DE GRUYTER

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RETHINKING ISLAM IN EUROPE

CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND THEOLOGY

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Introduction

Muslims have become an important part of the European population. This is also true for German-speaking areas, which include Germany, Austria, and parts of Switzerland. Because of this, public interest in Islam has increased. If Islam was perceived for a long time exclusively as the religion of guest workers and discussed only within small specialist groups, in German-speaking countries a lively discussion on themes of Islamic theology has emerged in recent years. In addition to the increase in the Muslim part of the population, the terrorist attacks that have been carried out in the past few years by Muslims have contributed to an intensification of the public discussion on Islam. All these circumstances lead to the founding of Islamic theological institutes at German-speaking universities. Above all, new theological and religious educational approaches should therefore arise that enable Islam to be understood and reflected upon in terms of its present European context.

For more than ten years, these institutes have on the one hand been working on various approaches to develop Islamic theology in its until then alien academic context and on the other to generate theological concepts that took into account both the heritage of classical Islamic theology as well as the current needs of Muslims, especially those living in Europe.

In this relatively short time and in the shadow of great expectations on the part of the political world, the academic community, and society itself, a considerable number of academic and scientific contributions to various themes in Islamic theology and religious education have been published. This is also the environment in which the essays contained in this volume were written and discuss various themes from the perspective of Islamic theology. The focus here lies on the German-speaking context, which is also the starting point of each essay. The purpose in translating these essays and thus this book into English is to make the approaches contained therein more accessible to a wider public and also to provide English-speaking colleagues glimpses into some of the already published academic articles and books. After all, however important the publication in German is for Islamic theology finding a home in German-speaking areas, these essays are also of enormous significance for the development of international and open discussions.

As already indicated above, this book is a collection of various essays that differ in many respects. They were written in different times and on different occasions. That is why they differ in length, style of writing, as well as in their thematic focus. Some of them are short and more introductory in nature, whereas others are longer and go into more detail. The formatting and methods of refer-

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encing, for instance, have been standardised to emphasise their coherence. At several points, the texts were also adjusted with respect to content to make them more readable. Overlaps and repetitions, particularly in the general parts and in the introductions to the different essays, could not be avoided. That means that all the individual essays can be read as self-contained units.

As can be understood from the title of the book, *Rethinking Islam in Europe. Contemporary Approaches in Islamic Religious Education and Theology*, the fundamental orientation of this book, despite the thematic differences, is based on a conviction common to all the individual essays. They all presuppose that an essentialist approach to Islam is not only false but also lies behind the current, undifferentiated attitude to Islam. Another shared feature of these essays in this book is the rejection of the idea that Islam is incompatible with other value systems, especially the Western or European system. On the one hand, Islam does not exist *as a monolithic block*; on the other hand, neither *the West* nor *Europe* constitutes a unity but – precisely like Islam – is enormously diverse. Another further important common premise, on which all the essays are based in one way or another, is constituted by the perspectivity and fragmentariness of human knowledge, especially with respect to God. The results of human knowledge are fleeting and are nothing more than small steps towards the truth. We should not omit the fact here that the path itself is the goal and that truth in its pure form is not accessible to humans and will therefore always remain a mystery. Aside from this general orientation, which connects all the essays, they differ regarding their themes, which will now be briefly introduced.

Following the basic principles sketched above, the problematic course of the discussion of Islam in the European context is explored in the first essay called 'Islam as Part of European Society'. Here it is shown that Islam is not essentially different from other religions and should therefore be approached with the same sensibility and the same differentiated view as other religions. The focus of this essay lies on the deconstruction of two widespread assumptions that dominate the current debate on Islam, i.e., the alleged interwovenness of Islam with violence and the essentialisation of Islam. This essay is a translation of an article that was first published under the title 'Der Islam als Teil der europäischen Gesellschaft' (Sejdini, 2015c).

The second essay, 'Islamic Theology in European Universities', deals with the establishing of Islamic theology at European universities whereby the focus lies on the German-speaking areas. In addition to explaining a few important reasons that led to this establishment, the main issue is the question of the integration of Islamic theology into this new academic environment. On the one hand, it discusses what is to be understood by the European context, and on the other it probes the challenges and opportunities that this inclusion in the Euro-

pean academic landscape yields for Islamic theology. This essay was originally published in German as 'Islamische Theologie an europäischen Universitäten' (Sejdini, 2017c).

The third essay, which is called 'In the Midst of Ambivalences in Islam', was a relatively early publication that was written following a conference on the theme 'Ambivalences in Religions' (Ambivalenzen in Religionen). Therefore, this essay looks at the question of ambivalence in Islam. Here the ambivalence or ambiguity of Qur'anic statements is emphasised. On the one hand, these open up a great deal of latitude for interpretation and thus pave the way for continual renewal. On the other hand, they open themselves up to instrumentalisation, which contradicts the general intent of the Qur'an. This essay was first published under the title 'Inmitten von Ambivalenzen im Islam' (Sejdini, 2015d). The effects of this ambivalence on interreligious dialogue are the focus here. This ends the first part of the book, which is comprised of essays that are more introductory in nature. The next group of essays focuses on themes in religious education.

The starting point of the fourth essay, 'Theological and Anthropological Foundations of Religious Learning: A Commentary' is constituted by two lectures that were held at a conference at the University of Giessen. The original German version was published as 'Theologische und anthropologische Grundlagen religiösen Lernens: Ein Kommentar' (Sejdini, 2017a). Even if this essay was written in a context that the readers are unfamiliar with, it is suitable as an introduction for the following essays that deal with the foundations of Islamic religious education. This introductory essay discusses two core issues that constitute a red thread throughout this book: a sensitivity to context and the situating of Islamic theology in the pluralist discourse of Western academics.

The ideas are continued in the fifth essay ('"Whoever does not leave his own shore behind will never discover anything new": Challenges for Islamic Religious Education in the European Context'), in which the possibilities of new approaches in Islamic religious education are explored. Here the central question is that of how there could have been such a decrease in the – initially so great – Muslim interest in education after the so-called 'golden Middle Ages', whereby a broad gap in education in Muslim-majority countries developed. Here primarily two important aspects of a new approach to Islamic religious education are classified and taken up. On the one hand, this is the new definition of the epistemological value of theological knowledge and, on the other, an appropriate approach to one's own Islamic tradition, for finding a balance between tradition and current challenges. This essay was originally published in German under the title '"Wer das eigene Ufer nie verlässt, wird Neues nicht entdecken". Herausforderungen für die Islamische Religionspädagogik im europäischen Kontext' (Sejdini, 2018).

My inaugural address at the University of Innsbruck, held in 2017, is the basis of the sixth essay, 'Between Certainty and Contingency: On the Way to a New Understanding of Islamic Theology and Religious Education in the European Context'. This essay was first published in German as 'Zwischen Gewissheit und Kontingenz. Auf dem Weg zu einem neuen Verständnis von islamischer Theologie und Religionspädagogik im europäischen Kontext' (Sejdini, 2016a). In this essay, I first treat the current debate on Islam in German-speaking areas as the negative effect of essentialist approaches that assume that there is one single, valid, and authentic Islam. Beginning with this state of affairs, I attempt to define the foundations of an Islamic religious education that is connected to the present. The core thesis of this essay constitutes an argument for an anthropological turn in Islamic theology and religious education, which is needed pedagogically as well as justifiable based on the Islamic sources. At the end of this essay, separate principles are set out that are indispensable for the anthropological turn and can form the foundation of a new approach to Islamic religious education.

The seventh essay, 'Foundations of a Theology-Sensitive and Participant-Centred Model for Islamic Religious Education and Religious Didactics in the German-Speaking Context', analyses the Innsbruck Model of Religious Didactics, which is based on the theme-centred interaction model of Ruth Cohn and on the possibility of an adaptation of this for Islamic religious didactics. Here both the advantages and the possible disadvantages are examined. The goal of the essay is to determine to what extent the Innsbruck model of religious didactics can be made fruitful for Islamic religious didactics. The original German version was published under the title 'Grundlagen eines theologiesensiblen und beteiligtenbezogenen Modells islamischer Religionspädagogik und Religionsdidaktik im deutschsprachigen Kontext' (Sejdini, 2015b).

This section on religious education concludes with the eighth essay called 'Value Issues in Islamic Religious Education in the Austrian Context'. The German version of this essay is called 'Wertefragen im Rahmen des islamischen Religionsunterrichts im österreichischen Kontext' (Sejdini, 2017d). Here, the curricula for the subject of Islamic religion at public schools are analysed across the various levels with respect to which values are thematised and how they are grounded theologically and in religious education. Here the focus is on the values that are of particular significance for the cultivation of a pluralist society.

The intensive analysis of the foundations of Islamic religious education is followed by four essays that are dedicated in one way or another to religious plurality and interreligious collaboration in religious education. This is because of the circumstance that a respectful approach to religious plurality is a precondition for peaceful co-existence in a pluralist society. In addition to the socio-po-

litical relevance of this, I personally see interreligious co-existence in the area of theology and religious education as a necessity that the common origin of the monotheistic religions in particular imposes on us.

The ninth essay, 'Religious Plurality from the Perspective of Islamic Religious Education', which is being published simultaneously in German under the title 'Religiöse Pluralität aus islamisch-religionspädagogischer Perspektive' (Sejdini, 2021) in a collection by the same publisher, thematises in a fundamental way the confrontation with the pluralist theology of religion. This and its different positions – like exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism – are sketched first. Then various Muslim positions on this theme are given, in which the primary issue concerns the advantages and disadvantages of a pluralist theology of religions. The purpose is primarily to emphasise what the Islamic sources provide and to what extent a pluralist position can be justified from a Muslim perspective. The essay ends with some implications for Islamic religious education that result from a pluralist attitude and are also theologically tenable.

This is followed by a shorter essay on the theme 'Interreligious Dialogue from a Muslim Perspective'. There I present in summary form what can be derived from the Islamic sources in collaboration with other religions. This tenth essay thus also forms a good transition to the following essay that explicitly revolves around interreligious learning from an Islamic perspective. This essay was originally published in German as 'Interreligiöser Dialog aus muslimischer Perspektive' (Sejdini, 2017b).

In contrast to most of the other texts in this book, the eleventh essay entitled 'Foundations of Interreligious Learning from an Islamic Perspective' is being published for the first time. Different, already present approaches and collaborations in interreligious learning in German-speaking areas are presented first. This is followed by an analysis of the significance and necessity of interreligious collaboration from an Islamic perspective, especially with Jews and Christians. In another step, the foundations of such collaborations are analysed in order to develop a fruitful interreligious concept of education and to initiate corresponding processes of education. The goal is to show that a concept of humankind stamped by dignity, reason, freedom, and the ability to learn, a contingency-sensitive theology and a holistic understanding of education are required to inspire interreligious processes of education that have a chance at success.

Finally, the interreligious section of this volume closes with the twelfth essay on the place of Jesus in Islam ('Jesus Christ in the Perspective of Islam'). This is directed primarily at giving non-Muslim readers insight into the Qur'anic presentation of Jesus Christ. It should be shown that – contrary to the widespread assumption that the respective place of Jesus in the religions constitutes an insurmountable obstacle to dialogue – there are many more commonalities around

the theme of Jesus that form a solid basis for a respectful dialogue without erasing the individual positions of the religions concerned. The German version of this essay is called 'Jesus Christus in der Sicht des Islam' (Sejdini, 2017e).

The next to last essay ('Human Rights and Islam: Another Perspective') treats the theme of human rights and Islam. This essay was originally published under the title 'Menschenrechte und der Islam. Eine andere Perspektive' (Sejdini, 2017f). Even if this essay is not directly related to the previous essays, it takes up a very important theme that is not only stamped by current discussions on Islam but is also an important element of Islamic religious education. The foundation of human rights constitutes the inviolable dignity of the human being that is also cited in many essays in this book and is presented as the foundation of every religious educational approach. Therefore, the analysis of the question of human rights is also of enormous significance in the context of religious education and is discussed extensively in this essay.

The fourteenth and last essay, 'Secular and Religious: Challenges for Islamic Theology' then follows. In addition to human rights, which were discussed in the essay before, the analysis of the compatibility of Islam with the secular context is one of the most important themes that are discussed in both theological and religious educational circles and with respect to its socio-political relevance. This theme is not seldom used in current discussions to construe an alleged incompatibility between Islam and Europe and to support the thesis that it is not possible as a believer, especially a Muslim, to affirm secular culture, let alone promote it. In this essay, I attempt to counteract the essentialist view by showing that Islam does not prescribe any concrete type of government and that there is a plurality of standpoints among Muslims regarding this that are all based on the same sources and therefore deserve to be considered authentic. This essay was originally published under the title 'Säkular und religiös – Herausforderungen für die islamische Theologie' (Sejdini, 2020b).

As in almost all publications, I would like to thank some people here who facilitated the work and thus the publication of this book for me. I would like to thank first my student assistants Sheril Sherifoska and Elias Mohammed Feroz, who also helped in standardising the formatting of the manuscript. In particular, I would like to thank Dr Mehmet Tuna and Dr Jonas Kolb without whose service and co-ordination it would not have been possible to publish this book in such a short time. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr Henry Jansen who has translated this volume.

Islam as Part of European Society

One of the most important changes to be observed in recent decades in Europe is the increase in cultural and religious plurality. Various factors like labour migration, refugee movements, and the like have imposed a multireligious and multicultural stamp on an originally relatively homogeneous society in the European states. These rapid and often unexpected upheavals were perceived and evaluated differently by European countries. On the one hand, the social transformation was viewed as an enrichment of European plurality and prosperity, and this transformation is necessary to ensure that plurality and prosperity; on the other hand, it was not seldom seen as a threat to European prosperity or European identity.

Terrible reports reach us daily from all parts of the world and are presented time and again unreflectively as genuinely Islamic, and these reports stoke fear and lead to an aversion to the 'otherness' currently imposed on Islam. The consequence is that, in the contemporary Western world, Islam is perceived as the "wholly other" (Casanova, 2009, 27). Based on the horrible terrorist attack on 9/11 in New York, the assumption of an existential relation between violence and religion in general and violence and Islam in particular has been increasingly reinforced in the public mind (Huber, 2009, 234). This renewed "essentialist" (Casanova, 2009, 55) treatment of these events is not only a major obstacle to mutual understanding but also constitutes a major danger to peaceful co-existence in a multicultural and multireligious society because violence is understood to be a constitutive feature of religion.

If we look at the alarming situation in some Muslim-majority countries, there is little hope that the situation will improve any time soon. This underscores the urgency of educational work in our society to prevent a broadening of an atmosphere of mistrust based on religious affiliation in European society.

It is precisely on this point that Austria can build on its rich and successful history in dealing with other religions, especially Islam. The example of PEGIDA (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes; Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamicisation of the Occident) in Germany shows that the rejection of the 'other' increases in proportion to ignorance about the other. This fact also supports the significance of the long Austrian tradition in dealing with Islam. Despite the controversial discussions on the new Islam Law, which are part of democratic culture, the legal recognition of Islam – and, concomitantly, the institutionalisation of Islam in Austria – guarantees a special starting position that is unique in Europe and whose fruits we are still enjoying in Austria (apart from some difficulties) (Sejdini, 2015a).

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The legal recognition of Islam, however, ensures only the framework and has to do more with religion in general. Therefore, we need to fill this framework with life and expand the understanding and collaboration in areas outside of religion because cultural, worldview, and religious plurality also raises the question of the foundations of societal cohesion. As mentioned previously, ensuring this cohesion requires an appropriate approach to the 'other' that should lead, ideally, to understanding and joint responsibility for society.

The conditions of the co-existence of different cultures and religions should be the subject of constant reflection. This is why political measures are needed and credible foundations created and made permanent to guarantee the social participation of all citizens. Some points need to be considered if the multicultural and interreligious co-existence is to succeed in our context. We will look at these below.

1 Islam is not Different from Other Religions

The current unfavourable world political situation and the conflicts that have arisen in recent years in Muslim-majority countries have had a negative influence on the image of Islam overall. In this connection, it is asserted all too often that Islam is essentially different from other religions and displays features that are irreconcilable with a secular constitutional democracy (Casanova, 2009, 21). This suggests a static image of Islam that, given an unchangeable essence ascribed a priori to 'Islam as such', declares 'Islam' to be incompatible with European values. This means, in turn, nothing other than that there is only one single and unchangeable Islam that cannot be reconciled with either human rights or secular democratic society. In other words, such a concept of Islam precludes Islam's integration into society. This view is also shared by Muslim fundamentalists. That is why it is not very surprising that Islam is increasingly equated with Islamism, and thus – already linguistically – any differentiated approach to Islam encounters resistance. We should not be surprised when views of this kind lead to a social insecurity that perceives any otherness as a potential danger and thus threatens one of the most important characteristics of European society, i. e., plurality. Here the question arises as to how the situation can be analysed and assessed more realistically and in a more reflective way, scientifically and academically.

It is important to clarify beforehand that not only is the assumption of a single interpretation and an unchangeable essence of Islam a position that extremists take. It is not tenable from a scientific and academic position either. Like every other religion, Islam is very ambivalent (Oberdorfer & Waldman, 2008, 11).

Its history has been stamped by many different epochs that can be evaluated in different ways from social, political, cultural, and religious perspectives. One phenomenon that has deeply influenced the history of Islam is a high tolerance for ambiguity (Bauer, 2011) with respect to the plurality in its own tradition as well as other religious traditions. The lack of a "church structure" in Islam also contributed to the development of an internal pluralism, which can be classified as more complex than religions with a "church structure" (Schmid, 2012, 534). That is why in his book on the culture of ambiguity, Thomas Bauer correctly holds that the assumption of a "society permeated by Islam" is a "caricature" that does not correspond to the truth but is very suitable for populism and proves to be "useful" (Bauer, 2011, 222).

This caricature ignores the plurality within Islam, which is characterised by different law schools, exegetical traditions, and ways of thinking that partly represented contradictory opinions and nonetheless could co-exist for centuries. This caricature also fails to acknowledge the tolerant attitude of Muslims towards others during its entire history. Through masking this plurality internal to Islam and reducing Islam to a few violent statements from holy texts without taking the context of these statements into consideration, a reductionistic view of Islam inevitably becomes established. Thomas Bauer calls this modern trend the "Islamicisation of Islam" (ibid.), which is nothing else than the theologisation of Islamic culture and one of the greatest misunderstandings in dealing with Islam.

In the area of politics as well, current ideas on the relation of Islam to politics are different from the classical ideas in Islamic culture. Even if a notion of secularism, as found in our context, does not inherently occur in the classical Islamic tradition, the rulers in the Islamic world were not religious scholars and did not have any authority over Islamic doctrine. Not seldom, they found themselves in disputes with the religious authorities.

This should not belie the fact that there are now Islamic groups that reject the separation of religion and politics. But this fact should help us identify these groups and thus categorise them correctly in the Islamic tradition and to distinguish between Islam and Islamism.

Regardless of the different traditions in history and the present, we should not forget that the acceptance of democratisation – in the European context as well – was a long and painful process for many religions. This process is presented in the following quote by Kalyvas in a very descriptive way:

> Christian Democratic and Social Democratic parties ... were initially formed to subvert liberal democracies; both evolved into mass parties and decided to participate in the electoral process after painful and divisive debates. Their decision had tremendous consequences:

> both parties integrated masses of newly enfranchised voters into existing liberal parliamentary regimes, and both were deradicalized in the process, becoming part of the very institutions they initially rejected.... [D]emocracy in Europe was often expanded and consolidated by its enemies. This lesson should not be lost, especially among those studying the challenges facing democratic transition and consolidation in the contemporary world. (Kalyvas, 1996, 264)

Kalyvas' reflections allow hope that also, following its rich tradition and responding to the challenges of modernity, Islam, which is perceived in the European context as a foreign body, will become a contributor to our secular and constitutional democracy.

2 Violence is Not Specifically Religious

Another theme that is quite virulent and a controversial topic in discussions is the relation between violence and religion, in this case between violence and Islam. The fact that various terrorist groups appeal to Islam creates the impression that violence is a defining characteristic of Islam. Nevertheless, religions also show a certain fundamental ambivalence in relation to violence. Thus, religions can make an important contribution to peace on the one hand and, in combination with other motives, initiate violence on the other. Therefore, as Oberdorfer and Waldmann (2008) write in noteworthy fashion, the question as to which of these ambivalent sides will be activated will not be derived a priori from the holy scriptures of religions but can only be researched by means of concrete empirical examples.

The French cultural anthropologist René Girard also supports this view by calling attention to the human inclination to represent religion as a scapegoat. According to Girard, "the violence for which we would hold religion accountable [is] our own violence" (Palaver, 2010, 30) that we have to face head on.

These considerations do not mitigate violence-promoting religious texts and do not exclude religiously motivated violence beforehand. But it does call attention to the fact that rash conclusions that see the only cause of violence in religion and thus veils the human potential for violence as an anthropological dimension will inevitably lead to false conclusions that could increase the danger of radicalisation and polarisation. It is not religion as such that leads to religiously motivated violence, but the loss of humility and the inability of humans to recognise their own limitations and thus also to tolerate other truths. Therefore, the understanding of God in Islam should not be reduced to violence because Islam holds that God is a merciful God (Baudler, 2005, 175).

Nonetheless, we are confronted with important challenges as a society that will determine our future and that we have to solve together. We will explore these challenges briefly in the final section.

3 The Societal Challenge for the Future

It will be clear from the previous sections that, despite unfavourable circumstances, a multicultural and interreligious society that can handle pluralism is completely possible. That requires letting go of ideas about allegedly clear lines of separation between certain ethnic and religious groups or worldviews. A dualistic perspective may indeed help in the short term to externalise the problems and thus liberate oneself from any guilt. In the long term, however, this will contribute to societal division. That is why there is the need to recognise that the problems can only be solved together and that the alleged lines of separation do not run between different ethnic groups and religions but represent mindsets that, depending on circumstances, can become manifest in various forms. Recent events in the crisis areas show that terrorist organisations do not make any distinction between religions when they want to spread their own ideology.

But Muslim theologians are challenged as well to grapple critically with those Islamic religious sources that stand in the way of the integration of Islam into the European context. The presence of Muslims in Europe will enable a historical-contextual approach to themes like human rights, secularism, and democracy so they can help shape European democracy from a Muslim perspective. In that way, an Islamic theology stamped by Europe will emerge that takes into account the needs of Muslims in Europe. In view of the many challenges that we are faced with, we need a mutual understanding and a differentiated approach to the present problems within the framework of a respectful encounter. In the end, our future will not be decided by the problems but by our answers.

Islamic Theology in European Universities

1 Introduction

The Muslim presence in Europe has a long and ambivalent history, which differs from country to country. Every European country has its own history of encounter with Islam that is shaped by its own context. That is why different models and traditions have developed within the European countries for interacting with Islam, which means that, given the various approaches and practices in individual countries, it is impossible to speak of a pan-European outlook.

Despite the different historically conditioned approaches of individual European countries to Islam, the developments in the 1960s and 1970s, when increased Muslim workers were recruited, showed similarities across borders. An oft-recurring assumption in the European context concerning the Muslim 'guest worker' is manifest in the expectation that the new arrivals would only be in Europe for a limited time and would then return to their home countries. Not only did the host countries – which recruited these people for economic reasons – think this would be the case, but the guest workers themselves, who had come for the same reasons, thought so as well.

