. The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), esp. 7–96.

Compared to their biblical and post-biblical counterparts, the Qur'anic rereadings differ in the sense that the Qur'an usually presents them in rather brief, abridged versions. The only exception to the rule, i.e., the only biblical story that is retold in the Qur'an at greater length, is the story of Yūsuf/Joseph in Sura 12 that bears his name in the title.

Mostly, however, the Qur'an simply alludes to biblical and post-biblical stories as is the case in the story of Ayyūb/Job, who is "remembered" twice, but both times only very briefly: in Sura *al-Anbiyā'* (21:83-84) and in Sura *Ṣād* (38:40-44).

Moreover, in their Qur'anic form, these biblical and post-biblical stories are often presented not only once but several times, and not only in one version but in versions differing from each other in their literary character as well as in their outlook according to their respective contexts. To give but two examples:

Again, as an exception to the rule, the story of the *ʿAqeda*, the binding of Abraham's/Ibrāhīm's son (1 Moses 22) is retold in the Qur'an only once (Sura 37:99–113).[12] On the other hand, Jonah/Yūnus, sometimes called *Ḏū n-Nūn*, "the one of the great fish" (Sura 21:87) and sometimes *Ṣāḥib al-ḥūt,* "the companion of the great fish" (Sura 68:48), appears no less than ten times in the Qur'an, and his story appears not only in four different Suras, but at the same time also in four different versions, varying in content, form and outlook depending on their respective contexts (Sura 10:96–98; 21:87–88; 37:139–148; 68:48–50).[13]

By and large, however, the Qur'an gives the impression that it can be taken for granted that the prophet's audience had an overall knowledge of the content of the earlier revealed books, so that there is no need to retell all the stories at length; it suffices to "remind" his listeners of them and to confine the remainder to what is new or how they should be interpreted and understood.

The mere fact that biblical and post-biblical stories are told in the Qur'an cannot be a surprise. The Qur'an itself confirms on several occasions that the Bible is an integral part and thus part and parcel of the Islamic tradition, part of the prehistory of the Qur'an as well as of the Qur'an itself.

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[12] Stefan Schreiner, "Die 'Bindung Isaaks'. Die 'Aqeda in jüdischer und islamischer Überlieferung," in Stefan Meißner and Georg Wenz (eds), *Über den Umgang mit den Heiligen Schriften. Juden, Christen und Muslime zwischen Tuchfühlung und Kluft,* Interreligiöse Begegnungen—Studien und Projekte, vol. 4 (Münster/Berlin: LIT-Verlag, 2007), 140-157 = in Schreiner, op. cit. (note 3b), 46–74.

[13] Stefan Schreiner, "Muhammads Rezeption der biblischen Jonaerzählung," in *Judaica* 34 (1978), 148–70 = in Schreiner, op. cit. (note 3b), 173–95.

A prophetic *Ḥadīṯ* narrated by Abū Huraira (c. 600–678) has the prophet answer the question, what is *īmān* (belief)? by saying: "the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) [...] replied: [*īmān* (belief) is] that you believe in God, His angels, His [*Holy*] Books (*bi-kutubihī*), His Messengers, in meeting Him [on the Day of Judgment], and that you believe in the Resurrection hereafter."[14]

Saying this, Muhammad remembered and confirmed what he himself was taught earlier and what he was instructed to convey to his faithful followers and believers:

> The Messenger [of God] believes in what has been sent down upon him by his Lord, and the believers with him, they all believe in God, His angels, His [*Holy*] Books (*bi-kutubihī*), His Messengers, making no distinction between any of his Messengers. And they say: "We have heard, and we pay heed. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord, for with You is all journey's end" (Sura 2:285).

Likewise, we read in the same Sura:

> Say, we believe in God, and in what has been bestowed upon us, and in what has been bestowed upon Ibrāhīm/Abraham, Ismāʿīl/Ismael, Isḥāq/Isaac, Yaʿqūb/Jacob and the Tribes [of Israel], and [in] what was given to Mūsā/Moses and ʿĪsā/Jesus and what was given to the Prophets by their Lord, and we make no distinction between any of them. And it is unto Him that we surrender ourselves (Sura 2:136).

However, neither the abovementioned *Ḥadīṯ* nor the verses quoted from the Qur'an provide any further detail regarding the books mentioned, nor do they specify their character. Neither do we hear anything about their content. Nevertheless, it should be noted that according to the text of the Qur'an as well as of this *Ḥadīṯ*, it is not one book only in which believers (Muslims) are called to believe, but books (in the plural: *bi-kutubihī).* Thus, it is certainly not only the Qur'an that is meant here, but other books are alluded to as well, something that deserves to be emphasized and all the more as today, this *Ḥadīṯ* is quite often quoted as if it reads in the singular: "they all believe in God, His angels, His [*Holy*] Book (*bi-kitābihī,* i.e., the Qur'an) etc."

More information about these books can be obtained from the Qur'anic context. According to it, they include scriptures that contain a revealed message and are regarded as books of divine origin transmitted by God's

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[14] Transmitted by Muslim b. *al-Ḥaǧǧāǧ* (817/21–875), *al-ǧāmiʿ aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ,* book I: k. *al-īmān,* no. 4 and 6; and Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl b. Ibrāhīm al-Buḫārī (810–870), *al-ǧāmiʿ aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ*, book II: k. *al-īmān,* no. 47 and book LX: k. *tafsīr al-Qur'an,* no. 300.

Messengers, prophets.[15] Altogether, the Qur'an mentions six such books by name:

1. The "Leaves (ṣuḥuf) of Ibrāhīm/Abraham and Mūsā/Moses" (Sura 87:18-19)
2. The "Torah (taurāt) of Moses" (Sura 3:3.48.50.65.93; 7:157; 9:111; 61:6; 62:5), i.e., the "Scripture revealed unto Moses" (kitāb Mūsā) and transmitted by him (Sura 2:53; 11:110 = 41:45; 11:17; 17:2; 23:49; 25:35; 46:12 etc.)
3. The "Psalms" (zabūr) bestowed upon David (Sura 4:163; 17:55; 21:105)
4. The "Scripture" (al-kitāb) bestowed upon John the Baptist (Sura 19:12);
5. The "gospel" (inğīl), i.e., the Scripture vouchsafed to Jesus (Sura 5:46 etc.)[16]
6. The "Arabic Qur'ān" sent down upon Muhammad (Sura 12:2 etc.).

In other words, to the books mentioned in the Qur'an, which Muslims are admonished to believe in, belong books which, according to Muḥammad ʿAbduh (1849–1905) and others, represent one tradition of revelation, one chain of revealed and prophetically transmitted books, otherwise called the Holy Scriptures or books of the Bible. However, the abovementioned list of books indicates at the same time that when speaking about biblical books, the Qur'an apparently means something other than the Bible as we know it today from the Jewish and Christian traditions. And this cannot be otherwise because, as indicated above, the formation of the Qur'anic text took place at a time and in an environment where there was no Arabic Bible yet.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that as far as the "Torah (taurāt) of Moses" and the "Psalms of David" (zabūr) are concerned, at least two parts of the tripartite canon of the Hebrew Bible are mentioned explicitly,[17] and the "Gospel of ʿĪsā/Jesus" (inğīl) may be regarded as a *pars pro toto* title for the entire New Testament or even the Christian Bible. But neither Jewish nor Christian traditions know anything about "Leaves (ṣuḥuf) of Ibrāhīm/ Abraham and Mūsā/Moses," let alone a "scripture" (al-kitāb) sent down unto John the Baptist. Despite all that, it seems to be appropriate to assume that when the Qur'an mentions these books, it refers to the Bible, making it part of its own prehistory and, at the same time, including itself into the *Auslegungs- und Wirkungsgeschichte*, the reception history of the Bible.

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[15] Prophets according to the Qur'an, of course.

[16] *Muʿğam alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Mağmaʿ al-luġa al-ʿarabīya, 1409/1989), I, 93-94 s.v. *i-n-ğ-ī-l.*

[17] Likewise, in Luke 24:44 the "Psalms" are mentioned to designate the third part of the canon of the Hebrew Bible (cf. Sirach, Prologue, and 1 Maccabees 12:9).

The reason for connecting Qur'an and Bible in this way is explained in the Qur'an itself: first, with reference to its concept of the unity of revelation and the succession of revelations and revealed books emerging from it and, secondly, with reference to the—likewise—Qur'anic concept of the succession of prophets.

THE UNITY OF REVELATION AND SUCCESSION OF REVEALED BOOKS AND PROPHETS

If God is but One (cf. Sura 112), then God's revelation, God's prophetically transmitted message must also be one. Thus, the Qur'an says:

> He has sent down from on high upon you (*nazzala*) the Book that is the Truth (*al-kitāb bil-ḥaqq*), confirming (*muṣaddiqan*) whatever there still remains [of earlier revelations]: for it is He who has sent down from on high the Torah (*at-taurāt)* and the Gospel (*al-inğīl*) before, as a guidance[18] unto all people. And He has sent down from on high the standard or measure (*al-furqān*) by which to discern [the true from the false] (Sura 3:3-4).[19]

Likewise,

> Verily, We revealed unto you just as We revealed unto Nūḥ/Noah and the prophets after him (*innā auḥainā ilaika kamā auḥainā ilā Nūḥ wan-nabīyīna min ba'dihī*)—just as We revealed unto Ibrāhīm/Abraham, Ismā'īl/Ismael, Isḥāq/Isaac, Ya'qūb/Jacob and the Tribes [of Israel], 'Īsā / Jesus, Ayyūb/Job, Yūnus/Jonah, Hārūn/Aaron and Sulaimān/Solomon, and We vouchsafed unto Dāwūd/David the Book of Psalms (*zabūr*) (Sura 4:163).

Therefore, all those who follow these prophets, listen to their message and accept it, believe *eo ipso* in one and the same God as the source and origin of all revelation and prophetically transmitted messages, as the Qur'an affirms:

> We believe in what has been sent down from on high upon us as well as what has been sent from on high down upon you: for our God and your God is one and the same, and it is unto Him that we surrender ourselves (Sura 29:46).

Affirming this, the Qur'an forbids Muslims, Christians and Jews to see each other as non-believers, "because they all observe and follow one and

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[18] This is precisely what the Hebrew word *torah* literally means (cf. Sura 5:44–49).
[19] Cf. the interpretation offered by Asad, op. cit. (note 7), 65f.

the same God's word and commandment," as Ğalāl ad-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 1459) explained in his commentary on the verse cited.[20]

If God is One and the only One and God's message is likewise one message only, then all the prophets (provided they all are messengers of this One God) who received and proclaimed God's divine message constitute a *silsilat al-isnād*, a single chain of transmitters and their respective messages likewise constitute one chain of transmission, in other words: a "prophetic succession" or "succession of prophets," as could be inferred from the Sura 4:163 verse quoted above.

Though every nation has its own messenger or prophet (Sura 10:47), they all are part of one and the same sequence of messengers, between whom "no distinction is being made" (Sura 2:136 and 285). Therefore, with reference to Muhammad we read in the Qur'an: "[And as for you,] nothing is being said to you but what was said to all messengers before you" (Surah 41:43). Therefore, Muhammad "is not an innovation among the messengers" (*ma kuntu bidʿan mina-r-rusul*), but is proclaiming "what the earlier revealed books contain" (Sura 26:196).

This concept of a "succession of prophets"—according to the Qur'anic idea of prophets and prophetology—includes the stipulation that every prophet announces the coming of his successor explicitly as, in turn, every successor explicitly refers to his predecessor: Thus, Muhammad is "the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet (*an-nabīy al-ummī*)[21] whom they shall find described in the Torah that is with them and in the Gospel" (Sura 7:157),[22] provided that they understand the Torah and the gospel correctly

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[20] *Tafsir al-Ğalālain*, ed. Ḫālid al-Ğūğā (Damaskus: n.d.), 531–32.

[21] For theological reasons, every prophet must be "unlettered, illiterate" to make sure that he is not the *author* of his message or scripture, but its *transmitter* only, as Philon of Alexandria (c. 15/10 BCE—c. 40 CE) already discussed with reference to Moses; see, Yehoschua Amir (1911–2002), "Mose als Verfasser der Tora bei Philon," in Yehoschua Amir, *Die hellenistische Gestalt des Judentums bei Philon von Alexandrien*, Forschungen zum jüdisch-christlichen Dialog, vol. 5 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983), 77–106. Therefore, Jeremiah dictated his message to his secretary Baruch (cf. Jeremiah 36,4sq.). Similarly, Muḥammad had his personal scribe in the person of Zaid b. Ṯābit al-Anṣārī (d. between the years 662 and 676) who, according to Islamic tradition, wrote down the message which Muḥammad was proclaiming. The only exception to this rule seems to be the Persian prophet Mani (216–276) who, so we are informed, himself authored his books accepted by the Manicheans as their Holy Scriptures.

[22] At this point, Muslim Qur'an commentators usually refer to biblical passages such as Deuteronomy 18:18–20; Isaiah 5:26–30; Matthew 21:33–46 etc. For further details, see Hava Lazarus-Yafeh (1930–1998), *Intertwined Worlds. Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 75–110.

(Sura 2:121).[23] An illuminating early example of this type of Muslim Bible interpretation that reveals dozens of announcements of and allusions to (the coming of) Muhammad in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament alike, can be found in the *Kitāb ad-dīn wad-daula* by Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Sahl Rabban aṭ-Ṭabarī (c. 830/8–c. 870)[24] (who, by the way, was a Christian physician from Persia who at an advanced age converted to Islam).[25]

From Sura 2:129, we learn that Ibrāhīm/Abraham already prayed (alluding to Deut 18:18): "Our Lord, raise up for them a messenger from among themselves who shall convey unto them Your Verses and teach them the Scripture and the Wisdom and purify them." And in Sura 61:6 it is ʿĪsā/Jesus himself who announces the coming of his successor:

> And ʿĪsā/Jesus, the Son of Maryam/Mary said: "O children of Israel, behold, I am the Messenger of God unto you, confirming [the truth of] whatever there still remains of the Torah and announcing a messenger who shall come after me, and his name shall be Aḥmad."

Since an entire library has been written on this much debated verse,[26] it would go well beyond the scope of this paper to discuss it anew. Muslim commentators see in it a clear reference to Jesus announcing the coming of a *paráklētos* (Jn 14:16f.; 15:26; 16:4b–15 etc.) and Rabban aṭ-Ṭabarī already suggested that the word *paráklētos* in the Gospel of John should

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[23] Cf. Muḥammad ʿIzzat Ismāʾīl at-Tahtārī, *Muḥammad—nabīy al-islām fī t-Taurāt wal-Inǧīl wal-Qurʾān* (Cairo, n.d.); David Benjamin, *Muhammad in der Bibel* (München: SKD Bavaria Verlag, 1992); Martin Accad, "Muhammad's Advent as the Final Criterion for the Authenticity of the Judeo-Christian Tradition: Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's *Hidāyat al-ḥayārā fī aǧwibat al-yahūd wa-ʿl-naṣārā*," in Barbara Roogema, Marcel Porthuis, Pim Valkenberg (eds), *The Three Rings—Textual Studies in the Historical Trialogue of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2005), 216–36.

[24] Arabic text ed. Alphonse Mingana (1878/81–1937) (Manchester/London: Univ. Press, Longmans, Green, and Co/Bernard Quaritch Ltd, 1923); English, *The Book of Religion and Empire*, transl. Alphonse Mingana (Manchester [etc.]: University Press, 1922, last reprint LaVergne, TN: Kessinger Publishing LLC, 2010).

[25] See Max Meyerhof (1874–1945), "Alī ibn Rabban aṭ-Ṭabarī, ein persischer Arzt des 9. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.," in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 85 (1931), 38–68.

[26] For a summary, see Asad, op. cit. (note 7), 861 n. 6; and Yūsuf Qazmā Khūrī et al. (eds), *ʿĪsā wa-Maryam fī l-Qurʾān wat-tafāsīr* (Amman: Dār āš-Šurūq lin-našr wat-tauzīʾ, 1996), 525a-532b. In the same way, and long before the rise of Islam, the Manicheans too regarded Jesus announcing the coming of the *paráklētos* as Jesus' announcement of the coming of their prophet Mani (216–276/7); cf. Alexander Böhlig (1912–1996), *Die Gnosis—der Manichäismus* (Düsseldorf/Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1997), 23–24 etc.

be understood as a misspelling of an alleged "original" *períklytos* which in Arabic means *aḥmad* ("praised"), just as 'Īsā/Jesus said in Sura 61:6.[27]

According to this concept of the "succession of prophets," the "differences" between the prophets are rather "formal." They differ from each other only with regard to: (1) their audience; (2) the time and (3) place of proclaiming their message; and (4) their language. Thus, every prophet conveys his message (1) to his people; (2) in his time; (3) in his place; and (4) in his language—Moses to the Jews of his time in Hebrew (the language of the Torah), Jesus to the Christians in Greek (the language of the gospel) and Muhammad to the Arabs of his time in Makkah and Madinah in "clear, pure Arabic" (Sura 12:2; 43:2 etc.).

No distinction between the prophets and their messages

The concept of successive revelation and succession of prophets also proves that no distinction can be made between them, because all revelation, i.e., all revealed and prophetically transmitted divine messages, originate from the same source: they all go back to the one "Book of God" (Sura 35:29), which is the "Mother of the Book" (Sura 13:39; 43:4; 47:20) that is inscribed upon the "well-guarded, well-preserved tablet" (*lauḥ maḥfūẓ*) in heaven (Sura 85:22). Nevertheless, in the same way that prophets differ from each other in each conveying his message to his people in his time at his place and in his language—their (orally) proclaimed messages and eventually also the books containing their messages in writing differ from each other above all with regard to their audiences and language. But all of them (re)present the same revelation that, put into writing, became— literally—a writ (*kitāb* > *k-t-b* "to write"), i.e., scripture or book.

It should be added in parentheses that there is a remarkable difference in the understanding of what revelation means. In Christianity revelation means incarnation: "The (divine) *Logos* became flesh" (Jn 1:14: *ho logos sarx egeneto*), while in Islam, the (Divine) *Logos* became (proclaimed) word and, eventually, book. In view of that, Jacques Berque (1910–1995),[28]

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[27] Among the European Orientalists it was Ludovico Marraci (1612–1700), who was the first to come up with the same idea without knowing anything about Rabban aṭ-Ṭabarī; see E. Denison Ross, Ludovico Maracci, in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies,* University of London 2 (1921), 117–23.

[28] Jacques Berque, *Relire le Coran* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993); German, *Der Koran neu gelesen*, transl, Monika Gronke, with an introduction by Tilman Nagel and preface by Mohamed Bennouna (Frankfurt am Main: Lembeck Verlag, 1996), 118.

Stefan Wild[29] and others therefore once suggested describing the Islamic concept of revelation as *inverbation* ("Logos becoming word") or *inlibration* ("Logos becoming book").

Even though these books contain God's revelation—the prophetically transmitted revealed message has been put into writing, each in its own way, i.e., in one language only. Therefore, no book can claim to contain the "preserved tablet" in full, let alone be regarded as its perfect copy. Every book presents and represents only part of it. It is only the sequence of books, their succession, which may be regarded as a presentation and representation of the entire "preserved tablet."

Despite the idea that no distinction is being made between the revealed messages and their transmitters (messengers or prophets), it cannot be overlooked that the Qur'an and the Bible, as we know them, are very distinct from each other.

According to the concept of prophetic succession and the succession of revealed messages and books, they should have been identical. But they are not, as can easily be affirmed by comparing the two books. Already Muhammad's Jewish and Christian contemporaries were unable to recognize their Holy Scriptures in their reading of the Qur'an and therefore rejected it and refused to follow the Arabian prophet (Sura 2:145). Instead, they insisted on believing only in what has been sent down to them (Sura 4:150). But

> those who deny God and His messengers and make a distinction between [belief in] God and God's messengers and say; "We believe in the one, but we deny the other," and want to pursue a path in between, they certainly are denying the truth, and for the deniers [of the truth] We have readied shameful suffering (Sura 4:150-151).

In order to explain the apparent distinctions between the Qur'an and the Bible, the Qur'an itself already suggested the idea (that was further developed by later Muslim scholars) that became known as intentional "alteration or falsification of scriptures" (*taḥrīf* or *tabdīl*) by Jews and Christians (Sura 2:75-79).[30]

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[29] Stefan Wild, *Mensch, Prophet und Gott im Koran. Muslimische Exegeten des 20. Jahrhunderts und das Menschenbild der Moderne* (Münster: Rhema-Verlag, 2001), 6.
[30] Cf. e.g., Surah 5,13: *ḥarrafa l-kalima 'an mawāḍi'ihī*; Surah 2,58-59 = 7,161–162: *baddala qaulan*; Surah 3,78: *lawā alsinatahū bil-kitāb*; Surah 2,42; 3,71: *labisa l-ḥaqq bil-bāṭil*; Surah 6,92: *aḫfā kaṭīran*, and Surah 2,79: *kataba l-kitāba bi-aidaihī*. For an analysis of these various Qur'anic expressions used to describe what "falsification of scriptures" means, see W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (London/New York: Routledge, 1991). On the concept of "alteration or falsification of scriptures" and its later development, see Thomas F. Michel SJ in his introduction to *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's Al-Jawab al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ* (Delmar, N.Y.: Caravan Books,

Had the Bible, the Torah and the gospel not been "falsified," but preserved in their original form as transmitted by Moses and Jesus respectively, they would be identical, congruent with the Qur'an. The mere fact, however, that this is not the case sufficiently proves that they must have been altered and falsified for whatever purpose.

The apparent distinctness of the Qur'an from the Bible and the inability of Jews and Christians to recognize their Holy Scriptures in the Qur'an in turn caused them to start to translate their Holy Scriptures "into the language of Islam," as Sidney Griffiths put it.[31] Indeed, Christian and Jewish versions of the Bible in Arabic began to emerge precisely as a reaction to Muhammad's message as an answer put forward to reproach and, at the same time, to correct the distorted version of the(ir) Bible contained in the Qur'an, thus, making a distinction. However, making such a distinction between the prophets and their messages is—according to the Qur'an—a sign and proof of disbelief (Sura 4:150-151).

SUCCESSION OF PROPHETS AND BOOKS AS SUBSEQUENT CONFIRMATIONS OF THE TRUTH CONTAINED IN THEM

The "succession of scriptures" as based on the idea of the unity of revelation and of revealed books does not mean, according to Qur'anic prophetology, that all revealed books are of equal rank, value, importance and validity. On the contrary, the idea of succession implies also that there is a sequence of prophets and books in terms of time, which is to be understood as a *climax ascendens* reaching its peak with the last prophet and culminating in the proclamation of the Qur'an:

Thus, the "Leaves of Abraham" precede the "Torah of Moses," the "Torah of Moses" precedes the "Gospel of Jesus," and the "Gospel of Jesus" precedes the Qur'an (Sura 3:65). Likewise, in his time, each successive prophet was regarded as the "seal of the prophets" sent to "seal" the sequences of messengers before him. Thus, in the same way as Moses and Jesus—and

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1984); Martin Accad, "Corruption and/or Misinterpretation of the Bible—The Story of Islamic Usage of *Taḥrîf*," in *Theological Review* 24/2 (Beirut, 2003), 67–97; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds. Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 19–74; Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*, Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science, vol. 22 (Leiden/New York/Köln: E.J. Brill Publ., 1996), 223–48. Schreiner, op. cit. (note 3), esp. 175–77.

[31] Griffith, op. cit. (note 11).

according to Manichean tradition also Mani—were "seals of the prophets,"[32] each in his time, in the same way Muhammad is the "seal of the prophets," but not only in his time, but of all the prophets of all times (Sura 33:40). With him, the succession of prophets ends.

The same idea is applied to the revealed books: The "Torah of Moses" (taurāt) and the "Gospel of Jesus" (inǧīl) were once "guidance and light" (hudā wa-nūr) in their times, but now it is the revelation transmitted by Muhammad that is not only the last in terms of time, but also the final and ultimate revelation in terms of significance and validity (Sura 3:3). The sequence in time of prophets and books reflects their ranking and order of priority. Thus, every successive prophet is superior to his predecessor.

Here we have the same type of concept of prophets as in the Jewish tradition, with one significant difference: instead of the Qur'anic *climax ascendens* (see above), the Jewish tradition assumes a *climax descendens*.

According to the Jewish tradition, it is not the last but the first prophet, Moses, who is superior to all others after him (see Talmud Bavli Yevamot 49b; Wayyiqra Rabba I,14).[33] Therefore, rabbinic sources describe and call Moses "the father of all prophets" (av kol ha-nevi'im):[34] All prophets who came after him are deemed inferior to him, and not only that, because the chain, the succession of prophets ends with the death of the last biblical prophet, the last prophet explicitly mentioned by name in the Hebrew Bible, that is Malachi, for "with the death of Malachi the spirit of prophecy withdrew from the world" (Tosefta Sota II,30). Consequently, any prophets coming after the death of Malachi were certainly not prophets, but regarded as false prophets.

Nevertheless, to prevent us from drawing premature conclusions, a little detail in the biblical obituary on Moses (Deut 34:10–12)[35] should not

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[32] Ibn Kaṯīr (1301–1372), e.g., calls Jesus "the seal of the prophets of the children of Israel"; see Abū l-Fidā' Ismā͑īl Ibn Kaṯīr, *Muḫtaṣar tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad A. aṣ-Ṣābūnī, 3 vols (Beirut/Mekka, ³1984), III, 493; furthermore, Carsten Colpe, *Das Siegel der Propheten. Historische Beziehungen zwischen Judentum, Judenchristentum, Heidentum und frühem Islam,* Abhandlungen zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte, vol. 3 (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1990), 15–37 and 227–43.

[33] See Stefan Schreiner, "'Der Vater aller Propheten'. Mose als Prophet und die Prophetie des Mose in jüdischer, christlicher und islamischer Tradition," in Klaus von Stosch and Tuba Isik (eds), *Prophetie in Islam und Christentum,* Beiträge zur komparativen Theologie, vol. 8 (Paderborn/München/Wien/Zürich: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2013), 13–34.

[34] See, e.g., the Midrashim Wayyiqra Rabba I,3; Ester Rabba I; Shemot Rabba XXI,4; Bereshit Rabba LXXVI,1.

[35] Cf. Sirach 44,23-45,5, and Philon of Alexandria, *Vita Mosis* II,189-191.

be overlooked. This obituary begins with the words: "Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses," which means that Moses was/is the greatest prophet in Israel. Outside Israel, among the nations of the world, however, it is not impossible that a prophet like Moses might rise (Sifre Devarim § 357 end; Yalqut Shim'oni II § 966).[36] And the Yemenite Jewish philosopher Netan'el ibn al-Fayyūmī (12th c.) identified the Arabian prophet as a prophet like Moses from among the nations of the world.[37]

But the abovementioned Qur'anic *climax ascendens* should likewise not to be misunderstood. It does not imply that each succeeding prophet and their books render their predecessors irrelevant and unimportant. On the contrary, as can be learned from the Qur'anic concept of succession as summarized in Sura *al-Ma'ida* 5:44-49:

> (44) Verily, it is We who sent down from on high the Torah (*taurāt*), wherein there was guidance and light (*hudā wa-nūr*), and on its strength did the prophets, who had surrendered themselves unto God, deliver judgment unto those who followed the Jewish faith etc. [...]. (46) And We caused 'Īsā/Jesus, the son of Maryam/Mary, to follow in the footsteps of those [earlier prophets] confirming the truth (*muṣaddiqan*) of what was before him of the Torah. And We sent down from on high upon him the Gospel (*inǧīl*) wherein there was guidance and light (*hudā wa-nūr*), confirming the truth (*muṣaddiqan*) of what was before him of the Torah, a guidance and admonition unto the God-fearing. [...] (48) And upon you, We have sent down from on high the book that is the truth (*al-kitāb bil-ḥaqq*) confirming the truth (*muṣaddiqan*) of what was before him of the Book and corroborating [literally: saying *Amen* to] it (*muhaiminan 'alaihi*) [...]

Consequently, the succession of prophets and books is to be understood as the "confirmation" (*taṣdīq*) and "corroboration" (*haimana*) of a preceding prophet and his book by his/its respective successor. Thus, the Qur'an does not only repeat the message contained in the Torah and the gospel in pure and clearly understandable Arabic (Sura 41:43; 46:9), but it confirms their truth and significance as guidance and light (*hudā wa-nūr*). As the gospel

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[36] Cf. Bemidbar Rabba XIV, 20, and Talmud Bavli Bava Batra 15b.

[37] Netan'el al-Fayyūmī, *Bustan al-'uqūl*, ed. Yosef D. Qafiḥ (Jerusalem/Qiryat Ono: Agudat halakhot 'Am Yisrael, 1984), 103–110; English, *The Bustan al-Ukul by Nathanael ibn al-Fayyumi*, transl. David Levine, Columbia University Oriental Studies, vol. 6 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908; reprint New York, N.Y.: AMS Press, Inc., 1966), 103–108. A similar view was held by Zekharyah b. Shlomoh ha-Rofe', *Midrash ha-ḥefeṣ*, ed. Meir Havatzelet, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1990–1992), II, 482.

confirmed and corroborated the Torah and the truth in it, the Qur'an confirms and corroborates the gospel and the truth therein (Sura 5:48; cf. 2:91).

With reference to the relationship between the Bible and the Qur'an and their interrelatedness, the ideas of *taṣdīq* ("confirmation") and *haimana* ("corroboration") have a fourfold meaning:

First of all, *taṣdīq* refers to the fact that the Qur'an has predecessors whose existence rather than being denied is recognized and positively evaluated.

Regardless of the so-called falsification of scriptures, i.e., of the Torah and the gospel, the Qur'an remains related to them. To understand the Qur'an, therefore, requires a certain knowledge of the Bible. As said at the beginning, many biblical and post-biblical stories are retold in the Qur'an in such an abridged version that it is sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to understand them and explain their message without knowing their biblical and/or post-biblical counterparts or parallels.[38] In that regard, knowledge of the biblical and post-biblical Jewish and Christian traditions provides a necessary, if not indispensable, means to understand the Qur'an. According to Sura *Yūnus* 10:94, Muḥammad is instructed: "If you are in doubt concerning that which We have revealed unto you, then ask those who are [were] reading the Book [*taurāt* and *inğīl*] before you. Verily, the truth has come to you from your Lord. So be not of those who doubt (it)." Similarly, in Sura 16:43 = 21:7:[39] "And We never sent but men upon whom We have sent down a revelation. Ask the People of Tradition (*ahl aḏ-ḏikr.* i.e., Jews and Christians) if you do not know something."

Secondly, the concepts of *taṣdīq* and *haimana* are to be understood as "confirmation" and "corroboration" of (a) the Divine origin of all the scriptures, including those preceding the Qur'an; (b) the truth contained in them; and, subsequently, (c) their claim to truth as well. The preceding scriptures are no less "guidance and light" than the Qur'an. With respect to the Qur'an, they serve as references and fulfill a legitimizing role ("Legitimationsinstanz").

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[38] Gabriel Said Reynolds speaks of the "biblical subtext" of the Qur'an. See his *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext,* Routledge Studies in the Qur'an (London/New York: Routledge, 2010).

[39] On that term, see Surah 21:7; 12,109; 17,101; 26,197. *ahl aḏ-ḏikr* is a parallel to the otherwise usually applied *ahl al-kitāb* (people of the book) and refers to those following earlier revelations, as Ibn Kaṯīr wrote (*Muḫtaṣar tafsīr*, ed. by aṣ-Ṣābūnī, II, 333). Ǧalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī, however, sees in it a hint at the "scholars of the Torah and the Gospel" (*'ulamā' at-taurāt wal-inğīl*) (*Tafsīr al-Ǧalālain*, ed. al-Ǧūǧā [Damascus, n.d.], 357).

Accordingly, Muslim Qur'an commentators and historians used biblical and post-biblical texts[40] throughout the centuries as *dicta probantia* as well as *praefigurationes* for the Qur'an, as Gustav E. von Grunebaum already rightly observed[41] years ago (cf. in this context also the so-called *Isrā'īlīyāt* that are serving a similar purpose).[42]

In the fifteenth century, Burhān ad-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn ʿUmar al-Biqāʿī (1406–1480) felt the need to write a book in defense of the use of the Bible in Muslim exegesis of the Qur'an: *al-Aqwāl al-qawīma fī ḥukm an-naql min al-kutub al-qadīma* ("The right words to rebuke the verdict to quote from the Old Books").[43] In addition, he compiled a comprehensive commentary on the Qur'an in which he repeatedly resorted to the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament alike, using them as an indispensable "Verstehenshilfe [help to understand]."

Thirdly, *taṣdīq* ("confirmation") and *haimana* ("corroboration") of the preceding *scriptures* imply their critical study and examination.

Indeed, the Qur'an claims to correct the falsification of the scriptures committed by the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*). Thus, the Qur'an offers to bring what the People of the Book omitted and to put right what they distorted:

> O People of the Book, now there has come Our messenger, to make clear unto you much of what you have been concealing of the book [Bible], and to pardon much. Now there has come unto you from God a light and a clear book, through which God shows unto all that seek His goodly acceptance the path leading to salvation and, by His grace, bring them out of the depths of darkness into the light and guides them onto a straight path (Sura *al-Ma'ida* 5:15-16).

In that sense, *taṣdīq* and *haimana* mean interpretation and commentary on the Bible. The Qur'an becomes—and serves as—a rereading of the Bible, as

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[40] See David R. Thomas, "The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemics," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7 (1996), 29–38; Jane D. McAuliffe, "The Qur'anic Context of Muslim Biblical Scholarship," in *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 7 (1996), 141–58; Accad, op. cit. (note 30), 72ff.

[41] Gustav E. von Grunebaum (1909-1972), *Studien zum Kulturbild und Selbstverständnis des Islam* (Zürich/Stuttgart: Artemis Verlag, 1969), 310.

[42] Georges Vajda (1908–1981), "Isrā'īlīyāt," in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill Publ., 1978), IV, 211f.; Meir Jacob Kister (1914–2010), "'ḥaddiṯū ʿan Banī Isrāʾīla wa-lā ḥaraja'—A Study of an Early Tradition," in *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972), 215–39; Gordon Newby, "*Tafsīr Isrā'īlīyāt*—The Development of Qur'an–Commentary in Early Islam and its Relationship to Judaeo-Christian Traditions of Scriptural Commentaries," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47 (1979), 685–97.

[43] Walid A. Saleh (ed.), *In Defense of the Bible. A Critical Edition and an Introduction to al-Biqāʿī's Bible Treatise,* Islamic History and Civilization, vol. 73 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008).

can be illustrated by many examples[44] where, as Wilhelm Bacher (1850–1913) wrote over 140 years ago, the Qur'an in connection with post-Qur'anic traditions provides interpretations that contribute to a better and deeper understanding of biblical texts.[45]

And finally, every successive revelation surpasses and "outbids" the preceding one, placing it on an inferior level, as can be inferred from Sura *al-Baqara* 2:91:

> For when they are told: Believe in what God has sent down, they reply: We believe [only] in what hast been sent upon us (*unzila 'alainā*), and they deny everything else, although it is the truth confirming the one already in their possession (*wa-huwa l-ḥaqq muṣaddiqan li-mā ma'ahum*).