That is why nothing much was done to integrate the new workers into society. The new workers were not expected to adjust to society, nor did the governments initiate the process of naturalisation. As would be emphasised later, it was a serious oversight, for things turned out quite differently than was first expected. The guest workers stayed longer and brought their families over from their native countries, which meant that, in distinction from their previous isolated lives, they were forced to some extent by the influx of their families to actively participate in public life. These developments revealed the omissions of the preceding years. It also became clear that the former guest workers and their family members had in the meantime become an integral part of society. But there were no models for integration that could correct the omissions and make the integration of the migrants into society easier.

The gradual change in the profile of the former guest workers, who had in the meantime become residents and whose children attended local schools, led to the first tentative steps towards integration. These initial considerations on integration first focused almost exclusively on learning German because inadequate knowledge of the language represented a major obstacle to communication that had in the meantime become unavoidable. The religious needs of Muslims, however, played no significant role, even though the debates on integration had greatly increased in the meantime.

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It had been obvious for a long time in the field of religion that the new citizens 'consumed' theological ideas that they brought with them from their home countries. The religious institutions founded by Muslims in Europe made do with transferring theological ideas from their countries of origin. These ideas were then further disseminated by imams in mosques that were organised along ethnic lines. The imams were educated outside of Europe in their mother tongue and had no knowledge of German. For a long time, no one was offended by the concomitant theological and personal dependence from abroad, which continues today, just as no one had been disturbed by the fact that 'guest workers' in Europe those first years lived as if they were still in their countries of origin.

The situation changed, however, through the changes in global politics and the growth of 'political Islam'. This had indeed been present for a long time in Europe but did not become active until the beginning of the 21st century. The increase in politically motivated violence by Muslim fundamentalists, and recently in the West as well, additionally intensified the discussions around and concerning Islam in Europe. In this connection, the terrorist attacks on 9/11 in New York marked a decisive turning point in the encounter with Islam in the West.

It is regrettable that it was only after several religiously motivated attacks that it became clear that more was needed. In addition to learning the language, it was now accepted that, among other things, a reflective encounter with one's own religion was needed to be able to create the presuppositions for an Islamic theology that was in line with the new context. Nevertheless, adequate institutions needed for such a step were initially lacking, like the university, which would have made a critical reflection on Islam, i.e., on its own religion, possible.

With its social and public educational task, the university can provide such a space, as it had also done in connection with Christian denominations in the German context. As Reinhard Schulze emphasises:

> It is not the case that only the interests of the Muslim communities are reflected on in the university, but it is also part of the claim of the university itself to be a place of academic interpretation of its society. If Muslims cultivate a Muslim discourse in our society, then it is also the task of the university to take up this discourse in such a way that it meets the academic condition of self-interpretation. (Schulze, 2012, 183)

Even if compensation for an oversight that lasted decades is probably no longer possible, the decision was made particularly in German-speaking areas to make the spiritual domestication of Muslims possible through the academic encounter with their religion in the European context. As a result of this initiative, some centres for Islamic theology were founded in Austrian and German universities that currently examine, among other things, the question of the principles of an Islamic theology with a European character (Aslan, 2012). Because the history

of Islamic theology at European universities is still at an early stage of development, it is no easy task to establish certain principles. This is so, particularly given the fact that this is itself subject of theological study; it has to be defined and discussed only as the result of the process of establishing Islamic theology. As is the case with other established theologies at European universities, it can also be expected in Islamic theology that the answer to the question of the principles of this new Islamic theology will, however, vary according to the basic orientation of the individual centre and individual actors. This is certainly an advantage for the European context, which is stamped and characterised by plurality.

In spite of this open and still initial phase of finding an identity for Islamic theology at the European university, some principles should be discussed in this essay. In our view, these principles must be part of the Islamic self-interpretation at European universities if justice is to be done to the university character of Islamic theology. The considerations concerning this, however, are not to be understood as a closed conception but as suggestions for an emerging developmental process with the foundations and organisation of Islamic theology at the European universities.

Because it is impossible to present all relevant points of view, in this essay we will make do with discussing three aspects that play a central role in Islamic theology at European universities. They are indispensable for the development of new theological approaches and make it possible for Islamic theology to shape both Islamic and European discourse. We should clarify two important concerns already at the beginning that will facilitate access to this contribution. First, we will deliberately forego – with some exceptions – any discussion here of the problem of the scientific or academic status of theology in general and Islamic theology in particular because this discussion is not specific to Islam and would go beyond the scope of this essay. Second, we will briefly point out here that the term 'Islamic theology', which is not uncontested among Muslims, covers all current Islamic canonical disciplines that are concerned with the topic of God from their own respective perspectives. Because the context is essential for the revealing of the necessity and usefulness of further reflections, I will begin with discussing the context.

2 The European Context

According to Joachim Willems, there is no 'pure' knowledge independent of context;

> What we construct as an image of the world, i.e., of our natural environment and our fellow human beings as well of the values that in our view have greater or lesser validity, depends essentially on our cultural and religious backgrounds. It is not only the interpretation of experiences and perceptions that are accordingly cultural and religious – there are no 'pure' experiences and perceptions that are not influenced by culture and religion. (Willems, 2011, 65)

This means that context also plays an indispensable role regarding theological models. Given this, the question arises here as to what the characteristic elements of the current European context are from which Islamic theology with a European stamp should emerge. Two important elements stand out that characterise the European context in particular.

First, there is the principle of the secular democratic constitutional state as the most significant achievement of the Enlightenment and the modern period. This principle became widely established in Europe after a longer series of confrontations in the European context and constitutes the foundation of worldview and religious plurality in Europe. Thus, the secular democratic constitutional state is an important framework for all theological models that originate in the European context.

Viewed from the Muslim perspective, both the historical as well as actual developments in Islamic theology show that the encounter with secularism will be the greatest challenge to be overcome. This is much more of an issue for Islamic theology than established Christian theologies. The latter have been acquainted with this tradition for a long time and have experienced some conflicts themselves. In distinction from Christian theologies in Europe, the secular context, as we know it in Europe, is strange to Islam. The experiences Muslims have with secularism are based on the practices of their countries of origin, which are characterised by dictatorship, repression, and hostility to religion. This has led inevitably to a fundamentally hostile attitude to secularism that can also be seen in part in the present.

That is why the primary challenge consists in first developing a positive approach to a secular democratic constitutional state and to ground this theologically as well. The belief in the separation of religion and state has to be given priority.

> The state guarantees religion the status of legal person insofar as the religion guarantees a connection to actually acting individuals ... In a countermove, the religion recognises the legal competence of the state and limits the theological claim of validity to immediate matters of religion. (Schulze, 2010, 2)

Next is the recognition and acceptance of universal human rights as fundamental and universal, which brings us to another challenge that Islamic theology faces in the European context. The secular context is based on, among other things, the assumption of the inalienable dignity of the human being, on which other human rights and the fundamental attentiveness to anthropological questions can be based. Independent of other qualities of being human, here it is primarily a matter of humans being at the centre of these encounters. Such an attitude affects theology and concerns questions of both content and methodology.

From the perspective of content, the involvement of the aspects mentioned in Islamic theology would entail a paradigm shift in the direction of an 'anthropological turn' as a result of which the classical theological positions must be redefined. This means on the one hand an orientation to the subject in the sense of attentiveness to the individual and the social development of the person, her biography, and living conditions. On the other hand, it entails fundamental reflections on the foundation of human dignity in theological models. This is primarily a matter of the recognition of universal human rights as fundamental that are valid for all human beings. These rights should neither be limited nor denied, and that also excludes basing any attempts to do so on an appeal to religious sources. The consideration of human rights and the accompanying acceptance of plurality within and outside one's own religion is crucial for the future of the Islamic theology that emerges in the European context.

The secular context determines not only the relation between religion and the state and the equality of all people but also provides the framework for scientific and academic analyses at the university, which also arose in this context. That is why we will explore this aspect in the next section.

3 Scientific Standards, Interdisciplinarity, and Renewal

Next to the challenges already mentioned, like the separation of religion and state and respect for human rights, the scientific and academic context represents a particular challenge to Islamic theology just as it does to any theology. How great this challenge was in the past is indicated by Klaus von Stosch, who says in this connection: "The Enlightenment and the modern period have

forced Christianity in Europe to rationalise its own faith to a considerable extent and to justify its faith in the forum of reason" (Von Stosch, 2012, 77). This is a process from which Islamic theology will and should not be spared if it wants to be part of the academic university landscape. Reinhard Schulze also underscores this when he says: "The Islamic self-interpretation that would qualify as academic is thus forced to enter into a discourse in which this accommodation to the secular conditions of the university is possible" (Schulze, 2012, 183).

The concrete challenges for Islamic theology in academia consist on the one hand in the encounter with scientific and academic standards regarding ways of thinking and working. On the other in going beyond self-preoccupation, Islamic theology is required to convey insights of academic theology with a view to the other sciences. Conversely, this also includes a deeper theological encounter with insights from other disciplines, such as the theory of evolution.

Altogether, the content of Islamic academic theology and forms of acquiring insight with a view to the European context are being put to the test. Islamic theology needs to abandon the notion that knowledge is closed and that acquiring knowledge is a static process. Rather, Islamic theology needs to establish new process-oriented forms that are open to historical circumstances. An Islamic theology that makes do with the perpetuation of old and familiar theological approaches can neither satisfy the academic requirement of an Islamic theology situated at the university nor develop new theological stimuli.

A renewal of Islamic theology does not necessarily imply disconnection from the rich tradition of Islamic theology or isolation from the current internal Islamic discourses as is often suggested. Rather, the complete opposite should happen: the current European context and the university location at a secular university should help Islamic theology connect with its earlier achievements. In the Middle Ages – and not just within Islam – these achievements were viewed as progressive and diverse. Aside from a few exceptions, current developments, especially outside the Western hemisphere, show that Islamic theology is far removed from its medieval achievements, it has instead drifted more and more towards an apologetic attitude and is thus no longer in a position to develop new approaches. Von Stosch also detects such a tendentially negative trend within present-day Islamic theology and argues that

> [w]hile Islam in the Middle Ages had an excellent theology … until now it has not sufficiently confronted the challenges of the Enlightenment and modernity. Therefore, until the present, only some initial approaches have developed for a modern Islamic theology. (Von Stosch, 2012, 78 f.)

Viewed in this way, the consideration of the present context, the observance of current academic standards, the openness to interdisciplinary work, and the constant examination of one's own results are not arbitrarily imposed instructions from outside, as they are often misunderstood to be, but standards that every theology has to follow if it wants to claim a place in an academic and scientific context in Europe. If we look it in this way, 'being true' to one's own tradition is not a matter of unquestioningly repeating old theological views that arose in a different context and therefore have little in common with the present. This loyalty, rather, is to be found in the constant renewal and adjustment to the environment and to the academic standards of the present.

How open the early Muslim scholars were to interdisciplinarity and how important the observance of academic standards was can be seen in the statements by the well-known Muslim philosopher and legal scholar Ibn Rushd (d. 1198 AD), known in Europe by the name Averroes. In his important discussion on the relation between philosophy or science and religion, he writes regarding the academic and scientific achievements of the Greek philosophers and scientists:

> But if someone other than ourselves has already examined that subject, it is clear that we ought to seek help towards our goal from what has been said by such a predecessor on the subject, regardless of whether this other one shares our religion or not. (Ibn Rushd, 1961, 47)

The (Christian) history of theologies in Europe shows unambiguously that the way to theology that communicates and engages in comprehensible argumentation is possible only through its integration into the academic and scientific context. In connection with this, von Stosch writes, with a view to Christian theology:

> Only because Christianity faced the challenges of such objections to faith by means of reason could it develop something like modern theology, which goes beyond the project of theology in antiquity and the Middle Ages in several respects. (Von Stosch, 2012, 78)

4 Interreligious Collaboration: A Theology for All

In a religiously pluralist society like Europe, interreligious collaboration has enormous significance for the reception and cultivation of the peaceful and respectful co-existence of different cultures and religions. In addition to the numerous other possibilities of engaging in dialogue, the embedding of Islamic theology in the university setting is a unique and challenging opportunity – together with Christian theologies – to deepen interreligious collaboration on the

theological level and to develop theological foundations for a mutual exchange. Von Stosch is not exaggerating when he says that the "multireligious society in Europe ... [can] succeed only if 'challenge theology' is accepted by Muslim and Christians both" (ibid., 79).

The necessity of working together and the cross-fertilisation between the various theologies, especially between the monotheistic ones, arise not only from the common origin of these religions from their identical "epistemic presuppositions" (Schulze, 2010, 5). They are also strongly conditioned by the present challenges that they can only meet together. In a time that is characterised on the one hand by a constantly diminishing sensitivity to religion and on the other by an increase in religiously motivated violence, no special arguments are needed to underscore the necessity for close co-operation in the interreligious area.

The classical Muslim scholars recognised Islam's theological interdependence with Jewish and Christian theology quite early and made use of it. They resorted time and again to the sources of both religions in order to close the gaps in their own knowledge. Nevertheless, this tradition has also been extensively weakened because of various, primarily political, reasons in Muslim-majority countries and has fallen into disrepute. This has led to interreligious dialogue and cross-fertilisation on the theological level occurring more in secular Western contexts, which once again makes clear the uniqueness of our European context. The quality of collaboration between established theologies – here the Islamic and Christian – at European universities will decisively influence not only the future of Islamic theology but also that of theology in general.

5 Conclusion

As already stated several times, the establishment of Islamic theology at European universities is a great opportunity for the renewal of Islamic theology in the free and autonomous space of the university and to provide new theological approaches. Unfortunately, these conditions are not present everywhere, especially not in those countries where the majority of Muslims live.

Islamic theology – especially in Muslim-majority countries – appears to have long ago lost its vitality and its relation to reality. Even so, however the rich theological tradition of Islam in the Middle Ages, as well as some personalities in the present, and the founding of Islamic theological centres in Europe provide hope for new approaches in Islamic theology that conforms to both tradition and the new context. Von Stosch also comes to the conclusion

> that Islam in Europe is confronted at present with the challenge to develop a modern theology in accordance with Western academic standards, and ... that there are promising approaches to this that could also be fruitful for Christian theology. (Von Stosch, 2012, 79)

The establishment of Islamic theology at European universities is a long process with many different challenges. Despite that, however, the recent developments in Islamic theology justify the hope that the desired new approaches in Islamic theology will come out of Europe.

In the Midst of Ambivalences in Islam

Because of recent events in the 'Islamic world' and the rise of the so-called 'Islamic State in Iraq and Syria', distinct, even partially contradictory positions have emerged within Islam more clearly than before. It is certainly no exaggeration to say that at this point in no other area do the ambivalences stand out so much as in Islam. The antinomy between the inhuman cruelties by those who allegedly appeal to 'true Islam' and the denial of any connection of these deeds with Islam by the majority of Muslims show the great ambivalences that are present within Islam, which is preferably viewed as a monolithic block.

The fact that Muslims even represent different positions on the legitimation of violence by religion shows that there is a fundamental ambivalence in various areas of Islam. Because it is impossible to present all these areas in this essay, it seems more appropriate to approach the ambivalences in Islam from three perspectives. These perspectives are of major importance in Islamic theology and bring Islamic theology into connection with current events around Islam. The internal perspective, the interreligious perspective, and the personal perspective discussed below will provide insight into ambivalence regarding the Qur'an, other religions, and religiosity within Islam.

1 The Internal Perspective: Between Text and Context

In distinction from Christianity, Islam has no structure like the church has and thus does not have a "priestly-clerical structure" (Casanova, 2009, 48) either, as found in the Catholic tradition. Accordingly, there is no fixing or promulgation of doctrine by a specific institution "as revealed by God" (Rahner, 1959, 439). But this does not mean that there is no core content to which many Muslims adhere; it only means that this content cannot be fixed by church-like institutions. This is also clearly evident in E. Muammar's essay on dogma, which was written from a Muslim perspective. We read:

> With the political events after the death of Muhammad, very different ways arose among Muslims for dealing with questions of faith. In particular, the encounter with various religions, cultures, and philosophical traditions was decisive for the development of Islamic dogma. Given this plurality, Islamic scholars strove to establish the principles of the faith according to its original meanings so that they could establish a uniform faith for Muslims. (Muammer, 2013, 137)

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It thus becomes clear that doctrine in Islam generally reflected the opinions of scholars who could only appeal to their own knowledge and not to institutions whose authority could be derived from a holy text.

Nevertheless, the reality – as is so often the case – is different on this point as well. The lack of an institution for the development of Islamic doctrine did not stand in the way of the formation of dogma-like doctrines, but this development became the task of individuals. Thus, there are various doctrines that were viewed as dogmas over the course of time without being designated as such. For example, in Sunni Islam, there are only four law schools and two schools of thought that are recognised, and any deviation from their teachings is often viewed as heresy (Abu-Zaid, 1996).

The most important source of Islam, the Qur'an, did not escape this process of dogmatisation either. Although the divine source of the Qur'an is undisputed in the Islamic tradition, its nature and the appropriate approach to it are subjects of controversy. On the one hand, it is a matter of faithfulness to individual passages of the Qur'an with the intention of maintaining the message's originality and to protect it from any non-divine intervention – and concomitantly to condemn any deviation from the wording of the text and the dogmatisation of any single interpretation. On the other hand, there is also the attempt to understand the Qur'an in the spirit of the times in order to keep it relevant and to allow it to have the effect it had when it was revealed.

Despite the fact that the Qur'an was not sent into a vacuum but came into existence over a period of 23 years and reflected the situation of the prophet, its first addressees, and the entire context at that time, the dogmatisation of the Qur'an prevailed in the Islamic tradition. The rise of individual disciplines in the early phase, which were to facilitate the understanding of the divine message and were subsumed under the concept of Qur'anic sciences (Krawulsky, 2006), did not succeed in bringing about a more historical-critical reading of the Qur'an. Therefore, the most recent efforts to present the historical-critical method as a lasting component of the above-mentioned Qur'anic sciences testify not only to the lack of knowledge about this method but also to the nature of the Qur'anic sciences (Körner, 2006).

The discussions on the nature of the Qur'an and the accompanying discussions on an appropriate interpretation came to a head quite early and led to two contrary positions. The renowned translator of the Qur'an, Theodor Adel Khoury, describes these positions in his commentary on the Qur'an as follows:

> Because Islamic theology until now has assumed that the Prophet was inspired word for word, the question arises as to whether the Qur'an has a supramundane existence and whether it must be viewed as eternal. One school emphasised that the Word is an eternal

> attribute of God and therefore the Qur'an has to be viewed as eternal and uncreated. As the Word of God, the Qur'an exists eternally and not only in the heavenly book. The Mu'tazilites rejected this teaching in the ninth century because it could not be reconciled with strict monotheism, with the unity and uniqueness of God. (Khoury, 1990, 99)

After a number of disputes between the advocates and opponents of the view of the Qur'an as uncreated, the doctrine of the eternity of the Qur'an prevailed over the view proposed mainly by the rationalistic Mu'tazilites who viewed the Qur'an as created and thus prepared the way for the rise of an ambivalent attitude towards the Qur'anic text within the Islamic tradition, which has had far-reaching effects right up until the present.

The dominance of the doctrine of the Qur'an as uncreated in Islamic theology did not only lead to the acceptance of a perfect Qur'anic text, which was obvious anyway for faithful Muslims (Özsoy, 2006a, 154). It also had a lasting impact on the entire image of Islam. Abu-Zaid describes the far-reaching consequences of this acceptance in a very striking way in his analysis when he writes:

> The belief that the Qur'an is eternal implies, for instance, that God preordained every event described in it and leads to the belief in God's absolute predestination; those who want to deny this predestination must believe the Qur'an to be created. And, to mention yet another example, he who advocates the doctrine of God's absolute unity and unicity (a central Islamic belief) and wishes to take this in its strictest sense, denies the existence of an uncreated Qur'an together with God in all eternity.... [T]he notion of eternal Qur'an leads automatically to strict adherence to the literal meaning of the text. (Abu-Zaid, 1996, 46)

Because of the literal approach to the Qur'anic text, however, the living communication between Creator and creature is suppressed and continually new interpretations of the Qur'an – which was indispensable for the vitality of the divine revelation – are inhibited. Ömer Özsoy sees the proof of the vitality and thus of the inclusion of human needs and their context in the process of the revelation of the Qur'an as embedded in the Qur'an itself (Özsoy, 2006a, 154). As one of many examples that indicate the living character of the Qur'an, Özsoy cites *sura* 5:101, which reads:

> O YOU who have attained to faith! Do not ask about matters which, if they were to be made manifest to you (in terms of law), might cause you hardship; for, if you should ask about them while the Qur'an is being revealed, they might (indeed) be made manifest to you (as laws). (Q 5:101; for this and other quotes from the Qur'an, see Asad 2008)

According to Özsoy, this verse and others in the Qur'an (Q 2:222, 2:189, 2:217) show clearly and unambiguously that the revelation refers to human needs

and the events of that time and responded to them. This means, therefore, that the process of revelation was influenced from outside (Özsoy, 2006a, 154).

The suppression of the vitality, the living quality, of the divine communication – which, given the fixing of the Qur'anic text in writing and the temporal distance from the time of the revelation, is difficult to reconstruct – leads to the suppression of the historicity of the Qur'anic text. Instead, a universality is alleged that sees the spirit of understanding to consist in constantly reproducing the interpretations of the early scholars. Independent interpretations that take into account the times and the context were viewed in extreme cases as dangerously close to unbelief. This is a problem that Abu-Zaid gets to the heart of when he writes:

> Religious discourse is aware that religious texts are only interpretable, and the interpretation can vary according to place and time. In interpretation, however, religious discourse does not go beyond the understanding of the text found in the early legal and religion scholars; it therefore limits interpretation to law texts and excludes beforehand (the possibility of the interpretation of) doctrines or the Qur'anic stories. It denies the independent interpretation of doctrine or the religious stories, even accusing such of apostasy. (Abu-Zaid, 1996, 82)

If we look at the approach of some people, who use Islam to justify their violent deeds, it becomes clear that an unreflective approach to the Qur'an – which is usually manifested as an attempt to understand the Qur'an apart from the context in which it came into existence – is one of the many causes that led to the development of a theology that, in my view, contradicts the spirit of Islam. Also, at the present time, it serves to legitimise a theology of violence that has been taken over and propagated by Muslim fundamentalism to justify its own cruelties and to recruit others.

2 The Interreligious Perspective: Between the Truth Claim and Acceptance

The differences in opinion concerning the nature of the Qur'an are also necessarily reflected in another thematic complex in Islam that is found in the Qur'an. This includes first the attitude of the Qur'an towards other religions. Conditioned by the context in which it came into being, the Qur'an talks of other religions that could be found in Mecca and the surrounding area in the seventh century. The Qur'anic texts give special treatment to Judaism and Christianity, whose adherents are described in the Qur'an as 'People of the Book' (*ahl al-kitab*) (Q 3:98 – 99, 3:65). The reason for this special treatment, the intensive explana-

tion and the constant reference to the 'People of the Book' in the Qur'an is that Islam sees itself as part of the monotheistic tradition that is grounded, according to Islam, in the one and only God. The Qur'an presents belief in the common origin of the three religions as follows:

> Say: 'We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus, and that which has been vouchsafed to all the (other) prophets by their Sustainer: we make no distinction between any of them. And it is unto Him that we surrender ourselves.' (Q 2:136)

Islam's reference to Judaism and Christianity has in the meantime also become known in Europe and constitutes the centre of all contemporary interreligious encounters. The Abrahamic roots of the monotheistic religions should contribute to the highlighting of commonalities – that is the general wish. But Islam's reference to a common origin contains not only chances for improved co-existence but also a certain potential for conflict that should not be underestimated. In the end, history teaches us that the common origin of these three monotheistic religions led to conflict rather than understanding.

This becomes clear in light of the following. Because of Islam's reference to Judaism and Christianity, the Qur'an also deals with events and persons that appear in the Bible and often presents them differently from how they are presented in the Bible. The differences between the Qur'anic and the biblical stories, which should not have existed because of their common origin, are explained in the Qur'an as resulting from human meddling in the holy scriptures of Judaism and Christianity. According to the Qur'an, this meddling led to changes in the content. In the Qur'an, these changes are called distortion in some places (*tahrif*) (Q 2:176; 4:46; 5:13) and alteration (*tabdil*) elsewhere (Q 2:59). Thus, in the holy scriptures of these three religions, there are contradictory views of certain people, events, or faith principles that cannot be reconciled theologically with each other, such as the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which is explicitly rejected in the Qur'an (Q 2:62; 5:17, 5:72–73). The different treatment of common content has certainly contributed to Islam being perceived by some Christian writers as a kind of Christian heresy (Uçar, 2009, 18 f.).

The emphasis on the common origin with Judaism and Christianity on the one hand and Islam's differences from them on the other represents the foundation of the ambivalent attitude towards these religions that is reinforced by the various, partly contradictory statements on Judaism and Christianity in the Qur'an. Chronologically, there were initially many verses in the Qur'an that emphasise what the three religions share (Q 2:136; 3:64) and prompt Muslims to a

respectful relationship with Jews and Christians. The following verse is a good example:

> And do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner – unless it be such of them as are bent on evildoing – and say: 'We believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, as well as that which has been bestowed upon you: for our God and your God is one and the same, and it is unto Him that we (all) surrender ourselves.' (Q 29:46)

But the language of the Qur'an about the adherents of Judaism and Christianity changed after the exodus to Medina in 622 (AD). Without going into the grounds for this change, it must be remembered that an intensification of reproaches against the Christians and the Jews can be observed in the Medinan period of revelation. Here the criticism is directed very much at the Jewish community, which had a significant presence in Medina at that time. The points of criticism range from the divinisation of Jesus Christ among Christians to the charge against the Jews of killing the prophets (Q 5:70).

The various statements in the Qur'an regarding Christianity and Judaism constitutes the foundation for the ambivalence noted above in dealing with Jews and Christians from an Islamic perspective. This also makes it evident that a contextual approach to the Qur'anic statements is needed to reinforce the potential for promoting peace and to make a differentiated approach to the other religions possible. For, as Oberdorfer and Waldman state, there is a "fundamental ambivalence" (Oberdorfer & Waldman, 2008, 11) in all religions. But the research into conditions that lead to the activation of one of these ambivalences is more important (ibid., 11f.). Zirker also sees the problem as not lying primarily in the violent statements found in the holy texts, which, in his view, "do not present any theological problem" (Zirker, 1998, 168). What Zirker finds more disturbing, however, is "that certain structures of religious thinking tend a priori towards radical oppositions, even if they are initially relatively open and not fixed on unambiguous consequences of action" (ibid.).

This is a statement that can be endorsed without any reservations from the Muslim perspective and requires an appropriate critical approach to the holy scriptures.

3 The Personal Perspective: Between Formality and Hypocrisy

Like every other religion, Islam also contains rules that present the general conditions of faith as such and, among other things, confers a unique identity on its adherents. These rules include, according to the religion in question, various

life areas of the human being. The observance of these rules is to help believers maintain their relationship to God and thus give meaning to their lives. But, as with every institutionalisation, a kind of formalisation also threatens faith in the process of the development of its own doctrine or in its process of its constitution if the rules, which are originally intended to serve faith, suppress or replace it instead. The parts thus become more important than the whole; formal rituals become more important than ethical principles. This tendency can even undermine the essence of a faith and, to put it mildly, water down the original mission. A tendency against which no faith can be secure, it is one more instance of ambivalence that becomes increasingly manifest in the Islamic context. As a result, both Muslim writers and non-Muslim experts on Islam draw attention to that phenomenon.

Among the important experts on Islam who draw attention to this problem is the Canadian religious studies and Islam scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith (d. 2000). Smith holds that a meaning shift in the concept of Islam occurred in the 19th century in which the individual character of Islam was equated with the religious system (Smith, 1964, 105). Viewed from a Qur'anic perspective, this is not an obvious move (ibid., 101 f.). In his explanations, Smith draws attention to the constant tendency to shift the concept 'Islam' from personal faith or piety towards a religious system. Smith expresses it as follows:

> There has been a tendency over the centuries and especially in modern times for the connotation of the word 'Islam' gradually to lose its relationship with God, first by shifting from a personal piety to an ideal religious system, a transcendent pattern, then to an external, mundane religious system, and finally by shifting still further from that religious system to the civilization that was its historical expression. (Smith, 1981, 63 f.)

These views have also been increasingly discussed recently by voices within Islam, even if from a different perspective. Mouhanad Khorchide is one of those voices, and in his publications, he has attempted to draw attention to this phenomenon. In his book on *Shariah*, which he claims provides a non-legalistic approach to the *Shariah* for the laity (Khorchide, 2013, 22), he writes:

> To purify the heart is not primarily an intellectual task but rather an emotional and spiritual one. A legalistic understanding of Islam masks the work of purifying the heart. The heart should be enabled to recognise the beautiful, the human, and to distinguish them from the ugly, the inhuman. But if religiosity is defined as adhering to legalistic statements, not only has the heart shifted to the background but human freedom as well and thus an authentic moral attitude in which morality is determined from within as a commitment. If good actions are directed from outside one, if I also, for example, help someone because I am told to, I have no inner morality. I help because I must help, not because I want to help. (Ibid., 17)

Without going into detail, this statement shows in our context that the meaning shift in Islam towards legalism can also be observed by Muslims themselves and is felt to be a deviation from Islam's original intention. The tendency here to keep to the wording of the text, as already mentioned in this essay, plays an important role in the development of a formalised approach to faith. This rather legalistic way of understanding faith has led to, among other things, greater value being attributed to religious rituals or external acts than to the ethical principles that are also embedded in the Islamic sources. Such a legalistic reading almost dissolves the connection between the religious rituals and the ethical principles. The dissolution of the existential relation between the rituals and a moralistic attitude often leads, for example, to the same person performing the five prayers and slandering others at the same time, even though this represents what the Qur'an also sees as a paradox. According to the Qur'an, prayer keeps the person from hateful deeds (Q 29:45), and gossip is so abhorrent that the Qur'an compares it to the consumption of human flesh (Q 49:12). To prevent religion from turning into something without content, the Qur'an constantly attempts to draw attention to this phenomenon. One of the important chapters (*sura*) to do this is the 107th, where we read:

> HAST THOU ever considered (the kind of man) who gives the lie to all moral law? Behold, it is this (kind of man) that thrusts the orphan away, and feels no urge to feed the needy. Woe, then, unto those praying ones whose hearts from their prayer are remote – those who want only to be seen and praised, and, withal, deny all assistance (to their fellowmen)! (Q 107:1–7)

This short Meccan *sura* points to a kind of formalisation of religion in which prayer is turned into a show and, understandably, cannot produce any virtues that could serve humanity and thus God. The focus on the formal, literal, or legalistic aspect of religion without the inclusion of values like love, justice, mercy, sustainability, reconciliation, etc. leads inevitably to a pseudo-religiosity that stays on the surface or a kind of religiosity without content. Given that a religiosity limited to external rituals is much easier to master than one focused on internal values, the majority often prefer it on practical grounds. That is why spirituality often remains in the background and the normative moves to the foreground.

Thus, this ambivalence between the external and the internal side of religion is one that very much stamps contemporary everyday Muslim life and is also decisively responsible for differences within the Islamic community. That is why people who perform all the rituals can still take the lives of innocent people while calling on God and hoping to be rewarded in the afterlife.

4 Conclusion

The analysis of some of these ambivalences shows that there are always different, even contradictory, approaches to religion, and that will probably be the case in the future as well. That is why one needs to be aware of these ambivalences and thus understand oneself as a seeker and not as a possessor of truth. Even if believers should assume that God is the absolute and only truth (for them), that does not change the fact that human beings themselves are limited and never able to possess absolute truth. Faith does not exist in the claim to possess the truth but in the knowledge of one's own finiteness.

In this connection, the statement by Max Born concerning our alleged possession of truth is very striking. But in our context, his statement also needs to be understood with respect to religions. Born writes:

> I believe that ideas like absolute correctness, absolute precision, definitive truth, etc. are fantasies that should not be admitted to any science.... This easing of our thinking seems to me to be the greatest blessing that contemporary science has brought us. But belief in a single truth and to be its possessor is the deepest root of all evil in the world. (Born, 1965, 183)

Theological and Anthropological Foundations of Religious Learning: A Commentary

1 Introduction

As a commentary on the panel 'Theological and Anthropological Foundations of Religious Learning' of the conference '*Aufbruch zu neuen Ufern*' (Setting off for New Shores), the focus of the present contribution is on the theological and religious education challenges addressed in the panel.[1] These challenges can be identified in the academic engagement with Islamic theology and religious education in the European context. The question of the Islamic self-understanding is fundamental in the context of heterogenous societies and pluralist academic discourse in Europe. This question includes many areas and facets and still needs extensive analysis. This is why this commentary can only be a fragmentary representation of this highly complex problem that is only beginning to be explored. Therefore, the ideas that will be worked out here are not to be understood as approaches ready to be implemented but as foundations for discussion.

In general, the panel displayed a certain scepticism regarding the focusing of Islamic theology and religious education on the Christian-secular European context. This contextuality leads not only to contempt for the classical Islamic tradition (which in any case includes everything) but also to a watering down of what constitutes genuine Islamic content. This scepticism, which stamped the whole panel discussion on the establishment of Islamic theology and religious education, also constitutes the central focus of the ideas to be explored here.

2 Between Context and Academic Standards

If one follows the discussions carried out in the panel or the debates on the establishment of Islamic theology and religious education in Europe as a whole, two important aspects emerge that show themselves to be a major challenge for the actors involved. First, there is the consideration of the context in the further development of theological and religious pedagogical positions and, second, the guarantee of the academic quality of Islamic theological doctrine and research. We will now look at both these aspects.

1 For further details on the panel, see the conference proceedings edited by Sarıkaya & Bäumer (2017).

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2.1 The Context

The European context is characterised by a free democratic and secular – i.e., the separation of religion and state – framework, which means that it is stamped by worldview plurality. Secularism is thus not to be seen in the first instance as critical of religion but as guaranteeing freedom of choice and thus as an element that makes religion possible (Bielefeldt, 2003a). Secularism thus understood is the foundation of equal rights and the guarantee of the co-existence of various religions and worldviews in a multicultural and multireligious society. That is why the commitment to the democratic and secular constitutional state is one of the most important conditions of an Islamic theology and religious education to be established in this context, which will ensure the peaceful co-existence of pluralist societies in Europe (Sejdini, 2015b).

This is, admittedly, more difficult than it at first seems. The established European churches did not find it easy either to recognise the necessity of a democratic and secular constitutional state for a pluralist society and thus take this framework into account in the further development of their own theologies (Casanova, 2009, 33–47). These churches needed quite some time as well before they could commit themselves to the recognition of a democratic and secular framework and make this the starting point of their theological reflections. And although they still struggle today with this principle – which means that we cannot speak of a completed process – a fundamental consensus has emerged in Christian theology that not only acknowledges the present secular conditions but also includes them in its reflections and allows them to shape in its theological analyses, especially in the university.

This step of recognition and taking the secular framework into account is also indispensable for Islamic theology and religious education if it wants to assert itself in a heterogeneous society and to stimulate it in a positive way. Without a doubt, this path will be no less difficult or painful than it was (and still is) for Christian theology and religious education – to the contrary. The additional difficulty here results not from the untenable and tendentious reproach of the essential interwovenness of religion and state in Islam (Rhonheimer, 2012, 329). Rather, it results from the fact that Muslims are confronted for the first time in their history with the task of actively and reflectively developing – if not defining anew – their theology and religious education from a minority position in a secular framework. The acceptance and taking account of the secular context will have a decisive influence on both the future and the social role of Islamic theology and religious education in Europe. And it will also affect theologies of other religions.

Accepting and taking liberal democratic secularism into account in Islamic theological and religious educational reflection should be more than pure lip service. It must go hand in hand with the commitment to concrete values and attitudes as a whole, such as the recognition of universal human rights or worldview plurality in society. Working on a contextual theology and religious education in heterogeneous societies also includes the discussion of the appropriate way to deal with the various worldviews that are an integral part of a heterogeneous society.

As is generally known, a pluralist society is grounded in the inviolable dignity of the human being, a dignity that is based on the humanity of all people independent of their gender, ethnicity, skin colour, and religious affiliation. It is from this fundamental assumption that the equality of all human beings and rights and responsibilities can be deduced, the observance of which guarantees the existence of the pluralist society.

One of the most significant rights to emerge from the equality of all people is the freedom to decide for or against a faith. A multiplicity of worldviews that hold opposing views on various matters must be assumed. Because that is so, there is the challenge, among other things, to embed cultural and religious plurality in theological and religious educational reflection and, in so doing, develop a fundamentally respectful theology and religious education that advances plurality from that. Nevertheless, it is precisely this theme that most theological and religious educational approaches, including the Islamic, have difficulty with. The recognition of plurality implies the acceptance of several competing truths as equal and thus, even if indirectly, the relativisation of one's own truth claims. How it deals with the question of the claim to absolute truth will therefore be the measuring stick for determining how successful the integration of Islamic theology and religious education into the pluralist academic and scientific discourse of Europe has been (Schärtl, 2004). This brings us to our second point.

2.2 Islamic Theology and Religious Education in Pluralist Academic Discourses

If one views the current understanding of Islamic theology and religious education from a European perspective, there is no doubt that a revision of Islamic theology's self-understanding is needed. A theology and religious education that

> understands itself as a speculation based on eternal truths and thus abstracted from temporal and contextual contingencies and whose insights are claimed to be universally valid ... can only lead to indoctrination and immaturity. (Mette & Schweitzer, 2002, 37)

This makes the integration of Islamic theology and religious education into the academic and scientific world impossible and thus challenges its place in the European universities.

In this connection, there is also the need for the separation of faith as such and assertions and statements derived from that as the *punctum saliens* in the development and establishment of an Islamic theology and religious education and its integration into the European scientific and academic discourse. Schärtl gives a convincing justification of this necessity when he writes:

> We should first state that the subject of religious faith is not a hypothesis in the scientific sense. It is so existentially interwoven with human life and operative there on such a fundamental level that the forms of expressions of faith (prayer, rituals, etc.) must be counted among the fundamentals of human life whose right to existence cannot be decided by reason. In other words, religious faith also makes statements that are cognitively relevant. As soon as this happens, we enter a level at which the question of truth, connected with the themes of certainty and rationality, must be raised: as soon as faith enters this cognitive level, it cannot claim any special rights with respect to the question of truth. Rather, it needs to be clarified in general what is understood by 'truth' and 'truth criteria' and how this understanding is important for religious faith. (Schärtl, 2004, 164)

Even if the internal perspective plays an important role in confessional theology, academic objectivity must be ensured as reflective subjectivity and contextuality. Other central requirements are laying out an argument, intersubjective analysis, and transparent verifiability. To be able to claim validity, Islamic theology and religious education must also take into account the results of other academic and scientific fields as well. An Islamic theology and religious education that is isolated and nourished exclusively by the holy sources, which takes neither the context nor the reality of life into account and does not take scientific results into consideration can meet neither the demands of the Qur'an (Q 45:4) and a heterogeneous society nor academic and scientific standards (Schulze, 2015). This does not mean, however, that classical theological and religious educational themes are thus simply

> thrown on the rubbish heap of history. But they ... are read from a changed perspective and thus often only rediscovered in their concrete, partly contemporary challenging content. (Mette & Schweitzer, 2002, 38)

3 Openness instead of Isolation

The comments we have made up to now show the fundamental character of the challenges that Islamic theology and religious education are facing in Europe. But the history of the Islamic self-interpretation shows that, in their theological and religious educational considerations, Muslims have time and again succeeded in both including the context as well as complying with scientific and academic standards of the time and in thus generating a theology that inspired not only Muslims but also a large part of humankind (Watt, 2010). To be able to activate this creative potential, specific attitudes are also needed today that are briefly discussed here.

First is the requirement of openness toward new developments. That means that efforts to establish a contextual Islamic theology and religious education in the European context should not be dismissed – as they often are – per se as objectionable innovations (*bid'a*). To resort to the instrument of *bid'a* complicates not only the development of a new and – for the European context – necessary understanding of Islamic theology and religious education but also continues an old and extremely un-Islamic tradition, widespread among Muslims, according to which opposing opinions were quickly stamped as *bid'a* and declared to be un-Islamic. This hostile attitude towards new approaches not only contradicts the Muslim tradition of knowledge (Bauer, 2011) but also recalls the attitude of Meccan idolaters. According to Qur'anic tradition, these idolaters rejected the divine message and justified this rejection by arguing that they were simply following what their forefathers had believed and practised. The Qur'an rejects this static and unreflective attitude and points out that the fact alone that something has been passed on can never serve as a sufficient ground for its validity (Q 2:170; 5:104). Even if these verses were revealed in a different context, they nonetheless go beyond that concrete event – they refer not only to Meccan idolaters but also to a mentality described in the Qur'an that any human being can display.

In the light of these statements, the time-related quality of the theological and religious educational tradition of Islam must also be understood. If we keep in mind that Islamic theology and religious education arose in a non-European context and developed until the present in this context, the confrontation between a traditional and a more contemporary understanding is not surprising, even if they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It seems important in this context, however, to cultivate a habit of mind that understands the Islamic tradition in its context and critically questions it. After all, the Muslim scholars who are part of the Islamic tradition and rightly continue to serve as a reference point were children of their time and always attempted to understand the Islamic sour-

ces in their own context in order to make them accessible to their contemporaries. Thus, just as the scholars' opinions on theological and religious educational questions were stamped by the social reality, political constellation, and the scientific discourse of their time, so the present analysis of theological and religious educational themes must reflect the current context if the message is to be understood. Viewed that way, the cultivation of the tradition should not be, as it often is today, understood as the adoration of ashes but as the passing on of the fire that makes a vibrant relation to the present possible.

A contextual attitude that also promotes a critical questioning is also necessary in connection with the Qur'an. Here, it is not primarily a case of a hermeneutics of the Qur'an but the understanding of the Qur'an as such. That it is a question of the Word of God in the Qur'an, is undisputed, at least among Muslims. Nor is it new in the Islamic exegetical tradition that various methods are needed to understand the Qur'an. The question of the precise purpose of revelation and the appropriate access to the Qur'an seems to be problematic, however.

Here the question arises as to whether everything must be substantiated by the Qur'an, and only what can be derived from the Qur'an can be seen as Islamic. Is the Qur'an intended to comprehensively arrange all issues of humankind up until the last day or does it only communicate some basic principles? Does God reveal himself in a general sense only in the Qur'an or does the revelation of God also occur through the whole creation? Does the Qur'an convey knowledge or is it a guide for human beings? These are questions that challenge Islamic theology and religious education. A narrow understanding of revelation that sees the Qur'an only as a source of eternal knowledge that – going far beyond the notion of a guide – also contains scientific truths does not only distort the Islamic concept of humanity and understanding of revelation but also leads to the neglect of reason, which is the actual basis for the special place of human beings in creation.

The constant pressure to have to justify everything by the Qur'an results in reading into the Qur'an things that cannot be derived from the text and attempts to develop an Islamic theology and religious education in the European context by using "good", "nice", and "harmless" texts (Özsoy, 2006b). Here the 'problematic' Qur'anic passages are masked, which, from a methodological point of view, cannot be distinguished from a fundamentalist approach. Rather, such an approach legitimises – either consciously or unconsciously – the fundamentalist approach to the Qur'an. That is why there is an urgent need to define anew the understanding of revelation in the Islamic context to make a progressive approach to the Qur'an possible.

4 Conclusion

It can be claimed without exaggeration that the Muslim community progressed in its history only when it was aware of the role of the Qur'an and reason and was open to philosophy and science. The heyday of the Muslim community, to which we Muslims can point to with pride, was a time of encounter with Greek philosophy and the various mystical traditions as well as a time in which the commentators on the Qur'an and the *hadith* scholars drew from non-Muslim sources to supplement the 'Qur'anic stories'.

It is to be hoped that we European Muslims can use the favourable conditions in Europe to further develop Islamic theology in this context and thus also become a spark of hope for the rest of the Muslim world like the Muslim community once was. I would like to end these remarks with an old proverb that corresponds to my comments and should also serve as a motto for further research in Islamic theology and religious education in the European context. It reads more or less as follows: 'Whoever does not have the courage to abandon his own shore can never discover new continents.'

‘Whoever does not leave his own shore behind will never discover anything new’: Challenges for Islamic Religious Education in the European Context

1 Introduction

Education is one of the central themes of Islam. Numerous verses in the Qur’an and sayings by the Prophet Muhammad leave no doubt that education is one of the top priorities of the Islamic message.[1] This assumption is shared by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars (Bilgin, 1988; Günther, 2013, 360). The history of Islam also offers various examples that can be interpreted as indications of the special and, above all, religiously grounded high value of education and upbringing in Islam. Last but not least, the scientific and academic contributions of Muslims – especially up until the 12th century – are an important indicator of the particular affinity of Islam with education. Next to education in general, religious education and upbringing – as in all religions – in the Islamic context played a crucial role right from the beginning. Right from the start, the Prophet paid special attention to education, and this contributed significantly to the acceptance and development of the Islamic message and to the promotion of education in general among Muslims (Günther, 2016).

The interest of the Muslim community in education, an interest that lasted for four hundred years, has decreased over time for various reasons. Even if it is not easy to determine the concrete reasons for this decline and the actual point in time that it occurred, it can be seen as part of the general stagnation in the ‘Muslim world’, which can be taken in general to have started at the beginning of the 13th century.[2] Since this time, despite various attempts, Muslim society has seldom succeeded in regaining its initial glory.

It was especially in the Enlightenment and the rapid technological progress driven by industrialisation in the West that made clear that the ‘Muslim world’ had not only lost its pioneering role in science, education, art, and culture towards the beginning of the 18th century but also its connection to the modern

1 Cf. Q 2:266; 10:24; 13:3; 16:11; 19:13; 30:21; 59:2; Ibn Māğa, 1998, 214 f.; At-Tirmiḏī, 1996, 417.
2 The stagnation refers to the comparison with the period before the 13th century and not to the prevalent view that, after the 13th century, there were no theological or philosophical developments in the Muslim world or that the door to the interpretation of the Islamic law sources (*ijtihad*) was closed.

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world. A large part of the Muslim community was confronted with this bitter reality most recently through the colonisation of Muslim countries. As a reaction to the fact that the once inferior West had become superior in almost all-important areas, various reform movements in the 'Muslim world' aimed at – in addition to the liberation of their countries from the colonial powers – liberating the Muslim community intellectually as well from this desolate situation.

Looking back, these reform movements, which strove above all for changes in general and religious education, achieved very little. Instead of bringing the Muslim community closer to the developed world, these movements instead paved the way in the opposite direction, especially in the field of religious education. Some saw the solution to the crisis in which the 'Muslim world' found itself in the post-Enlightenment world primarily in rejecting the West and orienting itself to the original community of the prophet Muhammad. That was the view that prevailed. This led indisputably to an increase that orientation to the old and the aversion to more recent concepts of education – in particular those stamped by the West. Regrettably, this trend has continued into the present because of the current world political situation in wide parts of the Muslim world.