And likewise in Sura *al-Ma'ida* 5:68:

> Say, People of the Book, you have no valid ground for your beliefs unless you observe the Torah and the Gospel and what now has been sent down upon you by your Lord.

The scriptures once given to Moses and Jesus were the divine writ in their time, but now they are superseded and replaced by the Qur'an. After the revelation of the Qur'an, the earlier scriptures (*taurāt, zabūr, inǧīl*) have not lost their validity, but are placed at an inferior level. And a prophetic *Ḥadīṯ* relates that if Moses had had the chance to listen to the message proclaimed by the Arabian prophet, he himself would have followed this prophet.[46]

In other words, the same question raised with regard to the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, that is, the relationship between the

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[44] Cf. the studies in Schreiner, op. cit. (note 3b); John Kaltner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac: An Introduction to the Qur'an for Bible Readers* (Collegeville, Mn: Liturgical Press, 1999); John C. Reeves (ed.), *Bible and Qur'an. Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series, vol. 24 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003 (Leiden/Boston: E.J. Brill Publ., 2004); Jane D. McAuliffe (ed.), *With Reverence for the Word. Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003; ²2010).

[45] Wilhelm Bacher, "Bibel und biblische Geschichte in der muhammedanischen Literatur," in *Jeschurun–Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums* 8 (1871), 1-29; cf. also Ignaz Goldziher (1850–1921),"Ueber Bibelcitate in muhammedanischen Schriften," in *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 13 (1893), 315–21 = in Ignaz Goldziher, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. J. de Somogyi, 6 vols (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1967–1973), III, 309–15); Ignaz Goldziher, "Neutestamentliche Elemente in der Traditionsliteratur des Islams," in *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902), 390–97.

[46] Transmitted by 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān b. al-Faḍl b. Bahrām b. aṣ-Ṣamad Muḥammad ad-Dārimī as-Samarqandī (797–869), *Sunan al-Musnad*, Nr. 436.

Gospel of Jesus and the Torah of Moses and the validity of the Torah *post Christum natum*, is also raised with regard to the relationship between the Qur'an and the Bible, Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

On the one hand, Paul writes in his Letter to the Romans that the coming of the Messiah (Christ) implies the end of the Torah (Rom 10:4: *télos gar nómou Christós*); on the other, we read in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 5:17) that not a single dot will be taken away from the Torah, it remains as it is and does not lose its validity. Thus, the Qur'an on the one hand supersedes the Torah and the gospel but, on the other, needs them for the purpose of legitimization and understanding and remains indebted to them. Therefore, in line with that, the Andalusian lawyer Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā aš-Šāṭibī (1320–1388) suggested explaining the relationship between the three scriptures as a relationship of mutuality and interrelatedness: they are intertwined and, thus, serve each other mutually as co-references.

The Suspension of Expertise in Scriptural Reasoning

Nicholas Adams

In this short paper I draw attention to two features of the practice of scriptural reasoning. First, it is hospitable to religious actors who are radically uninformed about religious traditions other than their own. Second, it strips academic participants of their knowledge, and thus, to a certain extent, their status, and requires them to engage in discussion as equal partners with non-experts.

These two features have in common a certain privileging of ignorance, whether natural (in the case of the uninformed) or learned (in the case of experts). The categories "uninformed" and "expert" in fact overlap in the case of any particular participant in scriptural reasoning: it is typically the case that scriptural reasoners with a deep knowledge of their own traditions are not competent in other traditions; and even those who are expert in one aspect of their own tradition, e.g., its early formation, its texts in the original languages, its later development, its modern trans-formations, will be more or less ignorant of other aspects. No one knows everything. My argument, however, is that even an ideal polymath, with a deep knowledge of all traditions, must learn a certain kind of ignorance in order to participate in scriptural reasoning. In brief: to do scriptural reasoning competently is to suspend one's expertise.

Scriptural reasoning is not one thing. It is certainly the practice of interpreting texts from multiple traditions in small groups, and it is guided by certain rules. But as Peter Ochs has indicated, these rules tend to be negative: they inhibit certain practices. All kinds of variants with their own distinctive positive qualities now abound, and it is hard to define what scriptural reasoning is. It is much more straightforward to say what it is

not.[1] In this investigation I do not wish to define the practice of scriptural reasoning or provide an exhaustive description of its features. Instead, I want to look at one aspect of it and explore its implications.

There is what might look like a paradox at the heart of the practice of scriptural reasoning. It is both simple and intimidating. And, curiously, it is more intimidating the more expertise one has in a religious tradition. It is simple in its format: participants have texts from different traditions, typically three, but there are many variations, and they interpret them together. "Together" is a key adverbial qualification here. It is not the case that Jews interpret Jewish texts, Christians interpret Christian texts, and Muslims interpret Islamic texts. And this is not only because texts that are Tanakh for Jews are simultaneously Old Testament for Christians. More importantly, all participants interpret all texts. More fundamentally, all participants interpret together. The business of interpretation is a shared enterprise where agency is located in the group rather than in each separate individual. It is intimidating in the discipline it imposes on participants. One must interpret the text, and not expatiate upon topics of one's own choice: no mini-lectures. One must pay attention to its details, and not subordinate its meaning to matters external to it, such as historical context or doctrinal settlement. One must speak, and not just listen, and listen, and not just speak. One must treat all scriptural texts as sacred objects. There are many musts.

This all takes some getting used to. One of the readily observable features of scriptural reasoning, when viewed long term over many years of its practice, is the horror or contempt expressed by some first-time academic participants. This reaction is quite common and may in part explain the uncertain reputation that scriptural reasoning has in academic circles. It is worth exploring this horror/contempt a little—not out of a concern for how some participants might feel about scriptural reasoning, but because it may shed light on core features of the practice that might otherwise remain on the margins of one's field of vision.

Academic experts are often invited to speak. Indeed, this is a common locution in English for the business of arranging a lecture or a colloquium. "Professor X has been invited to speak." Even the word professor adverts to this power of speech, of professing. In a certain sense it is redundant to invite a professor to speak: to invite a professor is just to invite one who speaks. The status attached to this speaking office is more uncertain than it once was, and there are doubtlessly many explanations for this change. Higher education is more widely available; universities are frequently viewed as businesses; the internet has rendered information more accessible;

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[1] Peter Ochs, "Re-Socializing Scholars of Religious, Theological, and Theo-Philosophical Inquiry," in *Modern Theology*, vol. 29, Issue 4 (2013), 201–19.

the fruits of research are often not readily intelligible to a general reader; feudal habits are attenuated with each passing generation; and so forth. Academic experts are thus in an uncertain position: their status is tied to their capacity for speech but that status, and therefore their speech, is diminishing. Scriptural reasoning certainly invites academic participants, but typically not to speak, and not to share their expertise, but to engage in a practice of interpreting texts where there is a good deal of listening.

This is often a disorientating and perhaps even offensive matter. The fundamental texts of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are not merely objects of research. They are the most researched objects in the history of the university. Indeed such research predates universities themselves, and by hundreds of years. To be expert in commentary on the Torah, or to have command of interpretation of the New Testament, or to be knowledgeable about the details of Tafsir, is to join a great chain of scholarship extending back into the indefinite past. It is to engage an unimaginably large bibliography in multiple languages, many of whose books mark high points of civilization, and some of which have very likely changed the ways entire communities understand themselves and the world. It is to practice scholarship whose potential readership and influence extends to the billions. It is thus an extraordinary shock for biblical scholars to discover that their scholarship and knowledge are not contested but, much worse, irrelevant to the practice of scriptural reasoning.

Likewise theologians with a grasp of the nuances of scriptural interpretation and a subtle sensibility for the shifting resonances that certain passages have for religious communities across the centuries might well be taken aback by the sheer vulgarity of a practice that presents grown adults with unmarked passages of scripture, typically in translation, and encourages free discussion of its meanings while discouraging interventions that draw other texts and voices into the discussion. Scriptural reasoning is surely a kind of joke, a travesty, or at best a parody of the worst kind of fundamentalist Bible study, where readers do not "study" at all, but serially offer their pious reflections, unchecked by such niceties as knowing anything about the text and its history of interpretation.

This exaggerated picture perhaps gives an idea of the experience of academic experts who participate in scriptural reasoning for the first time. It seems so amateur, so unschooled, and so ill-disciplined.

What this experience reveals, however, is the extent to which scriptural reasoning is not like academic study in the late-modern university. In a session of scriptural reasoning the texts are alive and have an agency that contains, and frequently overwhelms, the subjectivity of any particular interpreter; and the interpretations that circulate are more or less dominant, not because of the information they convey but because they generate conversation: certain interventions spark off an array of further explorations; others interrupt the

flow. The flow of conversation, within and across traditions, is one of the remarkable features of scriptural reasoning. A competent scriptural reasoner offers interpretations as gifts for others to receive, as seeds for others to plant, as bricks for others to build. And as with gifts, seeds and bricks, those who receive them may put them to uses quite unforeseen by the one who gives them. When multiple bricks are in circulation, their interactions—and the corresponding temporary architecture of interpretations—is quite unpredictable. A good session will typically display some surprises, as the texts stimulate unfamiliar interpretations, and frequently a good deal of humor—including the grim humor that accompanies acknowledgement of the capacity for these texts to be weapons in the hands of those with axes to grind and enemies to use them on.

Scriptural reasoning requires participants to suspend their expertise for the sake of generative interpretation. It invites participants to dispossess themselves of their own interpretative interests for the sake of a shared enterprise of interpretation. This can be seen quite clearly in four features of scriptural reasoning, which each interrupt the expectations of academic discourse but can also nourish it in unexpected ways. These are its tendency to produce (1) understanding more than agreement; (2) collegiality more than consensus; (3) generativity more than critique; and (4) temporary more than enduring interpretations. After considering each in turn, I shall suggest some ways in which scriptural reasoning aids certain kinds of academic study and may even make some of them possible.

Understanding

First, scriptural reasoning produces understanding more than agreement. Put differently, the orientations of scriptural reasoners are typically more towards illumination than persuasion, although there are plenty of exceptions to this. This is partly because when three or more traditions encounter each other in relation to their texts there is a good deal of history behind that encounter, and the more of that history one knows, the better one grasps that these traditions are constituted by their difference from one another. Their histories of textual interpretation, and especially of legal development, are often expressions of refusals of each other's ways of thinking and acting. Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism grew up together, often in physical proximity, and consciously crafted shibboleths to distinguish themselves. It is not merely the case that religious traditions happen to be different from one another. Our religious traditions have frequently defined themselves against each other: difference is core to their identities. This also has the strange result that in some deep sense the traditions require each other

in order to manifest this difference. Obviously if two things are different, each needs the other for that difference to exist. The point is that in these cases difference is core to identity, and so for the identity to show itself, the different other must be visible. Islam, for example, does not make as much sense if it is not contrasted with the traditions whose practices and beliefs it has refused. For better or worse, there is a good deal of negativity in the traditions' sense of identity.

Scriptural reasoning embraces that difference and, in ways that are perhaps obscure and difficult to grasp, it has the capacity to embrace that negativity. Participants who are emphatic about their own tradition's rightness, and emphatic about other traditions' wrongness, are quite welcome in scriptural reasoning. It is a practice of interreligious encounter that welcomes awkward customers. But scriptural reasoning also disciplines those tendencies by requiring conversation to be generated by the interpretation of texts. As any scriptural reasoner can testify, it is in fact rather a challenge to produce broad claims about each other's traditions when interpreting texts, because the specificity of those texts acts as a brake on ambitious generalizations about traditions as such. Those who have the tendency to speak negatively about other traditions are welcome, but scriptural reasoning affords severely limited opportunities for such claims to be articulated. It thus has the potential to attenuate certain habits. Scriptural reasoning does not merely privilege understanding above agreement. In various ways it actually sustains disagreements, in all their full negativity, but it does so in ways that mitigate the familiar aggressive rhetorical modality of that negativity.

For a reasoner trained in the academic study of religions, and especially of texts, this can appear odd. If the purpose of reading texts is to determine their meanings, then while there will doubtless be disagreements, even strong ones, the purpose of study is surely to end them, or at least reduce them as far as possible. Scholarly study of texts is in principle overwhelmingly oriented towards agreement, even if in practice scholarly habits of engagement often tend rather theatrically to generate disagreements in ritual displays of intellectual plumage. The practice of scriptural reason seems not to determine the meanings of texts in quite the same way that the scholarly study of those texts does. I shall remark a little later on certain features of this "not quite the same way."

Collegiality

Second, most forms of scholarly study deal in consensus. Conferences and their currency, academic papers, aim to establish or challenge established

consensuses. It is hard to imagine a view on a topic that does not position itself with respect to a consensus of some kind. Scholarly interventions are typically addressed to a community, which to a greater or lesser extent knows what it thinks about a subject. To have one's authority to speak to the community recognized is, at least in part, for one's grasp of the community's mind to be acknowledged. As in the case of agreement, while the principle of scholarly study is towards consensus, one often sees in practice the theatrical production of its absence: there are few things more satisfying for a scholar than to throw a consensus into doubt. Scriptural reasoning, by contrast, is a practice that neither seeks nor undermines consensus. It is just the wrong category to grasp what is being sought. A group of scriptural reasoners tends to aim at a shared practice of interpretation more than a practice of shared interpretation. It is the convergence of interpretive energies on a text rather than the convergence of interpretations of a text that is of value. There is nothing wrong with this, from a scholarly perspective, and indeed a discussion with an elegant flow of conversation is a beautiful thing. But such a flow is not exactly the goal of scholarly discussion: the goal is typically to generate knowledge, and to do so in such a way that a new consensus about it can be established. Scriptural reasoning is oriented towards a flow of interpretations, and the mark of a successful session is indicated by the quality of its flow just as much as the quality of the interpretations in play. Indeed, these two are closely linked: high quality interpretations often accompany high quality flow of discussion. The suspension of expertise is perhaps a core condition for this kind of conversation to flow elegantly. I suggest that this should at least be taken seriously as a possibility.

Generativity

Third, scriptural reasoning privileges the production of high energy interpretive activity: if my interpretation stimulates yours and yours stimulates another's, so much the better. Indeed, if this does not happen, then one is probably not doing scriptural reasoning in any meaningful sense. The correction of error, through the presentation of more secure knowledge, tends to inhibit the practice of scriptural reasoning. This is somewhat outrageous and delinquent from a scholarly point of view. A scriptural reasoner might offer an interpretation that is profoundly unlikely, given what is known about the context in which the text was produced; but it may be rather difficult to challenge such an interpretation from the text alone. The scriptural reasoner whose expertise leads to a clear diagnosis of what appears to be a glaring error is thus in a difficult position. From

a scholarly point of view, error invites critique and correction. But if the generativity of discussion is likely to be compromised, if the energy will probably be forcibly dissipated, by pointing it out, it is not entirely clear what the most fitting course of action should be. This is a matter of the good judgment of the scriptural reasoner; but the question of judgment would probably not arise at all in a scholarly practice. If someone makes a mistake, one has a duty to point it out. This is a duty many scholars discharge with impressive dispatch. To inhibit such corrective discipline, by requiring the suspension of expertise, is, I suggest, a further offensive quality of scriptural reasoning.

TEMPORARINESS

Fourth, the interpretations that are produced in scriptural reasoning are typically short-lived. One of the remarkable aspects of the practice of scriptural reasoning is the intensity of the discussion, and the depth of many of its interpretations and, yet, the fleeting quality that they have. Attempts to capture particular interpretations for long-term dissemination are often frustrated, and success in preserving scripturally reasoned interpretations for posterity frequently prove elusive. One possible reason for this is somewhat prosaic: if interpretations of the New Testament are generative and even profound in a session of scriptural reasoning because of their resonance with previous interpretations of a passage in the Qur'an, which the group studied earlier in the day, this is obviously a rather contingent matter, and in two ways. First, it is contingent on what happened to have been said previously; second it is contingent on what is said about a Qur'anic text, and this is not a respectable point of comparison, in scholarly terms, for illuminating a New Testament passage. For this reason many interpretations are destined to glow brightly for a short season, before dissipating, unlikely to return. This is not always the case: many scriptural reasoners have found uses for their or others' interpretations in their scholarly work. I am drawing attention to those cases where this is not the case. From the point of view of an expert, an interpretation that has only a present, and no future, is of negligible value. An interpretation that cannot, perhaps even should not, be recorded cannot be cited. Nothing could be worse.

AN AID TO SCHOLARSHIP

Strong contrasts have been in play so far. I have tried to specify not only the salient differences between scholarly practices of interpretation and

those of scriptural reasoning, but also to capture something of the offense that scriptural reasoning causes to those who are highly skilled in the academy. And I have suggested that the suspension of expertise in scriptural reasoning, while often perceived as an unwelcome and even unrespectable requirement, is necessary given the goods at which scriptural reasoning aims. These goods are significantly bound up with questions of shared agency, the flow of energy, the generativity of certain temporary insights for other temporary insights. Scriptural reasoning is genuinely odd, when judged from a scholarly perspective. One should thus expect that it might be viewed with a certain suspicion within the academy. And this is indeed what one frequently sees. One judges the quality of scripturally reasoned interpretations according to criteria different from those used to judge conference papers or journal articles.

I want to end, though, with a short note on a surprising outcome of scriptural reasoning for many scholars who suspend their expertise in order to practice it: it aids their scholarship in ways that are relatively easy to specify.

At its simplest, scriptural reasoning sometimes produces undoubtedly interesting and fruitful interpretations that actually can be preserved for posterity and put to use in more scholarly contexts. It is not entirely clear whether such interpretations require scriptural reasoning in order to be produced, however. It seems to me more likely that at least in principle any practice of interpretation could have produced them. It is nonetheless striking that they were produced during the practice of scriptural reasoning and not in one of the myriad other possible practices.

More interestingly, however, scriptural reasoning may attune its practitioners to questions of polyphony, of change, and of contingency. The practice of scriptural reasoning is, in some ways, a microcosm of what happens to scripture in traditions. There are many voices, which often do not converge; interpretations undergo mutations depending on what texts are on the table; their meanings are to a significant extent dependent, at a particular time, on what has just been. It is quite possible that scriptural reasoning produces interpreters who are particularly sensitive to these kinds of issues.

Most significantly, however, scriptural reasoning may generate models of collaborative interpretation that are otherwise difficult to find in the academy. There are publications in which members of different traditions address an issue of common concern, each interpreting their own tradition's texts, with a view to shedding light onto contemporary problems and potential ways to address them. This is not scriptural reasoning, but it is one possible product of scriptural reasoning. But this kind of approach is not restricted to scriptural texts. Anver Emon, of the University of Toronto,

published a collection of essays by scholars of Islamic law and Jewish law, proceedings of a series of meetings where scholars from two traditions read and interpreted legal texts from two traditions, and discovered in the process that this approach cast a new and unexpected light on familiar texts.[2] These workshops did not require any suspension of expertise, but their very existence was suggested by the practice of scriptural reasoning. Had its editor not participated in scriptural reasoning, it is unlikely that his project would have taken the form it did.

There are many other examples of scholarly practices which are transformed by the practice of scriptural reasoning. These include what Peter Ochs calls the cure of "binarism" and what I have referred to as the sustaining of long-term disagreements.[3]

What is the significance of all this? I have offered an hypothesis to account for the uncertain position that scriptural reasoning occupies in the academy: it requires the suspension of expertise, and this requirement is offensive in various ways. It also contravenes other scholarly rules in its emphatic lack of commitment to agreement, consensus and enduring forms of transmission. These might appear somehow less serious and less worthy of one's time, from a scholarly perspective. But I have also tried to draw attention to the necessity of these alternative disciplines if one is to do justice to certain kinds of shared agency and certain forms of collegiality.

Of course it is quite possible that the university is the problem, and that the practice of scriptural reasoning throws its deficiencies into sharp relief. But that is a battle for another day.

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[2] Anver Emon (ed.), *Islamic and Jewish Legal Reasoning: Encountering Our Legal Other* (London: Oneworld, 2016).

[3] See Ochs, op. cit. (note 1); Nicholas Adams, "Long–Term Disagreement: Philosophical Models in Scriptural Reasoning and Receptive Ecumenism," in the same issue of *Modern Theology*.

On the Way Towards a Dialogical Theology

Katja Drechsler and Thorsten Knauth[4]

Introduction

How a religious text is adequately and legitimately interpreted and understood is of great importance to all religious traditions. Theological efforts to interpret religious diversity outside dominant schemes of mission, confrontation, hierarchy and ignorance have intensified over recent decades. How can adherents of different religious traditions encounter each other in an open and appreciative way? And what do the sacred sources tell us about the encounter with the religious "other"? How do they describe the relation with other religions? A relationship between the understanding of one's own religious tradition and an attitude towards others is obvious: if my religion is the only legitimate way to truth and to salvation, there is not much left for the other.

The reconstruction and rereading of one's own texts while being aware of other religions also claiming to be ways to truth and salvation

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[4] This article is based on collective work of Thorsten Knauth, Carola Roloff, Andreas Markowsky and Florian Jäckel and a lecture held by Katja Drechsler and Thorsten Knauth, "Interreligiöse Hermeneutik und neue Ansätze in islamischer Theologie," November 2015, University of Hamburg. For full coverage of the multi-perspective hermeneutical experiment, see Thorsten Knauth, Carola Roloff, Katja Drechsler, Florian Jäckel and Andreas Markowsky, "Auf dem Weg zu einer dialogisch-interreligiösen Hermeneutik," in Katajun Amirpur et al. (eds), *Perspektiven dialogischer Theologie. Offenheit in den Religionen und eine Hermeneutik des interreligiösen Dialogs* (Münster/New York: Waxmann, 2016), 207–315.

constitute only a first step that might be taken without talking to the other. It is important to go further: if one's own and the other religious tradition are mutually and collectively interpreted, the other can become a partner in a joint effort to understand religion. Understanding becomes dialogical.

This article provides some insights into current research within the international and interdisciplinary project "Religions and Dialogue in Modern Societies" (ReDi). After introducing the Academy of World Religions at the University of Hamburg and the ReDi-project in general, the development, aims and outcomes of this multi-perspective hermeneutical experiment and our, preliminary, understanding of a dialogical theology will be discussed in greater detail.

ACADEMY OF WORLD RELIGIONS, UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG

In Hamburg schools, pupils of all confessions, religious or non-religious affiliations together experience the subject of religion; we call this "Religious Education for All" classes ("Religionsunterricht für alle"). In this context, the Academy of World Religions plays a crucial role in further developing this inclusive and dialogical concept and diversifying the training of religious education teachers (along with Protestant theology, there are currently programs for Islam and Alevism[5]). Research and teaching at the Academy are also shaped in such a way that theological concepts from Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and Alevism do not merely coexist but dialogically engage each other within the context of an academic discourse.[6] How this works is well explained by our research project ReDi, which is funded by the Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). The project seeks to contribute to the research on questions of interreligious dialogue with a simultaneous study at two levels:

(1) Dialogical theology: Considering existing approaches of plural, intercultural and especially interreligious theology, a team of experts from different religious traditions is working on developing a dialogical theology. The context-oriented nature of our research requires strong reference to

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[5] Alevism is by some considered a branch of Shi'a Islam that is practiced in Turkey and the Balkans among ethnic Turks and Kurds, and is related to—though distinct from—Alawism in Syria. Others maintain that Alevism is a religious tradition of its own.

[6] In addition to research and teaching, the Academy of World Religions is engaging in interreligious "dialogue in the city." For further information, see https://www.awr.uni-hamburg.de/website-content/pdfs-flyer/awr-flyer-englisch.pdf

observed forms of actual interreligious dialogue in real life, which will be studied at the second level.

(2) Dialogical practice: By applying methods of empirical qualitative research, the belief about and practice of interreligious dialogue as it exists today are studied. The surveys include both actors inside religious communities and those unaffiliated with them. Further, the possibilities and limitations of fostering interreligious dialogue, especially in education, are studied in depth.

"Dialogue in action: the hermeneutical project"

While in the first year of the project (2013), each religious tradition researched its own textual sources on possibilities for and also limitations of dialogue and openness towards the religious "other," the aim of the second year was to start a dialogue between the religious traditions and concentrate on hermeneutical questions. Starting from the idea of a "dialogical research laboratory," we developed a project, which we called in German "Auslegungsgespräche." These were four experimental dialogues that took place from April to June 2014 with a researcher from each religious tradition—Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam—being present in the Hamburg team. In these dialogues, everyone presented a selected "religious key text" concerning the subject of openness to the religious other. These texts were mutually interpreted together.

Methodological approach

The logic behind this practical approach was not to develop dialogical hermeneutical theory out of an already existing theory, which would constitute a purely reconstructive approach. We felt it necessary to collect and analyze our own data about our practical hermeneutical experience like an experiment conducted in a "laboratory" (as opposed to field study). The aim was to provide data, in the form of faithful transcriptions of our encounters that could lead to a better understanding of dialogical dynamics in the field of joint interpretation of sacred texts. Thus, our research, as in Anne Hege Grung's study, was more focused on process and dialogue than on content.[7]

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[7] Anne Hege Grung, *Gender Justice in Muslim-Christian Readings. Christian and Muslim Women in Norway Making Meaning of Texts from the Bible, the Koran, and the Hadith* (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2015).

The transcripts proved to be a meaningful tool to analyze our own experience. They allowed us to consider our intense dialogues from a distance. Furthermore, they helped us to question our first interpretations of the dialogues. We could trace back our collective interpretation processes and observe how different interpretive perspectives intertwined and overlapped. Additionally, the transcripts enabled us to compare the different dialogues and to identify common characteristics such as the search for similarities and differences in each dialogue, the respective roles of the participants and recurring strategies or themes. Theory was developed by analyzing and recalling the dialogues, which were considered as a model for a dialogue-oriented understanding. A further theoretical study of different approaches in interreligious hermeneutics/hermeneutics of recognition took place in a second step. To combine exegetical practice with analytical and theoretical work constitutes a new approach in theological research.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE DIALOGUES

The underlying understanding of "dialogue" is that of a mutual relationship. The opening up towards the other includes the possibility of transformation. This also includes the increased significance of individual perspectives: it is not the religions which talk to each other but their adherents, that is, the people.[8] In addition, context shapes conversations: "A conversation is a contextual event between individuals."[9] Symmetry is important: people should meet each other as equals. Different perspectives have the same right to be heard and recognized in the interpretative process. This includes an attitude of openness towards any new interpretations or perspectives that might emerge.

To ensure a variety of perspectives in our dialogues, we set up a four-step guideline, which was continuously adapted and developed throughout the talks.

Step 1: Interpretation of the text from the position of a "beginner's mind"

Initially, the dialogue partners read and interpret the text as if they knew nothing about it, that is, in an unprejudiced and consciously naive way. The text should not be instantly rated and limited by specific knowledge. It should be read as a new message and whatever comes to mind can be said.

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[8] Cf. Michael von Brück, "Gibt es eine interreligiöse Hermeneutik?" in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (2/1996), 284.
[9] Volker Küster, *Einführung in die Interkulturelle Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 150.

Step 2: Hermeneutical thought experiment

This openness towards the text is also pursued in the second step. The participants are asked to read the text as if it were a text of their own religious tradition, for example, as if a certain verse of the Qur'an were found in the Talmud, the New Testament or in the Pali Canon. The text should be interpreted by using one's own tradition's interpretative methods. Of course, this step is a strong provocation to classical hermeneutics because the text is alienated and maybe even colonized. But this step helps to bridge the gap and identify with the text.

While the first two steps aim at getting close to the text, the third step places it in its own horizon of meaning.

Step 3: Expert knowledge

In this step, the text is understood in its original context, that is, its origin in intertextual relations; such interpretations of this text already exist. The fact that it is a sacred text is also taken into account. The expert's knowledge may lead to less dialogical sequences but, in that case, monologue is to a certain extent necessary to do justice to the text and its context.

Step 4: Balancing traditional and new readings and reflections on the way towards a dialogical theology

We worked on the basis of the hypothesis that by interpreting the text from different perspectives, new interpretations or meanings would emerge. So our reflections on what we were doing already began during this step as we asked ourselves, Does my understanding of the text change through the other's perspective? And if it does, in what way? And what happens if we understand the text as one for all humanity rather than as belonging only to one particular religious tradition?

Example

We will give one short example to illustrate how our dialogues worked. It is taken from the first of our discussions, which was centered around the Qur'anic verse 5:48. This reads (in the translation of Yusuf Ali):

> To thee we sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the Scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have we prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.

Katja Drechsler chose this verse because it is seen as central to most Muslim arguments supporting a positive view of religious diversity. At the same time, it was clear that there is a problematic textual context of this verse; Q 5:51, for example, warns Muslims not to take Jews or Christians as *awliyā'*, which can be translated as friends, allies, guardians or helpers.

Traditionally, Islam is considered as a religion for all humanity and its prophet Mohammed the last of a series of prophets who were all bearers of the authentic divine message. Islam thus has a universalistic message and the perception that as the latest message, Islam has abrogated former messages, is common. The hermeneutical challenge of this verse consists of the basic question, Who is in and who is out?

When analyzing Muslim theological approaches to religious pluralism today, we witness a paradigm shift. Instead of understanding "Islam"–which literally means devotion–as a reified religion that is superior to other religions, the emphasis is now shifting towards an understanding of *islām* as a universal and individual principle in the relationship between human beings and God or the transcendent. This might include people of other religious affiliations. Connected with this is the perception of religious difference: are religions other than Islam seen as "wrong" and is it finally desirable that all humanity accept Islam? Or is religious diversity something that God willed for us and that has a deeper meaning? One's stance regarding the question of understanding Islam and religious difference determines how we accept and implement certain hermeneutical premises and methods.

Over the last twenty years, we have seen an increase in Muslim understandings of the Qur'anic claim of universality–not as a claim of superiority but, rather, as an acknowledgement that other religions might also be true and a way to salvation.

Farid Esack, for example, refuses traditional interpretations of verse Q 5:48. In his view, the metaphor of competition (Yusuf Ali: "So strive as in a race in all virtues") that comes directly after the diversity of religious paths is confirmed has not been taken seriously enough.[10] According to him, good and just deeds are not monopolized by one single (religious) group (Q 49:13) and the results of a fair competition are not known in advance.[11] Even if the Qur'an clearly postulates supremacy in defining forms of adequate devotion to God,[12] Muslims cannot be regarded as socially superior to others. Freedom and diversity are seen as fundamental prerequisites for unfolding faith and being tested by God.

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[10] Esack, Farid, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism. An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford/Rockport: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 170.
[11] Ibid., 171.
[12] Ibid., 174.

In our dialogue, verse Q 5:48 underwent a further extended interpretation. Among other themes in the first two steps of the dialogue (interpretation from the stance of a beginner's mind and experimentally reading the text as if it were in one's own tradition), the meaning of *ahl al-kitāb* (the people of the book) was discussed.

Strikingly, the Buddhist participant justified being the first to react by suggesting that she was the "farthest away" from the text and its tradition. She talked about the different concepts in this verse and explored the question of who might be talking to whom in this verse. Does the *pluralis majestatis* suggest that God is talking? And does the "scripture that came before it" point at Jews and Christians? She then formulated the idea that she herself might have become part of the "people of the book" because she had just received this text and its message. Through this interpretation, her initially felt distance from the text and its tradition was nullified. From her Buddhist point of view, she drew a link between the concept of competition and the Buddhist concept of Karma.

Because the Buddhist participant felt addressed by the first words of the verse "To thee We sent the Scripture" (which Muslims of course understand as God speaking to the Prophet Muhammad), she engaged in a direct and personal examination of the text. In the following conversation, all the participants dialogically picked up her idea and tested the plausibility of her suggestion. Through this critical investigation, her interpretation was exposed to a hermeneutical "pressure test." During this dialogical process, a collectively developed pattern of interpretation emerged.

Certainly, the legitimacy of this multi-perspective and dialogical process can be questioned, especially from the viewpoint of traditional interpretative methods of Islamic sources. The question of who is justified to interpret religious sources is found in every religious tradition. In contemporary Muslim approaches to hermeneutical questions, we find a range of suggestions that encourage a contextual understanding of theology. This includes thinking about the meaning of the interpreter's subjectivity or positionality that we find, for example, in the work of Farid Esack and Khaled Abou el Fadl.

Jerusha Lamptey's approach, which she herself calls "Muslima Theology of Pluralism," supports the interpretation that emerged in our interreligious dialogue.[13] Without explaining her concepts in depth, the striking point here is that she understands membership in particular religious groups not as being supremely important but as the fulfillment of *taqwā*. Often simply translated as piety, Lamptey understands *taqwā* as being a permanent

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[13] Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other. A Muslima Theology of Religious Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

awareness of God's existence, which affects a human person's whole being and action. She points out that *taqwā* has many different aspects and that while all human beings have the same potential for it, most only partly implement it. Preference for one of the many different aspects of *taqwā* is not justified.[14] Even the theologically central aspect of *tawḥīd* (the unity and uniqueness of God) would not be a sufficient criterion. So, according to her approach, it is absolutely possible that even human beings who do not believe in the one and only God have or implement *taqwā* or certain aspects of it. In support of this theory, she emphasizes the Qur'anic statement that God left no people without revelation (Q 10:47, 16:36). This means that God has sent a messenger to all people; all are in possession of divine guidance and revelation and so are justified to follow their own way.

Results: Dialogical hermeneutics as a balancing act between fields of tension

We found all the dialogues to be shaped by fields of tension. This is no accident but, on the contrary, inevitable when religious texts are interpreted from multiple perspectives. Dialogical understanding takes place only when fields of tension exist. If these conflicts or tensions are avoided, dialogue and understanding fall into a crisis.

The main fields of tension we found in our dialogues were the following:

Tension of knowledge

For our text-centered dialogue, it was important that lay perspectives be recognized. That nobody is expert in all religious traditions had to be acknowledged. In this way, all participants are able to meet at the same level. The differences in knowledge caused by respective proximity and distance to a particular religious tradition must also be acknowledged. Expert knowledge is important for an adequate understanding, but should not hinder the dialogue between participants. Thus, balancing between these poles of knowing and not-knowing is essential: required knowledge is to be provided, but new and unfamiliar readings are also to be admitted.

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14 Ibid., 238.

Tensions between contexts: e.g., original and contemporary contexts

Another tension is that between the texts' original and a contemporary context that might be totally different. Here as well, it seems important to relate both claims to each other and mutually to limit these claims. To consider only the original context may hinder a lively debate on the meaning of texts. And if only the contemporary context is considered, the text is cut off from the nourishing semantic stream of its tradition.

Tension between sacredness and profanity of texts or rather a divine origin of the text and cultural-historic experience

What does the sacredness of texts establish? On the one hand, the text can be understood as an essential and direct expression of divine or transcendent revelation, in the sense of knowledge that cannot be obtained otherwise. This truth from above would be more important for the meaning of the text than the context. On the other hand, the text could also be understood as a culturally and historically caused expression of an experience with the divine or the transcendent. This would imply that the meaning of the text is strongly related to a specific time in a particular culture and society. Talking about the sacredness of texts takes place in the field of tension between these two poles.