This attitude, which can be characterised as 'traditionalist', could be found among the majority of the Muslims who migrated to Europe at the beginning of the previous century in the labour migration at that time and was cultivated for a long time as their own and authentic religious approach in their new homeland. For a long time, this did not present a great problem for the Muslims, who lived on the margins of society, nor for the Europeans for whom the immigrants were 'invisible'. Finally, the Europeans were under the impression at first that this was a temporary phenomenon that would pass once the guest workers returned to their countries of origin.

Only the global political events at the beginning of this century, the continuous growth of the Muslim population in Europe, and the fact that the former labour immigrants had become an important part of society and a return to their home countries was no longer an option brought about change. Some political leaders became aware that the concepts of theology, education, and religious education at that time did not correspond either to the European understanding of education nor to the needs of Muslim students who had grown up in Europe. The integration of Islamic-theological studies in the local universities had thus become urgently necessary.

Given this new situation and the pressing need for a theological home for the Muslims living in Europe, the process of the integration of Islamic theological studies in domestic universities was set in motion, predominantly in Austria and Germany for several years. This initiative, which has in the meantime borne

its first promising fruits, is a challenge for Islamic religious education. This challenge must not be underestimated, but it is also a major opportunity to develop an educational approach that, in the spirit of Islamic educational theory, views the context as a constitutive element of religious education.

This relatively new development in the process of the integration of Islamic theological studies in European universities, the beginnings of which (with a few exceptions) go back less than ten years, is in its early developmental phase at present. Here the long Islamic theological tradition is being integrated into a new, unfamiliar context. The question arises here as to how Islamic theological studies can succeed in finding an appropriate balance between the demands of the secular university and its own tradition to produce innovative approaches within this new arrangement that must meet the academic standards of the university on the one hand but can also be supported by its own tradition on the other (Sejdini, 2017a). Islamic theological studies cannot avoid this partly difficult process of discussion in the context of the secular university, to which other theologies are also subjected, if it is to be taken seriously in academic discourse. As is well known, academic discourse at a secular university is not simply a matter of managing theological knowledge but is concerned primarily with conceiving new approaches and promoting a continuous and impartial development (Schulze, 2010, 1).

We will return to this below. This essay takes as its starting point the conviction that, for the development of innovative approaches in Islamic religious education, a fundamental discussion – especially in theology – is needed, if the changes are to be more than superficial.

To give the best possible presentation of this theme, this essay is divided into three parts. In the first part, the various religious educational approaches will be described in order to situate the underlying religious educational model. In the second part, we will look at the particular context of Islamic theology and religious pedagogy in the European context. In the third and final part, we will discuss the most important challenges facing Islamic religious education to demonstrate what conditions must be filled to produce innovative approaches.

2 Approaches to Religious Education

A proper discussion of religious educational themes requires a disclosure of one's own models of religious education. Expressions, analyses, and proposals for solutions in religious pedagogy make sense only if the religious educational conception on which they are based is clear. That is why the various religious educational approaches will be briefly explored here.

Current European research in religious education is dominated by two opposite approaches that encompass both religious education as a theory as well as religious didactics or religious education. These two approaches are, one, an approach more from the religious studies perspective and, two, a confessional approach. To illustrate these approaches, the model of religious learning developed by Michael Grimmitt (1981) and later picked up by the Dortmund religious educationist Bert Roebben can be used. This model speaks of levels "in religion" – from an internal perspective of religion – "from religion", and "about religion" – from an external perspective (Roebben, 2011, 151).

The approach just cited, which focuses on learning about religions and has become established in England, for example, is characterised above all by its religious studies approach to religion or religious education. For this approach, the reference field of study is, in addition to pedagogy, not theology but religious studies. This model of religious education does not, of course, have any confessional connection, which means that in the schools, the content of the religious instruction, the religion teachers and pupils are not subject to any specific denomination in the educational context. Even if sympathy for this model is increasing, the confessional form is still being used both in religious education and in religious pedagogical research in German-speaking countries, especially Austria and Germany. This form does not leave out the 'in religion' aspect but connects it with the 'about' and 'from' levels. This understanding is distinguished from the previous one in that the confessional connection or orientation plays a crucial role here. Accordingly, this religious pedagogical approach goes beyond the so-called 'neutral' learning about religion. Thus, this approach represents a confessional religious education that the respective religious community is responsible for, is planned and given shape by its authorised teachers, and attended by homogeneous groups of students. Even if knowledge of other sciences, especially religious studies, is taken into consideration, the dominant reference field of study of this religious educational understanding are theology and education.

Aside from the possible advantages and disadvantages of the theological or religious studies approaches, which are, as is well known, the subject of debate, this essay is primarily concerned to point out the – in our case – partly also legally based general conditions and possible tensions that must be taken into account if a religious education programme, as I understand religious education is set up theologically. The tensions that arise do so because of the connection of confessionally understood religious education to the religious community, which often tends to take only the perspective of that community into consideration.

That is why it is necessary for Islamic religious educational research – and Islamic religious education – to explore a feasible path forward. On the one

hand, this path must include dialogue with the religious community and collaboration with the other theological disciplines and on the other make compliance with the academic standards of research possible. Rolf Schieder views this structure – which is foreign to the classical Islamic tradition – as the only possibility

> in which the secular, religiously neutral state can exercise influence via the sciences on the thinking and feeling of religious communities without abandoning the requirement of religious freedom. (Schieder, 2013, 17)

Whether or not it is viewed as such or as interfering with academic freedom, these considerations should show how much our attempts to develop innovative approaches in religious education are balancing acts and how reliant we are on external factors.

In addition to the tensions that also arise from its relation to its religious community, Islamic religious pedagogy is confronted with additional challenges, especially in the European context. We will explore these challenges in the following section.

3 The Current Muslim Context in Europe

The Muslim religious community, which now numbers 1.5 billion, is a community that encompasses different ethnic groups, nations, and cultural circles. The heterogeneous composition of the Muslim communities has led to country-specific imprints of Islam and various concepts of religious education. This diversity is also mirrored in the composition of Muslim communities in Europe. Many of the Muslims living in Europe have different ideas of what Islam is and what religious education or religious pedagogy can mean – as, for example, the recently published social-empirical study by Ayşe Uygun-Altunbaş (2017, 26 f.) shows. Regardless of the plurality of differences, which we cannot go into here, there are nevertheless some theological commonalities that, with a few exceptions, are shared by a majority of Muslims and that are therefore important for Islamic religious education (Kolb, 2021a).

This does not refer to the personal attitudes of Muslims, which can be as diverse as those of the adherents of other religions. Rather, it refers to theological and religious-educational positions and attitudes that are still used, although they were developed in completely different contexts and periods and can be viewed as suitable for the education of modern people in only a limited way. The classical Islamic understanding of religious education, which is often transferred unreflectively in the guise of the authentic tradition, follows a paradigm

that in essential areas contradicts an enlightened understanding of religious education oriented to freedom and human dignity. Admittedly, some fundamentals of this classical Islamic understanding are not unknown in the West, but they are viewed as outdated because of reforms in Christian religious education since the 1960s (Lachmann, 2013, 59). In contrast, for demonstrable and partly already mentioned reasons, Islamic religious education is still at the beginning of this process, which indeed includes many obstacles but is nonetheless inevitable (Tosun, 2015, 40). Thus, the following legitimate question arises: Can a religious tradition be made fruitful in religious education for people who are born and socialised in a completely different context, without presaging a 'clash of civilisations' or religions, as has usually been the case since Samuel Huntington?

The opposition of classical and contemporary paradigms for religious education can reveal the direction Islamic religious education should move if it is to meet the current understanding of religious pedagogy. Indeed, the classical paradigm is not specific to Islam but nevertheless widespread in Islamic religious education (ibid.). The classical or traditional understanding of religious education is characterised above all by being based on an objectivistic or essentialist epistemology. In this view, Islam is viewed as the only true faith, and, accordingly, the goal of religious education is primarily obedience to the religious content and to follow the tradition. The contemporary understanding of religious education is opposed to this traditional understanding because the former is based epistemologically on the orientation to the subject and thus perspectivist/constructivist approaches. As a result, with respect to methodology, the contemporary view operates based on the relation to the subject, interaction, and context. This understanding always entails a critical approach leading to the view that one's own faith is only one 'truth' among many, and thus the maturity and ability of people to make decisions is viewed as the supreme goal of religious education.

Assuming that the classical understanding of Islamic religious education is widespread, this opposition shows that a paradigm shift is needed if Islamic religious education is to make a positive contribution to both Muslims and the entire community in the current context. Even though there are no sharp lines of separation here and traces of contemporary approaches can be seen in the traditional understanding of religious education – which is not limited to one religion – and vice versa, the above distinction still holds for the most part.

Based on the current state described above, challenges in two areas in particular become manifest for the contextualisation of Islamic religious education in the contemporary context. These two areas influence the uniqueness of religious education: epistemology and the understanding of tradition in a fundamental way.

4 The Challenges for Innovation

4.1 Epistemology

The question of the nature and limits of human knowledge is one of the central questions of human history. Various scholarly endeavours in early antiquity, especially in philosophy and theology, were devoted to this question. For our discussion, however, we first need to remember that, at the very least since Immanuel Kant, the notion that people could have a direct, unmediated knowledge of "things *an sich*" (Kant, 2010, 341) is no longer possible. Rather, knowledge is always mediated. Here, in this epistemological paradigm shift, the German physicist and mathematician Max Born sees 'the greatest blessing' to modern science. He writes:

> I believe that ideas like absolute correctness, absolute precision, definitive truth, etc. are fantasies that should not be admitted to any science.... This easing of our thinking seems to me to be the greatest blessing that contemporary science has brought us. But belief in a single truth and to be its possessor is the deepest root of all evil in the world. (Born, 1965, 183)

This – from a contemporary perspective – apparently constructivist view of epistemology has found little purchase in Islamic theology, which plays a central role in Islamic religious education as a partner discipline. To the contrary: an attitude became established (in Christian theologies) in the wake of the Enlightenment that is stamped above all by the recognition of the autonomy of scientific or academic knowledge and the necessity of the claim of theology within academic discourse. And this attitude is seen and criticised as the relativisation of the truth claim and as bowing to pure rationality (Nasr, 1990, 17). Instead of questioning the truth content of its own statements and being admitted to the academic discourse to facilitate exiting from its "self-incurred tutelage" (Kant, 1999, 20, quoted in Perry et al., 1995, 56 f.), Islamic theology is currently dominated by approaches that are determined to avoid the 'Western path' and to promote a kind of Islamicisation of knowledge or the sciences in order to reconcile them with revelation (Uyanık, 2014). Parallel to these efforts, there is also an omnipresent tendency to view the Qur'an as the source of all knowledge in the natural sciences (Daud, 1989, 3 f.). But how important and necessary this epistemological revolution is in theology and how much Islamic theology's participation in academic discourse depends on this can be seen in the following quote by Klaus von Stosch:

> Only because Christianity faced the challenges of such objections to faith by means of reason could it develop something like modern theology, which goes beyond the project of theology in antiquity and the Middle Ages in several respects. (Von Stosch, 2012, 78)

Instead of allowing the process of questioning oneself (and partly also) relativising one's own truth claims, wide tendencies in Islamic theology have implemented a self-immunisation. Stated simply, this self-immunisation continues entrenched thought and behaviour patterns as well as sacrosanct hierarchies through isolation, so that the oft-cited 'watering down of religion' that entails enormous difficulties, especially for the religious educational context can be avoided.

These difficulties are especially visible in contexts in which other theologies have not only completed this process of change but also took into account the results emerging from that in their theology. This happened in Christian theologies in the European context. As a concrete example of this, we could mention the development of the historical-critical method in biblical studies.

As indicated above, the unsolved question of the nature and limits of religious knowledge has, led to, among other things, a widespread acceptance in Islamic theology that theological statements can be articulated as universal truths only on the basis of their relation to the Qur'an as the authentic and unfalsified Word of God. Such statements thus constitute a type of alternative source for other sciences. What is interesting here is that, contrary to widespread belief, this attitude is not a classical phenomenon (Nusseibeh, 2016) but one found in modern Islam, under which the "rich Islamic history of ideas is buried" (Von Stosch, 2016b, 145 f.) and suppressed by its own inability to deal with the achievements of the Enlightenment. This circumstance turns out to be a particular historical paradox because the European Enlightenment was based decisively on the importation of scientific and academic knowledge from Arabic countries in the Middle Ages and the early modern period (Cavallar, 2017).

This way of thinking, which views theology as a source of explanation for all the sciences, leads to an important problem that is closely connected with the view of the Qur'an as the Word of God or the understanding of revelation. The point here is that the Qur'an is not understood as a kind of orientation that has only limited application because of its linguistic and cultural imprint. Rather, it is viewed as a comprehensive and universal instruction and a communication of information about the world. This epistemological assumption often leads not only to viewing religious innovations as objectionable but as also contributing to the academic knowledge that is viewed as legitimate if they are apparently 'confirmed' by revelation or do not contradict it.

This view, which has not lost any popularity among Muslim scholars, needs to be revised if Islamic theology and religious education is to be fruitful in the European context as well. This means the following. Even if it can be correctly assumed that, as an existential human need, religion needs no further justification, theological statements – especially those that are "cognitively relevant" (Schärtl, 2004, 164) – are subject to the same academic and scientific principles as all the other sciences, regardless of whether they can be traced back to revelation or not. This is a basic condition for the further development of Islamic theology and religious pedagogy and for their integration into academic discourse in the secular context. Without this fundamental encounter and a new orientation, this attempt to introduce religious innovations, especially in the area of Islamic religious education is not credible and is condemned to failure.

Beyond the fact that a perspectivist attitude in epistemology is a condition for innovations in theology and thus also in religious education, it also leads to the development of attitudes that belong in many respects to the basic conditions of religious education in a pluralist society. As Paul Watzlawick writes:

> First, such a person would be free, for it would make him free to create his reality again and again and always anew. Second, such a person would be responsible in the deepest ethical sense, for whoever knows that he is the architect of his own reality, for whom the comfortable excuse of pointing to the constraints or guilt of other people is no longer available. And, third, this person would be conciliatory in the deepest sense of the word. (Watzlawick, 1992, 75)

With these considerations in mind, we now come to the second challenge for Islamic religious education, which is closely connected to the epistemological: the appropriate way to deal with the Islamic tradition.

4.2 The Balance between Tradition and Innovation

Common interpretations, doctrines, and experiences as well that can be characterised here as tradition are of special significance for the continuity of theology and religious education. Nothing arises in a vacuum but develops over generations. Nonetheless, traditions, especially theological ones, can also become major obstacles to innovation if they are not adequately understood and categorised. Especially religious minorities, such as Muslims in Europe, are inclined to emphasise their tradition to the religious maximum to guard against assimilation in order to thereby protect themselves and the tradition. A one-sided turn to tradition often happens in situations in which there is dissatisfaction with the current situation of one's own faith community. In such cases, there are

often calls to get 'back to their roots' in the sense of a 'back to the future'; here it is believed that the solutions to current (and future) problems are found in the past – not as it actually was but as it is construed according to their own ideas.

Precisely there we encounter a problem that cannot be underestimated: it is not the tradition as such that constitutes a hindrance but the attitude that sees a historically conditioned and, in this form, the "best possible adaptation as the only one for ever" (Watzlawick, 1983, 28). According to Watzlawick, this view of tradition leads

> to a double blindness: first a blindness to the fact that the adaptation in question is, through the passage of time, no longer the best possible one and, second, a blindness to the fact that, in addition to that one adaptation, there is always a whole series of other solutions or at least there is now. (Ibid., 29)

This kind of view makes a renewal in continuity with the tradition impossible. For this approach to tradition implies not only the assumption that there is only one "possible, permitted, rational, meaningful, and logical solution" (ibid.) but also that this premise "[should] never be questioned; one should never play around with this fundamental assumption" (ibid., 30). As a result, "the same 'solution' is resorted to all the more, and thus the same adverse conditions are created" (ibid.).

While not exclusively specific to Islam, this understanding of tradition has been widely received in traditional Islamic doctrines, especially in fundamentalist circles. It is, however, criticised not only by the Qur'an but also by some contemporary Muslim scholars. In addition to the criticism by philosophers like Fazlur Rahman and Mohammed Arkoun, the criticism by the Arabic thinker and philosopher Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri of this understanding of tradition is extremely fruitful. In his treatise *Die Kritik der arabischen Vernunft* (Critique of Arabic Reason), Al-Jabri locates a stagnation in the Islamic understanding of tradition that is characterised by a pure reproduction of the old, and because it is bound to constant repetition is not in a position to produce anything new. According to him, the contemporary solution consists in "overcoming this understanding of tradition that is embedded in the tradition in order to develop a modern understanding and a contemporary perspective of tradition" (Al-Jabri, 2009, Position 531). In other words, Al-Jabri proposes understanding the tradition "both as continuing and as going beyond its past forms" (ibid., Position 456) and thus being liberated from the classical understanding of tradition, which implicitly conveyed with it. What can help us here is a new understanding of tradition that "includes the present, that constantly renews, is examined, and criticised" (ibid., Position 872).

In summary, it can be stated that a radical analysis of the nature of religious knowledge and the position of theological tradition is an indispensable condition for the development of an Islamic religious education that takes the Islamic tradition and the present context into account and aids in the cultivation of values that contribute to a pluralist and democratic society. Only in this way can an independently grounded Islamic religious education emerge that is not viewed as an application of theology but as generating theological knowledge from a perspective based on empiricism and education. It thus prevents theological statements from becoming ends in themselves. In the end, Islamic religious education cannot – from an educational viewpoint – be satisfied with passing on the ashes from generation to generation but needs to pass on the fire itself (Sejdini, 2016a).

It is not only religion that depends on such a theological and religious educational perspective coming out of education. Democratic and pluralist society as a whole is dependent on that as well. If we keep in mind that the secular democratic state, which is the guarantee of plurality, is based on conditions that it itself cannot guarantee (Böckenförde, 1976, 60), it becomes clear that a religious education programme is needed that can cultivate these values from an internal perspective. It is precisely there that we see the need to take the broader view or, in other words, to leave one's own shore behind in order to discover the new.

Between Certainty and Contingency: On the Way to a New Understanding of Islamic Theology and Religious Education in the European Context

1 Introduction

To choose 'Between Certainty and Contingency' as the title for an inaugural address may appear to be unusual and unexpected, given all the attempts – especially in the discussion of religious themes – at clarity, certainty, and truth. If we look at the situation in which we find ourselves, the necessity of the problematisation of clarity, certainty, and truth quickly becomes evident. Against the background of many discussions that are conducted in the context of religion, especially that of Islam, from the internal and external perspective, a tension between certainty and contingency becomes visible when we look more closely. This tension can be understood as possibility, in one way or another and thus as constantly different.

This essay is a response to that problem. It is divided into different consecutive and interwoven sections. The introduction is followed by a description of the state of affairs at this time, and the consequences of that state of affairs are outlined in the subsequent section. These consequences will then be made fruitful in approaches for a new understanding of Islamic theology and religious education in the European context. In connection with this, I will present my view of anthropology, revelation, and the significance of the context as basic components of a newly interpreted Islamic theology and religious education in the European context. This in turn permits the formulation of principles for Islamic education in the European context. The final section is concerned with the significance of these foundations for an academic encounter in Islamic theology and religious education at present.

In line with my academic-methodological approach, this essay first presents an overview of the current discourse regarding Islam.

Note: This essay is an edited version of my inaugural lecture on 13/01/2016 at the University of Innsbruck.

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2 Description of the State of Affairs

There is hardly any theme that is discussed so broadly, so intensively, so controversially, and emotionally at present as Islam; there is hardly any social area that is not permeated by the discussion on this topic. In other words, everybody is talking about Islam today. It is striking that, since the terrorist attacks on 9/11 in New York, the discourse on Islam has generally – if not exclusively – been negatively charged and far removed from the objectivity that is completely usual in other areas. This has resulted in Islam being discussed in an unreflective and undifferentiated way, especially in the media. But this has complicated possible solutions and causes rifts in our multicultural and multireligious society. An urgently necessary constructive analysis of this theme thus appears further away than ever.

If we look at the current discussion on Islam, a plurality of themes comes into view that are addressed in this context: at one point it concerns political Islam, at another the compatibility of Islam with democracy and constitutional secularity, and at yet another freedom of opinion and of religion, then women's rights, Islam's view of homosexuality, and last but not least Islam's potential for violence – and the list goes on. Given the often monocausal explanations of the problems mentioned, it is not surprising that objectivity and a concomitant analysis based on multicausal explanations fail to appear and that religion in general and Islam in particular are presented as a problem and danger for society.

This discourse on Islam is dominated at the present time by – generally speaking – two entrenched positions that make an objective analysis impossible. The first position is the main one taken by Muslims and can be characterised as an 'apologetic' approach or one in which Muslims take on the role of 'victim'. It disputes any need for reform on Islam's part and always seeks the reasons for Muslims' problems elsewhere. For this group, the advice to engage in 'self-criticism' is undesired and insulting. Critique from outside is viewed either as proof of Islamophobia by non-Muslims or, when made by Muslims, as heresy. Regarding the latter, proponents of this position have often developed conspiracy theories and see the critics as the henchmen of dark powers who want to use reforms to distort Islam into something unrecognisable. The solution is found in a backwards-looking 'back to their roots' movement in a blind imitation of the prophetic age, which promises unambiguous orientations and clear truths (Behnam & Fouad, 2014).

The second position, which dominates the discourse on Islam and is diametrically opposed to the first, is mainly represented by non-Muslims and suggests that there is an essential interrelation between Islam and violence, politics, and intolerance (Raddaz, 2005; Rhonheimer, 2012, 329). Thus, the proponents of this

position hold that Islam lacks compatibility with Western values in principle because of this interrelatedness. That is why neither consideration of human rights nor the recognition of a democratic secular society can ever be expected from Islam because they are foreign to the essence of Islam. Any attempt at a harmonisation of democratic values with Islam is, for the advocates of this position, a deviation from 'true Islam' (i.e., their understanding of true Islam) and contradicts an allegedly 'original Islam'. That is why, for the proponents of this view, those who assume several different versions of Islam are either blue-eyed non-Muslims who do not see the truth, Muslims who disguise themselves so they can infiltrate Europe and islamicise it, or Muslim heretics who have become so secularised that they no longer speak on behalf of Islam.

If we compare the beliefs of both groups, we can discover similar mindsets behind the two positions. Both assume the existence and unequivocalness of one (their own) understanding of Islam and ignore the perspectivity of their own perceptions, statements and convictions. They thus persist in the static, unchangeable truths that they see as valid for all time and which they consider themselves to be in possession of, denying directly or indirectly the presence of the other and withdrawing from the encounter with plurality. It is a mindset that has caused a great deal of suffering in human history in its various stages of development.

It is precisely this mindset that is the concern of this essay, by placing the awareness of contingency over against certainty and thematising the tension. Contingency is understood here in the sense of possibilities/awareness of possibility – entirely in the spirit of the philosophical, theological, and literary positions, it is contingency in the sense that it is also possible to conceive of something else than what actually is. According to this understanding, contingency leads to plurality, and plurality in turn draws ambivalence and ambiguity to itself (KramI, 2019, 330 – 348).

The German mathematician and physicist Max Born was probably aware of something similar. I quote him here:

> I believe that ideas like absolute correctness, absolute precision, definitive truth, etc. are fantasies that should not be admitted to any science.... This easing of our thinking seems to me to be the greatest blessing that contemporary science has brought us. But belief in a single truth and to be its possessor is the deepest root of all evil in the world. (Born, 1965, 183)

Based on these considerations, the fundamental attitudes to the academic analysis of theological and religious educational themes can be traced. With that in mind, I see myself challenged as a Muslim religious educationist to question my

own traditional foundations of theological and religious educational thinking in light of the tension between certainty and contingency.

This essay should also be understood as committed to this principle. Instead of ignoring the endeavours, tendencies, and ambivalences, Islamic religious pedagogy should be seen as an independent kind of theologising that, precisely because of those tensions, has constructive and active potential. In doing so, it sounds out the feasible ways of providing European Muslims with an approach to their religion that corresponds to the European context. It seems to be extremely important in these difficult times to be able to offer, through embedding the discipline in a university, religious educational viewpoints that are characterised by multi-perspectivalism, academic reflection, and interdisciplinary models (Sejdini, 2015b).

Such approaches promote an understanding of theology that is compatible with religious education and show a high degree of contingency sensitivity in the sense of an awareness of possibilities. The title of this essay, 'Between Certainty and Contingency', speaks of a new understanding of theology and religious education. The question arises as to what innovation consists in and whether the innovation being sought can be developed out of the Islamic perspective. Any attempt to renew an Islamic theology and religious education from outside and any introduction of foreign elements would only create resistance and isolation and would thus be condemned to failure.

3 A Contingency-Sensitive Theology and Religious Education

A theology that is compatible with religious education cannot be understood as a completed, static entity that believes itself to be in possession of the absolute truth or aspires to convey this. As Norbert Mette and Friedrich Schweitzer correctly argue, a theology that is

> to be understood as grounded in eternal and unshakeable truths, thus as speculation removed from temporal and contextual contingencies, and that claims its insights have universal validity can only lead to indoctrination and to the immaturity of its indoctrinated persons. (Mette & Schweitzer, 2002, 37)

Such a theology cannot be used for carrying out the task of education. Unfortunately, this – with a few exceptions – applies to a number of current theological approaches.

We will thus attempt to present theology here not as an isolated activity carried out by eccentric scholars in an ivory tower. Rather, it should be made clear

in our discussion how theology – in this case Islamic theology and religious education – develops on the one hand out of a specific social and cultural reality as well as, on the other, how it affects that society in turn by fulfilling the elementary function of explaining the world and the attribution of meaning for that society.

But how do we arrive a possibility-sensitive understanding in Islamic theology and religious education? What line of argument can we follow about this? To what extent can this line be compatible with the sources of Islam, and how can a theological narrowing be avoided? To be able to develop – as indicated in the above questions – authentic theological and religious educational approaches from the Islamic sources, we will explore three main pillars below that constitute basic conditions for every Islamic theology and religious education that connects with the world it lives in. If one looks at the usual Islamic theological and religious educational discussions, they reveal the greatest obstacles to such an understanding precisely in the basic pillars addressed. These pillars (anthropology, revelation, importance of the context) are programmatic for my own understanding of theology and religious education because they are the measuring stick for a quality theology and religious education.

3.1 Anthropology as a Starting Point

All theological and religious educational considerations are based on specific concepts of humanity that are usually derived from their respective holy texts. Even though these fundamental anthropological assumptions are not always the subject of reflection, they are always present. Thus, the theological and religious educational approaches provide information on the concepts of humanity that lie at their foundation. It is therefore not difficult to explore the concept of humanity that grounds a theology that forbids women from driving cars with theological arguments – thus in the name of God – as was the case until recently in Saudi Arabia.

From this perspective, it is the task of academic theology and religious education to research and explain the usually implicit concepts of humanity. This kind of explication and 'deconstruction' is a necessary measure for gaining distance to reflect and to create new approaches.

Theology and religious education are human products that – based on their relation to context and the subject – have subjective and contingent characteristics. That means that, in an anthropological analysis, pluralist concepts of humanity become visible even though the religious sources are the same. Nevertheless, the plurality of anthropological assumptions is not only due to the

perspectivity of human beings; it is also caused by the religious sources, which contain various, ambivalent, and even partly apparently contradictory expressions. Especially in Islam, the plurality of the interpretations of sources is advanced by the lack of an institutionalised authority.

The lack of a supreme theological authority in Islam that has the prerogative over interpretations of the source can appear to be a weakness in the contemporary context. Nonetheless, given the prevalent theological positions in Muslim-majority countries, God cannot be thanked enough for the lack of an Islamic 'church'. I say this not only because many colleagues who do research at European universities would not receive any *nihil obstat*, but no institutional decision is required to derive concepts of humanity from the sources that correspond to the present context, reinforce the humanistic concept of humanity, and make new theological approaches in the European context possible.

We now come to the content of new anthropological approaches, which are both sensitive to context and contingency and are authentically compatible with the Muslim tradition. Here, three characteristics can be found both in the Islamic sources and in the understanding of Muslim scholars. These characteristics are human dignity, reason, and freedom from which human responsibility is also derived.

3.1.1 Human Dignity

The Islamic sources contain many direct and indirect references to human dignity. The most important direct reference to the God-given inviolable dignity of the human person is provided in the verse in which God says that He has bestowed dignity on all people, not only Muslims (Q 17:70). Though the Qur'an does not explicitly state what that dignity consists in, it is nevertheless the most important foundation for an inclusivist understanding on which human rights can be based. Unfortunately, this approach, which places human dignity at the centre, has often not been continued – as it was in many other theologies – in classic Islamic theology. Only in Islamic mysticism can some traces of this be found (Schimmel, 1995).

In addition to the direct references found in the Qur'an, above all in the Qur'anic creation narrative, there are several indirect references that point to human dignity. Examples of these are the creation of human beings in the best possible form (Q 32:7), the in-breathing of the divine spirit (Q 32:9), as well as the appointment of the human being as God's viceregent on earth (Q 2:30) These are only some of the Qur'anic verses that point to the special status of all human beings, from which the dignity of all people can be derived (Renz, 2002).

The embedding of God-given and inviolable human dignity in theological and religious educational considerations is an indispensable condition for the development of a contingency- and context-sensitive theology and religious education. In the current context, this means that a theology that does not take human rights, in which the special dignity of all people has found expression at present, into consideration is inconceivable.

3.1.2 Reason

Another crucial anthropological feature is human reason. God has equipped human beings with reason and selected them to be God's communication partners. Because of reason, the human being is able to be addressed by the divine message and to respond to it. At the same time, however, he/she is also challenged to explore his/her environment, to enter into communication with others and to acquire new knowledge, which can in turn be put into service for humanity. That is why the Qur'an time and again challenges human beings to use their reason to continue to develop society (Q 6:32). Although the gift of reason is an essential property of the human being and the condition for communication with God, it has often been neglected in Islamic theology and religious education. Consequently, however reason, which is a gift of God and is constitutive for faith, is viewed as an obstacle and often combatted.

3.1.3 Freedom

Closely related to reason is human freedom, and here we arrive at the third anthropological property. Human freedom is also an essential characteristic, one that distinguishes humans from other creatures. It is fundamentally ambivalent: it can lead to good things or to disaster. Although human freedom as a possible source of misery was already announced by the angels, God himself wished to take that 'risk' to create a living being that, given these characteristics of dignity, reason, and freedom, is able to go his own way and to decide for or against God. This is portrayed in the Qur'an as follows:

> AND LO! Thy Sustainer said unto the angels: 'Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it.' They said: 'Wilt Thou place on it such as will spread corruption thereon and shed blood – whereas it is we who extol Thy limitless glory, and praise Thee, and hallow Thy name?' (God) answered: 'Verily, I know that which you do not know.' (Q 2:30)

These three anthropological aspects – dignity, reason, freedom – should not be viewed as isolated, for they are bound up with the responsibility that God be-

stowed on the human being for himself and for his world, and they show that the human being is responsible for his/her own actions.

Accordingly, what is needed is – as Karl Rahner formulated it – an 'anthropological turn' in Islamic theology and religious education that takes into account human beings in their responsibility and places them at the centre of Islam's theological and religious pedagogical reflections. Kenneth Cragg also advocates this approach when he says: "As reverent theists we can be sure that we shall never be far away from a living theology if we are radically and honestly committed to understanding man" (Cragg, 1977, 3). With these remarks on anthropology, we now come to two fundamental components.

3.2 Revelation of the Transference of Knowledge for Communication

Despite the anthropological notion of a free human being gifted with reason, Islam – like, incidentally, all monotheistic religions – sees divine revelation as the condition for responsible human action. Here, the question arises as to how revelation must be offered in a way that it can correspond to the anthropological properties indicated above. A revelation oriented to dignity, reason, and freedom can only be understood as a kind of communication that is directed at giving orientation to human beings through "right guidance" (Thurner, 2011).

This implies that revelation should not be understood as tutelage for humans in the form of an instruction, as the 'objective' conveying of knowledge. Nor should it be understood as something that is solely justified by an authority that stands above human reason. Rather, it should be viewed as a process of communication that involves subjectivity and is kept vital precisely through reason and freedom, constantly being interpreted anew and being made fruitful.

The primary source of revelation in Islam, the Qur'an, must also be understood in this context. Even though the Qur'an is seen as being inspired word for word, this does not present any obstacle to understanding it as a contextual process of communication (Abu-Zaid, 2008). For, as Harun Behr correctly states, "it changes one's thinking and deepens faith if history is understood not as the predicate of the Qur'an but the Qur'an as the product of history" (Behr 2014, 59).

Nevertheless, Islamic theology has, generally speaking, kept to the idea of the Qur'anic revelation as the transmission of information and instruction. Especially in fundamentalist circles, this becomes evident in an all too normative, literal, and contextless reading with an all-encompassing claim. This claim results in the human being not being taken seriously, being left to stagnate and no longer able to develop any further. In addition, truth as a whole is reduced to one revealed book. Thus, through false ascriptions, revelation, which should actually

open up ways for the development of humankind, instead becomes an obstacle to that development.

The Qur'an itself challenges human beings to use their reason and not to close themselves off from signs of God outside the Qur'an. The Qur'an says:

> Verily, in the creation of the heavens and of the earth, and the succession of night and day: and in the ships that speed through the sea with what is useful to man: and in the waters which God sends down from the sky, giving life thereby to the earth after it had been lifeless, and causing all manner of living creatures to multiply thereon: and in the change of the winds, and the clouds that run their appointed courses between sky and earth: (in all this) there are messages indeed for people who use their reason. (Q 2:164)

As Thomas Bauer says, this concerns a theology and religious education that is open to plurality and is tolerant of ambiguity (Bauer, 2011). It embraces new approaches to revelation in the sense of the anthropological characteristics of dignity, reason, and freedom.

3.3 Contextuality

Contextuality is the last of the basic pillars to which I will refer in this connection that plays a constitutive role in the development of new theological approaches. It is contextuality that brings contingency, plurality, ambivalence, and ambiguity to the fore and makes clear the mediated nature of our approaches. It thus appears, according to Joachim Willems,

> necessary to reject the idea of an unmediated depiction of the world. The image of the world that we form, thus of our natural environment and our fellow humans as well as of the values that in our view have greater or lesser validity, depends essentially on our cultural and religious context. It is not only the interpretation of experiences and perceptions that is culturally and religiously determined. Rather, there are no 'pure' experiences and perceptions that are not influenced by culture and religion. How something and the fact that something is perceived at all or experienced (and what not) occurs within a cultural-religious frame and is already the result of previous perceptions and experiences that are again constructed in a specific (culturally and religiously contingent) way. (Willems, 2011, 65)

This way of thinking makes clear that it is not possible to understand anything without including the context.

Traditionally, Islamic theology was often connected to the corresponding contexts and could stimulate those same contexts in turn. This was also the reason why the Islamic world became the centre of the civilised world between the

eighth and the twelfth centuries and enriched the world with respect to art, philosophy, and in other scientific and academic ways.

Only in the wake of an encounter with secular society, which went very badly in many regions because of colonisation, was the secular interpretation of Islam understood as a defeat and capitulation and consequently as humiliation. This led to resistance to contextualisation, as if the responsibility lay with the times and not in the inability to adapt to circumstances. This aversion to contextuality is still present in many parts of Islamic theology and religious education. Especially in a secular environment, which is strange to their tradition, Muslims see contextuality as a watering down of Islamic theology and take an apologetic attitude (Bielefeldt, 2003a). Europe is characterised by the democratic secular constitutional state. Thus, Islamic theology and religious education should include democracy and secularity as constitutive components to ensure their place in a multicultural and multireligious society.

4 Principles for Islamic Religious Education in the European Context

Starting from the basic pillars discussed above, which represent my view of theological and religious education, the justified question arises as to the possible effects of the proposed transformations in anthropology, the understanding of revelation, and contextuality for Islamic theology and religious education. This concerns the development of an Islamic religious education as a theory of religious education that meets academic and scientific standards and the European context. According to the German educationist and theologian Helmut Peukert,

> the interpretation of a living religious tradition will not only reconstruct its genesis and historical understanding. It is also directed, in its practical interpretation, at its 'application' in a contemporary situation. For the next generation is always confronted with the question whether this tradition itself opens or closes opportunities for life in the future. (Peukert, 2004a, 83)

An Islamic religious pedagogy conceived in this way should be oriented to the following principles:

- *All people are equal in dignity:* No one should be placed at a disadvantage or advantage because of his or her allegiance to a religion or non-religion. With reference to religious education, students should not be taught that their own religious group is superior to others because of religious adherence.
- *Faith is an offer by God:* As such, faith can be accepted or rejected based on one's God-given freedom. In term of religious pedagogy, this ability to decide

must be given to every person, without that person having to fear that he or she will lose any rights or respect as a person.

- *Coercion destroys faith:* A reflective religious education takes into account the unavailability of faith. To coerce faith is neither permitted nor desired nor in accordance with the Creator. Freedom is the condition for true religiosity. Only where freedom exists, to be for or against God, can one presuppose authentic religiosity. This is also clarified in the Qur'an, where we read: "The truth (has now come) from your Sustainer: let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it" (Q 18:29).
- *Faith is a personal experience:* If we assume this, Islamic religious education needs to display an attitude of recognition and respect towards other religions and worldviews. This approach constitutes the key to a respectful attitude towards the other in a multicultural and multireligious democratic society.
- *Faith does not exclude reason and science:* A properly scientific and academic religious education must keep one thing in mind: faith should not be built on the disregard of reason nor the banishment of science. The task of revelation consists in stimulating people into encounters with science and not the promotion of one's own kind of scientific knowledge. It is often overlooked

  > that it must often come down to a productive tension between religious institutions and their own traditions of knowledge management on the one hand and the culture of academic disciplines on the other. Islamic theology can do justice to its cultural and political task only if it enters into the religious discourse. (Behr, 2014, 58)

- *Not everything can be found in the texts of revelation:* Scientific and academic conclusions must neither be confirmed nor derived from these texts. The attempt to verify scientific conclusions theologically would be both a theological narrowing as well as a distortion to some extent of the fundamental intention of revelation and can lead to indoctrination and thus to immaturity (Özsoy, 2006a).
- *Maturity in the sense of taking one's own initiative as the principle of religious education:* Because of the desire to convey content, the danger of keeping the other in a state of tutelage and deciding for another is great. An Islamic religious pedagogy in our sense is not to be understood as teaching specific truths but as guiding those searching for truth.
- *Secularity and democracy as constitutive ideas of religious education:* Secularity guarantees the freedom of religion and enables the unfolding of various worldviews and religions. This alone makes religious plurality possible and entails a major challenge for religious education to cultivate religious plural-

ity, to promote it, and to see it as an enrichment. This entails the "willingness to change and to adapt" (Krainz, 2014, 61) and less "the perpetuation of habits, customs, and traditions" (ibid.). Such a religious education is inherent to a democratic ethos. This should "not only enable and allow but challenge one to engage in and promote social change. It concerns the training of a habit [of mind] that continually encounters itself as well as the world and others" (ibid.) which, in principle, means nothing other than appropriating an educational habit or a habit of education.

– *The university encounter with Islam:* Islamic self-interpretation must be transformed if it is to meet the conditions of the secular university. Here it is not a question of the "perpetuation of previous Islamic knowledge", according to the German expert on Islam Reinhard Schulze, "but the secular university determines an order of 'Islamic' knowledge that corresponds to the character of a secular university" (Schulze, 2012, 183). The condition is that both orders, 'religion and society' are viewed as mutually respectful orders (ibid.).

5 Truth, Certainty, Contingency

In the light of what I have written up till now, it is clear that the question of truth and certainty is in one way or another the core concern of all the abovementioned discussions. Therefore, Islamic theology and religious pedagogy at present, like every other theology and religious pedagogy, is concerned with, among other things, sounding out a context-sensitive approach to the problem of truth and certainty.

The religious educational task consists in reinforcing contingency-sensitivity. It is not to qualify the awareness of one's own limitations as a sign of deficiency but to use those limitations in a productive way. Precisely in this connection, it must be made clear that it cannot be a matter of eradicating contingency but one of facing it and dealing with it. From the point of view of religious pedagogy, "a deeper faith [shows itself] … not in the absence of doubt but in the constant processing of it". "Islamic theology should consequently cultivate more the attitude of questioning. Its task lies less in providing answers than making answers possible" (Behr, 2014, 59). It is, after all, not answers that open up the world; questions do. As Lotte Ingrisch writes, "we flourish not from answer to answer but from question to question" (quoted in Brunner et al., 2015, 129). Such an attitude would restore to religion, in this case Islam, its lost ability at present to speak to all of humanity and to enable it to develop theological and religious educational conceptions that speak, as one of my colleagues said, to 'both Hassan and Hans'.

Even if this contingency-sensitive attitude appears at first glance to be unacceptable, especially in religion, it represents a maxim for every theological and religious-pedagogical consideration that sees its primary task in understanding religion as a special way of being human. Viewed in this way, Islam will also be understood as one of the most superb possibilities and ways of "being human" (Smith, 1981, 12).

That this development of a contingency-sensitivity is possible despite all difficulties is shown in an impressive way by the ideas of a shaman. I will close this essay with quoting him:

> Question: 'Why should someone follow a spiritual path if all one desires at the end is the knowledge that one does not know?' Shaman: 'There is a beauty in this kind of not-knowing. It is a not-knowing and not a cluelessness. And with time, you desire to reach a point in which you embrace the idea that you know nothing. You have thus come so far that this not knowing actually becomes enjoyable because it lets you remain open to constantly expand your perception. It is like a dance, remaining stable and open at the same time. It is truly an interesting dance because it is a skill. Everyone can learn a skill, but this kind of skill is very difficult to learn because it is so contrary to our usual way of thinking. You must know that at bottom you know nothing and must be content with that. In this way, you will always be open to the mystery. In my view, this is what every good spiritual path should teach. (Kalisch, 2010, 51)

Foundations of a Theology-Sensitive and Participant-Centred Model for Islamic Religious Education and Religious Didactics in the German-Speaking Context

Under the impact of international political events, the question of the nature of Islamic religious education in the European context has been raised increasingly in recent years. It is not easy to answer this question, for the academic and scientific analysis of Islamic themes relevant for theology and religious education in the European context is still in its infancy. Starting from this situation and following the 'Innsbruck model of religious education' (Sejdini, 2020a), I will present a possible framework for a theology-sensitive and participant-centred model for Islamic religious education.

1 Current Developments in the Field of Islamic Religious Education

Muslims have lived in Western Europe for centuries, and the number of Muslims living there has been rising constantly since the 1960s. Despite that, no approaches worthy of mention have been developed in the field of Islamic theology and religious education that led to the further development of Islamic religious education in the European context in relation to the new context – in this case, Europe – of classical Islamic theology and the contemporary academic paradigm.[1] There are many reasons why this development has not taken place. Nevertheless, it can be stated that the lack of university institutions for study and research in these field is an important reason why we do not yet have Islamic religious education with a European stamp.

The consequence of the absence of such an Islamic theology and religious pedagogy can best be seen via the 'Austrian model'. Islamic religious education

1 The emphasis on the European context is based on the assumption that genuine religious education only occurs through taking one's own life circumstances into account. That is why those conceptions of religious education that arose in other contexts and surroundings cannot be transferred to Europe because they derive in part from a completely different understanding of religious education. Lamya Kaddor expresses it in this way: "The Turkish, Arabic, or Indonesian understanding of 'Religion and Pedagogy' is completely different in general from the German-European understanding of religious education" (Kaddor, 2009, 39 f.).

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has been offered at public schools in Austria since 1982/83 – following the official recognition of the Islamic Religious Community in Austria (Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft in Österreich [IGGÖ]) in 1979 (Heine et al., 2012, 55 – 64) – and an extramural education programme for Islamic religion teachers has been present since 1998 (Khorchide, 2009, 43 – 49). Nonetheless, we cannot point to any academic developments in Islamic theology and religious education (Mohr, 2006, 143 – 196). To the contrary, despite a long tradition, the Austrian praxis in Islamic religious education, as well as Islamic teacher training, is not seldom perceived as a "negative example" (Mohr & Kiefer, 2009, 20).

Beginning in 2006, Islamic study programmes were set up at Austrian and German universities (Özdil, 2011; Aslan, 2012). Only then did the first attempts at an academic and scientific analysis of themes relevant to theology and religious education in the European context emerge (Nipkow, 2008). But the academic analysis in theology and religious education is still in an orientation and self-affirmation phase at present, for the new university study programmes have to deal not only with the usual teething issues but with additional Islam-specific and situational issues as well. This included, among other things, the high expectations of society and political actors regarding themes like integration and deradicalisation as well as the lack of academically qualified people in Islamic religious education (Aslan, 2008, 74).

In addition to addressing the organisational, personal, and socio-political hurdles, the Islamic religious educationist in Osnabruck, Bülent Uçar, discusses, among other things, the inadequacies in content in his analysis of the situation of Islamic didactics in Germany. He includes here above all the inadequate internal Islamic discussion, the lack "of serious foundational research" (Uçar, 2008, 121) in Islamic didactics, and the insufficient consideration of the lived reality of the pupils (ibid.). The Muslim religious educationist Harun Behr gets to the heart of this when he says:

> As Muslims, we also have to deal with educational problems. They are the result of the structural lack of a theologically justifiable and nonetheless rational theory of Islamic education and training that are pragmatically conceived. (Behr, 2008, 49)

These statements indicate that there is still a long way to go and a profound encounter with Islamic themes lies ahead before independent conceptions of Islamic religious education in the European context develop.

The demand for a thorough academic internal Islamic discussion is therefore indispensable. The majority of actual publications in the field of Islamic religious education give the impression that Islamic religious education in the European context can be developed without any fundamental and deep analyses of

central theological themes like the understanding of revelation, the meaning of the Qur'an, the Islamic concept of humanity, etc. Here – depending on one's personal attitude – either a pure modification of classical Islamic doctrines or an adaptation of the Christian conceptions of religious education would suffice.

This demand does not entail either a break with the Islamic tradition or a disengagement and isolation from developments in Christian religious education, which would contradict the aim of this essay. It does entail, however, the inevitability of an analysis of theological content if Islamic religious education is to be more than an application of Islamic theology. In this process, it is a matter of something that Christian religious education has also gone through and is still going through to some extent (Lachmann, 2011).

The naive idea that a fundamental discussion of themes of Islamic theology can be avoided on the one hand and the partly insufficient understanding of the history of religious education in German-speaking areas on the other often leads to irreconcilable contradictory positions in religious didactics being held by one and the same person. This makes a discussion of these standpoints impossible. For example, one publication defines the task area of Islamic religious didactics as "reflection on the content to be taught and the investigation of its legitimation, relevance" (Dafir, 2013, 13) and bemoans the frequent reduction of didactics to and its "incorrect confusion" (ibid., 34) with method. And then the author immediately argues that "[i]t should not be forgotten that didactics is purely a means, a method for opening up religion" (ibid., 17). Because of these contradictory positions in one and the same publication, it is not easy to determine which direction is suggested for Islamic religious education and religious didactics. Statements like these reveal that the development of Islamic religious education and religious didactics in the European context is still in its infancy, and an analysis of content is imminent.