Tension between a hermeneutics of trust and a hermeneutics of suspicion

The last example relates to the tension between the attitudes in which a text is encountered. Is it an attitude of appreciation or of critical distance? A hermeneutics of trust acknowledges the text and views its meaning as a bridge towards the other. This is very important for dialogue. But texts can also bear problematic statements. To find disturbing and challenging meanings of the text is the function of a hermeneutics of suspicion. Especially where the text is promising heaven on earth, a hermeneutics of suspicion points at those who might be excluded.

Our thesis is that understanding in multi-perspective dialogue succeeds when we are able to balance both contact and contents. None of the poles can be permanently overemphasized without throwing dialogue and understanding into crisis. An awareness of these tensions is required. The tensions cannot be eliminated but, rather, their presence is desirable.

Processes of understanding: dialogical hermeneutics as dialogical co-construction

A second important result of our experiment was the discovery that interpretation takes place in a shared process of meaning making. The meaning and interpretations that were developed throughout the dialogues could only occur because this dialogue took place. This is not to say that all the interpretations that emerged during the dialogue were shared by all participants. But all of these meanings and interpretations constituted a shared stock that all the participants could use. Because the meanings were dialogically connected, making meaning was more of a process than a fixed result. Dialogical understanding in fields of tension has nothing to do with a harmony-seeking hermeneutics of "cuddling." On the contrary, dialogue is a challenging space of debate and thought. For an understanding of dialogical theology, this means implementing practice and reflection. Dialogical theology thus remains dependent on people of different religious and non-religious affiliations coming together and entering into a conversation. Dialogical theology needs thinking spaces for its development in which diverse voices, positions and faces are present to each other and dialogically make meaning together.

Transformative Readings
of the Qur'an

Developing Islamic Theology in the European Context

Safet Bektovic

Introduction

In recent decades, the question of a new interpretation of Islam in the European context has been raised in discussions on the integration of Muslims in Western Europe. Being considered a crucial part of the future development of Islam, Islamic theological thought has become very topical for many researchers of Islam, not least for politicians. In this contribution, I will discuss the legitimization of the idea of European Islamic theology, explore further dimensions and perspectives of Islamic theological thought in Europe and discuss its relevance to the training of imams and Muslim identity in Europe.

Legitimating European Islam and European Islamic theology

There are significant differences in culture and ways of thought between the various peoples of Europe, between southern Europeans and northern Europeans. Nevertheless, it is quite common to discuss a European identity, particularly when Europe is being compared to "the others." In this regard, many refer to a common history and values, such as humanism, freedom and democracy, as something being specifically European, particularly modern European.

How does this general approach to European history and identity or a common feeling of belonging to Europe, which is characteristic of most Europeans, affect Muslim minorities in Europe? How do they consider themselves as citizens of European countries and in what way do they feel themselves as Europeans?

Muslims in Europe belong to different national and ethnic groups. With the exception of Balkan Muslims, Tatars and small indigenous Muslim communities in south-eastern and central Europe, most European Muslims have an immigrant background and have come from Asian and African countries. The question of whether it is possible to identify a specific European way of being Muslim does not seem to be directly relevant for the so-called first generation of immigrants, who initially identify with other (non-European) cultures and traditions and do not have a long experience in Europe.

However, it seems to be much more relevant when it comes to the younger generations. They are Europeans by birth and education, they have acquired a number of European norms and values and many will argue that their "European" experience may affect not only their cultural identity but also their interpretation of Islam.[1]

However, cultural, moral and even political similarities do not necessarily reflect the same theology or the same religion. For example, religious Christians and religious Muslims from a particular area, for example, the Middle East or the Balkans, share a number of cultural and moral values despite having different religious backgrounds. Conversely, it is possible to have different cultural and political values yet to share a common theological background. This can be exemplified by comparing Hanafi-Muslims from Central Asia, the Middle East and the Balkans, who share the same tradition regarding Sharia and religious practices but are radically different in terms of culture and their understanding of the role of religion in society.

One might argue that Muslims in Europe tend to have a common cultural and religious identity, described as European Islam, but this does not necessarily mean that this identity refers to a common specific

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[1] It is important to note that the younger generations are not monolith when it comes to the interpretation of Islam and attitudes to Europe. In spite of this common experience, one can identify several different typological models of being a young Muslim in Europe, which furthermore reflect different degrees of social and cultural integration. See Jørgen Nielsen, "The Question of Euro-Islam: Restriction or Opportunity?," in Aziz Al-Azmeh and Effie Fokas (eds), *Islam in Europe. Diversity, Identity and Influence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 34-48; Safet Bektovic, *Kulturmøder og religion. Identitetsdannelse blandt kristne og muslimske unge* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum 2004).

European Islamic theology. In many ways, it may be quite legitimate to talk about being Muslim in a European way (and even about European Islam), but not necessarily about European Islamic theology as a distinct brand. Historically, Islam has established itself in various parts of the world from East Asia to North Africa without developing any particular, geographic and culturally based theological traditions. As argued by many orthodox Muslims, Islamic theology and Shariah principles were never determined by a local culture. Thus, what is needed today is not a European interpretation of Islam but an interpretation of Islamic principles in a European context.[2]

However, the relationship between sociocultural identity and religion/theology in a modern Europe is quite complex and cannot be directly compared with the previous traditional conditions. The role of religion in modern European society has radically changed and new challenges have emerged which, in many cases, demand quite new and specific answers. This also applies to the current presence of Islam in Europe and not least its role for a European Muslim identity, seen within a secular and minority context.

Thus, the discussion about European Islamic theology, understood as a theological reflection on the new challenges, is not meaningless. Quite the contrary!

In my opinion, in order to explain the idea of European Islamic theology, two key issues remain to be clarified: first, the question of the legitimation of such an idea; and, secondly, the relationship between a potential European Islamic theology (or Islamic theology in the European context) and European Islam, defined as social-cultural expressions of Muslim life in Europe.

Methodological questions

To what extent and in what way do historical, geographical, cultural and political conditions determine the content of Islamic theology? What is the impact of Muslim encounters and experiences with others on the development of Islamic theology? Does it make sense to speak about African, Middle Eastern or European Islam?

We can partially answer these questions by going back to the early classical period, when Islamic theology, known as *kalam*, emerged. Muslim

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[2] This is a hallmark of Muslim individuals and groups advocating global or transnational Islam and being under the influence of fundamentalist interpretations, which maintains the un-changeability of Islam's essence. See Jocelyne Cesari, "Muslim Identities in Europe: the Snare of Exceptionalism," in Al-Azmeh and Fokas, ibid., 49–67.

encounters with Christians in Syria and Iraq during the eighth and ninth centuries played a critical role in this emergence. The discussions with Christians left their mark on both the content and form of Islamic theological thought. It is within this context that we can understand why Muslims began to discuss topics such as the concept of God, the relationship between reason and revelation, free will and predestination.[3]

Muslims had their own motivation for engaging in these discussions. Among the most important was the need to defend Islam theologically and to formulate a coherent political theory that could justify the caliphate. In this regard, Muslims were not afraid to use arguments and ideas from others, including Christian theology, Greek philosophy and Persian tradition.

Al-Farabi formulated his theory of the ideal Islamic state by taking direct inspiration from Plato's theory of the ideal state. Mu'tazilites, who used to present themselves as the people of *tawhid* and defenders of Islam, used an Aristotelian way of argumentation. And finally al-Ash'ari, who successfully opposed the mu'tazila, was influenced by the Christian dogma in his formulation of Islamic orthodoxy.[4]

Here, we must mention that Muslims were not the only ones to seek inspiration from outside their own ranks. The same is true for Christians. They also formulated their theology under the influence of Greek thought and were later, in the classic medieval age, affected by Muslim theologians and philosophers. Thus, the flow of ideas was definitely stimulating and beneficial to both Muslims and Christians and this exchange shaped their respective theologies.

If we move forward in time and focus on Islamic modernism from the second part of the nineteenth century, we again find very intensive interactions between Muslim thinkers and the West. Afghani, Abduh, Iqbal, Kharputi—the famous protagonists of the reopening of *ijtihad* within Islamic theology—were influenced by Western philosophy while at the same time being engaged in defending Islam against Western objections. They strongly

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[3] Methodologically speaking, *kalam* reflects a process by which a problem is clarified through discussion and argumentation. For this reason, it is also known as dialectic theology. As emphasized by Josef van Ess, *kalam* emerged as "a dialectic discipline" within a form of discussion, through which the participants in a discussion had a common goal: to resolve a dilemma and to come up with an explanation, often evolving into the formulation of a principle or rule. See Josef Van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2006), 2.

[4] Mu'tazilites accused him and the so-called traditionalists of being under the influence of the Christian Trinity doctrine in formulating the doctrine on the un-created Qur'an. See Richard C. Martin, Mark R. Woodward and Dwi S. Atmaja (eds), *Defenders of Reason in Islam Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (New York: Oneworld 1997), 76-79.

advocated for the revitalization of the "philosophical spirit" within Islam and for a new *kalam* (*ilm kalam djadid* in Arabic and Persian and *yeni ilm-i kalam* in Turkish), emphasizing the relevance of Muslim interaction with modern philosophy and science. This is clearly expressed by Kharputi, who stated that "just as early *mutakallimun* reacted to Aristotelian philosophy selectively, today's *mutakallimun* should study modern thoughts accurately and choose according to Islamic principles what is necessary from them so that a new contemporary *lm-i-kalam* can be established."[5]

And what is the current situation? The relationship between the so-called Muslim world and the West, identified with Western political powers, is still characterized by political and cultural tensions. At the same time, there are very intense interactions between Christian, Muslim and secular intellectuals. For the first time, Muslims have started to experience the West and modernity by living in the West from within. Many Muslim scholars are now employees at Western universities and some of them are doing Islamic theology in cooperation with their non-Muslim colleagues.[6]

This has resulted in an improved understanding of the relationship between Islam and the others' religions and has provided new insights into Islam's potential to respond to challenges that come from the West. The question is how those interactions affect the development of Islamic theology.

IMPACT OF THE WEST

A number of experts on current developments in Muslim-majority countries argue that Muslim societies all over the Muslim world are strongly affected by Western civilization.[7] Nevertheless, many Muslims claim to maintain

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[5] See Sait Özervarly, "Attempts to Revitalize Kalam in the Late 19th and early 20th Centuries," in *The Muslim World*, vol. LXXXIX, no. 1. (1999), 95.

[6] Examples of this are, Timothy Winter—University of Cambridge, Tariq Ramadan—Oxford University, William Chittick—Stony Brook University, Timothy Gianotti—University of Waterloo, Amina Wadud—Virginia Commonwealth University, Yahya Michot—Hartford Seminary, Yaser Ellethy—VU University Amsterdam, Khalid Blankinship—Temple University, Racha el Omari—University of California-Santa Barbara, Asad Q. Ahme—University of California-Berkeley.

[7] One of those who claim that Muslims are dominated by Western civilization is Ibrahim Abu Rabi. For him not only the masses but also Muslim elites are totally influenced by the West. He claims directly "the Muslim world has culture, but lacks its own distinctive civilization." See Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', "Contemporary Islamic Intellectual History. A Theoretical Perspective," in *Islamic Studies*, vol. 44, no. 4 (Winter 2005), 503–26.

Islamic normativeness at the moral level, regardless of how much they are influenced by Western lifestyles.

We can always discuss how the West influences various Muslim societies, but it is almost a logical conclusion that if Muslims in the Muslim world are influenced by Western cultures, then this influence affects Muslims residing in the West.

Bearing in mind that European ways of living and thinking are part of the context in which Muslims live, it would be rather naive to believe that Muslims, as a minority in the West, remain unaffected by the majority culture. The integration of Muslim immigrants is far from perfect in the eyes of many European politicians, but this does not mean that Muslims are resistant to cultural and political change. The European experience has a significant influence on their way of life and an impact on their way of thinking. Let us take a couple of examples that confirm this statement.

The first is about the general challenges of being Muslim in Europe today and the second a vivid experience of Muslim-European identity in the case of Bosnian Muslims.

European secular ways of organizing society and specific working conditions have challenged religious Muslims to find new and alternative ways to practice Islam and also to search for new interpretations of Islamic normativeness.

Besides the effort to solve practical issues such as fasting in the Nordic region during the polar or long summer days, Muslims are challenged to reflect on a number of theoretical questions, for example, on the contextual interpretation of the Qur'an and on the implementation of Islamic normativeness and justice within the new context. The point in question is further emphasized by the fact that many Western European societies meet Islamic principles of social justice better than many of the existing Sharia-based Islamic societies.[8] Moreover, they are also challenged to reflect on the principles of Islamic ethics in relation to universal ethics and humanism in new multi-religious and multi-cultural contexts. Finally yet importantly, they must reflect on the question of Islamic normativeness and the meaning of Sharia in a secular society.

In this sense, we can speak of a constant tension between the challenge to reflect in an innovative way and an attempt to maintain Islamic identity under new circumstances. On the one hand, Muslims are aware of the necessity of developing new ideas and new models of interpretation but,

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[8] A remarkable insight into this is given by the survey, "How Islamic are Islamic Countries?," by Scheherazade S. Rehman and Hossein Askar from George Washington University (2010), see http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/gej.2010.10.2/gej.2010.10.2.1614/gej.2010.10.2.1614.xml

at the same time, many of them wish to preserve their Islamic identity in relation to the majority community. As highlighted by Ramadan, Muslim immigrants fear "the potential loss of their religion, culture and distinct identity."[9] In the situation of being thrown into an open space between the need for a new Islamic identity and the fear of assimilation, they respond very differently to the question of rethinking Islamic theology in a European context. Some are very enthusiastic; others take rather an opportunistic position in regard to established theology, as long as it can satisfy their needs; and some are skeptical or dismissive of any theology of Islam being developed under the influence of Western academia.[10]

The tension between "Islamic" and "European" does not characterize the identity of Muslims who live in Europe like the Bosnian Muslims and who have a long experience of living as a religious minority in a secular society. Unlike Muslims with an immigrant background, Bosnian Muslims are not required to "integrate" and they rely on a well-established Islamic–European tradition based on the historical institutionalization of Islam in a secular state and a well-developed system of religious education.[11]

They are used to being part of a multi-religious society and they have experienced that you do not necessarily lose your religious identity just because you live in a non-Muslim, even communist–atheist, society and because you are open to "the other."

As pointed out by Xavier Bougarel, Bosnian Muslims contributed to "the building of a European Islam" by creating autonomous institutions and integrating them into a modern national state. This process already

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[9] Tariq Ramadan, "Europeanization of Islam or Islamization of Europe?," in Shireen T. Hunter (ed.), *Islam. Europe's Second Religion* (London: Praeger, 2002), 207.

[10] Apart from the Muslims who maintain dichotomy between Islam and the West (such as radical salafists and Hizb ut-Tahrir), there are voices in the public debate who deny the possibility of a European Islam, either by arguing that there is an incompatibility between European culture and Islam, or by arguing that Muslims are not interested in integration in Europe but in the islamization of Europe, see Nezar AlSayyad, "Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam: On the Discourses of Identity and Culture," in Nazer AlSayyad and Manuel Castells (eds), *Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam. Politics, Culture, and Citizenship in the Age of Globalization* (London: Lexington Books, 2002), 9–29.

[11] However, Bosnian Muslim identity is not monolithic. Some Bosnian Muslims tend to minimize the importance of Islam for their identity and attach a crucial importance to pre-Islamic Bosnian heritage. On the contrary, some others tend to glorify Islam as the essence of their identity (e.g., salafist groups). The largest majority of them, those who consider themselves as representatives for the so-called Bosnian traditional Islam, insist that they belong to both Islam and European culture. See Enes Karic, *Essays on our European never-never Land* (Sarajevo: OKO, 2004).

began in the period when Bosnia, after the Ottoman withdrawal from the Balkans, became part of the Austro–Hungarian empire.[12]

Factors such as the establishment of religious, cultural and educational institutions (*Rijaset*, faculties for Islamic studies, high schools for religious education [madrassa], periodicals and publications) were crucial for the articulation of Islam in a European context and for the development of a specific identity based on the harmonization of Islamic principles with European humanist values.

INFLUENCE OF THE MUSLIM INTELLECTUAL ELITE

European Islam includes different elements of the sociocultural and intellectual fields in the everyday lives of Muslims but also within Muslim theological thought. However, there is no direct correlation between how Muslims in the European context practice Islam on a daily basis and how the Muslim intellectual elite interpret Islam. As immigrants in Western countries, Muslims do not always lean on Western-Islamic contextual interpretations but rather on a uniform (e.g., *salafist*) interpretation or on interpretations from their respective countries of origin.

The question of the role of modern thought in Islam and particularly the role of Muslim intellectuals living in the West is fundamental in relation to current developments in Islam. The Western (Muslim) interpretations are relevant not only for Muslims in the West but also for all Muslims in general, but their real impact seems to be rather weak due to a lack of adequate reception.

In general, the question of the influence of the Muslim intellectual elite, or rather the progressive thinkers, on the wider population is quite complex. It is clear that this influence cannot be treated independently of the sociopolitical conditions and academic climate in Muslim countries, which are often characterized by conservatism and ideological exclusivism. In the absence of academic autonomy and any real opportunity for free-thinking and critique, as well as scientific research institutes and international cooperation, it is also difficult to expect an intellectual movement towards mass enlightenment.

If progressive Muslim thinkers living in Muslim countries do not exert a real influence on the wider population in their societies, how can one expect intellectuals living in the West to have a big impact on these populations?

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[12] Xavier Bougarel, "The Role of Balkan Muslims in Building a European Islam," in *EPS Issue Paper Nr. 43* (Brussels: European Policy Centre, 2005), 1–31.

However, we are slowly witnessing a new development: Muslims who normally write in Western languages such English, French and German are being partially translated into "Muslim" languages such as Arabic, Urdu, Farsi. Muslim intellectuals are beginning to collaborate across different parts of the world. They are exchanging experiences and opinions more often than before and thus their ideas are becoming increasingly accesible.

Discussing Islamic theology and new ideas on modern Islam, it may be noted that what is decisive is not whether they have originated in the West or in the East but their content. In what ways are these ideas relevant for the understanding and resolution of new challenges?

In order to answer questions about a possible European Islamic theology (as debated by politicians and others who seek and demand a new interpretation of Islam), we must first consider the content and profile of such a theology. What do we expect from it? Besides being an expression of theological reflection on the aforementioned issues, many would expect that a European Islamic theology live up to modern methodological requirements such as the contextual and hermeneutical interpretation of texts, an analytical and critical approach to religious phenomena, etc. And this development is already taking place within Muslim theological thought. Examples include the rethinking of Sharia and Muslim identity in a secular context (A. El-Fadl, A. An-Naim); the rethinking of Islamic political theories and Islam's relationship to democracy (W. Hallag, A. Soroush, A. El-Effendi); Qur'anic hermeneutics and the reinterpretation of Islamic orthodoxy (F. Rahman, M. Arkoun, Abu Zayd); rethinking Islamic normativeness within a European context (T. Ramadan, F. Karcic, T. Oubrou).

These developments are not located in a specific geographical area and the aforementioned thinkers have lived in various parts of the world (although mostly in the West). We cannot geographically locate progressive thinking, just as we cannot pinpoint conservatism or religious extremism to certain areas. This means that ideas one might consider as highly relevant for European Islam may also occur elsewhere, for example in Indonesia or Morocco—countries that have experienced a flowering of modern Islamic thought. However, it is quite natural to consider that these ideas come largely from Europe, being generated by the struggle to define Islam in a European context. In that sense, we can talk of a new phenomenon called European Islamic theology.

I began by arguing that one can talk about European Islam in a sociocultural sense without relating it to a distinct European Islamic theology. But in fact, valuable theological reflection as exercised by the previously mentioned thinkers can take place without having any real impact on the wider Muslim population. These thinkers are not very well

known and discussed within broader Muslim circles and their ideas need systematic dissemination.

Therefore, it makes sense to ask two questions here. First, is there a cause-and-effect relationship between progressive Islamic theological and philosophical thought and the lived reality of Muslim populations in Europe? And second, should European Islamic theology be regarded as a precondition or as an outcome of the integration of Muslims in Europe?

Islamic theology at European/ Scandinavian universities

Compared to the Netherlands and especially Germany, where centers for Islamic studies, including Islamic theology have been established, the Scandinavian countries are a bit behind. However, we have partly managed to establish theological studies of Islam at some universities (Copenhagen, Oslo and Uppsala).

In Denmark, the Faculty of Theology at University of Copenhagen housed a Center for European Islamic Thought from 2007 to 2011, but it was closed because of research reprioritization and financial cutbacks. The same faculty hired a professor of Qur'anic studies in 2013 and as of 2016, it is running a masters program on Islam with a primary focus on Islamic chaplaincy.

In Norway, at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo, there is a masters program ("Religion and Society") that includes different Islamic subjects such as Islamic theology, philosophy, ethics and Sufism, aiming to contribute to both Islamic theology and interreligious theology.

In Sweden, in 2012, Uppsala University established a bachelors program in Islamic Studies entitled "Training in Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Jurisprudence."

The entire discussion about Islamic theology goes back to the 2000s, when the issue of education programs for imams was raised. Several public figures and politicians claimed that the integration of Muslims in Europe depended on whether Muslims had a modern European interpretation of Islam that was contrary to the conservative and radical Islam preached by many imams.

Since then, we have had many discussions about the need and importance of Islamic studies at university level with the participation of university employees, politicians and Muslim representatives. We have come to the conclusion that it would be unrealistic to establish imam training as such at the present time, but that it is possible and necessary to teach Islamic

theology at universities as a subject accessible to all interested, including those who wish to become imams.

Muslim representatives and organizations in Denmark and Norway are still quite skeptical about initiatives to establish study programs in Islamic theology at secular universities. However, this has changed to a certain extent since some imams have been employed by the state as hospital or prison chaplains and more Muslims, including imams, have participated in the existing courses on Islam at the Faculty of Theology in Oslo, and after having discussed it at several conferences and consultations during the last few years. This is evident in Denmark since several imams actively participated in the establishment of a masters program in "Islamic theology and practices" with a focus on Islamic chaplaincy at the Faculty of Theology in Copenhagen.

I remember the first conference on Islamic theology in Denmark in 2005, organized by the University of Copenhagen, whose goal was to discuss the possibilities and the experiences of other countries and Danish local ambitions in relation to academic studies in Islamic theology. Surprisingly, the Danish politicians and Muslim representatives present agreed not to launch such a program, although their motivations differed. The politicians argued that education in Islamic theology is an internal Muslim issue, whereas the Muslim representatives emphasized that a study of Islamic theology, which they perceived as being in fact imam training, should not be organized by Danish secular universities. In addition, I can mention our colleagues from the humanities, who were ultimately skeptical about theology, especially Islamic theology, as an academic subject.

There was a similar process in Norway. At the University of Oslo, on the initiative of the Faculty of Theology and in collaboration with the Islamic Council in Norway, a working group was established in 2007 to examine the possibility of establishing a Center for Islamic Studies in the Faculty of Theology. The initiative was not realized partly because of Muslim skepticism about the very idea of studying Islamic theology at a Christian theological faculty. The Muslims questioned whether it would not mean doing Islamic theology in a Christian way. It was also because the faculties of theology and humanities were unable to agree on the location of the center. A Center for Islamic and Middle East Studies was established at the Faculty of Humanities in 2011, but its field of research and teaching did not include studies in Islamic theology.

Coming back to the original question about the relationship between Islamic theology and the everyday life of European Muslims, we can come to the following conclusion based on the Scandinavian experience: the establishment of academic studies in Islamic theology, fully accepted and supported by Muslims, will remain a difficult task as long as Muslims

are not familiar and comfortable with the concept of theological studies within a secular university. Despite the already existing study programs at some universities, which actually do contribute to the continued education of imams, the majority of practicing Muslims continue to prefer imams/theologians who are trained at traditional madrasas and Islamic colleges/universities. Nevertheless, theological reflection related to the European context is already an important part of the Muslim self-understanding and the future study of Islamic theology will most likely be an integral part of the existing European academic system.

The Authors of the Qur'an are Still Alive: The Qur'an as an Act of Communication

Mouhanad Khorchide

The Qur'an is not a monologue

I am aware that the title of my presentation can be provocative for us Muslims because it suggests that the Qur'an has been written by humans who are still alive. But that is not what I intend to express. To avoid any misunderstanding, I say very clearly that there is no question for Muslims that the Qur'an is the Word of God. But the question is how we can understand the act of revelation of the Qur'an and can therefore also comprehend the act of understanding the Qur'an.

The term Qur'an means something that is recited. The Qur'an understands itself as speech or recitation and not as a book. The Qur'an as a book was compiled after the death of the prophet Mohammed. If you read the Qur'an, you'll find phrases such as: "Mohammed, they ask you about... Tell them this and that" or "O you mankind...", "You believers", "People of the book" and so forth. These phrases indicate that the Qur'an is not a monologue; communication clearly takes place and various protagonists get a chance to participate in this communication.

Beside these forms of communication, we find passages in the Qur'an in which the human being gets a chance to speak—directly rather than being quoted. For example, the first Sura in the Qur'an, the Sura al-Fatiha, the one that is most often recited by Muslims because it is found in every prayer and every prayer unit, reads as follows:

> In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds; Most Gracious, Most Merciful; Master of the Day of Judgment. Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek. Show us the straight way, the way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who go not astray.[1]

So who is speaking in this Sura? It is not God who speaks to the human and says: "Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek; show us the straight way." Rather, it is the believers who speak to God and who beg God for guidance. Nevertheless, it is a Sura from the Qur'an which contains the Word of God. Why does God quote humans when they say: "Show us the straight way"? Human beings seek to be guided and to get the help of God.

There are many other passages in the Qur'an in which not God but human beings speak. For example:

> Our Lord! Condemn us not if we forget or fall into error; our Lord! Lay not on us a burden like that which Thou didst lay on those before us; Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Blot out our sins, and grant us forgiveness. Have mercy on us. Thou art our Protector; Help us against those who stand against faith (2:286).

Here, the human being's concern is also to receive forgiveness. Human beings utter their longing and this is part of the Qur'an.

God speaks in the Qur'an and the human being speaks through God's Word. And likewise, God uses human language. As Nasr Abu Zayd says, the Qur'an is the God-human word.[2] God speaks in the Qur'an through human beings because God employs their linguistic and cultural language, but the human being also speaks in the Qur'an through God because the Qur'an carries God's revelation.

I would like to underline that for me as a Muslim, the Qur'an constitutes God's Word. I say this so that no brother or sister in faith will misunderstand me and ascribe to me a belief that humans wrote the Qur'an. What I want to say is that God does not hold a monologue or speak independently from human beings. The Qur'an itself states: "We have made it a Qur'an in Arabic, that ye may be able to understand" (43:3), so that the first recipients directly addressed here could understand it. In other words, we can say

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[1] Translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali.
[2] Cf. Nasr Abu Zayd, "The Qur'an: God and Man in Communication," lecture on 27 November 2000 at the University of Leiden, at http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/forum/01_1/onderzoek/lecture.pdf

that in the revelation act of the Qur'an, God borrowed the human linguistic, psychological and cultural language of the first recipients.

The first and main recipient of the Qur'an was the prophet Mohammed. According to the Islamic and Qur'anic conception, he did not receive it directly from God but by communication through the angel Gabriel. Why was this? Because God's Word needs translation. God does not speak in a divine, absolute manner that is not accessible for humans, but rather imparts God's Word so that it becomes comprehensible.

THE QUR'AN IS THOROUGHLY DIVINE

What makes the Qur'an divine? In the first place, it is its aesthetics. Understood as God's revelation, the Qur'an represents a medium for the encounter with God. It is God whom I encounter when reciting or hearing the Qur'an. Muslims who recite or hear the Qur'an are often deeply moved by it. It touches them in their hearts, even if they do not understand its content. This is not primarily about content but about the aesthetics of the Qur'an.

THE QUR'AN IS LIKEWISE THOROUGHLY HUMAN

What makes the Qur'an human? By revealing Godself in the Qur'an, God gets involved with the human being. This means that in their everyday reality the first recipients to whom God speaks participate constitutively in God's speech. God's speech is a result of the communication between God and humans. When I say human, I mean the first recipients. If God speaks to them for example about war material, God speaks of the horses they shall prepare:

> Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies of Allah and your enemies, and others besides, whom ye may not know, but whom Allah doth know. Whatever ye shall spend in the cause of Allah, shall be repaid unto you, and ye shall not be treated unjustly (8:60).

God does not talk about jet fighters and tanks and if he mentions transportation, he talks about donkeys and horses rather than cars and airplanes: "And (He has created) horses, mules, and donkeys, for you to ride and use for show; and He has created (other) things of which ye have no knowledge" (16:8). Indeed, the Qur'an claims to address not only Mohammed and the people of his setting, the first recipients, but understands itself as God's message to all human beings at all times. So the Qur'an also asserts the claim that

he addresses me here today in Europe just as he addresses you, too. The first recipients participated as constituents in the form of Qur'anic speech.

The hermeneutical challenge

As readers we need to deal with the hermeneutical challenge that the form was fixed by its written compilation. The Qur'an as speech is dynamic, but it adjusts itself to the language of the particular situation of its first recipients on the seventh-century Arabian peninsula. On the contrary, the Qur'an as a book, as scripture, is fixed. Its form no longer changes. Today, in the twenty-first century, I read in the Qur'an that donkeys and horses are my means of transportation. I read a certain perception of women. I cannot exchange those words with terms such as car, jet or equal rights because the form of the language has been already fixed in written form. An alteration of the language would be a falsification of the Qur'an. So all that remains is to project my everyday reality into the text so that as transportation, I understand cars and airplanes instead of horses and donkeys, for example.

But why is that even possible? It is only possible on one condition: if I understand the Qur'an not as a text or a book but as speech or communication that also takes place here and now when I read or hear it. The Qur'an speaks to me, indeed God speaks to me, especially in the act of reading and/or hearing the Qur'an. Even if God uses the same form in God's speech as God did with the first recipients, God leaves it up to me to decode this form, to understand God's message for me here and now according to my life's reality.

So that is why I am, here and now in my real life, constitutively contributing to this speech with God. My life reality and I as an individual are communicating with God here and now. If the Qur'an had been revealed today, today's language would have to be written in the Qur'an as well. But since that is not the case, because the revelation process of the Qur'an has already been completed, my communication with God through the Qur'an remains as speech today.

In the words of the great philosopher Paul Ricœur: "To interpret a text is to follow the path of thought opened by the text, to place oneself en route towards the orient[ation] of the text."[3] "What must be interpreted is a proposed world which I could inhabit and wherein I could project one of my own most possibilities."[4] Ricœur agrees that the text "invites multiple

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[3] Paul Ricœur, From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics, II, transl. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 122.
[4] Ibid., 86.

readings." Understanding oneself in relation to the text, he argues, is considerably more than "projecting oneself and one's beliefs and prejudices; it is to let the work and its world enlarge the horizon of the understanding which I have of myself."[5]

But contrary to Ricœur's hermeneutics, there is a special feature in the Qur'an. If I read the Qur'an, the act differs from reading another book in an essential dimension: God, as the originator of the Qur'an, not only still exists, but still communicates with me, in fact constantly. Just as the Qur'an itself speaks about God breathing life into the human person from God's spirit, there exists a medium inside human beings that enables them as limited creatures to communicate with the unlimited and thus to communicate with God directly. God continuously inspires the human being and this divine inspiration also accompanies humans when they read, hear or recite the Qur'an. When reading the Qur'an, the author is thus present. This author does not sit in front of the reader or hearer and speak in an objective language to them, but rather is closer than their own carotid artery, as the Qur'an says. The author is, in a metaphorical sense, inside the human person and the author does not speak an objective language that is divided from humans but through humans, through their fears and their hopes, through whatever they are engaged in or what they suppress, etc.

Therefore, there cannot be a single, forever valid interpretation of the Qur'an. Even in the life of the individual believer interpretations may change in relation to the different stages and experiences in their lives. God speaks to the human person throughout different situations. Qur'anic speech has various connotations and different meanings at different moments in the life of the individual. Hence, it is necessary to read and recite the Qur'an frequently. If the content were static, it would be sufficient to read the Qur'an once or twice in one's life; the message would then have been understood. But that is not the way it is because the Qur'an does not impart objective insights that exist independently of the reader/hearer. Rather, it develops its message steadily in interaction with the reader. Imam Ali, the forth Caliph, already said: "It is not the Qur'an which speaks; rather humans make it speak. Phrases like: "The Qur'an says...", or "the Qur'an suggests..." must be observed carefully. It is more correct to say: "I understand that the Qur'an wants to tell me...tomorrow I will understand that the Qur'an wants to tell me something else..." etc. In this way, the interaction between God and human beings remains an open communication.

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[5] Paul Ricœur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, transl. and introduced by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 178

Some could argue that this consideration could lead to a random interpretation of the Qur'an. This is true, but it is not so bad because we as humans have different concerns about which we communicate with God and the Qur'an should address everyone's individual request. On the other hand, we must protect against inhumane interpretations of the Qur'an so that the randomness of understanding is not understood in the sense of it being legitimate to read everything into the Qur'an. Because if I can read everything into the Qur'an, I silence it so that finally, God will not be available anymore as a communication partner and the Qur'an will stop being a communication.

God's mercy

The Qur'an itself describes God's highest attribute as mercifulness and highlights mercy as a God-addressed Qur'anic demand that is propagated by the prophet Mohammed. God says: "We sent thee not Mohammed, but as a Mercy for all creatures" (21:107). Every interpretation of the Qur'an that contradicts this criterion of mercy is therefore to be rejected. Mercy plays a central role in the Qur'an. The creation of the human being is already about mercy: "The most Gracious! It is He Who has taught the Qur'an. He has created man" (55:1-3) and "the mercy of God extendeth to all things" (7:156). But this mercy has been revealed not as a monologue but, rather, through human beings, their actions and life plans. It is not God who intervenes directly in this world to manifest God's mercy, but rather this is realized through human beings who act as God's tools if they say "yes" to God in freedom. This is exactly what the Qur'an wants to express with the word "caliph" as a synonym for human being. The human person is the medium through which God's intention of love and mercy is expressed. He/she has been assigned to that. The prophet Mohammed said:

> In the hereafter, God will say to a man: ‹I was sick and you didn't visit me, I was hungry and you didn't give me anything to eat, and I was thirsty and you didn't bring me anything to drink.' Astonished, the man will thereupon ask: ‹But You are God, how can You be sick, thirsty or hungry?!' God will answer him: ‹On such and such a day, one of your acquaintances was sick and you didn't visit him; if you had visited him, you would have found Me there at his place. One day, one of your acquaintances was hungry and you didn't give him anything to eat, and one day one of your acquaintances was thirsty and you didn't bring him anything to drink.'"[6]

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[6] Transmitted via Muslim, Hadith Nr. 2569.

This revelation of God's mercy through the action of humans applies equally to the Qur'an: the Qur'an claims to be a message of mercy which can only be unfolded through the human being in Qur'anic speech because humans participate constitutively in Qur'anic speech through their communication with God. Where human beings fail, where they are not available as God's tools, God's mercy can only partly reveal and unfold itself and this also in the Qur'an, because the Qur'an is God-human-speech. This also explains why in the Qur'anic text, God's mercy is not always mentioned. When I read: "Remember how the Unbelievers plotted against thee, to keep thee in bonds, or slay thee, or get thee out (of thy home). They plot and plan, and Allah too plans; but the best of planners is Allah" (8:30), then God speaks with the voice of a Muslim community which has long been oppressed. This situation is difficult because the Qur'an portrays a surface and likewise a product of the interaction with humans. God does not ignore the community to whom God addresses God's message; God shares their joy as well as their rage because God speaks through them. God also speaks through Mohammed and so shares his worries, his hopes as well as his fear, grief and fury: "Their purpose was to scare thee off the land, in order to expel thee; but in that case they would not have stayed (therein) after thee, except for a little while" (in Mekka) (and finally fall victim to the judgment) (17:76) and "When ye turn away from them and the things they worship other than Allah, betake yourselves to the Cave: Your Lord will shower His mercies on you and dispose of your affair towards comfort and ease" (18:16).

Qur'anic speech and the maturity of the recipients

So where the first recipients' situation was too difficult and God's mercy might have come into effect, the human response to the situation prevented mercy from unfolding itself; here one may read one or another more aggressive passage in the Qur'an. Hence, the speech of the Qur'an develops with the maturity of the first recipients. This can be compared with parents who talk to their children aged 6, 16 or 26: to impart the same message, the parents use different forms, images and expressions at each stage. Their discourse evolves depending on their child's level of maturity, but in all their discourses, they wish to express one thing: their love and responsibility for their children. Even if they threaten their child with punishment, or tell the child that the parents of the child who hit their child unjustly will be the ones to judge the child, the aggressive tone is due to the situation.

Thus we read verses like 2:190–192 in the Qur'an, which allow Muslims to defend themselves in the case of military attack. But where the situation

is almost ideal and humans are in paradise, it reads: "Allah says: 'This is a day on which the truthful will profit from their truth: theirs are gardens, with rivers flowing beneath, their eternal Home: Allah well-pleased with them and they with Allah. That is the great salvation, (the fulfillment of all desires)'" (5:119). Here, mercy comes into full effect; here there is talk of the fact that humans should be satisfied with God. God lets Godself be evaluated by humans and it is God's concern that they be satisfied with God. In my view, this is a major statement in the Qur'an.

The Qur'an as a medium and likewise a product of interaction of humans with God and God with humans in their different human needs is not a monologue. Neither is it the pure Word of God, nor the pure word of the human being. If the Qur'an says: "Nothing have we omitted from the Book" (6:38), then this does not denote a juridical or normative level in the sense that the Qur'an has regulated and determined everything. Rather, it points to the weakness as well as the strength of human beings, their anger, joy, hope, etc. All human beings can find themselves in the Qur'an in every situation of their lives. The criterion of mercy shall be a protection against inhumane interpretations of the Qur'an; here the Qur'an intervenes correctively.

Because the Qur'anic text is fixed, the act of speech, of communication between God and humans is no longer fixed in the text but, rather, in its interpretation. Therefore, exegesis today portrays the result of communication between God and humans who meet in the Qur'an when they read or hear it. The Qur'an is the stage on which they meet. The exegesis becomes dynamic: it does not say what the Qur'an means or what God wants to say to us but, rather, it is the result of the communication between those who are involved in the development of this exegesis and God. There are many participants, immediate and intermediate. Everyone who shapes our religious discourse also influences our communication with God through the Qur'an and sits at the communication table.

Nevertheless, the more mature the reader of the Qur'an, the more mature will be their interpretation of the Qur'an. Those who are merciful will be more likely to interpret the Qur'an in the sense of mercy, but those who carry hate in their hearts are more likely to read this hate into the Qur'an. The Qur'an gives us the concept of mercy as an indicator to avoid randomness. The Qur'an says in the second Sura that it provides guidance for the pious. So, it assumes piety, a certain inner maturity that allows humans to read mercy rather than hatred into their communication with the Qur'an. How we interpret the Qur'an reveals more about us than about God or the Qur'an itself. So our duty today is fully to unfold this mercy in the exegesis of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an on the Exclusivist Religious Truth Claim: A Ma'nā-cum-Maghzā Approach and its Application to Q 2:111–113

Sahiron Syamsuddin

Introduction

Religious exclusivism is one of the factors leading to intolerance among the various religious communities. Religious exclusivism is the position that the truth belongs to one religion alone, and that all other religions that differ from it are simply false. Because of such truth claims certain groups believe other groups to be on the wrong path and that only their followers will be saved. This attitude is widespread in our societies and poses a serious challenge to today's pluralistic societies. This theological position has a negative socio-political impact since it is used to legitimize the discrimination against others. I believe that an exclusivist religious truth claim is still alive in Muslim communities, including those in Indonesia.

For a good Muslim, the Qur'an provides guidance for their daily life. Since good Muslims try to behave according to their understanding of the Qur'an it is important that Muslim scholars of Qur'anic studies make it easily comprehensible. In the following, I shall attempt to interpret Qur'anic verses that refer to the religious truth claim. While there are many verses that can be discussed, I shall focus on Q 2:111–113, analyzing and interpreting these verses using the *ma'nā-cum-maghzā*-approach:

> (111) They also say, "No one will enter Paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian." This is their own wishful thinking. [Prophet], say, "Produce your evidence, if you

are telling the truth." (112) In fact, any who direct themselves wholly to God and do good will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve. (113) The Jews say, "The Christians have no ground whatsoever to stand on," and the Christians say, "The Jews have no ground whatsoever to stand on," though they both read the Scripture, and those who have no knowledge say the same; God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences.[1]

Maʻnā-cum-maghzā approach

The *maʻna-cum-maghza* approach is an exegetical approach where the interpreter tries to grasp the original historical meaning (*maʻnā*) of a text (i.e., the Qur'an) as it was understood by its first audience and then to develop its significance (*maghzā*) for the contemporary situation. There are other terms whose methodical substance is similar to this approach. Fazlur Rahman calls it the "double movement" approach. In his work, *Interpreting the Qur'an*[2] and *Reading the Quran in the Twenty-first Century,*[3] Abdullah Saeed develops what he calls a "contextualist approach." However, both Rahman's double movement and Saeed's contextualist approach appear only to be applied to the interpretation of Qur'anic legal verses, while the *maʻnā-cum-maghzā* approach is supposed to be applicable to the whole Qur'an (except *al-hurūf al-muqattaʻa*).

This approach presupposes that every text, including the Qur'anic text, has, first, a historical meaning specific to its own context since the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in a particular situation. The meaning of a certain Qur'anic text becomes universal through the process of further interpretation. On this basis, in order to understand its original meaning, it is crucial that the interpreter pays attention not only to the textuality of the text, but also to its historical context. In this case, the analysis of the Qur'anic language in light of seventh-century CE/first century AH Arabic is obligatory. This process is based on the fact that every language has synchronic and diachronic aspects. The synchronic aspect is the linguistic one that does not change, whereas the diachronic one is the one that changes over time. In order to avoid misunderstanding a text, the interpreter has to be aware of the development of the meaning of a word, idiom, phrase and structure. For example, the Arabic word *ikhlās,* which basically means the state of making something pure, is subject to development. In the pre-Islamic tradition, the word refers to the action of making something pure in a secular context. In

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[1] This Qur'an translation is from Abdul Haleem.
[2] Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).
[3] Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-first Century: A Contextualist Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

the Qur'an this word is used either in a secular or in a religious context. In relation to its Qur'anic usage in a religious sense, it means a monotheistic belief and action, so that its meaning is the same as that of *tawhīd* (the unity of God). This is supported by the fact that the sura, whose verses talk about monotheism, is called *sūrat al-ikhlās*.[4] The term is then defined by Muslim scholars as an act of directing all good deeds only for the purpose of receiving God's mercy. It means that it has pre-Qur'anic, Qur'anic and post-Qur'anic meanings, although its basic meaning still exists.

In order to understand the historical meaning which, according to Jorge Gracia, constitutes the "historical function of interpretation,"[5] one must also pay attention to the broader historical context in which a certain verse or sura was revealed. In this case, the *asbāb al-nuzūl* ("occasions of revelation") and the historical accounts of culture, tradition, legal system, socio-political situation and economic condition to which the Qur'an possibly responded are very helpful. Many classical Muslim scholars asserted that nobody could understand the Qur'an properly unless they knew its *asbāb al-nuzūl.* 'Alī ibn Ahmad al-Wāhidī (d. 468 H.), for example, writes in his work *Asbāb al-Nuzūl,* "The *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* are the most complete aspect to be understood and the first one to be paid attention to, because it is impossible to interpret a verse and its intention without understanding its story and explanation."[6] According to Fazlur Rahman, it can lead someone not only to grasp the original meaning of the Qur'anic text, but also what he calls *ratio legis* on which a Qur'anic ruling was based.[7] Abdullah Saeed points out that the knowledge of the socio-historical context can help one decide whether the message of a certain Qur'anic verse should be particularly or universally applied.[8]

However, the understanding of the original/historical meaning constitutes a starting point for further, deeper interpretation, which

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[4] See Ibn al-Munzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), 1227.

[5] Jorge J.E. Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality* (Albany: State University of New York Press,1996), 155. Garcia writes, "The aim of the interpreter is to recreate in the contemporary audience, first, the mental acts of the historical author of the text, not as creator of the text, but as audience. In other words, the aim of the interpreter taken in this sense is to produce an understanding in the contemporary audience that is intensionally the same to the understanding the author had of the text. The interpreter, second, has in mind the re-creation in the contemporary audience of the acts of understanding through which the historical audience of the text or the audience for which the work was intended went or were expected to go."

[6] 'Alī ibn Ahmad al-Wāhidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, ed. Isām ibn 'Abd al-Muhsin (Dammam: Dar al-Salāh, n.d.), 8.

[7] See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 6f.

[8] See Saeed, op. cit (note 2), 123f.

is relevant for the time in which such is conducted. There are several hermeneutical ways to develop and broaden the meaning of the Qur'anic text so that it can be understood in and applied to a contemporary environment. One of the ways to find out what the text means can be called *maghzā* (significance), or main message of a verse, or in Gadamer's word "general sense" (sinngemäß). Gadamer says:

> The task of interpretation always poses itself when the meaning content of the printed work is disputable and it is the matter of attaining the correct understanding of what is being announced. However, this "thing that is being conveyed" [Kunde] is not what the speaker or writer originally said, but rather what he would have wanted to say to me if I had been his original interlocutor. It is well-known that in the interpretation of "commands" or "order'" [Befehlen] as a hermeneutical problem, such orders are to be followed "according to their general sense" [Sinngemäß] and not in their literal meaning. Accordingly, we must say that a text is not simply a given object but a phase in the execution of the communicative event [Verständigungsgeschehen].[9]

Interpretation of Q 2:111–113

The *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* interpretation takes into consideration both the language of the verses under discussion and their socio-historical context for the purpose of grasping, first, their original historical meaning and, second, producing their new meaning for the period during which their reinterpretation is conducted.

Linguistic analysis of the verses

Wa qālū lan yadkhula l-jannata illā man kāna hūdan aw naṣārā (Q 2:111)

The plural pronoun in the verb *qālū* (they said) refers to the Jews and Christians in Medina. This reference can be understood from *illā man kāna hūdan aw naṣārā* (unless he is a Jew or a Christian). So, the abovementioned statement can be translated as follows: They [i.e., the Jews and the Christians] said, "No one will enter Paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian." Their statement constitutes a truth claim. However, it is not clear, whether the

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[9] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," in Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (eds), *Dialogue & Deconstruction. The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1989), 35.

intention was to humiliate each other, or the Muslims. According to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, the first possibility seems to be closer to the meaning of the text, as indicated in verse 113 that will be discussed. He says that Q 2:113 constitutes a more detailed explanation of Q 2:111 by mentioning the statement of the Jews against the Christians and vice versa.[10]

Tilka amāniyyuhum (Q 2:111)

The word *amāniyy* is a plural form of *umniyya*, meaning "wish for something." It has the same meaning as *munya* (singular) or *munā* (plural).[11] The phrase was interpreted by Muqātil ibn Sulaymān as *tamannaw 'alā Allāh* (they wished on God).[12] This word is translated by Abdul Haleem as "wishful thinking." The phrase is accordingly translated as "This is their own wishful thinking." The similar meaning can be found in Hartmut Bobzin's German translation of the verse, "Das sind jedoch nur ihre Wünsche." This indicates that their truth claim was denied by God.

Qul hātū burhānakum (Q 2:111)

The phrase *hātū burhānakum* means "to bring or produce your evidence." The word *hāti,* according to al-Zamakhsharī, has the same meaning as *ahdir* (provide; make something available).[13] Muqātil ibn Sulaymān interpreted the words *burhānakum* as *hujjatukum min al-tawrāt wa al-injīl* (your evidence from the Torah and gospel).[14] In order to reject such a truth claim, the Prophet Muhammad was ordered to challenge them to provide evidence (*burhān*). This was difficult because entering into paradise is one of the eschatological aspects that are known only to God.

Balā man aslama wajhahū li Allāhi wa huwa muhsinun (Q 2:112)

According to al-Zamakhsharī, the word *balā* is mentioned here in order for the Prophet Muhammad to reject the truth claims of the Jews and Christians of Medina.[15] The phrase *man aslama wajhahū li Allāhi* is interpreted by al-Zamakhsharī as *man akhlasa nafsahū lahū lā yushriku bihī ghayrahū* (anyone

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[10] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 8.

[11] Ibn al Manzūr, op. cit (note 4), 4283.

[12] Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, ed. Ahmad Farīd, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīya, 2003), 72.

[13] Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1 (Riyad: Maktabat al-'Abikan, 1998), 311.

[14] Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, op. cit. (note 12), vol. 1, 72.

[15] Al-Zamakhsharī, op. cit. (note 13), vol. 1, 311.

who purifies himself for God and does not associate others with Him).[16] It means that he believes in the One and Only God. Similarly, al-Tabarī interprets the phrase as "those who submit themselves to God in a sincere way."[17] Al-Rāzī has a similar interpretation. He insisted that the meaning of *man aslama wajhahu* is "those who submit their heart to the obedience of God (*islām al-nafs li tā'at Allāh*)." A modern interpreter, Ibn ʿĀshūr, says in his *al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr,* that the meaning of the word *islām* is "*taslīm al-dhāt li awāmir Allāh*" (the total obedience of the person to God's commands). Accordingly, he says, "Paradise will not be a monopoly for anyone, but it will be possessed by all those who submit to God."[18] All these interpreters agree on the point that the word *aslama* does not mean to enter Islam exclusively, but to submit to God, regardless of the fact whether a person is a Jew, Christian or Muslim.

In terms of the phrase *wa-huwa muhsinun,* interpreters differ. According to al-Tabarī, it means that someone's submission to God had to be sincere. Unlike al-Tabarī, al-Rāzī said that it means that "someone's obedience to God must be followed by good deeds, not by bad ones."[19] Ibn ʿĀshūr tried to combine the two opinions by saying it is not enough only to submit one's heart to Allah and to conduct good deeds without *ikhlās* (sincere devotion).[20]

Fa lahū ajruhū ʿinda rabbihi wa lā khawfun ʿalayhim wa lā hum yahanūna (Q 2:112)

This statement insists that those who devote themselves will be rewarded by God, that there is no fear for them, and that they will not grieve. There are no difficult words here, except the structural change or alteration from the singular to the plural pronoun.

Wa qālat al-yahūdu laysat al-nasārā ʿalā shay'in wa qālat al-nasārā laysat al-yahūdu ʿalā shay' (Q 2:113)

According to al-Zamakhsharī, the combination between the negative particle/verb *laysa* and the unspecific word *shay'* indicates the exaggeration in the

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān fī Taʾwīl Ay al-Qurʾān*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Dār Hajar, 2001), 431.

[18] Muhammad ibn al-Tāhir ibn ʿĀshūr, *al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 2 (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnīsiyya li al-Nasyr, 1984), 674.

[19] Al-Rāzī, op. cit. (note 10), vol. 4, 4.

[20] Ibn ʿĀshūr, op. cit. (note 18), vol. 2, 675.

negation.[21] The Qur'anic statement indicates that the Jews and Christians were in a conflict and each group accused the other group of going astray.

The immediate historical context: The occasion of revelation (Asbab al-Nuzūl)

Before mentioning the historical context of the verses, it is helpful to remind ourselves of Angelika Neuwirth's insight:

> We used to understand the Qur'an as the 'Islamic text' par excellence, though historically viewed, this is not evident at all. The Qur'an, before rising to the rank of the Islamic structure, for more than twenty years was an oral communication. Its message was not addressed to Muslims yet, ... but to the pre-Islamic listeners whom we might best describe as late antique educated persons, be they pagans, or syncretic believers familiar with monotheistic tradition, or be they even Jews and Christians.[22]

Q 2:111–113 were revealed to Prophet Muhammad in Medina. The audience were the Jews and Christians of Medina. According to Muslim historians, they dealt for the first time with the Christians of Najran and the Jewish rabbis in Medina. It is reported that on the occasion of the revelation (*asbab al-nuzūl*), when the Christian delegation of Najran came to the Prophet Muhammad, some Jewish rabbis came to them and said that they were not at all on the right path in terms of their religiosity. Responding to this accusation, the Christians said the same thing.[23] In his Qur'an commentary Fakhr al-Rāzī also provides the same report in a bit more detail. He quotes a report that describes how when some people of Najrān had come to the Prophet Muhammad, Jewish religious scholars or rabbis (*ahbār al-yahūd*) came to them and a serious debate among the two parties ensued and that their voices were high and strong. The Jews said, "You are not on the right track in terms of the religion." The Jews did not believe in Jesus and his *Injīl* (gospel). The Christians, in turn, accused the Jews of not believing

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[21] Al-Zamakhsharī, op. cit. (note 12), vol. 1, 312: He says, 'fa idhā nufia itlāq ism al-shay' 'alayhi fa qad būligha fī tark al-i'tidād bihī ilā mā laysa bi 'adad' (If the mentioning of something is negated, it is exaggerated in not counting it up to what is not counted).
[22] Angelika Neuwirth, "The Discovery of Writing in the Qur'an: Tracing an Epistemic Revolution in Late Antiquity," in *NUN: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Tafsir di Nusantara 2*, 1 (2016), 31-32.
[23] See al-Tabarī, op. cit. (note 17), vol. 2, 435.

in Moses and his Torah in a right way.[24] Knowing this context can help the interpreter to comprehend the verses, even though they need other historical sources in order to deepen their understanding. Muhammad 'Abduh says that in order to understand the verses, one should look at the history of religions and religious communities, so that one knows whether such belief is universal or applies only to a certain group of them.

THE BROADER HISTORICAL CONTEXT: ENCOUNTER BETWEEN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN MEDINA

The population of pre-Islamic Medina consisted of pagan Arabs and Jewish clans. The Aus and Khazraj constituted the biggest Jewish tribes. It is not clear whether they came from Palestine. A relatively small number of Christians also lived in this pluralistic city.[25] Thanks to the migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions and the conversion of the Medinan people to Islam, the city became even more pluralistic. Now also Muslims lived in the city. Even Q 2:62, which is a Medinan verse, not only mentions the Jews and Christians, but also the *sābi'ūn.* With regard to this term, there are diverse opinions among Muslim scholars. Some say that the *sābi'ūn* are those who did not have any religion, i.e., atheists. This opinion is mentioned on the authority of Mujāhid ibn Jabr,[26] a successor (*tābi'ī*) and student of Ibn 'Abbās.

THE MAIN MESSAGE (MAGHZĀ) OF THE VERSES

These verses clearly prohibit any exclusivist religious truth claims. Even if they refer to the truth claims by the Jews and Christians in Medina, the prohibition is directed at every religious community, including Muslims. This message can be inferred from the Qur'anic rejection of the religious truth claim, *balā man aslama wajhahū li Allāhi wa huwa muhsinun.* According to this, salvation will be received in the hereafter by anyone who submits to the One and Only God and conducts good deeds, regardless of their religion. This is why the Qur'an did not state, for example, *balā man ittaba'a muhammadan* (in fact, anyone who follows Muhammad).

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[24] See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, op. cit. (note 10), vol. 4, 8.
[25] See Marco Schöller, "Medina," in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān,* vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill 2003), 368.
[26] Al-Tabarī, op. cit. (note 17), vol. 2, 35.

The rejection of any truth claim is also mentioned in other verses. Q 2:135–136 reads:

(135) They say, "Become Jews or Christians, and you will be rightly guided." Say (Prophet), "No, (ours is) the religion of Abraham, the upright, who did not worship any god besides God.

(136) So, [you, believers], say, "We believe in God and in what was sent down to us and sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and what was given to Moses, Jesus, and all prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction between them, and we devote ourselves to Him (*muslimūn*).'

From these verses, we can conclude that the rightly guided people are those who submit to the One and Only God (*muslimūn,* in a general sense). The people mentioned here are Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets. While the Prophet Muhammad and his followers submitted to the One and Only God, it is important to note that it is not explicitly stated that the rightly guided community is exclusively a Muslim community. This indicates that Muslims should not make truth claims as the Jews and Christians of Medina did at the time. Therefore, all those who devote themselves to God are the rightly guided.

On this basis, God will save every religious community that submits to Him. Q 2:62 states that the believers in the Prophecy of Muhammad, the Jews, the Christians and the Sabians will be saved in the Hereafter, given rewards by God and will not grieve.

Yet, some Muslims imagine that only Muslims (the followers of Muhammad) will be saved and enter paradise. Such opinion can be found in several exegetical works. While interpreting Q 2:62, Ibn Kathīr, a student of Ibn Taymīya, says in his *Tafsīr,*

I said, "This is not contradictory to what was reported by 'Alī ibn Abī Talha on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās who said that after the revelation of *inna lladhīna āmanū wa alladhī hādū wa al-nasārā* ... [Q.2:62], God revealed the verse *wa man yabtaghi ghayra l-islāmi dīnan fa lan yuqbala minhu* ...[Q. 3:85]. Indeed, what is said by Ibn 'Abbās is information that God will not accept any way and deed unless it agrees with the *sharī'a* of the Prophet Muhammad after God appointed him as a messenger. Yet, before his prophecy, all people who had followed their messenger were on the right guidance and way, and would be given salvation. The Jews were the followers of Moses, who consulted the Torah in deciding any legal aspects in their time."[27]

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[27] Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azhīm*, vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Fārūq al-hadītha, 2000), 431.

Before expressing such an opinion, he quotes another report by al-Suddī on the authority of Salmān al-Fārisī, who reportedly informed the Prophet Muhammad of the existence of people [i.e., Salmān's friends] who prayed and fasted; they also would believe in his prophecy; they believed that he would be the last messenger. After listening to Salmān, the Prophet Muhammad said, "O Salmān, they would go to Hell." On the basis of this report, Ibn Kathīr then said that the Jews' belief was only accepted before the coming of Jesus, and the Christians' belief was only accepted before the coming of Muhammad.[28] His statement is an example of an exclusivist truth claim made by Muslims. It seems to me that this has influenced many Muslims all over the world today.

Nevertheless, if we pay attention to the main message of Q 2:111–113 and such verses as Q 2:65, we will find that such a truth claim should be avoided. Many interpreters of the classical, modern and contemporary periods have interpreted the verses in an inclusive, even pluralistic way. In addition to the abovementioned interpreters, we can name Muhammad Sharūr who, in his work *al-Islām wa al-Īmān,* interprets the Qur'anic term *islām* in a pluralistic way. After collecting the word and its derivations and comparing them with the word *īmān* and its derivations in Qur'anic usage, he concludes that the criteria, according to which people will be saved on the Day of Judgment, are belief in the One and Only God, belief in the Hereafter, and good deeds. Those who fulfill these criteria are called *"muslimūn"* (those who submit themselves to God), and accordingly there are *"al-yahūd al-muslimūn"* (the Jews who devote themselves to God), *"al-nasārā al-muslimūn"* (the Christians who devote themselves to God), and *al-mu'minūn al-muslimūn* (the believers in the prophecy of Muhammad, who devote themselves to God).[29]

Concluding remarks

In today's world, Muslims need a new Islamic theology that also deals with the problem of religious truth claims. Exclusivist religious truth claims have led religious communities to misbehave and even to create social conflicts. Therefore, it is very important for us critically to review

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[28] Ibid.

[29] See Muhammad Shahrūr, *al-Islām wa al-Īmān* (Damascus: al-Ahālī, 1996). See also Andreas Christmann, *The Qur'an, Morality, and Critical Reason: The Essential Muhammad Shahrur* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 20–70; and Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Die Koranhermeneutik Muhammad Šahrûrs und ihre Beurteilungen aus der Sicht muslimischer Autoren: Eine kritische Untersuchung* (Wuerzburg: Ergon, 2009), 170–90.

such truth claims. Q 2:111–113 can be an Islamic theological foundation for the prevention of any exclusivist religious truth claim. Even though the verses speak about the truth claim between the Jews and the Christians of Medina, but their main message (significance; *maghzā*) is that all people who submit themselves to the One and Only God and conduct good deeds will be saved, and, therefore, no believer should hold onto an exclusivist claim to the truth.

Adam and Eve from the Perspective of Contemporary Feminist Exegesis of the Qur'an

Dina El Omari

Introduction

In Judaism, Christianity and Islam the story of Adam and Eve is potentially a source of controversy, because it is often used as the starting point for discussions about gender equality. The various religious texts can be interpreted very differently with respect to discrimination. Interpretations range from the discriminatory to the equitable.

In my view, the Qur'anic tradition of the Adam and Eve story offers a more favorable basis for an equitable interpretation of the text than the Old Testament. Nonetheless, traditional Qur'anic exegesis has not produced interpretations that support gender equality. Voices, especially those of women, demanding a new interpretation of the creation of humanity and therefore a breaking free from traditional, deadlocked patriarchal interpretations and their substitution by those with a gender-equitable understanding, have only come to the fore since the 1980s.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the creation story of Adam and Eve (or that of human beings) as it is found in the Qur'an from a contemporary feminist perspective as well as its impact on feminist exegesis. First, we have to consider the following: in the Qur'an, some verses deal directly with the creation story while there is a corpus of verses that are only about the creation of female and male in general and do not refer to the creation story. I would like to begin my article by citing the relevant Qur'anic verses

of the creation story and their dynamic. Then I will present a popular way of interpreting the story in traditional exegesis as an example and finally I will focus on feminist exegesis and its approach to the creation story.

The dynamic of the creation story

The Qur'an mentions Adam and his wife in different verses, but the focus differs from one passage to another. It is important to say that Eve is not mentioned by name in the Qur'an. Adam's spouse, as she is referred to in the Qur'an, is only mentioned in three of the five Qur'anic passages of the creation story. The two narratives without the woman are basically about the dialogue between God and the devil (Sura 15 and Sura 38). Three other passages are highly relevant to my argument: Q 20:115–124; Q 7:11–28; Q 2:30–38.

The beginning of the complex of verses 115–124 of Sura 20 contains God's warning to Adam not to eat from a tree in paradise, followed by the scene where the angels are enjoined to prostrate themselves before creation, which the devil refuses. In verse 117, God warns Adam about the devil's intention to expel the couple from paradise. In this passage, Adam's wife is mentioned for the first time. God promises both human creatures that they will be well supplied in paradise. Verses 120–121 recount the devil's temptation: they eat from the fruit and their nudity is exposed. Both cover themselves with leaves, but it is Adam who, despite the fact that both human creatures have transgressed, is addressed as the disobedient one. And he alone is also addressed by God regarding God's subsequent forgiveness and guidance. However, the couple is sent down to earth together with the warning that only the rightly guided will live a good life there.

Verses 11–28 of Sura 7 begin with the creation and molding of both human creatures. Here, the angels' command to bow down to Adam and the devil's refusal are repeated. This is followed by the dialogue between God and the devil and the warning to Adam that he and his wife must not eat from the tree, the temptation of the two by the devil, the appearance of their nudity and God's admonition to them. Both human creatures beg for forgiveness, but in this passage, forgiveness is not explicitly mentioned. In fact, both of them are sent down to earth with words of warning.

The group of verses 30–38 of Sura 2 then reveals the reason for which God created the human being: God wants to appoint the human being as a vicegerent. A dialogue with the angels and the ensuing command to prostrate themselves before Adam follow. All the angels comply with the command except Iblis, who refuses. The rest of this passage is similar to that of Sura 20: Adam and his wife are expected to inhabit the garden but not to eat from the tree. Both are seduced by the devil, whereupon God

orders them to leave the garden. But after this command, God forgives Adam and sends both with God's guidance down to earth.

According to Nöldecke, the verses of each sura are listed chronologically.[1] The chronology of all the passages as a whole is presented as follows: four of the suras originate from the Meccan and one of them from the Medina period: 20, 15 and 38 are mid-Meccan, 7 is late-Meccan and 2 is from the Medina period. Here we see a certain dynamic. While in Sura 20, the woman is mentioned, the focus is primarily on Adam. But this changes in Sura 7 and 2 to the effect that Eve also increasingly comes into focus. In Q 20:117, we find the following passage:

> Then We said: "O Adam! Surely this is an enemy to you and to your spouse. Do not let him drive you both out of paradise, so that you be wretched! Surely it is given to you neither hunger therein, nor to go naked, and that you neither thirst therein nor suffer the heat of the sun." But then Satan whispered to him (wicked ideas). He said: 'Adam! Shall I indicate to you the tree of eternity and a kingdom that does not decay?' So the two of them ate of it, and their shameful parts became displayed to them, and they took to splicing upon themselves some of the leaves of paradise. And Adam disobeyed his Lord; so he became misguided."

Q 7:19 states in much more detail:

> And (God said): "Adam! Dwell you and your spouse in paradise. So eat (fruits) of where you both decide! But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers." But Satan whispered to them (wicked thoughts) to make apparent to them what was concealed from them of their private parts (until then). He said: "Your Lord did only forbid you this tree (to prevent) that you become angels or become of the immortal." And he swore to both of them (and reaffirmed): "I advise you well." And so he misled them both by delusion. As soon as they both tasted from the tree, their private parts became apparent to them, and they began to tack together over themselves the leaves (of the tree) of Paradise. And their Lord called to them, 'Did I not forbid you to eat from that tree and tell you that Satan is a clear enemy to you?' They said, 'Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers.'"

This dynamic indicates that a gradual shift in perspective has taken place and that, interestingly, it is first Adam and then Adam and Eve together

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[1] See Theodor Nöldecke, *Geschichte des Qorans, Teil 1*, 5th reprint of 2nd edition (Hildesheim: Olms, 2005), 74ff., following Angelika Neuwirth Sura 15 has been revealed temporarily before Sura 20. See Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran, vol 2: Mittelmekkanische Suren: Ein neues Gottesvolk* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2017).

who are responsible for consuming the forbidden fruit. This way of telling the story allows for a gender-equitable interpretation of the text, which we will see in detail later, since it does not support the dominant Christian perception that the woman is responsible for the fall of humanity. Rather, it lays responsibility on both. However, the latter perception is not put forward in traditional Qur'anic exegesis. I will now illustrate this point.

Interpretation of the so-called "fall of humanity" in traditional Qur'anic exegesis

The problem of Muslim classical interpretation is that it differs significantly from the Qur'anic narration because of the impact of the Jewish-Christian tradition, which led to a change in how the creation story was understood. This phenomenon is evident with regard to the role of women in history. Medieval interpretations implied that women by nature lack rationality and moral liability. This perception was incorporated into Muslim exegesis, in which traditions of a misogynous nature were accepted as authentic material. This attitude changed only slowly in the nineteenth century as the authenticity of this material judged not to be in accordance with the Qur'an was being questioned.[2]

The early exegete Tabari is a good example of how the Jewish–Christian tradition influenced the exegesis at the time. In his monumental work, Tabari quotes many biblical passages which he had either learned from "the people of the Torah and the Bible" (the so-called *Isrāʾīliyyāt*) or picked up from popular Muslim scholars. However, he always notes: "God knows it best in the end," indicating his less than complete certainty about this material. The references to "Adam's spouse" in his exegesis are interesting when considered from a feminist perspective.

Regarding the creation of Eve, Tabari relates that Adam felt lonely and so God put him to sleep. He then extracted one of Adam's ribs. When Adam woke up, he found a woman next to him. Eve received her name—in Arabic *Hawwa*—from Adam. He asked her what her name was and she answered, "woman." He then asked her, "Why were you created?" and she replied, "So that you will find peace with me." The angels asked Adam what the woman's name was and he told them that it was "Hawwa" because she was made of something alive.[3]

As for the temptation by the devil, Tabari quotes traditions which accuse both human creatures, although those which only accuse Eve, seeing the cause

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[2] For example Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 64.

[3] See Franz Rosenthal (ed.), *The History of al-Tabari, vol. 1: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 273.

of the fall in female weakness, predominate.[4] Here, we have different versions: the devil tempted Eve with words that she uses later with Adam/she orders Adam to eat the fruit/she fools him/Adam was poisoned by her/Adam is subject to his sensual desire.[5] As a result, their private genitalia were exposed, but only Adam is ashamed. Adam wants to hide from God because he is ashamed.[6]

We also find influences of the Jewish–Christian tradition regarding God's punishment: God condemns the woman, but not Adam. God condemns the earth from which Adam was created and so its fruits become thorns. God condemns Adam to live a life of needs and duty while God's curse on the woman is clearly fatal. Because Hawwa causes the tree to bleed by picking its fruit, women menstruate once a month; they must also bear the pains of childbirth, which can cause their death. Although he created her sapient, God makes women ignorant, morally and mentally weak.[7]

Especially these narratives led to an imbalance between men and women in the Islamic tradition but they must also be seen as being in strong contrast to the Qur'an. Some exegetes tried to lay patriarchal interpretations of the biblical narrative like a pattern over the Qur'anic creation story, without taking obvious conflicts and distortions with and within the Qur'anic text into account. These misogynous interpretations of the creation story provide the ideal soil on which patriarchal interpretations of other Qur'anic passages that stress the imbalance between men and women could grow even more easily.

FEMINIST EXEGESIS AND ITS APPROACH TO THE CREATION STORY

Feminist exegesis aims to end this imbalance and to achieve a gender-equitable understanding of Islam. It begins with the creation story as well as with the story of the general creation of human beings. One feminist Qur'anic exegetical method, the intertextual method, relies on a holistic reading of the Qur'an. Qur'anic verses are read with other verses on the same topic in light of what the exegetes call the Qur'anic nucleus: justice and equity for all human beings.[8]

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[4] Ibid., 274ff.

[5] Ibid., 275ff.

[6] Ibid., 277.

[7] Ibid., 277f.

[8] See Amina Wadud, "Towards a Qur'anic Hermeneutic of Social Justice: Race, Class and Gender," in *Journal of Law and Religion* 12.1 (1995–1996), 43.