Against this background, this contribution will provide stimuli for the development of "theologically justifiable and nevertheless rational theories of Islamic education and training" (Behr, 2008, 49) in the European context.[2] In doing so, it will assume current developments in the field of Islamic religious education in line with Islamic anthropology as well as the "Innsbruck model for the education

2 There are two crucial grounds why the Innsbruck model is used here as a source of inspiration. First, because of the establishment of Islamic religious education at the University of Innsbruck, a very intense collaboration with Catholic religious education has developed that entails a closer encounter with the Innsbruck model. Even more important is the orientation of the Innsbruck model, its orientation to the subject and its contextuality. Its understanding of truth and its communicative theological approach are universal aspects that can also be transferred to non-Christian contexts.

of religion teachers" (Scharer, 2000, 2013; Kraml & Sejdini 2015); here also called the 'Innsbruck model for religious didactics'.

2 Fundamentals of an Islamic Theological Anthropology

Theological anthropology provides an indispensable foundation for religious education and religious didactics. Only in relation to the theological concept of humanity can a religious educational/religious didactical approach be formed that can also do justice to a theologically inspired religious pedagogy.

Just as for Islamic theology as a whole, the Qur'an is the most important source for the field of Islamic anthropology and the "non-negotiable normative basis for its concept of humanity" (Wielandt, 1994, 97). Given the many Qur'anic verses that are relevant for anthropology, we can – to stay with the bounds of this contribution – only look at the most important verses here. Also, we can only give an overview of the Islamic concept of humanity with a view to religious education and religious didactics.[3]

According to the Qur'an, God, the Creator, created humans in optimum form (Q 32:7), breathed his own spirit into them (Q 32:9), bestowed dignity on them (Q 17:70), named them his viceregent on earth (Q 2:30), and placed the world at their disposal (Q 20:55). Furthermore, according to the Qur'an, the human being is equipped with various competences for the administration and the appropriate treatment of his environment, including his intellect (Q 39:9). The Qur'an calls freedom of the will another important human property (Q 6:169), which makes the human being responsible for his/her acts.

With respect to religious education, the verses from the second *sura* (Q 2:30 – 34) that deal with the creation of Adam and the conversation of God with the angels about his project are at the heart of Islamic anthropology.[4] We read:

> AND LO! Thy Sustainer said unto the angels: 'Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it.' They said: 'Wilt Thou place on it such as will spread corruption thereon and shed blood – whereas it is we who extol Thy limitless glory, and praise Thee, and hallow Thy name?' (God) answered: 'Verily, I know that which you do not know.' And

3 In this connection, the view of Ismail Cerrahoglu, a Turkish professor of Qur'anic hermeneutics, is interesting. In his essay on the creation narratives in the Qur'an, he holds that the Qur'anic narratives, which include the creation of human beings, are actually concerned with ethics and not intended to present a historical event (Cerrahoglu, 1972, 86).

4 For more on the theme of Islamic anthropology, see Bouman, 1989; Wielandt, 1994; Renz, 2002; Habābī, 2010; Hajatpour, 2013.

> He imparted unto Adam the names of all things; then He brought them within the ken of the angels and said: 'Declare unto Me the names of these (things), if what you say is true.' They replied: 'Limitless art Thou in Thy glory! No knowledge have we save that which Thou hast imparted unto us. Verily, Thou alone art all-knowing, truly wise.' Said He: 'O Adam, convey unto them the names of these (things).' And as soon as (Adam) had conveyed unto them their names, (God) said: 'Did I not say unto you, "Verily, I alone know the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth, and know all that you bring into the open and all that you would conceal?" And when We told the angels, "Prostrate yourselves before Adam!" – they all prostrated themselves, save Iblīs, who refused and gloried in his arrogance: and thus he became one of those who deny the truth.' (Q 2:30 – 34)

This passage makes clear that in these Qur'anic verses the human being is quite special. Despite his potential to cause misery – which is also recognised by the angels – he is entrusted by God because of the special gifts God has bestowed on him with the honourable task of being God's viceregent on earth. Although there are various ideas about what constitutes human dignity, it is important here to maintain that this dignity is given to every human being as something substantial and inviolable, despite his above-mentioned potential to cause misery (Q 17:70).

Moreover, it is evident from the Qur'anic verses quoted that the human being is a teachable being and characterised by that. According to Muhammad Asad, the "knowledge of all names" referred to in the verses above denote the ability of human beings for "logical definition and, thus, of conceptual thinking" (Asad, 2008, 16). Kenneth Craig also sees signs in the cited Qur'anic verses of the superiority of human beings to the angels because, according to Cragg, the bestowal of names is a classic Semitic depiction of sovereignty (Cragg, 1968, 28).

If the Qur'anic statements are now seen in a broader context, the following main features of an Islamic theological anthropology, among other things, emerge that could influence religious education and religious didactics.

- The special place of the human being in creation is an acknowledgement of the human being who, however, is given great responsibility before God: creation is entrusted to him/her and he/she is held to account in the afterlife for how he/she treats creation. Cragg gets to the heart of this when he speaks in this context with reference to the Qur'an of the dominion of the human being as a "privilege", an "entrusting", and a "gift", and not as a "right", a "possession", or "prerogative" (Cragg, 1999, 73).
- If Islam is viewed in its entirety and the Qur'anic image of humanity in particular, it becomes clear that Islam is not a religion of commandments, whose chief task is to issue commandments and prohibitions. Rather, what we have in the Qur'an is a way to be human in an Islamic way (Smith, 1981, 12). Smith expresses this as follows in essential points of mono-

theistic religion that have been forgotten: "It is a mistake to think of the Islamic as one of the several ways of being religious. Rather, for fourteen centuries the Islamic has been one of the salient ways of being human" (ibid.).
- Another anthropological feature, which affects the understanding of education and learning, consists in the conviction that, like all other people, Muslims shape their religion and are not purely passive receivers, even if they are "born" (ibid., 17) into a specific context. This assumption opens up the possibility of a continually new interpretation of religion and the restoration of a relation to the reality of life that is often lacking.

To summarise, two aspects of religion emerge in light of this anthropological understanding that connect immediately with the concept of education and thus to religious education and didactics:
- Over against the frequent perception of religion, especially in the Islamic context, as a set of rules for determining commandments and prohibitions, religion is perceived from an anthropological perspective as a "symbolic and ritual journey of the human being" (Gruber, 2003, 31) to find "his place of existence" (ibid.), a way of looking that is more suitable to the concept of education.
- Accordingly, the interpretation of a religious source or religious regulation cannot only be concerned with its genesis and the reconstruction of its own historical understanding. Rather, the interpretation must "in its practical exposition [be aimed] at a current situation and concrete subjects" (Peukert, 2004a, 83). Peukert sees an additional sharpening of the problem "when it is a question of conveying a religious tradition in educational and training processes to the following generation. Because the next generation is always confronted with the question whether this tradition itself opens up or excludes possibilities for life in the future" (ibid.)

3 Education as the Exploration of the Possibilities of Life

3.1 The Importance of Religious Education

In contrast to the current, often constrictive standardisation thinking, the concept of education can broaden the horizon and look at human beings holistically and openly in a theologically sensitive way. In the Qur'anic concept of humanity, the human being is equipped by nature with the ability to educate him- or herself. To do justice to the responsibility of being viceregent, the human being has to constantly be learning so that the relation to the world and the relation to the Creator

can be maintained and so that he is able to fulfil these tasks. There are some references in the Qur'an (Q 21:7; 39:9) that point to the necessity of a continuous education of the human being and present this development as willed by God.

Nevertheless, it is not only the fact that there *is* education that is decisive but also the *how* of this education. It makes a difference whether we – in a material understanding – see education as a one-dimensional process that is exclusively concerned with content or whether we see education as taking place in a more multidimensional and process-like way. We will view religion differently if we see religious learning and religious education as involving process, the participant, and identity than if we see it from a (non-participatory) observer's point of view. The strength of the Innsbruck model lies in the awareness of the process and in multi-perspectivalism. For this reason, we will now explore which aspects of Islamic religious education and religious didactics to be developed as theologically sensitive theories can be used for religious education.

3.2 The Innsbruck Model of Religious Didactics

The Innsbruck model of religious didactics (Scharer, 2000, 2013), which developed out of the approaches of theme-centred interaction (TCI) and communicative theology (Schneider-Landolf, Spielmann & Zitterbarth, 2009; Forschungskreis Kommunikative Theologie, 2006; Hilberath & Scharer, 2012), should be understood as stimulation to develop approaches to religious education that are suited to Islam. For, as Möller and Tschirch so aptly formulate it, "there can be no universal and normative approach to religious education" (Möller & Tschirch, 2009, 115). In what follows, the basic features of the Islamic model will be introduced by means of the key terms 'multi-dimensional', 'participant-related/identity-related', 'experience related', and 'theologically sensitive'.

The Innsbruck model of religious didactics distinguishes four perspectives that should be taken into account in reference to educational processes. Here it concerns the subjective-biographical perspective, the intersubjective-communicative perspective, the content-objective perspective and the globe/context perspective.

The research programme of communicative theology can contribute the idea of levels of theological teaching and research and the basic theological perspective to the further development of the Innsbruck model. Communicative theology distinguishes between the level of immediate participation, the level of experience and interpretation, and the level of academic reflection (Forschungskreis Kommunikative Theologie, 2006, 74 – 86). The question here is how these levels and perspectives intertwine in research and teaching on religious didactics (ibid., 86 – 93).

People come immediately into contact with each other at the level of immediate participation. Living processes occur in which individuals participate at first as educational subjects. They live in religious traditions and perform them. The individual subjects do not remain closed within themselves here. Religious communication occurs directly in interaction and communication with others. At the same time, these implementations are situated in a specific historical, social, religious, and political context and under specific conditions.

Actually, being involved and a participant in the process is temporary and fleeting. It only becomes deliberate, tangible, and able to be reflected on by education in a symbolic experience. This integrates what has been experienced in the totality of one's own life and enters into an exchange with the experiences and ideas of other persons as well as with the social political-religious context. Communicative theology speaks of the level of experience and interpretation. Here, one's own religious tradition and the other tradition are sources. This tradition represents, for its part, education in experience. That means that a hermeneutical process regarding religion and tradition is set in motion. In the field of didactic action, it essentially concerns this hermeneutical process via one's own experiences, the experiences of groups, the context, and the traditions. This process generates themes.

In teaching and research, we work on the third level of communicative theological teaching and research: the level of academic and scientific reflection (ibid., 80 – 87). This is characterised by being guided methodically and by academic reflection. Here the individual perspectives of biography, sociality, contextuality, and religious tradition or theological theory across all levels become sources (places) of theological and scientific knowledge. The decisive factor of scientific knowledge lies, however, in the link to these sources. But this should not occur in a methodical programmatic way. Rather, an attitude is required here that is nourished by fundamental theological and anthropological convictions, as the above example of the viceregent shows.

As can be concluded, religion/tradition is not a fixed and unchangeable system of belief statements that are passed down in the form of doctrines. Rather, it is a living, ever-changing structure. At the same time, the 'key points' of the Innsbruck model that recur objectively in the 'dimensions' of communicative theology and the levels of communicative theology should not be presented in an isolated way. One arrives at religious educational and theological knowledge that is theologically sensitive through interlinking the levels and dimensions (perspectives) (ibid., 86 – 92).

With a view to Islamic religious education and religious didactics, one can summarise several references that are fundamentally formative for the Innsbruck model as well as for religious education:

- The subject reference (the reference to subjects as individual persons in the educational process with their dynamic life stories);
- The reference to relation (the reference to the other, the group, the community);
- The reference to the situation (the human being should be in the position to understand his/her current life situation and his/her current experiences better and to be able to process them so that he/she can prepare for his/her future life situation);
- The reference to tradition (one's own religious tradition and other religious traditions).

In this multi-perspectivity, the Innsbruck model serves not only to shape educational processes but also to determine one's position and to account for the quality of religious didactic concepts. In this model prioritisations emphases, and one-sided views become visible and can be perceived and changed via the subjective, communicative interactive, contextual and tradition perspective. It is clear above all that it is not the reference to tradition alone that determines quality; it is much more an intertwining of the individual dimensions and levels and thus a fundamental theological religious educational and religious didactic attitude. Constant reflection is needed to be able to test the Innsbruck model. In what follows, we will briefly describe the advantages and disadvantages of this model.

3.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of the Innsbruck Model for Islamic Religious Education/Religious Didactics

The model is characterised by high flexibility and a maximum ability to adapt to current requirements, be it individual subjects, the dynamics of interaction and communication, or the contexts and traditions. Through this process orientation, phenomena like – in our case – education can be better understood. Multidimensionality takes into account the different factors of appropriation and allows religious and theological themes to enter the heart (and not only the head). Both individuals and groups are supported in their independence. In the context of process orientation, there is yet another aspect of the Innsbruck model that must be mentioned: the observation of the ambivalent and 'dark' sides of appearances and processes.

The following disadvantages can be cited. First is that the Innsbruck model demands a great deal of time and devotion with respect to implementing it. There are no shortcuts. Taking individual persons and groups into account makes the work of education all the more complicated. Much must be negotiated

with the group first. Another point – which can be doubted as to whether it is in fact a disadvantage – is the fact that instructors of educational processes are required to have competences in process, conflict, and an open attitude to theology in an open sense. This requires a high quality of education in teacher training: the interlinking of theological, didactical and pedagogical competences. This concerns especially competences in dealing with groups, i. e., leadership competences.

From an Islamic perspective, we can say the following here: as stated above, there is no concept or model of religious education or religious didactics for all. That applies to both the inter- and intraconfessional perspective. Nevertheless, there are individual aspects that, independently of their context of origination and on the basis of their universal character, can flow into different approaches to religious education while retaining their authenticity regarding content and autonomy of each religion or confession. This interaction then occurs primarily when approaches to religious education are founded on similar fundamental ideas, operate in the same context and are thus also confronted with similar challenges, as is the case, for example, with the monotheistic religions in the European context. For this reason – at least if one assumes the European context – aspects like multidimensionality, interactionality, process orientation, contingency awareness, ability to be pluralist, contextuality, and taking the reality of life into account as indispensable universal components of a 'European religious education', appear to be independent of the religious or confessional nature of the respective religion or confession.

How the individual aspects, however, are treated within specific theological and religious educational themes is left to the respective religions because, in this context, the theology of that religion plays a decisive role. This also means that the essential work of an emerging Islamic religious education in the European context consists in the incorporation of the aspects mentioned. The incorporation of these aspects, however, presupposes a specific attitude if it is a question of the universal validity of religious statements or their claim to absolute truth. To make headway in this difficult terrain, it requires – as in almost all other theologies – a paradigm shift in Islamic theology, especially in the attitude towards religious education. We will devote the next and final section of this essay to that theme.

4 Paradigm Shifts in Islamic Theology

The references to subject, relation, situation, tradition, and experience are indispensable aspects and constants of an emerging Islamic religious education in the European context. These aspects should not be understood only formally

but as constitutive elements of Islamic religious education. To guarantee a fundamental significance for these aspects that the present situation requires, as already stated, a paradigm shift in Islamic theology for constructing the necessary and indispensable interaction with Islamic religious education is needed. It is, after all, indisputable that, in addition to the education sciences, the theology of the respective religion or faith community represents the partner science of religious education (Rothgangel, 2011, 29).

We are confronted today with the precarious situation in the 'Islamic world' and a 'theological powerlessness' against the violence-promoting tendencies within Islamic theology. These factors and the question "how the adolescents of today ... can be prepared through their schooling (and training) for the imminent changes in the world in such a way ... that they will be able to help shape it responsibly" (Mette & Schweitzer, 2002, 36) also challenge Islamic religious education to make a contribution. The task of finding adequate answers in one's own tradition that can be applied in religious education can only arise through an equal relation of Islamic theology and religious education learning from each other (ibid., 38). As stated above, that is why – viewed from a contemporary perspective – a paradigm shift in Islamic theology is indispensable. A theology is needed that understands itself "as speculation based on eternal truths and thus removed from temporal and contextual coincidences and whose insights are claimed to have universal validity" (ibid., 37), seeing its practical task as making "theoretically guaranteed insights available" (ibid., 38) can only lead to indoctrination and immaturity.

But this does not imply a break with classical Islamic themes nor a degradation of these "to the rubbish heap of the past" (Mette & Schweitzer, 2002). Rather, it entails contemporising the themes in the present context to give the content life and bring it into relation with the reality of life. In this process, "religious education or religious didactics does not in any way remain a pure recipient of new and further theological developments initiated in the other theological disciplines" (ibid., 39). Rather, "for its part, religious education provides stimuli for the rest of theology that can take it further" (ibid.). Mutual recognition and a relation based on learning from each other between theology and religious education or religious didactics are essential. Only in that way can approaches to and conceptions of religious education and religious didactics emerge that can also open up the possibility for devout Muslims – in their respective contexts today as well – to be human in an Islamic way and thus make their contribution in the European context.

Value Issues in Islamic Religious Education in the Austrian Context

1 Introduction

Values involve all areas of human life and are an essential foundation of social life. Without a basic consensus about specific values, peaceful co-existence – especially in a pluralist society – is hardly possible. The question of what obtains as a value, however, as well as the obligatory nature and changeability of values are highly complex and controversial themes. Views on this can vary depending on the standpoint of the observers. These various approaches become especially visible in the present debates on values because "the plurality and competition of views about values, without any prerogative being granted in a binding way" (Fees, 2000, 9) are seen as a feature of pluralist modernity.

In this connection, there is a need, given the permanent social, political, and economic changes, for a continuous analysis of the present notions of values that are not left untouched by these changes. Especially in times of upheaval, which lead to radical social changes, the question of values arises in a completely particular way because traditional value systems are questioned and challenged with respect to whether they are self-evident. Accordingly, the debate on values appears in many respects to be extremely relevant in a globalised, multicultural present stamped by religious and worldview plurality.

In view of the changing conditions, as one of the most important pluralist societies of the world, Europe is also challenged to raise the question of the central values of European society. Especially with the increase in the Muslim portion of the European population, there can be no mistake about the desire for a debate on 'European values'. The particular focus of the current debates on values on Islam also rests on, in addition to the growing numbers of Muslims living in Europe, the strongly anchored assumption – at least since 9/11 – on the incompatibility of Islam with Western values. It would not be an exaggeration in this context to assert that Muslims or Islam constitute an important factor of the current debates because Islam is often viewed as a 'genuinely foreign' religion.

But we should not underestimate the number of Muslim immigrants in Europe who do not have an easy time with the values of the majority society (Koopmans, 2013). The difficulty here consists on the one hand in the fact that there are few or hardly any binding values that extend to the whole majority society. On the other hand, there is the fact that the immigrants come from contexts with values that are very different from those of most people in Europe. It is thus particularly difficult if specific fundamental values of the majority society, which

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have a universal character, are rejected in line with one's own religion, which can have serious consequences in a pluralist society. This religiously justified rejection of specific fundamental values is especially problematic because they are based on apparently unchanging religious sources of a normative character and are passed on from generation to generation in the European context unhindered. And it is precisely in this connection that the importance of Islamic religious education and that of the religious teacher training connected with that becomes apparent. Thus, Islamic religious education is a one-time opportunity to acquaint Muslim pupils as early as possible with values that are essential for the cultivation of a pluralist society and to have them internalise them. "Education in values is referred to religion; consequently, children and adolescents can be given 'bones of contention' early on, by which they can test, reflect on, reject, or reinforce their attitudes" (Joas & Nutzinger, 2007, 42).

To determine how to deal with questions of values in the framework of Islamic religious education in Austria, in this essay I will analyse primarily the curriculum for Islamic religious education in Austria and the official textbooks regarding specific values that are indispensable for a pluralist society. The major challenge that becomes manifest in the analysis of value issues in Islamic religious education is the establishment of specific values that will be looked at here. Given the impossibility of dealing with all value questions that are discussed in the framework of Islamic religious education, a selection of specific values cannot be avoided. Here two points are important: (1) first, I will discuss those values that, in my view, constitute the most important foundations for a pluralist, democratic society; (2) I will also thematise those values that, according to me, not only form the foundations of a pluralist society but also, as stated above, represent a major obstacle to the integration of Muslims into European society. Thus, on the one hand, the debate on values in Islamic religious education should be described, and, on the other, how values that are generally seen as fundamental for a pluralist society are dealt with in Islamic religious education should be explored. We will therefore at least indirectly answer the question as to whether 'European' and 'Islamic' values are still compatible according to the curriculum.[1]

To this end, we will devote ourselves in this essay to human dignity and human rights, religious and worldview plurality, freedom of opinion and reli-

1 However absurd these conceptual constructions may appear, they dominate because of the constant use in the media, in politics, and, through many popular academics, in our speech. On this, see Bielefeldt, 2003b.

gion, as well as to interreligious dialogue. In my view, all this constitutes the foundations for a pluralist society.

2 The Inviolable Dignity of the Human Being

A pluralist democratic society is based primarily on the equality of all people. Thus, what humans have in common with regard to essence is emphasised above the accidental divisions that constitute the individuality of the human being. This is an important foundation for a society in which people are seen as equal regardless of their ethnic background, origin and religion, their gender, their physical and mental condition, or their age. Only the fact of their being human is grounds for equality. The equality of all people can, however, only be guaranteed if it is assumed that all human beings possess inviolable dignity by birth because of their humanity (Sejdini, 2016a, 22). The inviolable and, from a theological perspective, God-given dignity of the human being is thus the foundation of every education in value because it also constitutes the basis of all rights, which are called human rights today and that legally guarantee the equality of all people (Bielefeldt, 2015, 27).

For this reason, the encounter with the question of the dignity of the human being and concomitant rights is an important value issue that is to be discussed in particular within the framework of Islamic religious education. For although the inviolability of human dignity has been recognised in almost all religions in the meantime, there are still enough groups and currents that view dignity as the exclusive right of the adherents of their views. Given the religiously motivated violence that is becoming increasingly part of everyday life, it is inescapable that this theme is to be addressed within the framework of Islamic religious education.

In this sense, the theme of human dignity is treated extensively and thoroughly in the curricula and the textbooks for Islamic religious education. The intensity and clarity with which the theme of human rights is approached within the framework of the Islamic religious education shows unmistakably that Islamic religious instruction sees itself as a place for the encounter with the question of human dignity. This question also needs to be grounded theologically, for the maintenance of a pluralist society.

In connection with this, we will look at a few instances below in which this theme is taken up. Even though the encounter with the question of human dignity is more suited to the higher school levels because of its complexity, the first impulses within Islamic religious education were first applied in the elementary schools. Under the title ‘Alle Menschen sind gleich – nur Gott is einzig’ (All Peo-

ple are Equal – Only God is Unique), it is was already made clear at the third level of the elementary school through references to specific verses in the Qur'an and a statement by the prophet Muhammad that human dignity is inviolable and that the other characteristics of being human should have no effect on the human being's God-given dignity. On this point, the curriculum reads: "The students should internalise that no human being is better than others purely on the basis of external features. All people are equal" (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011a, 10).