Modern scholars like Amina Wadud speak in this context of an interior coherence in the Qur'an (*naẓm al-qurʾān*).[9] The idea of this method already existed in traditional exegesis (*tafsīr al-qurʾān bi-l-qurʾān*) but was not frequently used. Traditional exegesis is criticized by these modern scholars because its concentration on single isolated words cannot lead to an understanding of the whole interior coherence, the strong thematic and structural unity of and within the Qur'an.[10] Moreover, for these scholars, the Qur'an as a whole contains a specific worldview, a definite attitude towards life. The common atomistic reading in traditional exegesis has led instead to a distorted picture of the role of women.[11]

A starting point and ruling principle of the intertextual exegetical method is the creation story, which can be read as a sign of the equity between men and women. According to such feminist scholars as Amina Wadud and Riffat Hassan, all verses that deal with the relationship between men and women can be read in light of this understanding of the creation story. One aspect of the Qur'anic creation story—the openness of the text's linguistic formulations—is relevant here. Mention is made of Adam and, literally, his "partner creature" (*zawj*), who is very often equated with "his spouse." But the term *zawj* is a neutral term and can refer to either gender.

The term "Adam" comes from the Hebrew word אָדָם (ādām) meaning "human," which is also a gender-neutral description of this creature. Because the fellow creature in the Qur'an is at no point declared as feminine and because the name Eve is not mentioned, the text enables a gender-neutral interpretation, i.e., God has created the human being and his fellow creature.[12] This concept is assured through further Qur'anic passages that do not address the creation story directly but the creation of human beings in general. Q 4:1 reads:

> O you mankind, fear your Lord, who created you of one soul (*nafs*), and created from the same nature as (*minha*) its spouse (*zawjaha*), and who let many men and women emerge from both of them who dispersed on Earth."

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[9] See Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986), 3–4.

[10] See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 2.

[11] Ibid., 6.

[12] See Riffat Hassan, "Feministische Interpretationen des Islam," in Claudia Schöning-Kalender et al. (eds), *Feminismus, Islam, Nation. Frauenbewegungen im Maghreb, in Zentralasien und in der Türkei* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1997), 217–33.

This verse includes a general description of the process of creation of men and women. Traditional exegesis presupposes that woman was created from man. But feminist exegesis posits the equal creation of both.[13] Their argument is based on several elements of the verse. First, the term *nafs* is neither male nor female although grammatically it is female, which is why the female pronoun—*ha* in *minha* and *zawjaha*—relates to it. So, feminist scholars state, there is no textual or linguistic reason to judge that *nafs* is male or that it refers to Adam. They argue, moreover, that *zawj* cannot conceptually be male or female, even if it is grammatically a feminine noun. If the particle *min* relates to *zawj*, it should not be understood as a derivative; rather, it can mean "of the same nature as," thus underlining the equality of *nafs* and *zawj* from which men and women descend.[14]

As well as examining the Qur'anic text, it is also possible to include concepts from Late Antiquity that the Qur'an may have included, especially in Q 4:1. The Qur'an is a communication between God, the Prophet and his community and, accordingly, did not arise in a vacuum. Rather, the community had a certain prior knowledge that was involved in the communication. This is perhaps reflected in Q 4:1, in the idea of a creation of a male-female creature—an idea that is definitely not new in human history. It can be traced back to Plato, whose account of the evolution of gender is similarly constructed with both originating from one creature.[15] In such literature as Midrasch Bereschit Bara VIII, it is also said: "When the One Saint created Adam, He created him as hermaphrodite [...] He created him with two faces and then He split him [...]."[16]

Based on the arguments up to this point, we can state that the first woman was neither created from man nor for him. For this reason, the idea that Eve was created from a rib should not be accepted. It should be seen as due to the influence of the Jewish–Christian tradition that is different from the Qur'an. The influence of this tradition began in the early days of exegesis; such exegetes as Muğāhid (d. 722) explained the creation story—a very short one in the Qur'an—with the help of Jewish and Christian converts who added more details from their religious contexts.[17] The idea of the creation of Eve from a rib is more difficult to deal with because it is

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[13] See Riffat Hassan, "Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam," in Paula M. Cooey, William R. Eakin, Jay Byrd McDaniel (eds), *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 47f.; Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 25.

[14] Wadud, op. cit. (note 8), 18f.

[15] See Plato, *Symposium* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2006), 55ff.

[16] Harry Freedman (ed.), *Midrash Rabbah* (London: Soncino Press, 1961), 54.

[17] See Muğāhid, *Tafsīr Muğāhid b. Ğabr,* ed. Abū an-Nīl (Kairo, 1989), 265.

based only on the following hadith: "The woman was created from a rib and you cannot straighten her. If you would like any benefit from her, you will have to do it despite her bend. If you try to straighten her you'll break her, and to break her means to expel her"[18].

Traditional exegesis assumes this hadith to be authentic while particularly within feminist exegesis, not accepting this hadith is well established. A third possibility in my opinion would be to ignore the question of the authenticity of the hadith and to interpret it metaphorically, knowing that the prophet used metaphorical language very close to that used by the Arabs at the time. In this case, we could suggest knowledge of the biblical creation story upon which the prophet based his comments. He clarified to his congregation that men should treat their women with care and not twist them around because this would harm them.

A further argument against the idea of Eve being created from a rib of the sleeping Adam can be found in the Qur'an, where God shows them the Garden of Paradise just after their creation. The assertion that Eve was created because Adam felt lonely in paradise contradicts the Qur'anic statement. Furthermore, regarding the idea that Eve is to blame for the fall of humanity, the Qur'an at no time mentions that Eve alone is guilty of the sinful action. According to the chronology, it is rather Adam who is blamed first and then later both of them.

The idea of original sin must also be also clearly rejected from a Qur'anic perspective, based mainly on two arguments: (1) the verse "I am deploying a vicegerent on Earth" from the second Sura points out that the human being was already appointed for the earth at the time of the creation, so that sending them down onto earth cannot be seen as a punishment but as part of the divine plan. The idea of gender equality also appears here when the Qur'an states that the destiny of the human *per se* is as a responsible vicegerent. This is stated in the latest revealed sura at a point where the dynamic of the story focuses on both genders. It emphasizes that the destiny of the human being, the task of being a responsible vicegerent, applies equally to men and women. (2) The second argument for rejecting the idea of original sin is the fact, mentioned many times in the Qur'an, that Adam and Eve were forgiven before they were sent down to earth; there can thus be no talk of God's punishment. The doctrine of original sin and its interpretations, even those of a misogynous nature, therefore are obsolete.

We can thus conclude that God's creation was an undifferentiated humankind and not man and woman; both arose in the same way, out of the same substance and at the same time. They share the same origins and

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[18] Hūd b. Muḥakkam al-Hawwārī, *Tafsīr Hūd b. Muḥakkam al-Hawwārī*, ed. Al-Ḥaǧǧ b. Saʿīd aš-Šarīfī, vol. 1 (Beirut, 1990), 345f.

are thus equal partners in the creation. The fact that the Qur'an mentions several times that everything was created in pairs supports this thesis. Two separate individuals form an entity. These couples are essentially equal, no explicit characteristics are associated with them and their function is to be found alike at the physical, social and moral levels. Feminist exegetes point out that the Qur'an explicitly determines the equality of both partners regarding moral virtues and rightly guided actions (Q 33:35 as an example). Both partners are encouraged to protect each other in their relationship (Q 9:71). And when the Qur'an characterizes men and women as mutual moral leaders, it strengthens the equality of their moral potential. Many Qur'anic passages refer to the fact that on the Day of Judgment, both men and women are entitled to receive the same reward and each person stands individually before God.

Based on the story of the creation of human beings, their moral abilities, their fear and their reward in the hereafter, contemporary exegetes have created solid ground for their thesis that the universal position of the Qur'an is the equality of men and women. Every interpretation of the Qur'an must meet this universal requirement, this Qur'anic principle, i.e., every interpretation related to women must be coherent with this principle and all interpretations that do not comply with it are invalid. I should also note that women exegetes partly underline the biological differences between men and women, even if the Qur'an makes only marginal mention of this. For example, on the topic of pregnancy, Amina Wadud argues that men are obliged to protect and support their wives wherever necessary, meaning that they are responsible for them.

Let us finally come back to the creation story. One element in traditional literature echoed by the Qur'an in another passage is the statement that Eve was created to be a place of peace for Adam. The defense of this harmony and of mutuality in marital relationships is another substantial principle of the Qur'an according to the intertextual method. The verses about the relationship between men and women should be read in light of this universal content. On this topic, feminist exegetes quote Q 30:21:

> And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves spouses (as He first made a single creature and from it a creature similar to him) that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you amity (*mawadda*) and mercy (*rahma*).

The idea that devout men and women should act as friends and protect each other, that they should be equally responsible for their moral activities in the world, that human beings should live in peace and tranquility with their spouses and that marriages lead to divine love and mercy, together reflect the ideal of sexual relationships.

Holy Scriptures and the Challenge of Animal Ethics: Fundamental Guidelines of Animal Ethics in Islam[1]

Asmaa El Maaroufi-Ulzheimer

Introduction

> Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'an,
> or are there locks upon [their] hearts?
>   (Qur'an 47:24)

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, there have been numerous disputes over human beings' ethical and moral responsibility towards animals. Through factory farming, animal experiments, genetic engineering etc. human beings inflict suffering on animals. This has given rise to numerous (bio-) ethical questions and the necessity to discuss possible approaches to solving the question of what constitutes a morally acceptable treatment of animals. Since over eighty percent of the world's population identify with a religious group, a closer look at religion is warranted.[2] Religions are

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[1] A revised German version of this article will be printed in Asmaa El Maaroufi, "Und sie sind Gemeinschaften gleich euch! Eine Einführung zum Tier im Qur'an," in Rainer Hagencord et al. (eds), *Jahrbuch Theologische Zoologi,* vol. 2 (*Wirbel der Schöpfung)* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2017), 39–50.

[2] Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), *Werte, Religion und Entwicklung. Die Potenziale von Religion erkennen und einbeziehen,* at https://www. giz.de/fachexpertise/downloads/Final_Factsheet_SV_Werte_Religion_Entwicklung.

seen as providing impulses for environmental and animal protection, and sustainable and environmentally conscious action. Religions are called upon to take a new look at their scriptures and to reinterpret text, tradition and context. Although the scriptures themselves do not contain concrete examples of environmental or animal protection, we can still discover in them basic ideas that provide orientation in this field. It is necessary to distance ourselves from a radically anthropocentric reading of scriptures and to relate the basic ideas in scripture to current challenges.

Many of the verses in the Qur'an apply to creation as a whole, to nature and especially to animals. Animals are mentioned in over 200 passages and throughout Islamic intellectual history these verses have been used by the addressees of the Qur'an, human beings, either for or against animals. From revering animals as god-fearing fellow creatures to their limitless exploitation—everything can be legitimated by the Qur'anic verses. The relationship to the animal within Islamic intellectual history is ambivalent. What do we actually learn from the Muslims' primary theological source, the Qur'an? What are the basic assumptions made? And what does this tell us about the relationship between God and animals? The following is an introduction to these questions, showing which aspects of the Qur'an must be considered for a transformative reading of the Qur'an in order to contribute to current questions in animal ethics. This article does not claim to provide a complete picture. It sheds some insight into how animals are dealt with in the Qur'an and the relationship between God and animals.[3] In addition to the Qur'an I shall refer to the Sunnah or Aḥādīṯ.[4]

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pdf. Of interest is also the following quotation: "What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is, by religion." Jr. Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," in David Spring and Eileen Spring (eds), *Ecology and Religion in History* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974), 18.

[3] Within this work some aspects are not mentioned but they should also be subject to a critical investigation, e.g., animals as allies of God (God sends birds to support an army [Qur'an, 105:1-5]; in the context of the history of Moses people are plagued with various animals [Qur'an, 7:133]. Interesting are also the metaphors in the Qur'an and the transformation of humans into animals (as a punishment of God, Qur'an, 2:65, 5:60). See Sarra Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2012), 123 ff.

[4] The Sunnah (tradition) denotes the prophetic tradition and represents together with the Qur'an the second source of Islamic jurisprudence, and thus has a normative character. Considered as Sunnah are all sayings, silent permissions or disapprovals, actions, as well as biographical information of the Prophet Muhammad. The transmission or rather written tradition of the Sunnah are the Aḥādīṯ (narrations, reports, songs, *Ḥadīṯ*).

Animals in the Qur'an

According to Islam, God's revelation was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (through the angel Gabriel), and recorded in written form in the Qur'an. This book is the supreme legal source of Islam and considered a guideline for Muslims.[5]

Six of the 114 chapters (Surah) of the Qur'an are named after a certain species or group of animals. For example, Surah 2 (The Cow), Surah 6 (Cattle), Surah 16 (The Bee), Surah 27 (The Ant) and others. It should be noted that the actual term "animal" cannot be found in the Qur'an. Even though in written and colloquial Arabic there is a term for animal (ḥayawān)[6] it does not appear in the Qur'an.[7] Therefore, there is no general concept that refers to the counterpart of humanity.[8] Instead, certain animal groups

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[5] We use the term "animal" in relation to non-human animals.

[6] The word ḥayawān (originated from the root ḥ-y-y and has the basic meaning of life or living) is often found in various encyclopedias of the Middle Ages (e.g., Kitāb al ḥayawān [Book of the animals] of al-Jāḥiẓ [d. 869] in which the term refers to both human and non-human animals. Therefore, for the delineation of man from the non-human animal, he was named al-ḥayawān al nāṭiḳ (the speaking animal/ the articulating animal). See Boratav Pellat et al., "Ḥayawān," in P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel (eds), Encyclopedia of Islam, second edition, at http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0279 .

[7] The word ḥayawān is not used in the Qur'an at any point to refer to the animal. The word can be found once but it refers to the afterlife. "And this worldly life is not but diversion and amusement. And indeed, the home of the Hereafter—that is the [eternal] life [al- ḥayawān], if only they knew." [29:64]. See Arne Ambros, "Gestaltung und Funktionen der Biosphäre im Koran," in Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft vol. 140 (1990), 290–325, 294.

[8] In fact, there are discussions on the extent to which the term dābba, which can be found eighteen times in the Qur'an, cannot be used as an equivalent to the non-human animal. Accordingly, we find in many translations that this word is translated with animal (excluding the human being). The special feature is that all those who represent this opinion would translate the term dābba differently in different contexts within the Qur'an (creatures, non-human animals, living beings, etc.). Even the classical Qur'an exegetes al-Qurṭubī and al-Suyūṭī interpret the term dābba in some verses as universal (relating to the human and the animal) and in other verses only as a word referring to the non-human being. The problem with using the term dābba as an equivalent to the (non-human) animal is found in Sarra Tlili, "The Meaning of the Qur'anic Word 'dābba': 'Animals' or 'Nonhuman Animals'?," in The Journal of Qur'anic Studies, vol. 12 (2010), 167–87. The Meaning of the Qur'anic Word "dābba," Musa Furber, Rights and Duties Pertaining to Kept Animals: A Case Study in Islamic Law and Ethics (Abu Dhabi: Tabah Paper Series), 4. Opposing opinions can be found in Richard Foltz, Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 11. For him the term ḥayawān specifically refers to non-human animals.

are repeatedly mentioned in the Qur'an; e.g., terrestrial animals (*dābba*), fish (*samak*), birds (*ṭuyūr*).[9] Individual animals are mentioned—both large animals (elephant) and tiny animals (ant, mosquito). These animals can be found in various contexts, e.g., in didactic plays, parables and admonitions.

In the following, we will look at the descriptions of animals in the Qur'an which, as far as possible, are related to all animals. It is also important to take into account the verses that provide information about a possible relationship between God and the animal. We learn how God treats all creatures, including animals, and enables us to determine the location of the animal within the cosmos.

About the characteristics of animals

In the Qur'an, animals appear as God praising creatures[10] and therefore in direct contact with God.

> The seven heavens and the earth and whatever is in them exalt Him. And there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His praise, but you do not understand their [way of] exalting. [...] [17:44][11]

Theologians and scholars of Islam, such as Al-Ḥafiz Basheer Ahmad Masri (1914–1993), have concluded that animals have a consciousness and a spirit (different from that of human beings) based on the abovementioned verse, which states that animals praise God, are able to worship God and have their own way of praising God, which human beings cannot understand. In his book, *Animal Welfare in Islam*, Al-Ḥafiz Masri, one of the most prominent twentieth-century authors who discusses the question of the animal in Islam, points out that "all living creatures possess a non-physical force of spirit and mind which, in its advanced form, we call 'psyche' [...], although animals psychic force is of a lower level than that of human beings [...]."[12] According to the Qur'an, animals have a certain knowledge about God:

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[9] More on the importance of the animal in the individual Surahs can be found in Basheer Al-Hafiz Masri, "Stellung des Tieres im Islam zu Lebzeiten des Propheten bis zum Kalifat (610–1492 n.Chr.) anhand religiöser Quellen," in *Tierärztliche Umschau*, vol. 65 (2008), 449–56.

[10] See Qur'an, 17:44, 24:41, etc.

[11] The English Sahih International Qur'an translation is quoted unless otherwise indicated.

[12] See Basheer Al-Hafiz Masri, *Animal Welfare in Islam* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2007), 19.

> Do you not see that Allah is exalted [*yusabbiḥu*] by whomever is within the heavens and the earth and [by] the birds with wings spread [in flight]? Each [of them] has known [*ʿalima*] his [means of] prayer and exalting [Him] [...] [24:25]

The use of the word *ʿalima,* which implies possessing knowledge, is remarkable.[13] Its use in relation to animals shows that the animal possesses a kind of knowledge which, according to Masri, proves that animals have more than just instinct. In this context the following verse is cited:

> And your Lord inspired [*awḥā*][14] to the bee, "Take for yourself among the mountains, houses, and among the trees and [in] that which they construct. [16:68]

The word *awḥā* used here is translated as "inspired to." Interestingly, this word has been used in the Qur'an in the context of God's (self-) revelation to the prophets.[15] According to Masri, only assumptions can be made as to which (non-verbal) form of communication God uses with animals.[16]

Nevertheless, "It proves the basic fact that animals have a sufficient degree of psychic endowment to understand and follow God's messages—a faculty which is higher than instinct and intuition."[17]

In addition to this aspect, another verse states

> And there is no creature on [or within] the earth or bird that flies with its wings except [that they are] communities [Arabic: *umam*] like you. [...] [6:38]

As already mentioned, animals are considered as living in communities. More importantly, animals do not only have communities but also their own languages as it is mentioned that the Prophet Solomon learned "the language of the birds."[18] Solomon communicates with a hoopoe and an ant.[19] It is particularly interesting to point out that animals do not adopt

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[13] Derivation of the word *ʿilm* (to have knowledge, to be informed, transl. Hans Wehr, Arabic dictionary).

[14] Derivation of the word *waḥy* (inspiration [spiritual], revelation [theol.] transl. Hans Wehr, Arabic dictionary).

[15] In this context, it would be interesting to examine and evaluate the different interpretations or exegetical approaches to this verse.

[16] See Masri, *op. cit.* (note 12), 21.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Qur'an, 27:16. Precisely, the Qur'an merely mentions that Solomon learned the language of the birds. However, it is also mentioned in a following verse (27:18-19) that he understood the language of the ants. More about this and the concept of language (*manṭiq*) is discussed extensively by Sarra Tlili. See also Tlili, op. cit. (note 3), 176 ff.

[19] Qur'an, 27:18–19.

the language of human beings, as is usually the case in narrations. Rather, God emphasizes that he had taught Solomon the language of the birds. Here we see human beings turning toward the animal.

We can summarize all of this by saying that in the Qur'an animals are understood as God worshipping creatures, living in communities. They communicate directly with God, without requiring any intermediary.

We must now turn to the verses in which animals are mentioned in the context of their fellow-creatures. Since the addressee of the Qur'an is the human being, the animal is particularly mentioned in the context of humanity. Many verses mention animals as being for the benefit for humanity.

About the benefits of animals for human beings

According to the Qur'an it is possible to differentiate between the material, spiritual and aesthetic benefits[20] that human beings can gain from animals. The material benefit is mentioned in two verses of Surah 16. However, it should be noted that the following is not about the benefit of animals in general, but rather about a specific animal group, *an'ām* (cattle or livestock).[21]

> And the grazing livestock He has created for you; in them is warmth and [numerous] benefits, and from them you eat. And for you in them is [the enjoyment of] beauty when you bring them in [for the evening] and when you send them out [to pasture]. And they carry your loads to a land you could not have reached except with difficulty to yourselves. Indeed, your Lord is Kind and Merciful [16:5-7].

Therefore, this verse commands the use of animals, especially cattle, as a source of food,[22] pack animals for riding, and animals as a source for clothing.[23] The aesthetic benefit is also mentioned here "And for you in

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[20] We already find this subdivision by Sarra Tlili. See Tlili, op. cit. (note 3), 79.

[21] In the following, it should be noted that the Qur'anic verses used in this context do not refer precisely to all animals. Rather the Qur'an mentions the benefit of certain animal groups.

[22] Here the flesh of *an'ām* or *bahīmat al-an'ām* is meant. However, the wild [*ṣayd al-barr*] and the fish [*ṣayd al-baḥr*] are also allowed elsewhere.

[23] However, it should be noted that there are guidelines for all those "functions." There is, for example, a ban on Muslims on pilgrimage to hunt animals in the countryside. Moreover, the Qur'an allows humans to use the wool of animals; but in the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad several prohibitions for the use of the skins of wild animals etc. can be found. See Abul Fadl Mohsin, Ebrahim, *Organ Transplantation, Euthanasia, Cloning and Animal Experimentation. An Islamic View* (Lane: Islamic Foundation 2001), 13.

them is [the enjoyment of] beauty when you bring them in [for the evening] and when you sent them out [to pasture]." This verse is also discussed by Qur'an exegetes who discern the concept of beauty and the associated joy while viewing the animal as a feeling that enriches the soul.[24] Here the call of the Qur'an is to find in God's creation the proof of the truthfulness of God's words. For it is the beauty of animals that reminds the created, i.e., the human being, of the creator and makes them part of the beauty of creation.[25] In this consciousness, humanity can come closer to another benefit of the animal, namely that by its mere existence the animal reminds us of the creator and can thus increase an individual's religiosity or spirituality. Here God's demand in the Qur'an to understand creation, and especially also animals, as a sign (āyāt) and a miracle of God and to ponder over this miracle is fulfilled.[26] Here, animals together with the rest of nature function as God's signature. According to this, animals also are of spiritual not only practical benefit for humanity.

But what do these "uses" of the animal by the human being say about the animal itself? This question is briefly examined in the following to determine the extent to which animals fulfill their purpose on earth only by being of use to humanity. This step is also necessary in order to locate the animal within the cosmos: by means of the location of humanity—and a possible boundary—it becomes clear how animals are to be placed within creation.

About the mission of humanity on earth

The Qur'an assigns to humankind a special role within creation:[27]

> And We have certainly honored (Arabic: karrama)[28] the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference. [17:70]

Human beings were thus distinguished by God in a special way. This distinction (takʿīm) is made more concrete in a later passage when it is

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[24] See Tlili, op. cit. (note 3), 88 ff.

[25] Ibid., 89.

[26] See also: Qur'an, 45:45, 14:45, etc.

[27] It should be kept in mind that the commission of humanity refers only to our planet, the earth (cf. reference to the term vicegerent in connection with the statement "vicegerent on earth." See Qur'an, 2:30, 24:55, 38:26).

[28] The usual translation (also according to H. Wehr) for the word *karrama* here is "excellent" or "honored."

said that God appointed the human being as *ḫalīfa* (vicegerent) on earth.[29] In order to determine how to understand the distinction between human beings and animals, we have to examine two basic concepts of the Qur'an: the controversial term *tasḫīr* (often translated as serviceable) and *taḏlīl* (often translated as subjugation).[30] These concepts show how extensive humanity's power is over the rest of creation. Let us first consider the concept of *tasḫīr*:

> Do you not see that Allah has made subject to you [Arabic: saḫḫara lakum] whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth and amply bestowed upon you His favors [Arabic: niᶜam], [both] apparent and unapparent? [...] [31:20][31]

At this point we are talking about everything on earth that has been put at the service of humanity. Within the context of discussing the submissiveness of all things on earth, we also encounter the already mentioned term *taḏlīl* (subjugation). This is not infrequently mentioned in literature in connection with the idea of the authority of humanity and the servitude of animals since this is more frequently thought of as subjection or submission.

> Do they not see that We have created for them from [ḫalaqna lahum] what Our hands have made, grazing livestock [al-anᶜām], and [then] they are their owners [mālikūn]? And We have tamed them for them [or subdued; ḏallalnāhā lahum], so some of them they ride, and some of them they eat. And for them therein are [other] benefits and drinks, so will they not be grateful? [36:71–73]

These verses are often used to legitimize the absolute supremacy of human beings over the animal world. From this perspective, humanity as a distinct creation should be able to subjugate animals and deal with them according to their own interests, without taking into account the interests of other creatures. This is justified by the fact that it is said that God has created for them [ḫalaqna lahum], i.e., for human beings, cattle that the human being owns [mālikūn] and gains many benefits from.

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[29] "It is He who has made you successors [ḫalīfa] upon the earth." [35:39]. M.A. Rassoul says vicegerent instead of successor. On the problem of the term *ḫalīfa* as well as a discussion of the position of man within creation, see Tlili, op. cit. (note 3), 222 ff.

[30] Because of the overlaps in the meaning it is difficult to translate these terms clearly. But it can be said that the term *taḏlīl* is the one, which "[...] comes closest to the biblical idea of dominion in the Qur'an [...], because this term combined "[...] both elements of authority and servitude more discernible than they are in the idea of *tasḫīr*." (Tlili, op. cit. [note 3], 74 ff.).

[31] This verse is not infrequently used to suggest the absolute supremacy of humanity over the environment and thus against animals; what is more, with reference to the term *saḫḫara* (make subject to, the verb of the noun *tasḫīr*) it is often interpreted as meaning that humanity on earth possesses everything at their disposal and consequently also rules.

However, if we discuss the two concepts in a more differentiated way, we realize that these concepts cannot be interpreted simplistically. An analysis of the terms is also found in the works of Sarra Tlili. She evaluates the abovementioned verses, taking into account other, similar verses in her work, and examines the interpretation of four classical Qur'an exegetes.[32] Regarding verse 36:71–73 mentioned above she remarks that we must consider three things: first, we have to discuss the term *al-anʿām,* which is here translated as cattle. Since the verses in this constellation refer only to *anʿām* (cattle), this should not be transferred to all animals as it has been described by the aforementioned exegetes.[33] In other words, even if the abovementioned verse is interpreted in such a way as to affirm an "annexation" of the *anʿām*, this is nevertheless only related to a particular animal group and therefore only valid for it.

If we look at the concept of *taḏlīl* and its interpretation in more detail, we must consider that this concept was not understood as the absolute authority of humanity over this group of animals, but much more as God's grace that made it possible for human beings to subdue a camel, which is physically superior. Because of these aspects, the concept of *taḏlīl* was frequently supplemented by the statement that one should meet the interests of the animal groups, since God demands that we show gratitude. It is precisely this gratitude which becomes clear when human beings do not cause any evil on earth and accordingly do not inflict harm on animals.[34]

According to Tlili, based on these aspects we cannot conclude that humanity is legitimized to understand itself as the ruler over the rest of creation, since God is always the ruler in the last instance. Therefore, at no time does humanity have an authority over the environment and thus the animal. The abovementioned verse also clarifies this statement. For the Qur'an uses the verb *saḫḫara* (make subject) also with regard to other things, such as solar systems,

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[32] Aṭ-Ṭabarī (d. 923), ar-Rāzī (d. 1209), al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273) and Ibn Kaṯīr (d. 1373).

[33] See Tlili, op. cit. (note 3). 76 f; Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʿān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya 2000), 15:38.

[34] It is interesting to note that this aspect or the notion of not being allowed deliberately to harm animals was included in some state regulations. For example, the second caliph ʿUmar (d. 644) issued a law to regulate how much weight a load-bearing animal could bear. Non-compliance with this law led to punishment, which is actually transmitted to us in a case. (Tlili, op. cit. [note 3], 86. Quoted from al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʿān* 10:49). From this Tlili derives that "[...] in addition to being morally wrong; mistreating animals of burden in violation of Islamic law is an act punishable in this world as well, and not only in the next" (Tlili, ibid., 86). The fact that the disregard of animals not only has consequences for the human being in the afterlife but can also be punished in this life leads to the addition of animals within a moral community as beings able to cope with suffering. In this community they are regarded as moral objects (moral agents) and therefore have to be given moral consideration as well as rights by the moral subject, the human being.

seas, clouds, etc. This raises the question of how this term is to be understood in this context. Can humanity also have the sun and the moon at its disposal?[35] It should also be borne in mind that the concept of *tasḫīr* is not a concept solely applied to humanity. In the Qur'an, certain elements are subjected to animals (for example the heaven to the birds [Qur'an, 16:79]). This sheds doubt onto the extent to which hierarchical structures can be derived from this concept. In addition, it may be surprising why the concept of *tasḫīr* is interpreted so extremely positively and, in particular, as supremacy, while it is actually much less than that. If we consider the contexts in which the term *tasḫīr* appears, we find that this term is often followed by the phrase "that you might be grateful" (*laʿallakum taškurūn*). This is what the Qur'an says in one place:

> That you may settle yourselves upon their back and then remember the favor of your Lord when you have settled upon them and say. "Exalted is He who has subjected this to us, and we could not have [otherwise] subdued it. [43:13]

We can therefore state that human boundaries and weakness are clearly located within the cosmos. This also shows human beings' dependence on the rest of creation, without which the human being "would not be able" to do certain things.[36]

We find similar interpretations of these Qur'anic verses by classical Qur'an exegetes such as Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 1272), Faḫr al-Dīn al-Razī (d. 1209) and Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar ibn Kathīr (d. 1373). They not only associate the concept of *tasḫīr* with a form of weakness of humanity since it often underlines the dependence on fellow creatures. Rather, they emphasize the statement that the fact that God has made something subject to human beings (among others) is no proof that they can fully instrumentalize creation or animals and merely use them for their own benefit.[37] It is God who has absolute authority over God's own creation. According to this, human beings cannot understand themselves as being intermediaries between God and animals. Rather, they must join the rest of creation as a special creation.[38] Consequently, it would be oversimplified to say that God created everything solely for the benefit of the human being. Rather, God has made available to every creature what it needs.[39]

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[35] "And He has subjected for you the night and day and the sun and mood, and the stars are subjected by His command (*amr*). Indeed, in that are signs for a people who reason." [16:12]. See 14:32-33, 45:12-13, etc.

[36] See Tlili, op. cit. (note 3), 99.

[37] See ibid., 79 ff.

[38] See Ibid., 92.

[39] "And there is no creature on earth but that upon Allah is its provision, and He knows its place of dwelling and place of storage. [...]" [11:6]. See Qur'an, 29:60.

In addition, as we approach the Qur'an we must bear in mind that the addressee is the human being and as such God highlights God's graces towards this addressee. Therefore, due to their physical capacity, what distinguishes human beings is their task as ḫalīf on earth, which should be characterized by responsibility towards fellow creatures. However, we should never understand this distinction as freedom of action or as having absolute authority over the rest of creation.[40]

"And cause not corruption upon the earth after its reformation"[41]

Both human beings and animals are the result of God's creative act and this act implies God's decision for humanity and for animals. This fact alone should be enough to give animals an intrinsic value that should not be denied. This is underlined by the fact that God communicates with the animal and allows it to communicate. There is a divine immediacy, a "you" is created in the light of God and the animal. A "you" that seems to be able to serve the genuine purpose of being on earth in the Qur'anic sense—constantly to serve God. There are no grounds in scripture that allow human beings to harm their fellow creatures. The fact that we share a common origin, God, should be sufficient to make efforts on behalf of animals. Moreover, we must not forget that wounding an animal prevents a God praising animal from glorifying God.[42]

A reductionist anthropology can still be observed that radically focuses on the human being and thus leaves no space for fellow creatures. This is also

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[40] Ebrahim, op. cit. (note 23), 12.

[41] Qur'an, 7:56.

[42] Because of this aspect, among the Sufis certain individuals and groups follow a vegetarian diet, although the Qur'an allows the consumption of certain animals. Some of them are mentioned in Richard C. Foltz, "Is Vegetarianism Un-Islamic?," in *Studies in Contemporary Islam 3/1* (2001), 39–54. More about vegetarianism can again be found in Foltz, op. cit. (note 8), 105 ff. Also interesting is the following narrative of the well-known Muslim mystic Rabiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya al-Qaysiyya (d. 801): "Rabiʿa ventured into the mountains for a day and was 'soon surrounded by a flock of deer and mountain goats, ibexes, and wild asses.' When Hasan of Basra approached, the anymals fled, causing him to feel dismayed. He asked Rabiʿa 'Why did they run away from me and associate so tamely with you?' Rabiʿa minces neither flesh nor words, asking him: 'What have you eaten today?' Rabiʿa knows that he has been feeding on bits of anymal bodies, and asks a second direct question: 'Why then should they not flee from you?'" Farīd ad-Dīn Aṭṭār, *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya*, transl. A. J. Arberry (New York: Penguin Books 1990), 44–45.

noticeable in the interpretation of the Qur'an over the last centuries, where animals are not paid attention in interactions with prophets and therefore remain unmentioned. This has led to a focus on the human being to the detriment of the animal. But is not this perception of the fellow creatures in which human beings are solely driven by their own interests against an Islamic conception of the world, which understands itself to be universal?

It is therefore necessary to reread the Qur'an and at the same time look at all fellow creatures. Here, too, we have to look for the subtleties of the Qur'an with regard to animals. What can we learn from the history of Noah and the rescue of all animals? And what does it mean that the Prophet Jonah finds refuge from humans in an animal (a fish)[43] and is alive in the animal? And further, what does the Qur'anic story about the ant, which in Surah 27 warns its own people about the carelessness of the Prophet Solomon, tell us?[44] These and other questions show to what extent our view of our fellow creatures must be more sensitive and that we must reposition ourselves within the cosmos in order to fulfill the task of a holistic interpretation of the Qur'an: against the neglect of the animal within our theology and towards a theology in which every fellow creature finds consideration inside the house of creation. It is only when we face this task that we can adequately meet the challenge of a transformative reading of the Qur'an for the evaluation of various current (animal) ethical questions.

> I wish to call you in the mountains
> Amidst the rocks,
> With the birds in the cities,
> With the fish in the depth of the seas,
> With the gazelles in the plains. . .,
> With the doves which sing,
> In the songs of nightingales,
> And through the voices
> Of those who love you and call you,
> I want to call you God.[45]
>   (Yunus Emre, thirteenth century)

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[43] Qur'an, 37:142. According to the Qur'an Jonah (Arabic: Yunus) is devoured by a fish (ḥūt).

[44] "Until, when they came upon the valley of the ants, an ant said, "O ants, enter your dwellings that you not be crushed by Solomon and his soldiers while they perceive not." See Qur'an, 27:18 f.

[45] Najib Ullah, *Islamic Literature: An Introductory History with Selections* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963), 377. (Quoted from Lisa Kemmerer, *Animals and World Religions* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2011], 262).

Images of God in Crisis Situations

Naveed Baig

> God will give me suffering to give me strength!? It is people that have harmed me and God has seen it. He has felt with me. I don't believe that God wants to harm us. Should a child be sexually abused so that the child will be more God-aware? I will harm you now so that you can come close to me?!
>
> (Sarah, a sexually abused Muslim woman)

Introduction

Qur'anic ideals of patience (*sabr*), thankfulness (*shukr*), steadfastness in tribulation (*istiqamah*), self-purification (*tazkiyyah*), reflection (*fikr*) and reliance (*tawakkul*) are some of the religious concepts that Muslims navigate with in times of suffering and pain. What is interesting to observe in a secular context, is whether Muslim patients turn to other coping mechanisms at such times. Tradition and orthopraxy are two dimensions of religious coping mechanisms for Muslim patients during times of crisis. But there are also signs that traditional Muslim coping ideals are being expressed in a variety of ways during times of suffering and need, quite independently of the individual's personal situation and environment. There is a "talking with God" that defines new ways of perceiving God and the images of God.

This paper first provides a general introduction to Islamic spiritual care. Then, patients' coping mechanisms and "talking with God" will be addressed and elaborated upon.

Islamic spiritual care

Every religious tradition has a spiritual dimension interwoven into its teachings. In the Islamic tradition, the spiritual dimension cannot be separated from the divine injunctions and vice versa. Care is an existential need of the living. Linking "spiritual" and "care" means providing a specific type of care that "moves" the spirit.

Tariq Ramadan defines Islamic spirituality thus: it is not a half-hour routine neither is it achieved through one's separation from the external world, nor is it deprivation of life's pleasures and enjoyments. Instead it is "a perpetually liberating process, a purification and nourishment for the soul." There is no disconnection between spirituality and religion.[1]

The process of individualization in the West has forced minority religious traditions to find way and means to deliver spiritual care in settings where earlier, families and society at large took care of that function. This institutionalization has resulted in—amongst other things—a renewed and systematic understanding of spiritual care.[2]

Islamic spiritual care is the Muslim term to describe religiously-based spiritual care offered by religious and spiritual leaders to congregations and individuals.[3] Its essence is founded on the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Even though Islamic spiritual care is an independent discipline, it is related to other forms of Islamic care such as Islamic education, preaching, ethics and spiritual healing. It has many forms and levels to help Muslim patients to broaden their understanding of life and abilities to face the personal, relational or public challenges, which include grief and loss, emphatic listening, parenting, etc. Islamic spiritual care is more than clerical responsibility. The main goal is healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling.[4]

Four maxims of Islamic spiritual care can sum up the spiritual caregiver's role with a special focus on the view of the human being and the world from a theological perspective. These maxims try to reformulate and compress the theological material that is available in the Islamic tradition in relation to spiritual care.[5]

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[1] Amira Ayad, *Healing Body and Soul* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2008).

[2] Naveed Baig, *Islamic Spiritual Care* (Copenhagen: Master thesis. Faculty of Theology, Copenhagen University, 2015).

[3] Nazila Isgandarova, "The Evolution of Islamic Spiritual Care and Counselling in Ontario in the Context of the College of Registered Psychotherapists and Registered Mental Health Therapists of Ontario," in *Psychology & Psychotherapy* (2014), vol. 4, no. 3, 143.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Baig, op. cit. (note 2).

MAXIMS OF ISLAMIC SPIRITUAL CARE

Seeing people as the creation of God, "Allah created Adam in His image" (*ala suratihi*). This is recorded by both Bukhari and Muslims in their hadith collections. This hadith on God fashioning Adam in Allah's own image is widely debated. To understand this narration, one must first recall a fundamental aspect of Islamic belief, namely the transcendence of Allah and Allah's complete dissimilitude from created things. This is unwaveringly reported in the Qur'an itself when it states, "There is nothing whatsoever like Him" (42:11) and also by the foremost and most notable theological texts from the Islamic tradition. One way of understanding the word "image" is through attributes such as hearing, seeing, etc., which both God and Adam possess. God's attributes are eternal and absolute whereas Adam's are relative. Allah being the creator gives God superiority, and God "creating something" is not to be understood as a biological process as we know it. Another hadith attributed to the Prophet is *Al-khalq ayal Allah*, meaning "Creation is from the family of God." This is also to be understood metaphysically since God has no family and is free from human characteristics. "... [A]nd breathed into him (Adam) of My soul" (38:72) signifies God's particular attention and care in forming humankind.

The Qur'an addresses not only Muslims and believers but all humankind (*ya ayuhan naas*) on many occasions. It also refers to humankind as the progeny of Adam (*bani Adam*) honored by God (17:70).

MEETING PEOPLE ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN UNDERSTANDING

Relating to people at their own level of thought and intelligence is prophetic behavior (Bukhari). The Prophet's counsel to people differed according to their mental, social, educational and geographical backgrounds. He spoke to the chieftains of Mecca as well as to the Bedouins from the desert. He met foes and dear friends according to their stature and mentality. Meeting people where they are is not a weakness but a sign of mental and spiritual grandeur.

"MERCIFUL PRESENCE": SPREADING THE WINGS OF MERCY ONTO EVERYONE

Allah instructs the Prophet in the Qur'an "...and lower thy wing (in tenderness) for the believers" (15:88). The same message is given in another place:

> Thus it is due to mercy from Allah that you deal with them gently, and had you been rough, hard-hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around you;

pardon them therefore and ask pardon for them, and take counsel with them in the affair; so when you have decided, then place your trust in Allah; surely Allah loves those who trust (3:159).

In the hadith of mercy, it is said:

The merciful are shown mercy by the Merciful. Be merciful to those on Earth, and He who is in heaven will be merciful to you. Kinship ties are connecting branches from the Merciful. Whoever maintains them will be maintained by God, and whoever cuts them will be cut off by God (Tirmidhi).

"God is not merciful to the one who is not merciful to people" (Bukhari and Muslim).

REMINDING THEM OF THEIR ORIGINAL HOME

The journey back to God is the final destination, the point of eternity for Muslims. There was a blissful time where all were part of the "world of souls" in the intimacy of God. The souls in this world long for that.

The Qur'an says: "Indeed, to your Lord is the return" (96:8).

ISLAMIC COPING IDEALS—EXPERIENCES FROM DENMARK

Islamic coping strategies, methods and skills are deeply embedded in Islamic spirituality. They are intertwined with various forms of worship and moral-ethical disciplines. The strategies Islam advances for Muslims provide remedial potential for coping with unexpected life situations.[6]

In my professional work as a hospital chaplain from 2005 until the present, I found that most patients had some sort of coping strategy or another. Coping can be defined as the response of an individual or group to unexpected life situations. In a spiritual care setting, these coping mechanisms are sometimes reinforced by the patients themselves and sometimes recalled by the chaplain when talking to them and their relatives. They include:

- Faith (*iman*)
- Trust and reliance on God (*tawakul*)

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[6] Cf. Meguellati Achour, Benaouda Bensaid, Mohd Roslan Bin Mohd Nor, "An Islamic Perspective on Coping with Life Stressors," in *Applied Research in Quality of Life* (2015), vol. 11, no. 3, 663–85.

- Patience (*sabr*)
- Thankfulness (*shukr*)
- Endurance (*istiqamah*)
- Purification (*tazkiyyah*)
- Reflection (*fikr*)
- Remembrance (*dhikr*)
- Hope (*aml*)

The list is not ranked in any order. Some patients use various coping ideals whereas others use only a few. One central and frequently returning coping ideal is the reliance or *tawakul* on the will of God. Trust and reliance on God gives Muslims a strong coping ideal since Muslims have faith in the will of God. The Qur'an encourages Muslims to place their unconditional trust in God in all matters and further to take God as the ultimate source of guidance and comfort in all of their businesses and decision making. A Qur'anic verse illustrates the point, "Say, 'Never will we be struck except by what Allah has decreed for us; He is our protector. And upon Allah let the believers rely'" (9:51).

For Muslims, the reliance on God (*tawakkul*) represents one of the most effective ways to steer motivation and enhance behavioral performance. It represents an intrinsic part of Muslim life, especially during times of stress and hardship. Trusting God's plan, however, does not imply a fatalistic stance where Muslim involvement in self-change is neglected or barred altogether.[7] Rather, the individual struggle generates a state of intimacy with God at the center of which Muslims realize that God's plans are just and wise and that no matter how challenging life's difficulties may be, they should place their trust in God who has the power to change conditions for the better.[8]

The Qur'an also stresses personal responsibility: "Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves...." (13:11).

The will of God and personal struggle endure a parallel movement and common fate. The will of God is there all along, but individual responsibility is rewarded by its intentions and efforts, ultimately fusing with the will and plan of God.

The Qur'an says that Allah's plan is preeminent, "... but they plan, and Allah plans. And Allah is the best of planners" (8:30).

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[7] Naveed Baig, Marianne Kastrup, Lissi Rasmussen, *Tro, omsorg og interkultur'* (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag, 2010).
[8] Ibid.

TALKING WITH GOD DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

The Qur'an recounts many incidents of God talk during times of calamity. The Qur'anic story of Abraham and the birds is a special one. The Prophet Abraham's experience with the birds is one of the favorite stories in the Qur'an. The theme it evokes touches the souls of all who seek a kind of reassurance that satisfies our natural instincts for belief and proof. Abraham wanted to ascertain how God gives life to the dead. He was a believer, but yet wanted a sign to strengthen his heart with certainty and satisfaction.

> And when Abraham said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead," (Allah) said, "Have you not believed?" He said, "Yes, but (I ask) only that my heart may be satisfied." (Allah) said, "Take four birds and commit them to yourself. Then (after slaughtering them), put on each hill a portion of them; then call them—they will come (flying) to you in haste. And know that Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise" (2:260).

The Prophet *Ayuub* (Job) and his bodily sickness are mentioned in the Qur'an and God praises him for his patience and endurance.

> And Job, when he called to his Lord, "Indeed, adversity has touched me, and you are the Most Merciful of the merciful" (21:83).
>   (So he was told), "Strike (the ground) with your foot; this is a (spring for) a cool bath and drink."
>   And We granted him his family and a like (number) with them as mercy from Us and a reminder for those of understanding.
>   (We said) "And take in your hand a bunch [of grass] and strike with it and do not break your oath." Indeed, We found him patient, an excellent servant. Indeed, he was one repeatedly turning back (to Allah)" (38:41–44).

These verses provide the longest account of Job in the Qur'an. As in the Bible, Job provides an example of patience and forbearance. But unlike the Bible, the Qur'anic accounts do not comprise a didactic meditation on the problem of evil.

PROPHETIC GOD TALK

The *Ta'if* episode is a decisive part of the prophetic life narrative. After being stoned and ridiculed and his shoes covered with blood in the city of *Ta'if* by opponents who were dissatisfied with the Prophet's message of the new faith, he said the following prayer:

O Allah! I complain to You of my weakness, my scarcity of resources and the humiliation I have been subjected to by the people. O Most Merciful of those who are merciful. O Lord of the weak and my Lord too. To whom have you entrusted me?

To a distant person who receives me with hostility? Or to an enemy to whom you have granted authority over my affair? So long as You are not angry with me, I do not care. Your favor is of a more expansive relief to me. I seek refuge in the light of Your Face by which all darkness is dispelled and every affair of this world and the next is set right, lest Your anger or Your displeasure descends upon me. I desire Your pleasure and satisfaction until You are pleased. There is no power and no might except by You.[9]

The Prophet's turning to God without condemning his adversaries is an example from the literature that Muslims refer to as exemplifying his regard for enemies. This is intensified with the Prophet's reaction when the angel of the mountains met him outside *Ta'if* following his supplication and offered to cause the mountains surrounding the town to crumble over and destroy it, to which the Prophet replied, "No, I hope that these people will one day come to worship only Allah and Him alone."[10]

"Why does God do this? He gives me a baby just to take it away after a few hours in my arms" (A Turkish mother)

A Turkish mother who had lost her premature baby was angry. Her anger was directed towards the divine and she was assailed by many questions immediately after the baby's death. Interestingly, she was not expressing contempt or hatred towards God, but was addressing God sincerely. This "inner complaint" of the mother can be portrayed as an example of her relationship with and not her disconnection from God.

Another patient said:

In the beginning of my sickness, I thought a lot inside of myself, wrestled with Allah, complained to Him. Asked "why me?" Then I thought I was the cause of my sickness. I had committed an offense. So I sought forgiveness from friends and family and called everyone. That gave me a feeling of satisfaction.

I had a direct line to Allah. I didn't think about anyone else. Read a lot of Istaghfaar (reciting the repentance formula) (Hasan, a liver patient).

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[9] Safiur Rahman Mubarakpuri, *Ar-Raheeq al Makhtum* (Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers, 1996), 137.
[10] Ibid., 138.

The patient also mentioned that he recited the Qur'an with translation daily and prayed and recited the *asma al husna* (Ninety-nine "beautiful" names of God).

A well-known hadith from the Prophet attributed to his companion Abu Hurayra enumerates 99 "beautiful names" by which God may be known. These "beautiful names" refer to God in multiple ways. One way the names have often been classified is as either *jalaal* (majestic), or *jamaal* (beautiful).

Another classification calls them *tanzih* or *tashbih*, often translated as transcendent and immanent. *Tanzih* names are incomparable and unknowable. They establish the greatness of God and the smallness of the human being or the reality of the Real and the unreality of the unreal. The names situate people in their right relationship with their Lord. They allow them to understand that they are servants of God, and that they must act like servants. *Tashbih* names, by contrast, are intimately familiar: these include names such as *al-Mujeeb,* "the Responder to Prayer," or *al-Ghafoor,* "the Forgiver and Hider of Faults." To comprehend *tashbih* is to experience God's nearness, immanence and approachability.[11]

The *asma al husna* as indicated by the patient are also used for assistance and guidance. The Qur'an instructs:

> Say: "Call upon Allah (God), or call upon Rahman (the All-Compassionate): By whatever name ye call upon Him, (it is well): For to Him belong the most beautiful names" (17:110).

Rumi and God talk

The famed mystic, poet and theologian Jalaludeen Rumi (d. 1273) is best known for his sixty thousand verses of mystical poetry, both didactic and lyric. But his disciples also captured some of his metaphysical insights that were written down later. He says:

> There is an inner world of freedom where thoughts are too subtle to be judges. As the saying goes, "We judge by externals, and God will take care of innermost thoughts." God creates those thoughts within you, and you cannot drive them away with any amount of effort... there is a world of bodies, another of imaginings, another of fantasies and another of suppositions, but God is beyond all worlds, neither within nor without them.[12]

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[11] Cf. Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, transl. David B. Burrell and Nazih Daher (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1992).

[12] Quoted according to John Renard, *Islamic Theological Themes* (California: University of California Press, 2014), 289

Rumi here alludes to God's omnipotence. God is beyond all conceptions of Him but at the same time aware of human "exercise"—hidden and manifest. Even the minute thought that comes to mind is the will of God, also known by God and therefore God is supreme and all "meaning-making" refers to back to God. For example a patient relates:

> He has put people in this world, some to do good, others bad. Some choose *shaytan*. I don't understand the evil people, how they can choose that. I don't think Allah is like that and He has not wished this for me. I have told Him that this should not take place ever again! He has to show me that He is God and He can stop humans. He can do everything (Sarah).

Sarah pleads with the all-powerful and omnipotent God. She is making God personal and counseling Him! She does not see the evil acts coming directly from God. So where does evil come from?

The Qur'an states, "What comes to you of good is from Allah, but what comes to you of evil, [O man], is from yourself..."(4:79). Central to this discussion is whether God allows evil to take place. If God is all-powerful and everything is under His dominion (including the evils of the world), then Islam does not have a theodicy "problem." If evil has its own "life" and "room of influence," then the theodicy question is very much at the heart of Islamic theological discussions.

Coping with and in faith

These patient examples tell us that tradition and orthopraxy are present in religious coping for these patients. But there are also signs that traditional Muslim coping ideals are being expressed in a variety of ways, quite independently of the individual's personal situation and setting during times of crisis and need. Chaplaincy work indicates that finding meaning and direction during times of crisis is essential for patients and relatives. There is a religious language and understanding blended with a worldview that tries to replace calamities and difficulties with a meaning structure that helps one to submit oneself to God and God's plan. In simplified terms, faith is revitalized and gains intensity during calamities and, for many, is already deeply rooted in the cosmos of meaning and understanding.

Transformative Readings
of the Bible

Reading Genesis—
An Invitation to Dialogue

Clare Amos

The thesis of this paper is that the shifting presentation of God in one particular biblical book—the Book of Genesis—constitutes an invitation to us to ask deep questions about the image of God, about God's relationship with humanity and, in particular, to what extent God's voice heard in and through the biblical text is intended as imperative or dialogical.

Listening to stories from Genesis at different times and contexts

Like many adults from church-going families of my generation I think I first encountered the Book of Genesis as a child in Sunday School. We learned about Noah, Abraham, Jacob and Joseph through the stories that we were told from Genesis: subtly edited of course—I do not think that we heard too much about awkward interludes such as Abraham seeking to pass off his wife as his sister, and the distinctly uncomfortable saga of the relations between Abraham and Hagar and Sarah and Ishmael were largely omitted, while the behavior of Mrs Potiphar was definitely presented in a censored format. We did, interestingly enough, get to hear about Abraham's near sacrifice of his son Isaac, and I have vague memories of wondering and fearing as a young child whether my own parents were ever likely to hear a similar call and command. Strangely enough, in retrospect, the story of the flood and the near extermination of the whole of humanity did not fill me with the same terror. Somehow the attraction of the rainbow and the animals happily trotting in two by two to the Ark managed to remove the sting of the story. It was not until well into my adult years that I began to

think about the flood as what has been called an "episode of divine cosmic child abuse."

In summary I think we were encouraged to think of the patriarchs as basically being moral exemplars for us, above all because they listened to the voice of God, and largely obeyed it. Sometimes they got things wrong, as Jacob did when he tricked his brother (an excellent moral illustration to prove the dangers of sibling rivalry to children), but then although they were punished, in Jacob's case with twenty years of exile, they eventually learned their lesson and so could still be useful tools in the Sunday School curriculum. I suspect that in the case of Abraham at least, the New Testament use of his figure, particularly, though not exclusively, in the letters of Paul, has colored the Old Testament accounts and encouraged him to be viewed through a special kind of rose-colored spectacles.

Fast forward to my early adulthood and to my years living in East Jerusalem. There another encounter with the patriarchs made an indelible mark on me. I lived and worked in the compound around St George's Anglican cathedral and it was there that one day in I think 1977 I met a friend of mine, Najwa Farah, a Palestinian Anglican Christian and the wife of the then Anglican priest in Ramallah. In her own right Najwa was a distinguished Palestinian poet. On this particular day Najwa was almost hyperventilating with shock. She had apparently been having lunch at the hostel attached to the "other" Anglican church in Jerusalem, which although it was located in East Jerusalem, indeed the Old City, saw its ministry as largely related to Jewish people. A Christian American tourist, also at lunch, had asked her about herself. When Najwa had responded, "I am a Palestinian Christian living in Ramallah," the woman had retorted, "You can't be a real Christian because if you were a real Christian you would have known that God had given this land to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and you would have got up and left the country." One can assume that the woman was alluding to Genesis 15:18–21—with perhaps a bit of Genesis 12:1–3; 13:14–17 thrown in. It does not really need me to spell out the implied biblical hermeneutic that lies behind such a theology: the concept of scripture as being the Word of God viewed primarily as a command to human beings to be carried out on the historical plane, with perhaps special attention and authority being given to biblical texts that present themselves as the actual words of God.

The sheer monstrosity of what was said to Najwa has always affronted me, and it has had a significant impact on my work on the Book of Genesis over the last twenty years or so.[1] I have come to believe that the woman's

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[1] Discussion of this and linked subjects is clearly present in the commentary I wrote on Genesis. See Clare Amos, *The Book of Genesis* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2004). I also contributed substantially to the Anglican Communion report on Christian Zionism, *Land of Promise?* (London: Anglican Communion, 2012).

asserton and the theology and hermeneutics that underlie it can and should be challenged, from within the Bible, and specifically from the Book of Genesis itself. Although what I am now going to explore has I believe wider theological implications, the use and misuse of the Bible, specifically Genesis, in relation to the Middle East conflict has been for me a motivating force for my exploration.

The structure of Genesis

I have always felt grateful that I became an academic biblical scholar around the time that the discipline began to focus on larger units of scripture, rather than brief isolated texts. I am interested in questions such as the ordering of the Bible and the two Testaments as a whole, and the structure of complete biblical books. I think for example that viewing that potentially problematic text, Genesis 15:18–21, within the corpus of Genesis as a whole is not an optional extra, but essential for a proper interpretation of the passage.

So just what is the structure of the Book of Genesis? Even a cursory view suggests a dividing point towards the end of chapter 11 between the primeval and patriarchal history. However I would want to suggest that Genesis—as it currently stands—can be divided into five sections, each separated by the recurrent use of what is called the Toledot formula. The Toledot formula appears ten times in Genesis—strictly speaking eleven, but I think one can legitimately consider its use in 36:9 a strengthening repetition of its use earlier in the chapter. So the word Toledot appears at 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1 (repeated 36:9); 37:2. It is variously translated in the English Bible: translations of the word include "history," "genealogy," "descendants," "list of descendants," "story," "generations." Five times the word Toledot introduces a lengthy section of narrative, and five times a genealogy (sometimes accompanied by a short narrative). Along with a number of other commentators, particularly, though not exclusively, Jewish, I believe that the word deliberately divides Genesis into five sections. These are: the story of creation (1:1–6:8); the story of the flood and its aftermath (6:9–11:26); the story of Abraham (11:27–25:18); the story of Jacob (25:19–36:43); the story of Jacob's sons (37:1–50:26).

It is worth noting that the first use of the word Toledot appears in chapter 2 of Genesis rather than chapter 1. I would suggest that one possibility is that chapter 1 is perhaps intended to be an introduction to the whole book, rather than part of a section in its own right. Another suggestion would be that the word is intended to help seam together the two accounts of creation that are told in each of the first two chapters. My overall argument does not depend on whichever of these possibilities is chosen.

My fundamental argument is that the image of God shifts and changes—quite radically—between the five sections of the book. The image of God at the end of Genesis is very different from the image at the beginning. I will give examples from each section of the book. I will also look briefly at the shifts in the name of God in the story: between Elohim, Yhwh, El Shaddai. I think these differences are not so much the result of an incompetent editor, but are deliberately designed to share with us different aspects of the divine human relationship.

The story of creation

Putting Genesis 1 to one side for the moment—what is the image of God we are given in the story of creation? An activist and personal deity, who seems almost to be physically involved in the creation and care of humanity—it is by God's "breathing" into humanity that human beings come to life (2:7), and it is by God's secondary surgery on the man that the woman also comes into being (2:21). God walks in the garden (3:8). God gives direct commands to his human creation, "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (2:17) ... and God gets angry and ensures that there are consequences when they are broken, whether in the case of the man and the woman (3:11) or in the story of the fratricide of their sons (4:10). God also wants to ensure that the barriers between humanity and divinity are not transgressed: note for example the intriguing comment in 3:22 regarding God's concern that, "the man has become like one of us," a strange worry for a deity who has in chapter 1 explicitly created human beings in the image and likeness of God. There is perhaps speech between divinity and humanity, but one could not exactly call it conversation, much less dialogue. This section draws to its conclusion with a brief reference to the intermarriage of the sons of God and the daughters of humans (6:1-4)—seemingly an explicit example of the danger of divine human intermingling that has been previously alluded to—and then sets up what is to come next through divine self-reflection: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart" (6:5-6).

The story of the flood and its aftermath

At first sight the second section of Genesis, which I have described as being the story of the flood and its aftermath, feels as though it is simply circling round and revisiting the first. There are indeed many of the same

themes—and like the first it too ends with a tale, in this case the Tower of Babel, which seems to allude to the divine worry about human beings who seek to become like gods. But in fact God's relationship with creation undergoes a major shift during the course of these five chapters. Traditional commentators, particularly from within Judaism, have long noticed the ambiguity of the figure of Noah, how throughout the whole saga of the flood he is mute, speaking not even one word. There is no attempt to plead with God, to save others as well as his own family. Indeed such commentators sometimes suggest that the praise given to Noah, namely that he was "a righteous man, blameless in his generation" (6:9) is deliberately qualified and grudging. Chapters 6–8 of Genesis are a one-sided monologue, in which other than the occasional speech of God, the only sound one can hear is the incessant drumming of the rain. But within these chapters there is in fact also a major shift in the divine-human relationship. It is found in 8:21, "And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth.'"

If we remember that back when God announced the flood there was also a double use of the word "heart," *leb*, referring both to the heart of God and the heart of humankind this becomes very significant. After the flood, though the "inclination of the heart" of humanity is still evil, but as God "speaks to his own heart" once again, this, God's own heart, has moved from regret to compassion. The flood "has effected an irreversible change in God, who now will approach his creation with an unlimited patience and forbearance."[2] God will continue to grieve over human wickedness, but has pledged to show forbearance. And this means that the promise that God offers to Noah and all creation is one, which will be of great cost to God and necessitate divine suffering. God will allow God's love to be wounded—again and again. God will voluntarily limit God's power, but in giving humanity this new freedom God will open up the possibility of a real relationship with them.

Back in Eden God had been fearful of allowing human beings to "grow up" and make decisions for themselves. Their childish disobedience had been duly punished—for God had not yet realized that if God wants a real relationship with humanity it would inevitably involve confrontation. The flood is the moment when that original mode of relating reaches its climax—and God learns that it is not enough. In the world begun anew after the flood God will try another way that will allow us to reflect back God's love. This is the paradox that I believe is at the heart of Genesis: God has to allow human destructiveness to exist and take its course in order for there to be such a thing as divine love incarnate.

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[2] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1982), 81.

An example of human destructiveness comes almost straight away. With a very bitter irony the first time that Noah utters a word in the story it is to curse his son Ham (9:25). Yet even this shows the shift that the relationship between God and humanity has undergone—for now it is a human being rather than the deity who is doing the cursing—and, as we know, Noah's words were used for generations to justify the slavery of millions of Africans. Yet, quite apart from the question of who is the intended target of the curse, could we not suggest that the Book of Genesis never intended these words to be authoritative and performative: are they rather an intentional indication that human beings such as Noah, like God, have still much to learn and that we are not yet at the end of the story that the writer is sharing with us?

The story of Abraham

Chiastic literary theory would probably suggest that the story of Abraham is the center of the book of Genesis, and certainly lies at the heart of what I, remembering the conversation with my Palestinian friend, call "the Najwa issue." In this section the portrayal of the divine human interaction has shifted from the omnipresent deity of Genesis 1–11. God does pop up and intervene fairly frequently in the story, either directly, or via an angel of the Lord, or in a vision, or in a word. But there are several episodes where God is not clearly present and where the story focuses on human interaction—with human beings struggling, but perhaps also learning, something about the necessity of relating to each other constructively.

It has often been suggested that the Abraham saga itself is shaped chiastically, with the frame provided by two instances of the Hebrew phrase *Lek Leka*—perhaps most literally translated by the words "Go for yourself"; one instance comes at the beginning and the other at the end of the story. In the first *Lek Leka* in 12:1, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you," Abraham is being asked to sacrifice his past. In the second *Lek Leka* in 22:2, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering ..." he is seemingly being asked to sacrifice his hoped for future. Within this frame the story moves inward from either side, to find its perhaps unlikely or unexpected center in the story of Hagar and Ishmael in chapter 16.

Genesis seems to try to subvert the idea that particularity can totally replace universality, certainly as far as the ethics of relationships between human beings are concerned. I do not think it is an accident that Hagar's name contains the exact Hebrew consonants of the word *ha-ger*. It is a word that is

notoriously difficult to capture the exact meaning of, but has been variously translated as the stranger, the sojourner, the migrant, the refugee, the alien; and I think that in some sense she stands for the universal other. It is by our behavior towards Hagar, *ha-ger*, that human beings judge themselves. This, I believe, is what lies behind the cryptic verse in Genesis 15:13, which comes just before Hagar makes her first appearance, "Then the Lord said to Abram, 'Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years;' … ." This verse, which appears in the context of the covenant being made between God and Abraham, includes two words that will significantly reappear in the following chapter, which deals with Abraham's treatment of Hagar. The words are "alien"—*ha-ger* in Hebrew, and "oppress," which will also appear three times as verb or noun in Genesis 16 portraying Abraham and Sarah's behavior towards Hagar (16:6, 9, 11). The slavery and oppression of Abraham's descendants in Egypt are being directly linked to the abuse of their Egyptian slave girl. We can say that justice for Hagar is being written into the fabric of the covenant between God and Abraham.

The other passage that the thesis of this paper requires me to comment on is for me the highlight of the Abraham story, namely the discussion—or should we use a stronger word such as debate?—between God and Abraham over the fate of Sodom in Genesis 18. It is, I believe, of fundamental importance for a proper interpretation of Genesis. Remember just why God decides to confide in Abraham what is about to happen. It is significant that this is the last divine self-reflection within Genesis. God muses to Godself "for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; so that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him" (18:19). This is the first time that the word *mishpat* (justice) has appeared in the Bible. So it is fascinating that only a few verses later the same root *shapat* is used—this time on the lips of Abraham to throw back to God, questioning God's own apparent lack of justice: "Shall not the Judge (*Shophet*) of all the earth do what is just" (18:25). Abraham here is the absolute antithesis of the mute Noah. The strength of Abraham's challenge is reinforced by the repeated use of the phrase "Far be it from you," which appears twice in verse 25 and is underlaid by the Hebrew root *hrm*, which could more literally be translated as "profanation." This is a word often used in connection with cultic worship, where it describes objects or people who are polluted and thus "defile" or render invalid a holy place or ritual. In effect, Abraham suggests that if God allows the innocent to suffer along with the guilty not only is God not just, but God is also not holy, and thus not God! Is Genesis deliberately inviting us to consider whether the role of human beings is meekly to accept—or to challenge—the interventionist God presented in parts of scripture, when

God's interventions seem to us as unfair? As the text itself illustrates, if Abraham's descendants (including ourselves) have learned what is "right and just" then we have the responsibility to use that wisdom.

I would argue that some of the theologies that underpin the passions alive today in Israel/Palestine feel like a state of arrested development. I find it intriguing how many of the current flashpoints for trouble are linked to the story of Abraham. There is Hebron—whose Arabic name *el khalil* ("the friend") actually recalls Abraham (see e.g., Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23), and is where he is traditionally buried. There is Jerusalem, where the foundation legend for its temple was linked to the almost-sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham's son. There is the area near Nablus/Shechem where a Jewish settlement has been named Alon Moreh after an altar built by Abraham (Gen 12:6). But Abraham, fascinating character though he is, is not God's final word—not even in Genesis. Humanity cannot, and is not meant, to sustain the ongoing and direct involvement of God in its affairs in the way that Abraham experienced.

THE STORY OF JACOB

In the story of Jacob God becomes notably less interventionist. In fact there are only two episodes of direct divine involvement within the story of the adult Jacob, Jacob's encounter with God first at Bethel (28:10-17) and then at Peniel (32:22–32). The latter's importance is underwritten by the way it becomes the moment when Jacob is renamed Israel (32:28). Interestingly, in both of these episodes the numinous element of the encounter of humanity with the divine is emphasized. But what is also important is the way that the wrestling at Peniel between Jacob and the angel, which includes the moment when Jacob cries out "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (32:30) leads straight into the meeting between Jacob and Esau when Jacob tellingly reflects to his brother, "truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor" (33:10). I would suggest that this is a marker delineating an important stage in the journey of Genesis. For the text suggests that divine intervention now is made not through direct divine action, but through the reconciliation of brothers.

THE STORY OF JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

In the story of Joseph and his brothers God does not clearly intervene directly in the action. Is this section of Genesis intended as an example in the life of a family of what it might now mean to see God through seeing the face of one's brother? Now, instead of God's direct action or command,

we are given Joseph's own expert guidance as to the meaning of the events in which he and his brothers are caught up. In 45:5–7 immediately after revealing himself to them Joseph reassures his brothers, "do not be ... angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ...God sent me before you." The second example of Joseph's self-proclaimed theological expertise comes in the final chapter, after Jacob's death as the brothers fear that Joseph may be intending to take a delayed vengeance on them and he states, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people" (50:19–20). In the story of Joseph God has retreated from front stage, yet, in some ways, has through God's human spokesmen now controlled the narrative more completely than ever.

Robert Cohn puts it like this, in relation to the entire book of Genesis, "In stages the divine director retreats from the scene permitting the actors to shape their own world. Finally, equilibrium is achieved as Joseph and his brothers, acting on their own initiative, unwittingly and ironically become the agents of providence."[3]

Can this offer an answer to "the Najwa question"—namely that we are not intended to take the God whom we meet in texts such as Genesis 15:18–21, as God or the Bible's or at least Genesis' final word? Yet, as it happens, I find myself quite uncomfortable with the story of Joseph and the theology it implies, for in some sense Joseph does precisely play God, putting himself in God's place, in quite an oppressive way, both with his family and with the entire population of Egypt. It is remarkable that Joseph's behavior in enslaving the Egyptians recounted in 47:21 was regarded by the rabbinic tradition as so morally questionable that the Masoretic text seems to have been amended at this point.[4] But perhaps those who were willing to take such a liberty on what appears to have been ethical grounds are teaching us an important point, namely that readers of the Holy Scriptures have a responsibility to study—and perhaps challenge—the text in light of what seems to them as right and just. Indeed, is not that precisely what is implied in the conversation between Abraham and God regarding the fate of Sodom?

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[3] Robert L. Cohn, "Narrative Structure and Canonical Perspective in Genesis," in John W. Rogerson (ed.), *The Pentateuch: A Sheffield Reader* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 102.

[4] The Masoretic text reads here, "He removed them to the cities." It is on the basis of Samaritan manuscripts of the Hebrew text, as well as the early Greek translations that it is assumed that what was originally written was, "He made slaves of them."

Reading difficult texts with a
sensibility towards justice

In his paper,[5] Professor Oddbjørn Leirvik draws attention *inter alia* to some contemporary Muslim commentators and their efforts to deal with difficult texts in the Qur'an. In particular he mentions the view of Khaled Abou el Fadl that "the Qur'anic text assumes that readers will bring a pre-existing innate moral sense to the text." Leirvik also quotes the perhaps even more radical Muslim writer Ebrahim Moosa,[6] who notes

> It may be preferable to hear the Qur'an in its patriarchal voice but to understand it with the sensibility of an actor/reader/listener/reciter immersed in the process of revelation. It is that listener/reciter who discovers through his or her history, experience, and transformed inner sensibility that gender justice, equality, and fairness is a norm for our time, and not patriarchy. [7]

I would want to suggest that one should read the Book of Genesis in a similar way, but I would then add to that the very structure of Genesis, and the gradual withdrawal within the book of God from direct action, may constitute an overt invitation for readers to immerse themselves in the process of revelation. Indeed, in the case of Joseph perhaps we are intended not merely to treat him as an exemplar of a human being, immersing himself in the process of revelation as he seems to do in 45:5–7 and 50:19–20 but also as a figure to challenge our own inner sensibilities.