In addition to the various thematic fields that are included in the curricula for Islamic religious education and indirectly take up the theme of human dignity, there are also other thematic areas that concern themselves explicitly with this theme. Thus, human dignity is treated anew in the ninth level in vocational educational training (VET) schools and colleges. Under the heading 'Der Mensch' (The Human Being), a theological grounding for human dignity is sought in the curriculum for Islamic religious education. We read: "The students will understand that all people, independent of their origin, are equal in dignity (*karamat*)" (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011b, 113). Consequently, it is attempted, in line with the concept of *karamat*, to legitimate human dignity based on the Qur'an, which is of enormous significance given the place of the Qur'an in Islam.[2]

In addition to the above-mentioned examples of dealing with the theme of human dignity in Islamic religious education, we should cite a few other examples in the curriculum. They are concerned with this theme from an Islamic perspective and thus address the fundamental values of pluralist society. In this connection, we should mention the sub-section of the curriculum for the twelfth level at VET schools and colleges called 'Menschen in ihrer individuellen Würde gerecht werden' (Doing Justice to People in their Individual Dignity). We read:

> Respect for all people should be built on the recognition of the individual human dignity of every human being. The practical consequences of this attitude should be discussed. A hadith reads: A funeral cortege once passed by the prophet (a. s.), and he stood up. Someone

2 It is difficult to estimate why a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, which talks about the natural aptitude for faith, has been mentioned at this point. The second part of the prophet's statement was omitted from the curriculum and can be interpreted in the sense that Islam can be viewed as the 'natural disposition' of the human being, whereas other religions are seen more as deviations – influenced by their surroundings – from the 'natural or God-given disposition'. Thus, the impression can arise that the previous anchoring of human dignity in the Qur'an is relativised here. There are, however, various possibilities of understanding this tradition, but it is mentioned here in the context of human dignity without any additional explanations. This leaves a bitter aftertaste that should have been avoided.

> remarked: "O, Messenger of Allah, it is the funeral of a Jew." The prophet (a. s.) answered: "Is it not also a soul?"' (Bukhari). (Ibid., 136)

In line with human dignity, human rights, which rest on human dignity, are also given particular attention in Islamic religious education as a special achievement of modernity. Thus, a separate section is dedicated to the analysis of this theme within the framework of Islamic religious education called 'Religion und Menschenrechte' (Religion and Human Rights). In this thematic field, according to the curriculum, "[h]ow human rights can be derived from an Islamic perspective, from the religious sources should be discussed. Here the concept of human dignity in particular should be explored" (ibid., 123).

All the examples mentioned show that Islamic religious education deals with human dignity and the concomitant human rights across several school levels. They attempt to derive these fundamental values from their own sources and to make them accessible to the pupils through logical argumentation.

While human dignity and human rights are dealt with extensively in both the curricula and the textbooks for Islamic religious education, there is no critical analysis of this theme that is so essential for the European context. The theological approaches that contradict the ideas of human dignity and are often enough present in the Muslim world are not problematised, nor are the practices of Muslim countries addressed that contradict both human dignity and human rights. That is the case, although the most precarious human rights situation in many countries influenced by Islam is not only a fact that is evidenced by various studies and reports by international institutions. This phenomenon is also increasingly being addressed or criticised by Muslim intellectuals (Würth, 2003). Mohamed Talbi writes in connection with this:

> Of course, the Islamic world, though relatively tolerant, was no exception. As everywhere in the world, human rights were violated in this area, and it still happens that here and there, they are more or less ignored. But that does not mean, as we shall soon see, that Islam as such authorizes violation of these fundamental rights. (Talbi, 1985, 100)

Because human rights violations occur precisely in countries characterised as Islamic and are partly even theologically justified, it would be meaningful – precisely in Islamic religious education – to show the dark sides or ambivalences regarding this within the Islamic community itself, including in the individual theological sources and doctrines. This could then be explained critically on the one hand, and the significance of this fundamental value and the necessity of a continuous effort on behalf of this value for pluralist society will be more obvious on the other.

The theological grounding of human dignity and human rights as essential, fundamental values of a pluralist society will naturally have other consequences if this grounding is not purely theoretical. One of the direct consequences of the acknowledgement of human dignity and human rights is primarily manifested in a respectful attitude towards religious and worldview plurality. In the next section we will look at how religious and worldview plurality is processed within the framework of Islamic religious education.

3 Plurality is Grace

A fundamentally positive attitude to plurality is of existential significance for a pluralist society. This positive attitude, however, needs to be cultivated and is not, unfortunately, self-evident, for plurality can also be perceived as a threat and a disruptive element that has to be eliminated in order to preserve one's own. It can also be seen as an enrichment and an opportunity that should be promoted. Cultural and religious and worldview plurality is viewed especially as a threat if cultures and religions are perceived as fundamentally different (Sejdini, 2015c, 12–16).

Perceiving the religious and worldview plurality as enrichment is not unproblematic, especially in the religious context, which often operates with an exclusive claim to truth. A look at the history of religions shows that religious leaders were seldom willing to allow the validity of other truth claims, especially in situations in which they possessed superior power. Only as a consequence of the Enlightenment and the resultant establishment of the secular constitutional state did some states in the West succeed in creating a comparably peaceful framework for worldview and religious plurality. This does not mean that there was no plurality before the Enlightenment, nor does it mean that the plurality after the Enlightenment was always seen as an enrichment. It only shows that the separation of church and state made it impossible to enforce the truth claim of a religion through state violence, and, in the framework of the new system, each religion had to be satisfied with representing only one of many equal truth claims (Bielefeldt, 2003a, 16).

From this historical perspective, not only does the relevance of an acknowledging and respectful attitude towards plurality become evident, but so does the necessity of a constant analysis of plurality from various perspectives. From this point of view, the encounter with plurality is an important part of religious education in a pluralist society, as it now exists in Europe. In this connection, both the challenges and the limits of plurality should be addressed within the framework of religious education and its potential and emphasised and evaluated.

Like the themes of human dignity and human rights, Islamic religious education grapples very intensively with religious and worldview plurality. Thus, according to the curriculum, the pupils at the first school level should learn that, although there are numerous differences between people, these differences are less a hindrance than an enrichment. They should learn that there are different religions with various interpretations and people freely choose their personal paths (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011a, 11). The first pages of the textbook for the first level accordingly discuss the theme 'We are one community'. The pupils are given the assignment to search for the commonalities and differences among people in pictures of people from all over the world. Thus, the abundance of the commonalities that were already known to them was emphasised (Shakir, 2013a, 11–13).

From the general school (*Hauptschule*) onwards, 'people with other beliefs' are thematised in multiple ways at every level so that the pupils discover the commonalities in the religious interpretations and, despite the differences between the individual religions as well as those between religious opinions, appropriate a healthy approach to differences and with the focus on 'friendship instead of hostility' (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011c, 9). Pupils do not only deal with the faith content of the various religions but also with their art, culture, and origins. They will therefore have a better understanding of the religions and become better acquainted with the benefits of a pluralist society. At the higher general education school, moreover, pluralism is dealt with particularly in Islam, and the origins of the different law schools with special attention to their commonalities are thematised. Moreover, there is an analysis at the eleventh level of how differences of opinion are dealt with in Islam (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011b, 188).

In general, pluralism in the classroom is viewed as a valuable extension of a society, even if the advantages of this extension should already have been taught and demonstrated in the early school years. The purpose and meaning of promoting pluralism in and through education is to convey to children and adolescents a peaceful, solidary, and respectful way of dealing with people of every faith and of every background and to motivate them to build a community despite and in view of the plurality. The lessons show that, in contrast to many prejudices, religious or ethnic differences must not be the cause of conflict or rejection and, furthermore, peaceful co-existence is not only possible but is also enriched by this plurality, which is also one of the main elements of a democratic society.

The goal is thus to establish the view that Islam is one religion like every other, with numerous different views, contradictions, opponents, and defendants, who all claim to know the absolute truth that does not, however, exist. Re-

ligious education thus seeks to counteract discrimination and, with the idea of the decentralisation of the self, to offer the pupils an attitude that creates more room for one's fellow human beings and focuses on commonalities.

4 Freedom (of Opinion) is the Foundation of Respect

To allow and to value plurality also implies the right to freedom of opinion and religion. These freedoms are included among the fundamental human rights that mark a democratic society. Precisely as is the case with the other human rights, however, these freedoms are, unfortunately, suppressed in some non-democratic countries. Not seldom this suppression is also justified religiously. That is why the thematisation of the right to freedom of opinion and religion is very important within the framework of religious education: the pupils will acquire more understanding and acceptance and thus be motivated to commit themselves to this value.

Because of the emphasis on human dignity and the human rights that emerge that as well as the appreciation of plurality, the way is being paved for a positive approach to freedom of opinion and religion within the framework of Islamic religious education. Already at the second level, general rules for communication and behaviour for a fair and respectful treatment of one's conversation partner are being dealt with, whereby the necessity for courage to express one's own opinion is emphasised here.

Under the titles 'Ich respektiere die Meinung des Anderen' (I respect the opinion of others) and 'Ich lasse dich aussprechen – so wie auch ich aussprechen möchte' (I let you speak, just as I also want to speak), the theme of freedom of opinion is already dealt with in elementary school. That should make pupils capable already at a young age of tolerance towards different opinions and views (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011a, 8). We read in the curriculum: "The pupils should learn how to deal with other opinions and how important it is to refrain from any pretentiousness and arrogance towards others" (ibid.).

At the seventh school level of general education, pupils should learn how important it is to listen, to allow the conversation partner to speak, and to attempt to understand other views. On the other hand, it is made clear that it is necessary precisely to make one's own voice heard and to make one's own point of view known (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011c, 12). At the eighth level, according to the current curriculum for Islamic religious education, the clear object of the thematic block 'Ich und Menschen mit anderen Überzeugungen' (I and People with Other Opinions) lies in the

> competence of the pupils ... to also tolerate contradictory experiences. Here it concerns the Islamic principle of tolerance, which says 'I accept and respect the fact that you have your own views and ideas that you deem to be correct and at the same time expect from you that you also accept the fact I also have my own views and ideas that I hold to be correct' – according to the Qur'anic principle 'You have your religion and way of life and I have mine'. The pupils should understand and be able to achieve this basis of a successful co-existence in dignity and respect. (Ibid., 13)

Freedom of opinion is taken up and dealt with in higher general education. In this connection, the curriculum arranges that, at the sixth level, the pupils confront the differences between people in a discursive way and do not perceive these as conflict potential or as a disadvantage, thus leading to rejection of the other (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011d, 153).

The curriculum for Islamic religious education places great value on the pupils learning to respect the privacy of others, to listen to them, show them empathy, give and accept advice, as well as to endeavour to understand. After all, the tradition of differences in opinion, especially in Islam, goes back a long way, even among Muslim scholars, for which there must be not only tolerance but a high appreciation today as well (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011b, 145 f.). At the same time, however, pupils should be inspired to engage in critical thinking in general, especially about their own religion, so that they can form their own opinions and to be able to express them (Moore, 2006, 143).

5 Many Paths, One God

Without a doubt, freedom of religion is one of the most important values of a pluralist society and the religious plurality connected with that. If freedom of religion is to be anchored in society, what is needed in addition to the legal framework is a deep conviction that appreciation of and respect towards other religions are important elements of a pluralist society. Especially in times in which other religions and worldviews are disparaged in the name of religion and their adherents oppressed, it is of enormous relevance to thematise this value in religious education to counteract the latent suspicion that religions promote violence through their claims to truth. In the context especially of the Abrahamic religions, which rest on the same monotheistic tradition, the respectful treatment of other faiths is a condition for dealing with other religions outside this tradition with respect (Sejdini, 2017b).

In connection with this, the theme of interreligious dialogue in Islamic religious education has been treated very intensively. According to the curriculum, at the fourth level of elementary school, pupils

> will be enabled to have a respectful and appreciative exchange also about religious content with children of other religious affiliations. They should recognise what numerous commonalities they have beyond their different religious affiliations and how nice it is to shape life together with others. (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011a, 17)

Here projects are recommended that should help to process and reflect on the differences between the various religions so that the pupils learn "that peaceful co-existence can be preserved through respect and recognition" (ibid.).

Moreover, the curriculum places value on the idea that commonalities and differences can be presented through the encounter with common content as well as via individuals who appear above all in both Judaism and Christianity (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011c, 3). To be able to achieve this, Muslim pupils should, according to the curriculum, learn about the Jewish view of Moses and the Christian view of Jesus (ibid.). The curriculum also provides for an analysis of the quality criteria for a successful dialogue. The pupils should

> be inspired to reflect on the value of dialogue. Here they should recognise important quality features like openness, respect, acceptance of other opinions, curiosity, being able to listen and to empathise with the other. They should think about everywhere where dialogue arises and draw the most practical consequences possible for their communication behaviour. (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011b, 115)

Furthermore, the pupils are encouraged to share the content of their religion with others and to 'invite guests to our celebrations' and at the same time to talk about the different religions, to respect other religions, and to congratulate others on their feast days (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011a, 17). The textbook *In Freundschaft leben* (Living in Friendship) for the fifth level tells stories from the perspective of different religions of how various feasts are celebrated and has Muslim children write their own stories. In this way they are prepared for life in a pluralist society and at the same time given a good exercise for interreligious dialogue (Shakir, 2013b, 69).

Problems like the Crusades, colonialism, and the Regensburg address of Pope Benedict XVI stand in the way of a deep discussion of the themes of human dignity, plurality, freedom of opinion and religion, and interreligious dialogue (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011b, 129). Nonetheless, it is striking that these themes arise very tentatively and one-sidedly.

Moreover, no religions are thematised other than Judaism and Christianity, and this is not good for our contemporary social reality.

6 The Necessity of a Critical Analysis of One's Own Religious Sources

The comments up till now regarding how we deal with value issues in Islamic religious education, which rest mainly on the analysis of the Austrian curriculum and textbooks for Islamic religious education, clearly show that the encounter with the fundamental values of the democratic pluralist society is occurring in a comprehensive way. In addition to the thematic areas already mentioned, which in my view are primarily social in nature, individual values and virtues are also thematised in Islamic religious education that can be seen as important conditions for better internalising the fundamental values mentioned. The individual values that are mentioned in the curricula for Islamic religious education and are important in our context are, among others, patience (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011c, 12), generosity (ibid.), gratitude (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011b, 114), a sense of justice (ibid., 121), selflessness, and empathy (Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur, 2011a, 15).

The analysis of curricula and textbooks cannot by itself establish how these themes are treated concretely in Islamic religious education, although that would be of enormous importance for the actual assessment of these fundamental values. Nonetheless, it is striking in the analysis of the curricula and the textbooks that a single image emerges regarding the themes mentioned, which in this connection does not appear to be very productive. As stated previously, a critical analysis is needed especially of Islam's tradition and religion or with its own sources and doctrines, and reality itself, if pupils are to reflect extensively on the theme and internalise these fundamental values. It is noteworthy that the dark sides or problematic sources and teachings in connection with human dignity, freedom of opinion and religion, religious and worldview plurality, and interreligious dialogue are concealed for the most part. Not only are critical points included very sparingly, but the calls to maturity are also placed in a simply superficial relation to concrete themes.

Although the above-mentioned fundamental values are often taken up and thematised within Islamic religious education, the nature and use of this approach to these themes shows that a critical attitude to one's own religion, which is one of the most important fundamental attitudes in a pluralist society, is not cultivated. The absence of critical discussion on fundamental values does

not, to be sure, diminish the quality of the curriculum for Islamic religious education with respect to the encounter with the fundamental values of pluralistic society. But it does show, however, that the procedure in education, which does not seem to be interested in a critical encounter, must be questioned because that encounter is urgently necessary in this context. Only if the dark sides of one's own religion are equally and deliberately addressed can there be hope that the opponents and foes of the values mentioned will not succeed in convincing the pupils of their ideas for their future lives and thus harm both the pupils and society.

Religious Plurality from the Perspective of Islamic Religious Education

1 Introduction

The complexity and multifaceted character of creation could lead us to expect that people – an important part of this creation – see plurality as an enrichment. Nevertheless, contrary to this well-intended assumption, reality often looks quite different. For various reasons, plurality – particularly in its religious and worldview manifestation – is viewed increasingly as an artificially induced situation that is owed to a wrongly understood tolerance, a situation that threatens one's own cultural and religious identity and therefore must be overcome.

One can see how non-intuitive a respectful approach to plurality or religious and worldview diversity is can also be seen in the fact that it is also being increasingly rejected in liberal democratic society. This again indicates that an attitude that guarantees a peaceful and respectful co-existence in a pluralist society can only be appropriated through reflection and self-control and must then be constantly put into practice.

An essential role in the shaping of a respective attitude to plurality naturally belongs to religions, which are instructed to encounter the growing religious and worldview diversity in our society with new and theologically grounded approaches. In contrast to the apologetic assertion that religions as such are pluralist in themselves, one can say that

> [w]ithin each of the major religions we find a range of different approaches to religious plurality, both in terms of how to understand it doctrinally and how to relate to it practically. (Schmidt-Leukel, 2017, 1)

To conclude from this that religions fundamentally lack an ability for plurality would be almost as wrong as insisting on the opposite. To be sure, it is not a commandment simply written down in the sources, simply waiting to be discovered. On the contrary, a special mindset and a hermeneutical ability are needed to base a religious and worldview pluralism on these sources from a religious or theological perspective. Numerous examples of religious intolerance towards those of other faiths and dissidents in history and in the present reveal the ambivalent nature of religions. At the same time, they indicate the necessity of a suitable, contextual approach to the religious sources that do no more than open up the possibility of developing a respectful attitude toward the religious and worldview plurality based on one's own sources.

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Islamic theology and religious education cannot avoid this task of course. Particularly in religious and worldview pluralist societies like the European one, theological and religious educational approaches are needed on whose foundation plurality can be understood as a natural enrichment and an internal theological perspective can be grounded. It is true that – due to the increasing interreligious collaboration in recent years as well as the increase in religiously motivated violence by radicalised Muslim youth – the question of a respectful approach to religious and worldview plurality is also being introduced more and more by Muslims themselves, and classical positions in Islamic theology that stand in the way of plurality are being re-examined (Wielandt, 2007). Nonetheless, there are still no well thought out theological approaches that have been formulated – a condition that can turn out to be disastrous for Islamic religious education (Amirpur, 2015, 168). However unimportant the consequences may be for societies that are culturally and religiously and ideologically homogenous, for a pluralist society, such approaches are a "necessary condition for survival" (Peukert, 2004b, 364). Precisely in the Austrian context in which confessional-collaborative religious education models are being tried out and theological and religious educational training is done interreligiously in many places, there would be hardly any prospect of success without a respectful attitude towards religious and worldview plurality (Sejdini, Kraml & Scharer, 2020).

Accordingly, one of the greatest challenges for Islamic theology and religious education in the European context consists in supplying the stated lack – including through the development of new approaches that enable and promote a respectful approach to diversity. Here the cultivation of such an attitude – right in the teacher education programme and religious education – is anything but an easy task: this process is nonetheless influenced by many factors that follow different, indeed even contradictory, interests and logic. For example, in addition to institutional stipulations, various epistemological, theological, pedagogical, and especially anthropological assumptions and approaches based on different premises enter into theological and religious educational approaches.

Because these approaches, which stamp the attitudes to plurality as a whole, also provide information on the ability of theological and religious educational approaches to promote diversity, they should be assessed first. Given that we cannot, for various reasons, look at all approaches, we will focus in this essay on the theological conditions for a pluralist Islamic education programme that can be a viable foundation for a respectful approach to religious and worldview plurality. To that end, the present theological approaches to religious and worldview plurality will be briefly presented in the next section. After that, I will attempt to explain such plurality from the perspective of Islamic theology. Finally,

I will present the necessary conditions for such an approach to religious education.

2 Approaches to the Religious Other

The question of how to deal with the other, the stranger means that there is no community that does not see itself as confronted by great challenges. This also obtains for the religious context. Given the increase in religious plurality and the concomitant rise in competing religious worldviews, religions are required to interpret – from their own perspective – and to define religious plurality and their mutual relations. This task has indeed, according to Christian Danz, gained urgency through the "modernisation moves of the last 200 years" (Danz, 2010, 23) and the subsequent globalisation, but it is not, however, new. Religions have been guided right from the start by the need to interpret (anew) their cultural, religious, and political environments and to place themselves in relation to it. Accordingly, this theme, at least in the Islamic context, already penetrated the sacred scriptures and the early modern theological discussions and treatises. The statements in the scriptures and views of the scholars are predominantly related of course to those religious traditions and groups that were present in the immediate cultural and geographical environment of their context of origination. This has changed with time. On the one hand, the focus, which was originally directed at the immediate environment expanded; on the other hand, various, even contradictory, opinions arose within the religions themselves on how to deal with religious diversity (Schmidt-Leukel, 2019, 14). Thus arose a plethora of different, diverging approaches with respect to orientation. In the modern period, the first attempts at a categorisation or defining of new relations between one's own and other religions occurred in the Christian context. According to Danz, they naturally dealt first with the relation between Christianity and the other religions because

> above all the transformation process, to which Christianity and Christian theology have been subject since the European Enlightenment ... also [led] increasingly to the insight that the traditional models of the relation between Christianity and the non-Christian religions are inadequate. (Danz, 2005, 13)

This original Christian 'initiative' has in the meantime been widely imposed as a model for defining relations in other religious contexts as well. A significant part in this development was played by Alan Race and Gavin D'Costa, both students of John Hick. Race devoted himself to this theme in his work published in 1983,

Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions. In 1986, D'Costa published his *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions*. Since then, in the words of Perry Schmidt-Leukel, one of the most significant representatives of the pluralist theology of religions in German-speaking areas, "a typology has spread around the globe that lists three different options for a religious interpretation of religious diversity: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2017, 3).

Even if this typology is explained in different ways, partially modified and criticised (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, 61), it still forms the foundation for all categorisation models of the attitude of religions to religious plurality.[1] We will give an overview of this typology below, in which the focus will be on pluralism, given that this essay explores the question as to whether – and, if so, how – Islamic theology allows the development of a position of religious pluralism.

2.1 Exclusivism

The first of the three elements of this typology is exclusivism, which rests on the assumption that one's own religion is superior to all others. According to Danz, the exclusivist model is a

> position, option, or attitude ... guided by the conviction that there is only one true religion and, consequently, all other religions are mere superstition, illusion, or false religions. (Danz, 2005, 57)

Even if the exclusivist model is nuanced in certain ways (Schmidt-Leukel, 1993, 167), it still stresses the principle that "the communication of salvific knowledge/revelation of a transcendent reality exists only in one religion" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2006, 16).

For demonstrable reasons, the characterisation as *exclusivist* applies to most of the classical theological approaches. On the one hand, the exclusivist position promoted the development of one's own and independent identity; on the other hand, it served – beyond the origination phase – to legitimate the religious tradition. Particularly for Christianity and Islam, this aspect was of enormous significance from the start because both, despite their unanimous appeal to the Abrahamic tradition, distinguished themselves from Judaism on central points.

This approach is problematic in many respects. The absolute truth claim that is immanent to it and the accompanying limitation of the possibility of sal-

1 For further details, see Schmidt-Leukel 1993.

vation to one's own religious tradition practically excludes a respectful interreligious dialogue on an equal footing. Moreover, by making its own internal perspective absolute, this model contradicts the elusiveness of absolute transcendence, which is anchored in various forms in the Abrahamic tradition. And finally, the exclusivist approach "clearly undermines the credibility of each religious perspective" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2017, 2f.) and thus turns out to be a precursor of naturalism, which, in distinction from exclusivism, does not concede a special position to any religion but sees a plurality of deception and error in the plurality of religions (ibid., 2017, 6).