Different names of God indicating different
aspects of God's relationship with humanity

One of the often remarked features of Genesis is the variety of names by which the divine is called: most usually Yhwh (Yahweh; the Lord) and Elohim (God), but also El Shaddai (God Almighty). It was in fact the recognition of these different names that was initially responsible in the late eighteenth century for the early source critical work on Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch, which argued that the different names reflected

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[5] Oddbjørn Leirvik, "Handling Problematic Texts: Ethical Critique and Moral Enrichment," in this publication, 17ff.

[6] Ebrahim Moosa, "The Debts and Burdens of Critical Islam," in Omad Safi (ed.), *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 111–27.

[7] Ibid., 125.

different sources. Yet, ultimately I believe that this linking of the variations of divine designation with different sources largely falls down—not least because of the dual name of Yhwh Elohim, by which the divine is referred to in Genesis 2–3, which makes any easy correlation of names with sources inherently problematic.

I would suggest that rather than correlating with sources in a mechanistic sort of way, the different names are chosen to reflect different aspects of God and in particular God's relationship with humanity. Perhaps the name Yhwh appears when an intimate personal interaction with human beings—or particular and chosen human beings—is the focus. The name Elohim then is chosen to suggest distance and less personal interaction between God and humanity. If this is the case then it becomes interesting to notice how rarely, for example, the name Yhwh appears in the latter part of the Joseph narrative. For after appearing six times in Genesis 39 in a context that suggests direct action and specific proactive care for Joseph, the name Yhwh does not reappear in the rest of the Book of Genesis, with the exception of chapter 49, where it comes in a rather anomalous way in verse 18 as an interjection in the middle of the long Blessing of Jacob. It is interesting therefore that Genesis, taken as a whole, both begins (Genesis 1) and concludes (Genesis 41-50) with the designation of God as Elohim, a name that suggests both the transcendence of the divine, but seems also to be reticent about the direct intervention of God in the affairs of humanity. Is it that God as Yhwh (and perhaps also El Shaddai) has ultimately to be subsumed to this more abstract concept of Elohim? And what might this say to us about our reading of scripture?

The Bible as dialogue partner

Over a decade ago I wrote the chapter on Genesis for the *Global Bible Commentary*. I still believe that my suggestion there that Genesis is intended to be read as dialectic rather than command is not only correct, but also vital in the context of our contemporary world and its realities:

> Perhaps Genesis needs to come with a health warning. Do not treat it as history; do not use it as a prophetic blueprint, or as an unconditional charter for a specific modern political arrangement in the Middle East. Above all read this book, which explores the development of an "adult" relationship between God and humanity, with the reflective heart of an adult. It is in some ways unhelpful that so many of Genesis' stories Noah and his flood, Joseph and his brothers are ones which we first came to know and love as children, for in reality Genesis is quite a dangerous book to use with young people. We risk going wrong if we try (as is often done

in Christian education) to use the patriarchs simplistically as moral exemplars. To read Genesis properly requires us to stand at a slight distance from the text, and explore it quizzically. It provides questions rather than offers easy answers. Throughout its 50 chapters Genesis has teased out the relationship between two and one. It is notable that the last mention of God in this book (Gen 50:20) reminds us that God uses human beings to work his purposes. It is not good for human beings—or even God—to be one and alone, yet being "two" is only life-giving if both partners are prepared to engage with each other in a way which risks mutual change. But are we ever likely to be brave enough to treat the Bible itself as such a dialogue partner, and is it a message which protagonists in the Middle Eastern maelstrom will ever be ready to hear?[8]

[8] Clare Amos, "Genesis," in Daniel Patte (ed.), *Global Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 15f.

Implications of Divine Communication in the Christian Tradition: The case of 1 Samuel 1–7

Kenneth Mtata

Gerhard Ebeling, a twentieth-century German Lutheran theologian, is said to have summarized the history of the church as essentially the history of biblical interpretation. One could say, on the basis of Ebeling's compelling argument and in the spirit of interfaith hermeneutics, that the history of the Abrahamic religions is one of negotiating the interpretations of divine communication. In the Christian context, Ebeling's conclusion can be understood in two ways: it may mean that "many of the significant turning points in ecclesiastical (church) history had to do with conflicting interpretations over the meaning of particular texts and over the methods of biblical interpretation," or that "the history of the church is essentially the story of how the church interprets scripture 'bodily,' through the shape of its community life."[1] Such differing interpretations of meaning and the tentative interpretive consensuses reached from time to time play a key role in the internal vitality of religious communities and help form the way religious communities engage with contemporaneous forces—both for good or evil. In other words, the interpretation of sacred texts transforms readers who in turn transform their relationship with their environment—even though this transformation is not unidirectional.

This transformative dimension of the Word of God is presupposed in the self-understanding of diverse Christian communities, including my own Lutheran tradition. In this tradition, the Holy Scriptures constitute one of the main "divine media of salvation," salvation in a broader sense being the

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[1] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 418.

ultimate form of transformation. The scriptures are also highly regarded for their theological epistemological function, that is, they are considered the primary "source and norm of human knowledge of God."[2] Even though this knowledge about God is not fixed, without a momentarily fixed body of knowledge or claims about the divine, communities of faith cannot be formed and communities of transformation cannot be established. According to this understanding, strong in the Lutheran tradition, the church or believing community is a creation "of the Word (*ubi verbum, ibi ecclesia*)."[3]

The underlying assumption in this Christian tradition is that God speaks and in a language human beings can understand. The consequence of this divine communication is transformation or change. For this reason, in the Hebrew Bible, which is also the Christian Old Testament, God spoke in the beginning and chaos was transformed into order (Genesis 1–2). When chaos returned in the form of injustice, immorality or idolatry, God would send out God's messengers, the prophets, who would restore the covenant relationship through God's word. This divine communication was not always benevolent as it was, for example, in the Garden of Eden when human beings were given the privilege to eat and enjoy one another's company. In the narratives of the flood or of Sodom and Gomorrah, for example, divine communication had disastrous consequences.

God is understood in this Christian tradition to speak in two ways. God sometimes spoke in kindness and grace and promise but, at other times, in judgment and justice. In both ways, the people of God would rather have a God who spoke than one who was silent. So the Psalmist cried, "God, do not keep silence; do not hold your peace or be still, O God!" (Ps 83:1). Divine communication in this and other psalms is tantamount to the active intervention of the divine in the ordinary lives of creation.

I think that this is where the problem begins. If God human agency to actualize God's communication, be it through a prophet or through interpretation of the written sacred texts, the vision of transformation had better be in ways with which we can identify. Transformation or change is required by a value judgment of the present situation. The Holy Scriptures provide faith communities with such value judgments. As has been pointed out by Ebeling, visions of transformation tend to diverge, sometimes violently. The problem is that in reading the Holy Scriptures, "hermeneutical

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[2] Hans-Peter Grosshans, "Lutheran Hermeneutics: An Outline," in Kenneth Mtata (ed.), *"You have the Words of Eternal Life": Transformative Readings of the Gospel of John from a Lutheran Perspective*, LWF Documentation 57/2012 (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2012), 23–46, here 25.

[3] Vítor Westhelle, *Transfiguring Luther: The Planetary Promise of Luther's Theology* (Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016), 18.

communities" may find divine communication that was violent and can use such readings to sanction their own destructive transformation agendas.

Transformative reading of the scriptures is therefore, for me, a deliberate predetermination of the boundaries of the positive changes in individual and communal life that are possible in response to the demands or promises of the Holy Scriptures. Such visions of positive transformation are not necessarily inventions of Christian communities but can be traced throughout the Bible.

> For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout … so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it (Isa 55:10–11).

The transformative promise is that "the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken" (Isa 25:8). This God will make God's home among human beings and dwell with them; "they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away" (Rev 21:3–4).

Structure

In the following I shall pursue the following two objectives. First, by reading 1 Samuel 1–7 I would like to demonstrate how divine communication and presence shaped the national transformation project from decline to total well-being. Second, I also shall explore the applicability of such a reading to efforts to influence the positive transformation by the way in which we interpret and appropriate sacred texts. Since I have chosen a long text for its particular narrative cycle, I will not give equal exegetical emphasis to all the verses or pericopes but, rather, to those that facilitate our illustration. Before doing this, let me locate myself as a reader as well as outlining what I think are challenges and opportunities of doing this from an interfaith perspective.

Locating the reader—challenges and prospects

I have already hinted at the fact that the process of interpretation is made possible because there are texts as well as readers. Readers are not usually aware of themselves while in the process of interpretation. This is not

deliberate but because readers bring past accumulated resources and models that make it possible for them to "anticipate" what the text is supposed to mean when they read it. In hermeneutics, we consider it a strength to make an effort critically to observe what we are doing when we read. For this reason, it matters that I clarify who I am as a reader of the text.

As a Zimbabwean, a Christian shaped by my pietistic Swedish missionary background and then influenced by Enlightenment Western theological scholarship, I approach the texts with a hybrid identity. I bring both conscious and unconscious motivations to the reading process. One of my strongest interests is to ensure that my reading deliberately contributes to the positive transformation of institutions, practices and ideas so that they facilitate the fullness of life for all people. The idea that the "fullness of life" exists is not only shaped by my reading of the Gospel of John 10:10 but is also reinforced by ideals that come from different movements and visions of the shared "good life." Such visions are also present in other faiths and hence the need to reflect within but also across faiths.

In this self-description, I have already pointed to what I consider to be one of the main challenges for interfaith transformative hermeneutics, namely the heterogeneity of intra-faith interpretation. There are varied approaches among Christians as to the relevance and applicability of the different books and words of the Bible to the faith and life of Christians as well as the various methods of reading them. Even though they will not always be explicit about it, many Christian traditions work with some form of a canon within the canon; certain books of the Bible are preferred to others. For example, Luther had a fondness for Paul's letters. Pentecostal Christians will find books like the Acts of the Apostles more appealing to them, just at Seventh Day Adventists will highly value the books of Daniel and Revelation.

Differences in faith traditions are shaped by a number of influences, the strongest among which includes education, culture and socioeconomic and political experiences. I, as a theologian from the global South, received my formal training in the reading of the Bible from Western educators or from Southern scholars trained in the West. Of course, many of us have now gone on to do other things with this knowledge, sometimes to the embarrassment of our academic progenitors. During our formation, one method of reading biblical texts that was considered orthodox was the historical approach, which worked with the assumption that the text as we have it in its final form has several histories. One can look at its own history or look "for the historical setting(s) that generated it," or use "it to write history."[4] The assumption behind this approach is that biblical texts are

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[4] Serge Frolov, *The Turn of the Cycle: 1 Samuel 1-8 in Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 7.

enclosed in theological wrappings, in some circles viewed as "corruptions" that are a result of the editors' machinations. It was assumed that the editors came from the different religious communities. The responsibility of the biblical scholar was therefore to go back to the earliest phase of the text to uncover its original uncorrupted core because that was where its true meaning lay. (This is a kind of caricature of course.)

Such an approach assumed that the readers ought to cleanse themselves of all preconceived reading lenses or pre-understandings that would obscure the true meaning of the text. This was the case at least until Bultmann helped us to understand that all interpretations are shaped by interest, including historical approaches, which are also guided by "a certain putting of the questions to history."[5] The assumption was that serious biblical scholars, unlike church theologians, were supposed to rid themselves of such theological baggage so as to get to the heart of the biblical text in order to find the truth. When some of our teachers felt that the processes of peeling away these editing layers might be futile, they started to look at texts as pieces of literature that could be read in their final form while striving to "isolate the literary entities that underlie the received version and identify the literary processes that brought in into being."[6]

Sometime in the twentieth century, scholars mainly from the South and others from the North, preferring to be explicit about their sociopolitical and economic interests and how these impinged on the process of reading, began to revise the reading practices they had learned and reshape them to consider their context as an integral component of the interpretive process. These so-called "contextual hermeneutical" approaches sought—to various degrees—to take the Bible as a text for faith communities, which must be read from this starting point. What this means is that when the words of the Bible are read, studied, explained and performed in the ritual of worship, the text is viewed as a vehicle through which God speaks to God's people. Since God spoke only in context, the context of the people, especially those who were most vulnerable, provides the interpretive key. These "poor and marginalized" subjects of the reading experience were not to be viewed merely as victims who could identify their plight with similar victims in the biblical stories. In the process of reading, they were supposed to find the redemptive and transformative voice of God in the narratives, because God sided with those who were oppressed. The contextual methodological community experienced a serious challenge when reading texts that presented God as unjust or where the biblical people of

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[5] Rudolf Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity; History and Eschatology* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 110–22.

[6] Frolov, op. cit (note 4), 7.

God were behaving in ways considered repugnant to modern readers. Here, the ways between this community and the majority of Christian readers and ordinary Christian communities tended to part.

This brings me to another challenge I wish to highlight as we seek to develop a transformative hermeneutics across Christianity and Islam: the challenge of representation and scope of influence. Today, many ordinary church members read the Bible in ways that tend to be different from biblical scholars. It is common to see, at least where I come from, that as soon as students of theology go back to serve in their faith communities, they disregard the critical tools they acquired from their training. The question this raises for our project is: do we as biblical scholars and theologians represent our faith communities? Others are more cynical, observing that while scholars and Protestant churches opted for the poor and the marginalized, the poor and the marginalized opted for the Pentecostal churches. If academic reflection on the use of sacred texts has only limited impact on the reading habits of ordinary members of faith communities, how do we expect to influence their lives? In other words, if those religious actors who have the power to influence the beliefs, structures and practices of the majority of the faith adherents do not share in the transformative vision shared by the scholars, does it really matter what we do here?

For me, the dilemma described above also provides the way out. It is clear that behind the possibility of harnessing the transformative dimension of the sacred texts is the question of authority or legitimacy. For me, this fundamental question of the conflict over who possesses the authority to speak on behalf of God in both Christianity and Islam today could be defining regarding how we want to reflect on transformative hermeneutics across the two faiths. But what is the source of legitimacy? In his helpful paper, "The Legitimacy of Economics,"[7] Kenneth Boulding discusses it as a phenomenon and identifies six sources of legitimacy of which I shall highlight three.

Boulding starts by pointing out that "legitimacy is something which we take for granted when we have it, almost without question, while when we do not have it, the system falls apart with such rapidity that there is no time to investigate [the causes]."[8] He also makes an important distinction between legality and legitimacy where an "institution can be legitimate... without being legal, and it can be legal without being legitimate ...."[9] He goes on to identify six sources of legitimacy of which I shall focus on three. The fourth source of legitimacy on Boulding's list, which I think informs

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[7] Kenneth Boulding, "The Legitimacy of Economics," in *Economic Inquiry* (1967), vol. 5, no. 4, 299-307.
[8] Ibid., 299.
[9] Ibid.

the actions of many religious actors in my part of the world, is that of "mystery and charisma."[10] Here, legitimacy comes from the tendency of people to regard as legitimate that which they do not fully understand or "only dimly understand."[11] In contemporary Africa, the currently growing influence of so-called prophets who speak on behalf of God and perform miracles can be ascribed to their use of mysterious claims that they have special powers to access realms to which ordinary human beings have no access. What they say is taken to be indisputable truth since it is supposed to come from God.

Closely connected to the fourth is the fifth source of legitimacy, which is "communication through accepted symbols of legitimacy." Here "rituals, clothing, incense, music, dance, art, architecture and so on are devoted in no small part to creating the symbols of legitimacy."[12] In many Christian communities, at least in Africa, just as in Europe in the past and still in some churches to this day, the ability of religious authorities to speak on behalf of God for good or bad was legitimated by several rituals and symbols. In contemporary Africa, the flamboyant lifestyle of such religious figures and the high regard with which they are viewed make it possible for them to issue directives to their followers, which the followers accept without question. Similar directives coming from a religious university professor speaking on the authority of his research knowledge will not command the same response as long as he cannot communicate through these accepted symbols of legitimacy.

The sixth source of legitimacy according to Boulding, "consists of alliances and associations with other legitimacies. Legitimacy, as it were, is something that rubs off, and if a less legitimate institution can ally itself with a more legitimate one, the legitimacy of both may even be increased."[13] He gives the "frequent alliance of church and state" as an "example of this phenomenon."[14] We have seen an increase in the building of alliances of religious actors in different parts of the African continent giving legitimacy to one another as those who are speaking on behalf of God. In many cases, these actors have decimated the meager livelihoods of poor people in the name of God. Their gullible audiences are willing to part with their wealth in the hope that God is going to bless them and change their plight of poverty to prosperity. These actors are not interested in challenging the political and economic systems that impoverish these people.

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[10] Ibid., 301.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 302.

[14] Ibid.

The hope of our conference is that we can build alliances and associations across our religious divides in order to develop ways of reading the sacred texts in a manner that will promote positive transformation in our faith communities. Maybe what some of us may lack in the form of mystery and charisma can be compensated for by clarity of divine communication. Maybe our transformative hermeneutics could seek to uphold alternative symbols of communication aligned to justice, peace and reconciliation.

Below, I attempt such transformative hermeneutics using 1 Samuel 1–7.

1 Samuel 1-7

The book of 1 Samuel provides insights into how the nation-building transition from theocratic to monarchical models was understood. In the Hebrew Bible, 1 Samuel comes after the book of Judges. The book of Judges provides a scenario in which Israel is in "cultic and moral chaos."[15] The situation is summarized by the closing words that anticipate a transition: "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg 21:25).

This transition from theocracy (in the form of judges) to monarchy (in the form of kings) seems contentious, as can be seen from 1 Samuel 8, where Samuel himself complains to God about the people's request for a king. The text is ambiguous as to God's view regarding kingship. God's response to the people's request for a king is begrudgingly to encourage Samuel to grant them their wish saying, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (8:7). But Samuel must warn the people regarding the negative consequences of kingship:

> These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons
> and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his
> chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and command-
> ers of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his
> implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters
> to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and
> vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth
> of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers.
> He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys,
> and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be

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[15] Frolov, op. cit. (note 4), 2.

his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day (1 Sam 8:11-18).

In short, kingship is regarded as problematic because it will compromise the covenant relationships between God and God's people and between people themselves since it will be characterized by injustice and oppression.

Theocracy under the judges is not perfect either according to the first seven chapters of 1 Samuel. Throughout chapters 1–7, there is a transition going on where the priestly house of Eli at Shiloh is being replaced by Samuel. Eli and his household are presented as having presided over the decline of Israel and hence the necessity to have them replaced—God has spoken. In order to understand such a national decline, one needs to understand the Old Testament logic of an ideal relationship between God and God's people—a logic that is assumed throughout this entire narrative.

The relationship between people and their God in the Hebrew Bible is defined as a covenant relationship. According to Walter Brueggemann, a covenant relationship is "an enduring commitment by God and God's people based on mutual vows of loyalty and mutual obligation through which both parties have their lives radically affected and empowered."[16] Both parties have obligations and benefits. Yahweh will provide security for Yahweh's people so that they can prevail against their enemies; Yahweh will ensure that they have rain in season and that their land and their women are fruitful. On their part, the covenant people would treat each other with justice, take care of the widows and orphans and worship Yahweh alone. If this perfect balance is kept in place, people will be able to exist in peace.

"Shalom" is the word that appropriately expresses this holistic life of fulfillment and peace for the covenant people. A word which occurs more than 250 times in separate places in the Christian Old Testament or Hebrew Bible refers to a core belief that "comes from the root meaning 'to be whole' and hence speaks of 'wholeness', 'soundness', 'health', and 'well-being'. Shalom is peace as opposed to war, concord as opposed to strife."[17] As such, it is

a condition of "all rightness" of things being as they should be, in various dimensions...Shalom usually refers to material or physical conditions or circumstances...A second dimension of shalom has to do with social relationships. God intends for people to live in right relationship with one another and with God... A third ap-

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[16] Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 10.
[17] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 178.

plication or dimension of shalom ... applies to the moral or ethical realm...Shalom involves a condition of honesty, moral integrity.[18]

As will be shown below, 1 Samuel 1–7 reflects the decline of a nation where shalom has become absent. At the same time, these seven chapters provide an account of the recovery process through which the nation is restored through the agency of God and God's messengers. One can read it as narrative movement on two pivots, swinging from Ichabod (departure of God's glory) to Ebenezer (the affirmation of God's guidance thus far) and characterized by God's speech or silence and God's presence and absence as experienced by the imagined audience.

The path towards decline

The path towards decline is symbolically represented by the broken family of Elkanah (1 Sam 1–8) as well as by the broken worship presided over by Eli and his sons (1 Sam 9–28). Eli, the priest at the holy place at Shiloh, and his sons are no longer fit to preside over the people in matters of worship and of justice, so God prepares for their replacement. As in other Old Testament narratives of the birth of key agents, this one, Samuel, is born in strife and in extraordinary circumstances. His mother, Hannah, is one of the two wives of Elkanah, an Ephraimite who devotedly attends to his pilgrimage duties to the holy place at Shiloh every year.

Hannah is childless and is therefore grieved even though her husband gives her a double portion of the sacrifice "because he loved her" (1 Sam 5). Her grief comes not only from the social stigma attached to women without children, but because Peninnah, the other wife of Elkanah, constantly mocks her because of her childlessness. So many times "Hannah wept and would not eat" (1 Sam 7). It is in this mood of anguish that she goes to the place of worship to make her sacrifice and "deeply distressed," she "prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly" (1 Sam 10).

If one looks closely at Hannah's petition, one observes that her bitterness seems to be triggered not only by her personal situation of childlessness but also the state of the nation and the cult:

> O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant,[19] and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then

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[18] Perry B. Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1995), 130–31.

[19] A word that was also used to refer to the whole nation of Israel.

> I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.

She is already praying for the replacement of Eli and his sons. Her personal petition is at the same time a yearning for a national leadership renewal. The need for this prayer is confirmed by the disconnection between Eli and the needs of the people visiting the shrine. Eli has lost touch with the people's deepest needs in such a way that when he sees a women entreating God in her anguish, he concludes "she was drunk" (1 Sam 1:13). This misdiagnosis of the status of the worshippers makes the ministry at Shiloh irrelevant in terms of contributing to the national shalom. Combined with the many injustices and sexual immorality of Eli's sons (2 Sam 22–25), Eli will no longer play a central role in the nation-building process—so God will speak. One symptom of the unhealthy state of the covenant is the rejection of the ministry of Eli and his sons (2 Sam 22–36):

> Therefore the Lord the God of Israel declares: "I promised that your family and the family of your ancestor should go in and out before me forever"; but now the Lord declares: "Far be it from me; for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be treated with contempt (1 Sam 2:30).

The priest in this covenantal arrangement is the bearer of religious legitimacy as he serves as the intermediary between people and God. Without him or his household, the routines at the shrine cannot be sustained. He must therefore be replaced soon.

Another sign of decline is the rarity of divine communication: "The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread" (1 Sam 3:1). Some commentators have, I think correctly, suggested that the play on words in this opening verse referring to "Eli's advanced blindness, the 'lamp of God' that has not yet gone out, and Samuel lying down in the temple of the Lord" reflect the paradox of juxtaposing the extent of decline with the hope of national recovery.[20] So it is not only Eli whose sight is challenged, but the whole nation is groping about without clear direction of either the word of the prophet or divine intervention.

The third sign that this covenant relationship is unhealthy, as recounted elsewhere in the Old Testament, is that the nation loses its battles. In a situation of national blindness, the way the loss is diagnosed is misguided:

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[20] Uriel Steen-Noklberg, *Reading Prophetic Narratives*, transl. from the Hebrew by Lenn J. Schramm (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 62.

> When the troops came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the Lord put us to rout today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, so that he may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies" (1 Sam 4:3).

But this is a wrong move because since God is no longer speaking to them, or since they can no longer hear God, their solutions are based on shared ignorance. In this battle, Israel loses many of its soldiers including Eli's sons. The worst outcome is that the Ark of the Covenant is captured by the Philistines (1 Sam 4:10–11).

Losing the first battle (1 Sam 4:1–2) was a challenge but not a big issue since they could regroup and restrategize. They are misguided in assuming that a single battle could mean that maybe future battles will be won. Their situation is grave since, in the second battle, the Ark of the Covenant is taken away when they lose the battle. The Ark of the Covenant, or *Tabut* in the Qur'an, was one of Israel's most precious possessions. It was a

> box-like object containing the Tablets of the Law and perhaps other items which were representative of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. On top of the Ark was a seat made of gold, which was said to represent the presence of Yahweh. In time, the Ark was considered to have magical properties and it played a significant role during the days of the judges and the early years of the monarchy.[21]

So the loss of the Ark of the Covenant was the lowest point of decline for Israel according to 1 Samuel. When Eli hears mention of the capture of the Ark, he "fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died" (1 Sam 4:18). His daughter-in-law, the wife of one of Eli's sons who had perished in battle, begins her labor pains. She gives birth to a son and names him Ichabod before she, also, dies. The name Ichabod is indeed symbolic not only of the day, but of the era of decline. Ichabod means "'The glory has departed from Israel,' because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband" (1 Sam 4:21).

The path towards recovery

To understand this narrative in a linear sense of cause and effect misses its narrative complexity and its theological paradoxes. This is especially so if one reads it from the perspective of the Christian tradition. 1 Samuel 1–7 provides a

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[21] Francis I. Fesperman, *From Torah to Apocalypse: An Introduction to the Bible* (London: Lanham, 1983), 53.

more nuanced understanding of the covenantal relationship since it presents God as a harsh judge but also as forgiving and caring. This gracious side of Yahweh does not only manifest itself after Ichabod but even in the midst of the debacle.

From the beginning, we can observe that even in the midst of decline, the covenant people still travel from far away for fervent communal worship at Shiloh (1 Sam 3; 7:3ff). We can also observe that this worship is not mere routine but directed and strategic, entreating Yahweh to intervene at both personal and communal levels of need. As mentioned above, Hannah's prayer is a good example (1 Sam 1:9ff; 1 Sam 2:1ff) that recalls all the covenant elements. She mentions how God will intervene on behalf of the weak in battle and break the "bows of the mighty" as well providing the harvest and food (1 Sam 2:4). It is not only the land that will be productive but also the women of the land: "The barren has borne seven... ." (1 Sam 2:5). She even envisions the coronation of the king before the appointed time: the Lord "will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed" (1 Sam 2:10). In other words, in Hannah's prayer, lament is interlaced with hope and prayers of anticipation, even in the midst of much gloom.

The same is true of Eli. Even though he is criticized for not reining in his children, we cannot fail to see his extraordinary function as a mentor to the young Samuel, even if he is aware that God has chosen Samuel in his place. Eli does not only pronounce a blessing to Hannah, but also mentors and teaches her son to hear the Lord (1 Sam 1:17ff; 2:20, 27; 3:8ff). Even though Samuel has been chosen to replace Eli and his house, Samuel does not yet "know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to" (3:7). So when God speaks, Samuel confuses God with Eli. Under these conditions, God can be heard again; under the rejected Eli, Yahweh can only be heard because Eli facilitates the hearing. This is no longer for him and his family but for the people of God.

God's words can be seen in 1 Samuel 1–7 as both a condition but also as a result of the new national direction. Once God has begun to speak and to be heard, the covenantal floodgates open. First, the priestly ministry recovers its legitimacy and effectiveness:

> As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel (1 Sam 3:19–4:1).

When Samuel as the religious agent speaks, God legitimates his speech by making sure God's word comes to pass. This, in the Deuteronomic tradition, is the proof of being the messenger of Yahweh:

> You may say to yourself, "How can we recognize a word that the Lord has not spoken?" If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it (Deuteronomy 18:21-22).

Further, in line with the covenant relationship, we can also see the restoration of justice and God's glory. Samuel "would come back to Ramah, for his home was there; he administered justice there to Israel, and built there an altar to the Lord" (1 Sam 7:17). In this state of shalom, *mishpat* (justice) and *tsedaka* (righteousness) come close together as in the prophecy of Isaiah: "But the Lord of hosts is exalted by justice, and the Holy God shows himself holy by" (Isa 5:16). In this state of shalom, the covenant people do not need to prevail against their enemies because: "There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites" (1 Sam 7:14). There is no necessity to win wars because peace can prevail.

The Lord has now finally spoken according to the promise in the Psalm:

> Lord, you were favorable to your land;
> you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
> You forgave the iniquity of your people;
> you pardoned all their sin. Selah
> You withdrew all your wrath;
> you turned from your hot anger.
>
> Restore us again, O God of our salvation,
> and put away your indignation toward us.
> Will you be angry with us forever?
> Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
> Will you not revive us again,
> so that your people may rejoice in you?
> Show us your steadfast love, O Lord,
> and grant us your salvation.
>
> Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
> for he will speak peace to his people,
> to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.
> Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
> that his glory may dwell in our land.
>
> Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
> righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
> Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,

and righteousness will look down from the sky.

The Lord will give what is good,

and our land will yield its increase.

Righteousness will go before him,

and will make a path for his steps (Ps 85:1–13).

CONTEMPORARY IMPLICATIONS

What does this mean for our yearning for transformative interfaith hermeneutics? Let me propose three concluding insights that I think could define such a hermeneutic.

First, we need to acknowledge that the power of sacred texts, at least in my own Christian tradition, lies in their ability to offer a language for alternative reality. This alternative reality is always a promise with a condition—it is covenantal; "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (Jn 15:10). The promise to abide in God's love is conditional on keeping God's command. What is that command? In the New Testament they ask Jesus:

> Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Mt 22:36-40).

In other words, God's communication is an invitation of love. How is this love discerned?

This brings us to the second insight that lies in the character of divine speech. How is it possible to evaluate whether it is God who has spoken, apart from the collective authentication or mutual affection? The litmus test is the convergence of righteousness and justice. True shalom, which is the climax of transformation, is characterized by *mishpat* (justice) and *tsedaka* (righteousness), not one after the other or one above the other, but both together. True hearing of the divine Word materializes in the realization of just relationships and true worship. How does the speaking of God materialize this alone?

The third observation is that the realization of justice and righteousness, though a result of divine speech, are mediated by human actors. In my Christian interpretive tradition, this agency does not come first and then divine intervention but follows the divine lead. The new alternate reality of

shalom is wholly owned and orchestrated by God. But in God's grace, God has fully sanctioned human agency for the realization of shalom. As such, no human agent can claim divine authority—which is beyond questioning or evaluating by other human agents. No human agent can claim insight into the workings of the divine for the transformation of society that is not accessible to other human actors. Again we use the Deuteronomic test: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law" (Dt 29:29). From this perspective, transformation cannot be effected through swords but by words of persuasion. Any zealous human agency that seeks to materialize divine communication by force slowly slides into idolatry. In other words, to say that God is speaking should always be agreed upon by other members of the faith community.

Dealing with Sacred Scripture: New Testament, Otherness and Intersectionality

Marianne Bjelland Kartzow

Introduction

When a text is considered sacred, it generates complex challenges of interpretation and meaning. It invites communication and dialogue. It needs community and relationships across time and place to make sense. It not only comes with a challenge but also with beauty, wisdom, paradox, humor, strangeness and hope. Encountering sacred scriptures is a rich intellectual enterprise, calling its readers to be creative and to act in the world.

In this article, I will look for interpretative models in the New Testament that have a destabilizing and transformative potential. I am interested in social history as a hermeneutical and epistemological tool, not to find out what actually happened in the past, but to rethink how bodies, relationships and social interaction are the raw material with which sacred scriptures construct their theology. After discussing different contexts for reading, some approaches will be presented and, towards the end, a model for biblical interaction and engagement will be suggested.

Readings in context

Scriptural hermeneutics start with the encounter between everyday experience and texts. I will very briefly describe characteristics of the world we live in today and the current Norwegian context.

The current Norwegian context

We live at a time of an ever increasing gap between rich and poor and in a multicultural world challenged and enriched by religious diversity. We face environmental crises and a growing global refugee conflict. God's creation is suffering. In northern Europe, we live in partly secular, once Protestant, societies. The majority, lacking narrative roots, will soon face biblical illiteracy. Religious diversity is welcomed here if it accepts Scandinavian paradoxes of freedom and equality. In Norway, sacred texts play an ambiguous role.

For instance, in the winter of 2015 we learned from one of our government ministers, Sylvi Listhaug, that in order to help as many as possible, Jesus had helped people in the neighborhoods where they lived.[1] She encouraged us to follow the example of Jesus in our refugee politics. Accordingly, we should not allow more asylum seekers and refugees into our country, but rather help them where they are. We should support Syria's neighbors and let them help people in need, not invite them to Norway.

Some years ago, we had a discussion on slavery in the Bible. A high-profile evangelical theologian argued strongly that, according to the Bible, slavery is not a sin. Since it is not sin, it is not against the will of God. Therefore, since our ancient sacred scriptures do not consider it a sin, this reading of the text could easily encourage us silently to watch modern slavery spreading in our global world.

Over the past few years, we seem to have witnessed a general cultural trend, in which people who do not necessarily like Christianity still very much like the Bible. Almost every year a new play based on the Bible is produced, often breaking theatre audience records and at times involving sacred texts from different religions.[2] The Bible remains a bestseller in this country. When a new Bible translation was published in 2011, many of our most prominent authors were involved in the process. The Bible is considered as belonging to our cultural canon.

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[1] For the video (in Norwegian), see https://www.nrk.no/video/PS*236374 (NRK 03.11.2015).

[2] In particular I will mention the great success "Abrahams barn" (Children of Abraham), where texts from the three traditions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) were included. See http://www.detnorsketeatret.no/framsyningar/abrahams-barn.

Generally, the majority would support gender equality in religion. The majority is not very active in the faith community, but has a cultural-personal interest in the Holy Scriptures. I sometimes think the Bible has primarily a symbolic value; it is a book to demonstrate who you are, not necessarily to be read. How can this particular ambiguous context contribute to making scripture sacred?

Interpretation

The history of interpretation also has a context. It has been argued that the Christian Reformation was a biblical movement: the Word of God was now free for all by the spirit of God. All believers were to read scripture and there to find guidance for everyday life. Printing presses and schools for lay people would contribute to reaching these goals. There was optimism that the principle of *sola scriptura* would make the text—no longer filtered through church authority or the power of the clergy—speak clearly and directly in people's lives. Prior to the invention of the hermeneutical circle, this enthusiasm was perhaps a bit naive in relation to the complex act of reading or the role of the reader in constructing the meaning of a text. Perhaps we can say that the lack of tools to let the text speak clearly was the reason why the exegetical method of historical criticism was developed some hundred years later. Within a theological framework, the first generations of exegetes tried to reconstruct the original historical context and meaning of the texts.

In the past forty years or so, literary theories and impulses from the social sciences have contributed new perspectives, challenging the hermeneutical approach. New Testament scholars are no longer necessarily believers reading their Holy Scripture, searching for theological meaning. An interdisciplinary group of researchers has continued to study these texts as part of various historical, literary or ideological projects. The Bible is still sacred scripture for the churches, but also an academic, cultural, poetic and political text.

Texts of terror

It has been pointed out that the Bible contains numerous "texts of terror."[3] This cultural and sacred bestseller has an ambiguous history. The Bible has helped colonizers and military campaigns by legitimizing their brutal or violent actions, mixing mission and politics to oppress other people,

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[3] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, Overtures to Biblical Theology, 13 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

supported the slave trade, gender discrimination, religious intolerance, racism, the Holocaust and apartheid. It has worked perfectly well to exclude and construct "others." Difference is seen as problematic.[4] Simultaneously, the same text has played the opposite role in many of these contexts. Colonialism, the slave trade, gender discrimination and racism have been fought with inspiration from the Bible, the same sacred text. Is the Bible a book to be recommended, for example, to boys and girls or new citizens coming from other parts of the world or other religious traditions? What criteria should be employed in order to prevent the Bible from being a text of terror?

APPROACHES TO SACRED SCRIPTURE

SACRED TEXTS AS NARRATIVES

We will now turn to some New Testament texts. According to the Acts of the Apostles (Acts), the story of the early church starts where the Gospel of Luke ends: with the resurrection of Jesus. Their master has now left them and the disciples have received the Holy Spirit. They start speaking in all kinds of languages and all people can understand them. They behave strangely and Peter makes a speech in order to calm down the crowd and explain what is going on.

> But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of
> Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I

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[4] Othering: a way of discriminating or looking down on other individuals or groups. See Pui-lan Kwok, "Finding a Home for Ruth. Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Otherness," in Robert M. Fowler, Edith L. Blumhofer, and Fernando F. Segovia (eds), *New Paradigms for Bible Study: The Bible in the Third Millennium* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004). See also Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, *Never Wholly Other: A Muslima Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 17ff. See also Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, "Gossip and Gender: Othering of Speech in the Pastoral Epistles," in *BZNW*, vol. 164 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009). Definition: Othering can be described as discrimination of people or a population that is different from the collective social norm; since they are different they are also seen as deviant or in need of being cultured by the group that is othering them. An example of othering is when individuals that identify closely with their own ethnic or religious beliefs begin to gain the mentality that those who are different from them are problematic. This can lead to extreme separation, alienation and the exclusion of the person or of people seen as different or unusual in terms of the typical lens of one's societal views.

say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:14–18).

This is indeed a fascinating little narrative. In the quotation from the Jewish prophet Joel, inclusive and inviting statements aim at involving all humankind: sons and daughters, young and old men, male and female slaves. Enough hopes, dreams and visions: that is the work of the Spirit in Acts. It connects to the overall metanarrative of the Bible in which all people are the children of God.[5]

People need narratives that can offer models for how to deal with life. Where a critical historical exegete would ask about what kind of a time system and clock they had or where in Jerusalem they were when Peter made his speech, a narrative approach asks for characters, relationships, scenes, plot, humor and point of view–and the reader's role in the production of meaning.[6] Narratives are "open texts"; they both invite and require the participation of their audience.[7] The reading of narratives involves embodiment: we must read with all our senses. It involves seeing and listening to the texts and to the world. Communities need stories to build on, to remember who they are and where they come from. Narratives can lead to confusion and give no clear answers, where readers are confronted with their own good deeds or mistakes. Narratives cannot be read only to search for right or wrong; they ask more from their readers.

Peter's speech in Acts can work this way. Readers may identify themselves with the sons, old men or slaves. The story gives hope, drama and visions to those encountering the text. It connects past, present and future and inscribes all of us into that metanarrative. It does not matter whether we are rich or poor, high or low, successful or not: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). No one is the other here. The people of God are unified. No wonder that the passage from Acts 2 has

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[5] More on the concept of "metanarrative," see Timo Eskola, *A Narrative Theology of the New Testament: Exploring the Metanarrative of Exile and Restoration* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

[6] Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism? A New Approach to the Bible* (London: Spck, 1993).

[7] See chapter 4 on narrative criticism in Joel B. Green (ed.), *Methods for Luke* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

globally been the strongest canon within the canon for neo-charismatic movements over the past decades.

There is only one small snake in paradise: when this text passage includes young and old men and children and slaves of both genders, why are young and old women not mentioned? And why are only the men of Judea addressed?

An intersectional approach

In other New Testament texts, the term "old women" works as a name tag for what is wrong. In the Pastoral Epistles, part of the so-called disputed Pauline, "old wives tales" is a category used to label false teaching (1 Tim 4:7).[8] Old women are requested not to teach young women to slander or drink too much (1 Tim 3:11; Tit 2:3–5) and young widows are blamed for running around, gossiping and saying things they should not say (1 Tim 5:3–15).[9] Women shall be saved through childbirth (1 Tim 2:15). Such requirements hide stereotyping and "othering" and gender rhetoric is used to blame. In the same letters, slaves are told to be obedient and not to talk back to their masters (1 Tim 6:1–2; Tit 2:9).[10] The problem is not only that the text is "othering" women; several groups seem to be excluded. Women, children and slaves are also regulated in the so-called household codes, for example, in the Pseudo-Pauline "Letter to the Colossians":

> Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart. Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord (Col 3:18–22).

The three relationship pairs—wives/husbands, children/parents and slaves/masters—may work rhetorically as isolated parameters, but not

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[8] Joanna Dewey, "Women on the Way: A Reconstruction of Late First-Century Women's Storytelling," in Holly E. Hearon and Philip Ruge-Jones (eds), *The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media: Story and Performance* (Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2009), 36–48. Jouette M. Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus,* Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996).

[9] These texts as discussed in Kartzow, op. cit. (note 4), 164.

[10] More on slavery, see Bernadette J. Brooten and Jacqueline L. Hazelton (eds), *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies* (New York: Palgrave, MacMillan, 2010); Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

in the real life of the ancient world.[11] Instead of hierarchical organized pairs, a complex web of intersecting relationships in which authority and power were negotiated and distributed corresponds better to the everyday experience of the first Jesus followers.

I will use "intersectionality" to rethink this cultural complexity. Intersectionality as a theoretical concept has only very recently been applied to biblical scholarship,[12] although the basic ideas and concerns have been articulated by African and African-American scholarship and womanist biblical interpreters in particular for some years now.[13] The basic idea is the following: instead of examining gender, race, class, age and sexuality as separate categories, intersectionality explores how these categories overlap and mutually modify and reinforce each other.[14] Intersectionality enables interpreters to "ask the 'other' question" and thereby make visible categories that otherwise are overlooked or downplayed.[15]

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[11] Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, " 'Asking the Other Question': An Intersectional Approach to Galatians 3:28 and the Colossian Household Codes," in *Biblical Interpretation 18*, no. 4–5 (2010), 364–89.

[12] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Introduction: Exploring the Intersections of Race, Gender, Status, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies," in Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (eds), *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 1–23. Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, "Intersectional Studies," in Julia M. O'Brien (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Gender Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[13] Sarojini Nadar, "The Bible in and for Mission: A Case Study of the Council of World Mission," in *Missionalia 37*, no. 2 (2009), 226. See also Brian K. Blount et al. (eds), *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007) and numerous works by Schüssler Fiorenza and for example Kwok (note 4).

[14] See for example Kathy Davis, "Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful," in *Feminist Theory 9* (2008), 67–83; Gudrun-Axeli Knapp, "Race, Class, Gender: Reclaiming Baggage in Fast Travelling Theories," in *European Journal of Women's Studies 12*, no. 3 (2005), 249–65; Leslie McCall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, no. 3 (2005), 1771–800; Ann Phoenix and Pamela Pattynama (eds), *European Journal of Women's Studies* (Issue on Intersectionality), vol. 13 (2006); Sumi Cho, Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectional Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis," in *Signs* (Theme Issue: Intersectionality: Theorizing Power, Empowering Theory 38), no. 4 (2013), 785–810.

[15] Mari Matsuda argues: "The way I try to understand the interconnection of all forms of subordination is through a method I call 'ask the other question.' When I see something that looks racist, I ask, 'Where is the patriarchy in this?' When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, 'Where is the heterosexism in this?' When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, 'Where are the class interests in this?'," Mari J. Matsuda, "Beside My Sister, Facing the Enemy: Legal Theory out

In the social world of the New Testament, ethnicity, class, gender and age/generation worked together and mutually constructed each other. A man could be either free or a slave—although slave men were not considered real men.[16] Different rules worked for women depending on their status: slave women had no chance to follow the gender codes where honor and invisibility were the norm, as was expected of freeborn women.[17] Small children, slave and free, may have played together and had some kind of schooling together, but the life waiting for them had clear borders and separated them into different social worlds according to gender and social class.[18]

So who were the insiders in the communities that produced the Christian sacred scripture? Who were those considered to be in control of themselves, their choices, their bodies? And who was the other? It is tempting to say that for Paul, free adult Jewish men like himself were the ultimate insiders. He admitted that "in Christ Jesus," all other parameters were of less value (Gal 3:28), but the metanarrative he wrote into what that privilege was belonged to a specific position in society. The other could be welcomed into the spiritual reality as long as they followed the code of obedience and submission according to gender, class, age and race. How do we deal with this message without letting the New Testament work like a text of terror?

We have to read against the grain and with a hermeneutics of suspicion.[19] Paul and the Pauline traditions belonged to a specific cultural and social context, as the historical critical method has taught us. Theology is formulated accordingly, with the help of bodies, relationships and social interaction, as intersectionality may help us realize. Nevertheless, the Pauline letters, disputed or not, belong to the sacred scripture of Christianity. They are considered part of the Word of God. As a storyteller, Paul brings good news to the table, such as the credo of Galatians 3:28, but in his name, we also find stereotypes and othering. For good reasons, he has a firm status within the church, academy and Lutheran communities. I will nevertheless suggest that we read him in light of other, less famous texts from the Christian scripture.

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of Coalition," in *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1990), 1187. See also Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality," in *Feminist Review* 89 (2008), 12.

[16] Halvor Moxnes, "Conventional Values in the Hellenistic World: Masculinity," in Per Bilde, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, Lise Hannestad and Jan Zahle (eds), *Conventional Values of the Hellenistic Greeks*, Studies in Hellenistic Civilization, 8 (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1997), 263–84.

[17] Anna Rebecca Solevag, *Birthing Salvation: Gender and Class in Early Christian Childbearing Discourse* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[18] Carolyn Osiek, Margaret Y. MacDonald, and Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress Press, 2006).

[19] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

A MODEL FOR BIBLICAL INTERACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

CRITERIA FOR FINDING (NEW) TEXTS

Not all texts do good things for all people. The world needs voices which, based on the sacred scriptures and faced with the current situation, speak out loud in the face of crises and discrimination. We need to find narratives that can cure the growing scriptural illiteracy. What kind of criteria can be used for finding text passages that are not othering but rather bring a message of hope?

I think that a variety of genres is one answer: household codes or legal material must be put into dialogue with narrative passages or metanarratives. Doctrinal conclusions need to be scrutinized for stereotyping and othering. Texts from the New Testament itself can work as interpretative models for other texts in an internal biblical dialogue. In addition, familiar texts that have a special status within the canon must be read side by side with texts in the margins; they all belong to scripture. Although the Reformers and others before and after them had ideas about which texts were most central, Christians consider the whole Bible sacred. Instead of bringing texts to the table with clear answers, we must risk the possibility that a reading might lead to challenge and change. To be taken by surprise by a text is better than knowing beforehand what it will tell us.

Can internal biblical genre–dialogue, marginality, risk and surprise– be criteria for how to encounter the New Testament as sacred scripture without othering?

THE SLAVE GIRL WITH THE SPIRIT OF DIVINATION

One short story, once again from Acts, can take us by surprise and destabilize the truth. It presents a different narrative about Paul and about the roots of Christianity. Paul and Silas are in Philippi and they have just met the dealer in purple cloth, Lydia, and baptized her and her household. Now they are moving on and the following little incident is quickly passed over:

> One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation. She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour (Acts 16:16–18).

This story has not received prominent focus; in fact, it has hardly been noticed at all. The slave girl is constructed as the other at several levels: narratively, theologically and in the history of interpretation due to intersections of gender, class and ethnic/cultural background. Volumes entitled "Women in the Bible" mostly focus on the prominent Lydia, described some verses before, and pay little attention to this girl. As a slave, her talent in fortune-telling is owned by others; the grammatical form is plural, so she might be shared property between several owners or households. She could be inherited property between brothers. Later in the chapter, her owners become very angry with Paul and his men and send them to prison because Paul has healed her and thereby taken away their income. Such a girl, lacking her fortune-telling talent, would need another job; to sell a female slave's body into prostitution could be an option. Ethnically and culturally, in common with several other slaves, she has lost the ties of origin, nationality and family. Slaves are cut off from what normally gives people identity and position.[20] The spirit she is said to be possessed by—a spirit of divination—makes her appear as a strange and foreign character on whom Paul's spiritual power is demonstrated. He talks to the spirit and not to her.

In problematic ways, the text builds on rhetorical techniques where gender and class are used in intersecting ways. At one level, the text tells a bad story about the readers who sympathize with Paul. As discussed above, narratives invite readers or listeners to be involved and engaged and they can offer models for how to deal with life. Such narratives cannot be read only to search for right or wrong; they require more from us. It requires ethical and self-critical reflection.[21]

The story recounts how Paul operates in the field, how the spirit of God wins the battle over other spirits and how minor characters' bodies and lives become artifacts and are used as rhetorical devices. How do we deal with the fact that early Christian missionaries were annoyed and mistreated, marginal characters and left them behind with no means of survival, simply because the hero wanted to show that our God is the strongest?

The spirit-possessed slave girl is the other, the religious other. The young female refugee, fleeing due to war or the environmental crisis, shivering in an open boat on her way to Europe. The Roma woman begging at the

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[20] Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); John Byron, *Recent Research on Paul and Slavery* (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2008).
[21] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship," in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107, no. 1 (1988), 3–17.

Metro station. We have all seen her. She is annoying; she does not give up, she keeps on crying, day after day.

Truth in unexpected places

While this narrative has a destabilizing potential, further investigation may reveal that there is more to it than simply stating that "she should be numbered among the disadvantaged of the sort who are the particular objects of Jesus' salvation."[22] Interpreters have paid attention to what the slave girl is reported to have said: her words correspond to what is seen as the truth in Acts.[23] She cries out that Paul and his men are slaves of God, a common description of early Christian individuals and groups; she also declares that they proclaim a way of salvation.[24] Some would even say she sounds like a prophet, like one of the female slaves in the Joel quotation in Peter's speech, on whom the Lord will pour out the spirit and allow to prophesy (Acts 2:18). A character at the margins carries the truth, however annoying or unpopular.

The story can encourage people from all traditions, contexts and backgrounds to look for the truth in unexpected places. It opens up for self-reflection. It invites us to follow the model of the marginalized other. The story about the slave girl presents a model for how to behave, regardless of whether we are in the center or on the periphery, whether rich or poor, whether strong or weak: speak out loud. Be annoying. Tell the truth.

Stories like this demonstrate that genre-variety, marginality, risk and surprise help us to find new models. Although the text and Paul is involved in othering, readers of sacred scripture can find creative models for hermeneutical engagements. It may look like a text of terror at the first glance, but it has some transformative potential. It can work as a narrative to inspire action in the world, to inspire those suffering from scriptural illiteracy. Speak out loud. Be annoying. Tell the truth.

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[22] Robert F. O'Toole, "Slave Girl at Philippi," in David Noel Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, London: Doubleday, 1992), 58; discussed in Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, *Destabilizing the Margins: An Intersectional Approach to Early Christian Memory* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 131.
[23] Turid Karlsen Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994).
[24] John Byron, *Slavery Metaphors in Early Judaism and Pauline Christianity: A Traditio-Historical and Exegetical Examination*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament, Reihe 2, vol. 162 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

"Choose Life so that you and your Descendants may Live": Climate Change as a Case Study for a Contextual Hermeneutics

Martin Kopp

Introduction

For a few hours in early 2016, the Northern hemisphere appears to have breached the 2°C limit under which the average global temperature is supposed to be kept by the end of this century.[1] Although in part political,[2] this 2°C limit is recognized by all parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as the threshold leading us to reach the tipping points, the irreversible climatic trends and possibly runaway climate change and, in any case, catastrophic consequences for human societies. That this limit was briefly reached only two months after the diplomatic success of COP21 in Paris, France, and its unexpected ambition to pursue efforts to keep the mean warming below 1.5°C[3] resounds as a

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[1] Eric Holthaus, "Our Hemisphere's Temperature Just Reached A Terrifying Milestone," in *Slate*, 1 March 2016, at http://slate.me/1WTPMNi

[2] See a brief historical account of the definition of this temperature limit. Stefan C. Aykut and Amy Dahan, "Le choc de Copenhague. La régression du climat," in Stefan C. Aykut and Amy Dahan (eds), *Gouverner le climat ? 20 ans de négociations internationales* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2015), 325–98.

[3] Article 2 of the Paris Agreement.

stark warning: the peaking and then slashing of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is of utmost urgency and must not suffer further delay.

Since the UN climate conference COP19 in Warsaw, Poland, in 2013, thousands of people have fasted for the climate all around the globe on the first day of the month to express their solidarity with vulnerable people and to call for action.[4] The people who fast come from all walks of life. Many of them are Christians from all denominations, especially Lutherans. From the beginning, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has been very committed to this initiative. This should not come as a surprise. For decades now, especially at the Protestant–Orthodox international ecumenical level of the World Council of Churches,[5] Christians have been theologically engaged with the issue of climate change and, more broadly, the environmental crisis. Catholic theologians and popes have also discussed the matter, but it is only recently that it has entered the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church through the encyclical *Laudato Si*.

Nevertheless, at the local level, for churches and individual believers— whatever the Christian confession—the commitment to climate change is often not a "natural" move. The link between climate change and the Christian faith is not obvious and churches need to use both a solid contextual theology and good ecclesial pedagogy to put it on the agenda and integrate it into the various aspects of the life of the Christian community.

Climate change thus provides an interesting case study on the subject of "transformative readings of sacred scriptures" and biblical hermeneutics— the latter being understood here as "a systematic and disciplined form of second-order reflection on the praxis of interpretation,"[6] i.e., a distanced reflection on the act of interpretation of the biblical scriptures. What is the interpretative landscape of climate change? What are the peculiarities of this contemporary subject? How does Christian theology interpret the scriptures in light of this new question? What are the opportunities but also the risks of such an endeavor? What can we learn from it at the hermeneutical level? These will be our guiding questions as we first explore the interpretative landscape of climate change and then its meeting with the biblical scriptures.

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[4] https://www.lutheranworld.org/fastfortheclimate

[5] Guillermo Kerber, "International Advocacy for Climate Justice," in Robin G. Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-Delay (eds), *How the World's Religions Are Responding to Climate Change* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), 278–94.

[6] Ernst Conradie, "What on Earth is an Ecological Hermeneutics," in David G. Horrel et al. (eds), *Ecological Hermeneutics. Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 298.

THE INTERPRETATIVE LANDSCAPE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

To depict the specific interpretative landscape of climate change, we will rely on the general conceptual map proposed by Ernst M. Conradie (see below).[7] This map acknowledges that the "text" has a "historical context of origin" and depicts the relationship between the "source" and the "receiver" as a "spiral of ongoing interpretation" and appropriation. The "message" from the "source" reaches the "receiver" within a "contemporary context" and a specific "rhetorical context," by which Conradie means the "rhetorical thrust of the act of interpretation and appropriation."[8] In between, so to speak, the text and its context on the one hand and the spiral of ongoing interpretation and appropriation on the other stand the "traditions of interpretation," which are diverse in their forms (confessions, liturgies, creeds, etc.). Finally, as a background to all elements, one finds the "world of hidden interpretative interests" and subconscious ideological distortions.
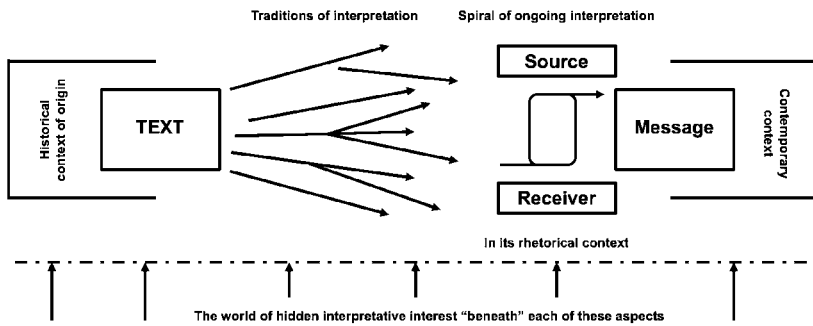
The origin of the interpretative inquiry triggered by climate change is found in the contemporary context. This challenge is new and belongs to the wider modern issue of the ecological crisis. Science with, notably, the growing role of social sciences, provides knowledge about it. The Christian interpreter[9] usually relies on the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as well as on other climate focused papers. These studies establish (1) the unequivocal mean global warming since the beginning of the industrial revolution and its related climate changes; (2)

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[7] Ibid., 299.

[8] Ibid.

[9] We prefer to speak of an "interpreter" rather than a "receiver" so as to stress the active and constructive role interpretation requires—which Conradie recognizes.

estimate that there is an over ninety-five percent probability that human activities have been the dominant cause of this warming since the mid-twentieth century; and (3) warn against the diverse harmful consequences on ecosystems, other species, humans and their livelihoods.[10]

Based on these findings, different agents engage in an exegetical, interpretative and theological inquiry. The praxis of interpretation of an individual Christian and a collective of Christians—be it a church, a fellowship of churches or a communion of churches—is a bit different. In the case of a collective effort, the interpretative work seeks to articulate a shared understanding of the scriptures, building on nuanced or differentiated interpretations, which is a process that would demand a study of its own. In any case, although climate change is global and affects everyone, it impacts people differently according to where they live. Climate science is universal; climate experience is local. It takes little imagination to understand how differently the climate issue and the scriptures would be approached by a wealthy Norwegian single businesswoman or a sub-Saharan small farmer with a family, an Indian solar company CEO or an East European coal miner, an Australian conservative politician or a Latin-American indigenous mother. It is reasonable to posit that the level of climate dependency and vulnerability of the interpreters' livelihood and context—and closely linked to it, their relationship to "nature"—are key.

One should add the other usual "baggage" that any interpreter carries: personal history; education; worldview; set of values; theology; spirituality; political stance; etc. This underscores the role of one's identity and context as one meets the biblical text: the question(s) carried by the interpreter as well as the way the text may speak to and move them—actually, the way the scriptures can become the Word of God through the work of the Holy Spirit—can differ based on these elements. This also applies to professional theologians. The fact is not to be criticized, nor does it entail any determinism allowing anyone to prejudge the way one will read the scriptures, but it is to be taken into account in order to recognize the legitimacy, under certain conditions, of the diversity of interpretations. Such an understanding is especially important in the case of a collective international interpretative effort.

Speaking of baggage, if not a sense of guilt, surely an apologetic agenda constitutes an item either explicitly carried or present as a hidden interpretative interest in the approach of many Christians. It derives from the famous thesis according to which Judeo-Christianity as it evolved in

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[10] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2014. Synthesis Report. Summary for Policymakers* (Geneva: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014).

Western Europe in the Middle Ages bears a great responsibility for the development of the current ecological crisis: simply put, it is accused of having diffused a worldview based on a reading of Genesis according to which humans are at the center and top of creation and have been given the divine mandate to dominate and exploit the rest of creation, which has value only through its utility for humans. The medieval historian Lynn White Jr. made this case in his famous 1967 article in *Science*.[11] Others supported a similar thesis[12] and it has been a regular critique of Christians in environmental circles. Acknowledging this background, an interpretative pitfall can be outlined: someone convinced of the importance of the climate crisis and the urgency to act risks approaching the biblical text with the objective of defending their faith and opposing a tradition of interpretation based on the axiom that the theology of creation depicted by White and others is not—or cannot be—sound. We are presented with a clear danger of eisegesis, i.e., the bringing of meaning to the text by the reader who is not receptive of what the text may say but tweaks the interpretation in a certain pre-determined direction.

We have now stepped into the spiral of interpretation and reappropriation. Such a spiral exhibits an ongoing coming-and-going between the text and the interpreter in context, and rightly so in our view. Yet, in the case of climate change, one can argue that there is a primary "structuring" movement, which goes from the contemporary world to the text. The dynamics are opposite to how the text can be read in a traditional daily reading of the Bible or on the occasion of the Sunday sermon; in that case, the text comes first as a source being considered as meaningful and meets the contemporary world down the interpretative road. We therefore hold that there are at least two kinds of spirals. The main difference between both is that climate change leads us to approach the text with a specific question. The fact that a question is posed and, more decisively, the way in which it is formulated, which can vary significantly, play a role in the interpretation. We could metaphorically depict the question and its language as colored glasses that interpreters put on their noses as they approach the biblical text.

Being aware of wearing glasses puts interpreters on their guard: it may be that some elements of meaning of the text are seen in a certain fashion or not seen at all because of them. To give one example: a person who would

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[11] Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," in *Science* 155 (1967), 1203-07.

[12] For a summary of the discussion, Paul H. Santmyre, *The Travail of Nature. The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 1–7.

approach the biblical text using the concept of "environment" would be party to modern Western dualism, which separates human beings from what surrounds them. This person might thus not be sensitive enough to the strength of the biblical view, which puts the greatest divide between the creator and creation, consequently underlining the ontological proximity of humans, animals, plants, rocks, etc., which all fall under the same theological category of creature. Therefore one should always be open to the possibility that the text might put into question the glasses themselves.

THE MEETING WITH THE BIBLICAL SCRIPTURES

Among all the possible questions arising from the climate change challenge, we choose to consider the broadest and primary question in its simplest expression: is climate change an ethical issue for Christians and does it commit them to action in the name of their faith? For the Lutheran World Federation and, more broadly, the World Council of Churches, but also for other Christian bodies like the Roman Catholic Church or even the World Evangelical Alliance, the answer to this question is positive. Two main theological arguments have been put forward: climate change does concern Christians and commits them to act in a differentiated way because it is (1) a matter of care for God's creation; and (2) a matter of justice and peace. We will focus on the first pillar: the theology of creation.

Climate change did not exist at the time of the writing of the different books of the Bible. In that sense, it is an issue alien to the scriptures. But the climate is a fundamental subsystem of the earth system and the experienced and projected changes impact all ecosystems and life in its variety[13] and quality. It arguably falls under the general theme of the relationship human beings establish with what exists around them and with themselves. In theological terms, it relates to the relationship humans entertain with creation in the face of God the creator.

We cannot explore the rich discoveries of the Christian theology of creation as it unfolded over the past decades. But it is of special interest to get back to the interpretation debate triggered by Lynn White Jr.'s argument, which lies at the heart of our problem.[14] The text put into question by White

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[13] Climate change is for now playing a secondary role in the extinction of species, but it could become a major contributor to the much-feared sixth great extinction of species. See, Robert Barbault, "Loss of Biodiversity. Overview," in *Encyclopedia of Biodiversity* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2013), 656–66.

[14] We rely on John W. Rogerson, "The Creation Stories: Their Ecological Potential and Problems," in David G. Horrel et al. (eds), *Ecological Hermeneutics. Biblical,*

is the biblical narrative of creation. Following the work of the Old Testament scholar Norbert Lohfink,[15] the debate focused on verse 28 of the first chapter of the book of Genesis, which seemed to give credit to White's case: "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'."

Lohfink argued that important elements of this passage had been overlooked or were wrong. In particular, he defended the verse considering that the Hebrew verbs behind the translation "to subdue" and "to have dominion," respectively *kabash* and *radah*, had been misunderstood. The former actually meant "to put the foot on something, in the sense of claiming ownership,"[16] as in the case of the taking of the land of Canaan by the Israelites (Josh 18:1) and that the latter actually had a semantic field implying that it should be understood as "tender, sympathetic rule."[17] This lexicographical argument has since been critiqued and thought to be unfounded, for example by Old Testament scholar Alfred Marx: "The verbs used [in Gen 1:28] are very harsh, they shall not be sweetened."[18] And it is true that a thorough review of the fourteen uses of *kabash* and twenty-four uses of *radah* in the Old Testament make such a softening difficult to defend.[19] One might wonder whether it is Lohfink's defensive agenda that made him push an argument that does not hold up—a danger we had spotted above.

But Lohfink also made a remark that led scholars to reconsider the whole narrative from chapter 1 of Genesis to chapter 9, i.e., including the narrative of the flood. Lohfink indeed pointed to the following verse, which seemed to have been forgotten and whose implications had not been considered up to then: "God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food" (Gen 1:29). In other words, according to the first narrative of creation, at the beginning, human beings were commanded to be vegetarians. It is only after the flood, considering that the human heart is inclined to evil, that God gave permission to humans to eat meat, lifeless meat, that is to say, without its blood (Gen 8:21–9:17).

Historical and Theological Perspectives (London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 21–31.

[15] Norbert Lohfink, *Unsere großen Wörter. Das Alte Testament zu Themen dieser Jahre* (Freiburg: Herder, 1977).

[16] Rogerson, op. cit. (note 14), 22.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Alfred Marx, "Assujettir ou veiller sur la création ?," in *Revue Projet* 347 (2015), 37.

[19] See Rogerson, op. cit (note 14), 25; and for a detailed discussion, Ute Neumann-Gorsolke, *Herrschen in den Grenzen der Schöpfung. Ein Beitrag zur alttestamentlichen Anthropologie am Beispiel vom Psalm 8, Genesis 1 und verwandten Texten* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004), 204–29 and 274–300.

Lohfink dismissed as absurd the idea that all human beings should be vegetarians, but underlined that the first creation narrative was prophetic in its vision of a world without violence between humans and animals.

Later studies built on Lohfink's remarkable insight and went a step further by noting that in verse 30, animals themselves were supposed to be vegetarians: " 'And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so." Furthermore, they also noted that the narrative of the flood explicitly states that the relationship between humans and animals changed with the change of diet:

> The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything (Gen 9:2–3).

Paul Beauchamp's study[20] shows that through diet, it is the relationship between all living beings that is at stake: according to the ideal of the origins, no one was to eat another living being. No one must hunt another. No one must fear another. The relationship between humans and animals is peaceful. It is quite relevant that this ideal of the origins also appears in texts about the ideal of the end of times. Scholars typically quote Isaiah:

> The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:6–9).

From these considerations, Beauchamp, Rogerson, Marx and others conclude, first, that it is only in this context that what the two verbs *kabash* and *radah* entail in the relationship with other creatures can be understood correctly: they are mastery in a non-violent world. Second, they acknowledge that this is not our world. We live in the world after the flood. But the worlds described in protological and eschatological texts share an ideal vision and put forward values, which Marx identifies as being solidarity between living

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[20] Paul Beauchamp, "Création et foundation de la loi en Gn 1,1-2,4," in Fabien Blanquart et al. (eds), *La création dans l'orient ancien* (Paris: Cerf, 1985), 139-82.

beings, non-violence and respect for life. These provide an orientation or moral compass towards a renewed creation, which will be fully realized in eschatological times.

This interpretative effort, together with taking into consideration the whole biblical testimony, including several key excerpts of the New Testament, allows theologians creatively to construct a legitimate position in the face of climate change. Christians have to take the climate issue seriously and act upon it: to anticipate the coming world and the kingdom of God; to fulfill the well-understood mission of domination of the earth and submission of all living creatures; to till and guard the earth; truly to embody the image of God as followers of the serving Christ; to obey the command of loving the neighbor and follow the example of Jesus in the care for the most vulnerable; and to be seeds of justice and workers of peace.

Climate change is an example of transformative reading of the scriptures in three directions: a renewed interpretation of the scriptures in the face of the ecological crisis led to a transformation of our theology with a renewed theology of creation. But, a renewed theology of creation also led to a transformation in the understanding of what it means to be a Christian in the contemporary world. These transformations or renewals can be described as a *metanoia*, a conversion, which leads to a third transformation: the transformation of individual and ecclesial behavior towards low-carbon, climate-resilient, sustainable livelihoods. "Choose life so that you and your descendants may live" (Dt 30:19), God advised after the giving of the Law. Although the issue of climate change was clearly not in the mind of the historical author, one cannot escape the resonance of this verse in the face of climate change. It is indeed a matter of life and death and God invites us to choose life, today as in the past.

List of contributors

Adams, Nicholas, Dr, Professor of Philosophical Theology, University of Birmingham, UK

Amos, Clare, Dr, Program Executive for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, World Council of Churches, Geneva, Switzerland

Baig, Naveed, hospital chaplain in Copenhagen, Denmark

Bektovic, Safet, Dr, Associate Professor of Theological Studies of Islam, Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, Norway

Drechsler, Katja, researcher at the Academy of World Religions, University of Hamburg, Germany

El Maaroufi-Ulzheimer, Asmaa, doctoral researcher, Center for Islamic Theology, University of Münster, Germany

El Omari, Dina, Dr, postdoctoral research fellow in Islamic theology, University of Münster, Germany

Grung, Anne Hege, Dr, Associate Professor of Practical Theology, University of Oslo, Norway

Kartzow, Bjelland, Marianne, Dr, Professor of New Testament, University of Oslo, Norway

Leirvik, Oddbjørn, Dr, Professor of Interreligious Studies, Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, Norway

Khorchide, Mouhanad, Dr, Professor for Islamic Religious Education, director of the Center for Islamic Theology, University of Münster, Germany

Knauth, Thorsten, Dr, Professor for Protestant Theology/Religious Education, Institute for Protestant Theology, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany

Kopp, Martin, doctoral researcher at the University of Strasbourg, France

Mtata, Kenneth, Rev. Dr, General Secretary, Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Harare, Zimbabwe

Schreiner, Stefan, Dr Dr h.c., Senior Professor of Comparative Study of Religions and Jewish Studies, University of Tübingen, Germany

Sinn, Simone, Rev. Dr, Study Secretary for Public Theology and Interreligious Relations, The Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, Switzerland

Syamsuddin, Sahiron, Dr, Professor, Islamic State University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

The interpretation of sacred scriptures engenders vivid debates in religious communities, both at the scholarly and grass-roots levels. Issues of debate are the hermeneutical assumptions, the methods of interpretation, and the constructive and harmful implications of certain readings. For Christian and Muslim communities, themes related to God's grace, violence, gender relations and ecology, are topical.

As scholars from different contexts and faith backgrounds together interpret sacred texts they gain fresh insights into their meaning and their transformative dynamics. Essays by authors with expertise in scriptural interpretation, religious studies, pastoral care, philosophical theology, gender studies and pedagogy explore Christian and Muslim perspectives on scriptural interpretation, and discuss how to understand how God communicates with the world today.

CONTRIBUTORS: ADAMS, Nicholas; AMOS, Clare; BAIG, Naveed; BEKTOVIC, Safet; DRECHSLER, Katja; EL MAAROUFI-ULZHEIMER, Asmaa; EL OMARI, Dina; GRUNG, Anne Hege; KARTZOW BJELLAND, Marianne; LEIRVIK, Oddbjørn; KHORCHIDE, Mouhanad; KNAUTH, Thorsten; KOPP, Martin; MTATA, Kenneth; SCHREINER, Stefan; SINN, Simone; SYAMSUDDIN, Sahiron