Even if the exclusivist approach is finding less and less of a reception at present – especially in theological circles – such a view is still widespread, especially in conservative and fundamentalist circles. At first glance, this primarily salvation-centred approach has no great significance. In religiously pluralist contexts, however, it can have thoroughly fatal consequences. Johanna Pink gets to the heart of this when she writes:

> If an adherent of a religion is convinced that the adherents of all other religions are threatened with hell in the hereafter, then this may thoroughly influence his attitude in this life to these people, whether this attitude is expressed in offensive mission activity or in derogation of these people. In this respect, the relevance of the discussion on the question of admission to paradise cannot be underestimated. (Pink, 2011, 59f.)

2.2 Inclusivism

Danz writes:

> *Inclusivism* and *superiorism* characterise a religious and theological position, option, or attitude in which it is assumed that there are indeed several true religions, but one religion is more true than the others. (Danz, 2005, 62)

The inclusivist model is defined in general, according to Schmidt-Leukel, "by reference to and in demarcation from exclusivism" (Schmidt-Leukel, 1993, 167). Namely, inclusivism grants other religions a fundamental validity (Schmidt-Leukel, 2006, 16) – unlike the exclusivist model – and thus in that respect represents a considerable advance by not fundamentally denying the possibility of salvation outside its own religion. Regardless of this essential distinction from the exclusivist approach, inclusivism – and all its subgroups (Schmidt-Leukel, 1993, 167) – holds that the fullness of salvation is only found in one's own religion – whereby all other religious traditions necessarily turn out to be inferior (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, 25). The goodness of the experiences of salvation in

other religions is measured in terms of its agreement with what one's own tradition promises. The greater this agreement is, the more the other religion can be said to be 'true'. In contrast, everything in which other religions deviate from one's own is interpreted as "an expression of its inadequacy" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2006, 26).

The original advantage over exclusivism is relativised to a certain extent, and it is clear what unites the inclusivist and the exclusivist positions despite all their essential differences: the inability to cultivate a respectful view of religious plurality because the generally negative attitude of these approaches to other religions leads them to see religious diversity as a shortcoming and not as a natural enrichment. This attitude towards religious plurality leads to the contempt of other religious beliefs and excludes any respectful encounter beforehand. According to Danz, inclusivism is, in the end, nothing more than "a kind of rinsed exclusivism" that attempts "to impose an interpretation of one's existence on someone of another faith that does not correspond with the latter's own self-awareness" (Danz, 2005, 70).

If one follows Schmidt-Leukel, the proposed triad is suited not only for theological analyses. It is also "logically comprehensive and inevitable' so that 'the search for alternative typologies ... is pointless and commitment to one of the three possibilities is unavoidable" (Schmidt-Leukel, 1993, 163). The last model described by Schmidt-Leukel on the relation is, according to this triad, the pluralist model, which – as the model at the basis of this essay – will be the subject of the next section.

2.3 Pluralism

Like the inclusivist and the exclusivist positions, the pluralist approach – known in the literature as 'a pluralist theology of religions' or 'religious theological pluralism' – pursues various approaches to religious plurality (Danz, 2005). The pluralist theology of religions can be traced back to the English philosopher John Hick (d. 2012), who, in addition to being a professor of philosophy of religion, was also an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church of England. His own originally conservative evangelical orientation experienced a radical change through his encounter with other cultures and religions in his hometown of Birmingham. Furthermore, his views were decisively influenced by the theses of the famous Islamologist, theologian, and religious studies scholar, Wilfred Cantwell Smith (d. 2000) (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, 20 f.). Hick's pluralist approach influenced numerous theologians in various countries, religions, and confessions

and up until the present constitutes the foundation and starting point of many similar reflections and approaches.

With respect to content, the pluralist model shares the inclusivist view that there is also a possibility of salvation outside one's own religion; in distinction from inclusivism, however, it rejects the assertion that salvation "is achieved or achievable in its highest degree in one single religion" (Schmidt-Leukel, 1993, 168). Following Hick, in distinction from inclusivism and exclusivism, pluralism

> designates a specific theory and evaluation of religious diversity. This theory first assumes that religious truth exists – and in a sense must exist – in a diversity of forms, which are then assessed as equally valid despite their being different (Schmidt-Leukel, 2017, 1)

The main concern of the pluralist theology of religion consists essentially in placing the perception of religious plurality as an enrichment and not as a shortcoming on a solid theological footing. It sees the recognition of the equality and equal rights of every religion concerning what is held as true, authentic, and salvific for its adherents to be a basic condition for this. It advocates the belief that a religion's salvific power does not depend on its doctrinal formulas but on "the spiritual state, or existential condition, constituted by a person's present response to the ultimate divine Reality" (Hick, 1985, 29). Hick defines the positive openness to this reality as "the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness" (ibid.). In other words, "God alone … should be at the centre of religions" (Bernhardt, 1993, 146). The orientation to God is what constitutes faith – independent of the differences between the religious traditions; religions in themselves, however, are "cumulative traditions" (Hick, 1985, 30) that arose in various contexts and are distinguished from each other in a number of aspects – each in the attempt to provide an answer to the problem of transcendence. This perspective prohibits any religious tradition from elevating itself above the others because every religion can lead its adherents to this transformation, for "salvation … is not necessarily restricted within the boundaries of any one historical tradition" (ibid., 32).

This attitude should on the one hand reinforce the credibility of the different religions but on the other it should also smooth the road to a substantial interreligious dialogue. Important here above all is the awareness that this pluralist attitude "can be developed only from within the different religious traditions" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2017, 1).

To base a religious pluralist approach on one's own religious tradition is, as already maintained above, not an easy undertaking – not least of all because this approach has not only been encouraged; it has also been critiqued a great deal (ibid., 28). In particular, the pluralist theology of religions has been subject-

ed to the objection that the equality of the different religions leads to relativism. Schmidt-Leukel replies with the clarification that the pluralist position also leaves no doubt

> that not everything that is claimed and believed in religions can be equally true.... What pluralists advocate, however, is that the various ideas of transcendental reality that we find in the major religious traditions can be understood as equally valid under two conditions. (Schmidt-Leukel, 2006, 21)

The point here is not to even out the differences but to interpret them in such as way "that they can be understood as compatible in principle or even as complementarity" (ibid.).

Paul F. Knitter, another important advocate of pluralist theology, also emphasises that it is not a matter of declaring all doctrines and actions of all religions as equally valid but the recognition "that all participants in the dialogue must have equal rights to be able to conduct an actual dialogue" (Knitter, 1998, 77). For him, dialogue is the "highest good" and the "normative value" (ibid., 75 f.) in the pluralist theology of religions.

Independent of the objections raised against pluralist theology, it is indisputable that only this approach to religious plurality is able to recognise the fact of this enrichment and provide a stable foundation for interreligious dialogue and exchange grounded in mutual respect. For this dialogue to occur, the attempt to ground the religious pluralist approach theologically as a possible or favoured interpretation out of the various religious traditions must succeed. Whether – and, if so, how – this is possible from the Islamic perspective will be investigated in the next section, taking all possible consequences for Islamic religious education into account.

2.4 Islamic Approaches to Religious Plurality

The engagement with religious plurality or with other – in particular the Abrahamic – religions has a long tradition in Islam, going back to the time it originated. Muslim scholars began quite early to occupy themselves with this theme, whereby a series of different views on religious plurality emerged over the course of time. Other than often assumed, there is no shared, consistent Islamic position (Hartmann, 2006, 131). In all the generalisations suggesting such unity, to which all Muslims are bound, we encounter inadmissible simplifications that mask the internal Islamic plurality and promote the emergence of biased images of Islam that contradict reality (Zirker, 1996, 190).

Furthermore, the circumstance that Muslim scholars appeal to the well-known Islamic sources, especially the Qur'an, to ground their positions on religious plurality, should not lead us to lose sight of the fact that there is no concrete approach to religious plurality here either. To the contrary, the numerous passages in the Islamic sources can be interpreted in completely different ways.[2] That also applies to the Qur'an, the primary source of Islam, whose partly ambivalent statements allow different options with respect to determining the relationship to other religions. This is connected primarily with the fact that the Qur'an came into existence successively over a period of more than twenty years and in relation to its context, which needs to be considered in understanding the Qur'an's central meaning.

The broad range of meanings that emerge because of the ambivalent character of Qur'anic statements on religious plurality ranges from various nuanced exclusivist and inclusivist approaches to those that can be viewed as pluralist (Pink, 2011, 60). In view of this, there can be no talk of *the one* 'genuine Islamic' approach. Rather, every opinion and every view should be evaluated concerning its advantages and disadvantages as a possible approach, and it should be kept in mind that they are all subject to contextual stamps and therefore without exception perspectival and fragmentary (Hanafi, 2013, 30). This does not mean that all views are equally important and that none deserve to be rejected; it does mean, however, that, despite the differences or contradictions between them, we should not attempt to deny 'the Islamic as such' in them. For our purposes, we do not need to determine which of these approaches are authentic – which would be very difficult – but to understand the circumstances under which they arose, which arguments they follow, and what the consequences for the present are.

Consequently, this essay should also be understood as an attempt to present that aspect of plurality in various approaches in the Islamic context and to weigh the advantages and disadvantages. This should be done to make both the opportunities and the limits or challenges visible that open up in the search to deal with worldview and religious plurality in the Islamic context.

It should also be mentioned that, as an approach, religious theological pluralism arose not least because of the changes in the modern period. To search for a similar approach in the Middle Ages would be anachronistic and not expedient. And this is not because there were no approaches and behaviours geared towards the peaceful co-existence of different cultures and religions. Rather,

2 "Islam could be both 'tolerant and intolerant', and both to an extreme degree" (Hartmann, 2006, 147).

the approaches correspond with the spirit of the times and are fundamentally different from the pluralist approach proposed here (Al-Azmeh, 2009, 10).

Regardless of the different views on the proper approach to plurality in general and to other religious traditions in particular, every view that can be called 'Islamic' needs to be legitimised by the Qur'an. Because the Qur'an, as already stated, does not contain any concrete approach but instead presents numerous statements on this theme, any discussion of this theme must assess the most important Qur'anic statements.

3 The Plurality Willed by God

In addition to divine unity (*tawhid*), the Qur'an also thematises the plurality of creation: just as unity and uniqueness belong to the essence of God, so plurality belongs to the essence of creation. This plurality also extends to human beings as an essential part of creation. Despite their common origins, they are stamped by cultural, ethnic, *and* religious diversity. A central Qur'anic statement that brings the ethnic and cultural plurality to expression as a divinely intended state can be found in Q 49:13. There we read:

> O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware. (Q 49:13)

Already in this verse, which is not only a clear confession of plurality but also communicates a rejection of any claim to superiority over other cultures, the Qur'an provides a stable argumentative foundation that not only permits but even commands that plurality be understood and cultivated as a divinely willed and irreversible state of nature.

Although the focus here is on cultural and ethnic plurality, evidence can be produced via numerous Qur'anic verses that God also at least permits religious plurality, which indicates that this is to be viewed as a natural phenomenon. Several verses (Q 5:48; 6:107; 10:99; 11:118; 16:93) serve as important supports of this assumption and together point out that God, if he had so willed, could have joined humankind into one single community or could have compelled them to believe. Because this contradicts the meaning of faith – which consists above all in people having free will and consciously choosing faith – God refrained from such intervention and admonished those who seek to impose faith on others that this is neither possible nor the intention of the creator.

3.1 The Religious Others

The Qur'anic occupation with other religions did not occur in a vacuum but was embedded in the cultural context in Mecca in the seventh century in which it arose and in which it had influence. Consequently, the question of the appropriate attitude to other religions was at first limited to those religions or faith communities that were known in the Qur'an's context of origination (Hermansen, 2016, 46). This included on the one hand polytheism and on the other Judaism and Christianity, as well as Zoroastrianism (Zirker, 1996, 191). Whereas the polytheists are invited to turn from their worship of many gods and to believe in the one God, the adherents of Judaism and Christianity are called, as adherents of the same monotheistic tradition, to a common confession in the one God (Q 3:64). Adherence to the common Abrahamic tradition, to which various verses (Q 2:136; 3:84; 5:48) refer, led to an intense engagement with Judaism and Christianity. That is why there are numerous Qur'anic verses that either thematise both religions – summarised under the designation *ahl al-kitab*, i.e., the so-called people of the book or receivers of revelation – or each religion individually (Pink, 2016). Against this background, inherent tendencies of the Qur'anic perspective will be explained below by means of central Qur'anic verses. These verses have to do with the attitude towards other religions in general and Judaism and Christianity in particular.

We should first of all recall that the statements on Judaism and Christianity found throughout the Qur'an are neither chronologically nor systematically ordered. Moreover, many statements are quite ambivalent and bound to their immediate context, which hampers the determination of their precise significance and scope. These circumstances favoured the rise of different, even partly contradictory, views on what form to give to the relation to other religions (Sejdini, 2017b).

The central texts for an exclusivist attitude in the Muslim context are the following: "Behold, the only (true) religion in the sight of God is (man's) self-surrender unto Him" (Q 3:19) and "For, if one goes in search of a religion other than self-surrender unto God, it will never be accepted from him, and in the life to come he shall be among the lost" (Q 3:85). These and similar Qur'anic statements (Q 5:3) led Muslim scholars to see in exclusivism the only possible approach to other religions that was legitimated by the Qur'an. Accordingly, non-Muslims are in principle excluded from the possibility of salvation (Koçyiğit, 1989). This widespread assumption found general acceptance – with a few exceptions in Islamic mysticism – so that discussions focused more on the rights and duties of those of other faiths than on whether they enjoyed the possibility of salvation (Pink, 2011, 59).

In addition to these Qur'anic verses, which – at least at first glance – exclude the prospect of salvation outside of Islam, there are others that support a more pluralist approach. These include primarily a verse that appears in two places (Q 2:62; 5:59) in identical words. There we read:

> VERILY, those who have attained to faith (in this divine writ), as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians – all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (Q 2:62)

These verses are the most important references for inclusivist and pluralist approaches in Islamic theology. For Muhammad Asad (d. 1992), they unmistakably state that salvation does not depend on religious affiliation but on the fulfilment of the following three conditions: "belief in God, belief in the Day of Judgment, and righteous action in life" (Asad, 2008, 21). Moreover, Asad derives from them a clear rejection of any exclusivist interpretation that wants to connect the possibility of salvation to adherence to a particular religious tradition.

Qur'anic statements like those introduced here as exemplary have thus, due to their ambivalence and ambiguity regarding the approach to the religious other, bestowed complexity on the theme. This complexity is such that the Qur'an continues to be a source of controversy among Muslim scholars and a lasting source of differing opinions. The differences between the Islamic exclusivists and the pluralists did not only result from the fact that they, as stated, find support for their views in different Qur'anic verses. Rather, they also result from the fact that they interpret verses that support the other side differently in order to bring them into harmony with their own claims. Thus, for example, Muslim pluralists defend the view that the word *islam*, which appears in both versions and serves as the foundation for the exclusivist attitude does not refer to institutionalised Islam. Rather, it means the submission to God that transcends religious confessions, whereby these verses acquire a completely different meaning. Accordingly, it is not institutionalised Islam that is the object of God's good pleasure but devotion to him. Muhammad Asad argues similarly when he translates the Arabic word *islām* in both cases by "self-surrender unto God" (ibid., 95).

Again, Muslim exclusivists are opposed to the decidedly pluralist attitude advocated in the verses Q 2:62 and 5:59. They endorse the majority of commentators on the Qur'an who argue against this unequivocalness and instead

> either say that by Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans here are meant those who have actually become 'Muslims' – which interpretation is clearly belied by the fact that 'Muslims' constitute only the first of the four groups of 'those who believe' – or that they were those good

> Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans who lived before the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) – which is an even worse *tour de force*. (Rahman, 1980, 115)

The ambivalence of the Qur'anic statements is not limited to the fact that the wording in specific verses apparently contradicts the wording in others. This ambivalence also increases through the fact that there are apparently unequivocal verses, such as those cited above, that can be interpreted in different ways. Aside from political interests, there is an important reason in this double ambivalence for the fact that entire regions of the world that were under Muslim dominion have experienced periods characterised by tolerance towards those of other faiths and periods in which repression was practised (Sachedina, 2019, 70). Thus, a progressive exegesis was possible that permitted the expansion of the privileges granted to Jews and Christians to other religions not mentioned in the Qur'an (Zia-ul-Haq, 2010, 513). On the other hand, an exegesis was also possible in which entire Qur'anic verses that speak of respect towards and appreciation of those of other faiths are declared abrogated by one single verse, the so-called sword verse (Q 9:5), and the pluralist approach is denied any foundation in the Qur'an (Öztürk, 2016).

Thus, neither the numerous Qur'anic verses that simply argue for a respectful approach to those of other faiths nor the countless examples of lived Muslim tolerance found in history establish a tendency in this direction. In many areas and regions today, one can observe a stagnation or even a regression beyond the achievements of earlier, more plurality-friendly epochs (Aydın, 2019, 262).

This possibly also has to do with the far-reaching and not very reflective continuation of approaches in classical Islamic hermeneutics as well as Islamic jurisprudence, both of which enjoy dominant positions in the Islamic theological disciplines. As progressive as these approaches may have been in a certain period, they suffer from the shortcoming of, at best, professing a toleration of others. This was a tolerance that was accorded certain religious groups under specific conditions, but not an understanding of plurality that implied equal treatment and respect. This attitude – progressive for relations at the time – towards people of other faiths, which was acknowledged in general (Wielandt, 2007, 56), is an important indication of the ambivalence of Muslim sources and the flexibility of Muslim scholars in dealing with this theme. Moreover, it suggests that a hermeneutic operative in light of this progressive spirit would also be able today to develop new approaches that could encompass plurality, which are both nourished by the Muslim tradition and takes the current spirit of the times into account. This would also be in harmony with the well-known legal maxim from the Ottoman period, according to which it cannot be denied that rules also change with the times (Zia-ul-Haq, 2010, 501).

This progressive view and the requirements of the present have, pursuant to the general developmental process of pluralist approaches, encouraged a considerable number of Muslim scholars to work on theological approaches – as they occasionally did in the classic Islamic period. These approaches are intended to provide a solid basis for a pluralist Islamic theology. The central thesis of Muslim pluralists will be explored briefly below.

3.2 Muslim Voices on Plurality

The attempt to determine the relation to other religions, especially Judaism and Christianity, was already present among Muslims right from the start for the reasons cited above. The focus was then directed, according to Pink, at the

> status of non-Muslims in Muslim-majority societies, freedom of religion, and *ǧihād* – thus questions of co-existence at the time between Muslims and non-Muslims. One aspect that has been almost always concealed is, however, the theological classification of non-Muslims. (Pink, 2011, 59)

Given political developments as well as the growing religious and worldview plurality, primarily as a consequence of the Muslim presence in non-Muslim majority countries, the focus of the debate has changed, partly under duress. Under the influence of the budding pluralist approaches in Christian theology and a heightened awareness of the inadequacy of exclusivist attitudes, approaches also emerged in Islamic theology, if somewhat delayed, that can also be classified as pluralist.[3]

Even if such approaches in Islamic theology are relatively new, the number of publications on this theme have the meantime become incalculable, which is why we can only look at a few central figures and approaches here. Instead of exploring the various nuances among Muslim pluralists, in the following section I will explain those approaches that display a minimum consensus that the promise of salvation cannot be limited to Muslims alone.

Among the most important Muslim intellectuals who advocate pluralist positions and attempt to ground these in Islamic sources are Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988), Nurcholish Madjid (d. 2005), Hasan Askari (d. 2008), Asghar Ali Engineer (d. 2013), Süleyman Ateş (b. 1933), Mehmet Aydın (b. 1943), Mahmoud M. Ayoub (b. 1935) und Farid Esack (b. 1959), to name only a few (Amirpur,

3 For an overview of the theme of Islamic pluralism in the German language, cf. Ernst Fürlinger and Senad Kusur (2019); Schmidt-Leukel (2019); Amirpur (2015); Pink (2011).

2015, 167 f.). Katajun Amirpur summarises the hypothesis of Muslim pluralists, which they derive from the Qur'an, as follows:

> First, the confirmation of a general possibility of salvation for all those who live in the true fear of God and accountability, even if they are not Muslim (Q 2:62, 112, 113; 5:72; 20:112); second, the conviction that God has not left any people without the necessary revelation or prophetic right guidance (Q 5:19, 48; 10:47; 14:4; 35:24); third, the confession of the transcendence of God that goes beyond all human forms of expression (Q 17:43; 37:180; 112:4). (Amirpur, 2015, 168)

In addition to general Qur'anic frameworks, reference is made to the following basic assumptions in grounding a pluralist attitude.

The most important foundation for the Muslim pluralists is their broad understanding of Islam. In contrast to the exclusivists who, through referring to the Qur'anic verses 3:19 and 3:85 already mentioned above, limit the possibility of salvation to institutionalised Islam, pluralists advocate the view that the word *islam* in these verses does not refer to a specific religion – in this case institutionalised Islam – but to a general attitude understood as devotion to God (Izutsu, 2008, 217 f.). Consequently, every person who believes in the uniqueness of God and serves him is a *muslim* at heart, even without explicitly confessing institutionalised Islam (Ateş, 1998, 11). In the words of Süleyman Ateş, the respected Turkish exegete and former head of the Turkish Diyanet (Department of Religious Affairs), *islam* is

> not only the designation for the religion that the Prophet Muhammad proclaimed, but Islam is the common name of the religion that God proclaimed to people from Adam to the Prophet Muhammad. (Ibid., 24 f.)

Ateş does not see the distinction between the individual religions in the essence of the revelations that consist in serving God and doing good deeds. He finds that distinction, rather, in human nature (ibid., 13).

Nurcholish Madjid also argues in a similar fashion when he distinguishes between a 'universal way' that all religions share and a 'particular way' that differs from religion to religion. He therefore argues for maintaining the idea of universality, while in practice using the various forms and making them productive for the common good (Madjid, 2005, 212). Mahmoud M. Ayoub endorses this view with the remark that the meaning of the concept *islam* is not exhausted in the designation of a specific religion: "The term *islam*, in this sense, applies to the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, to humankind and to everything that God created" (Ayoub, 2016, 278 f.). This view, which constitutes the common basis for Muslim pluralists, paves the way to the recognition of different

experiences of the transcendent as potential ways of salvation and to taking up a respectful dialogue in which the primary concern is to understand the transcendental dimension of the other.

As a further argument for the separation of institutionalised Islam from *islam* in the sense of devotion to God, the Muslim pluralists also use the verses Q 2:62 and Q 5:59, in which, as already mentioned, the possibility of salvation is extended to other religions, especially Judaism and Christianity. Appealing to the Qur'anic indication that God had turned to people over the course of time via countless prophets (Q 16:36), who communicated the message of God in their respective languages (Q 14:4), they advocated the view that the core message was the same among all (Ateş, 1998, 17), even though the form differed according to the context. Syed Vahiduddin also endorses this idea when he says: "In other words, *dīn* in its essence is the same, whereas the Way (*sharīʿa*) differs from period to period of religious history" (Vahiduddin, 1990, 6). This is why no religious community may insist its own religious tradition is superior (Ateş, 1998, 10).

There is, finally, a consensus among the Muslim pluralists also regarding the fundamental assumption of the incomprehensibility of the actual truth or God as such. Accordingly, the human being is by nature a finite and needy being in all respects, whose desire for knowledge of the absolute truth remains unfulfilled in all legitimacy – not because there is no absolute truth but because, as a finite being, he possesses neither the means nor the ability to harness for himself something of the Infinite and Wholly Other. Referring to *sura* 112:4, which underscores God's uniqueness, Madjid argues that the only absolute is God who, by definition, remains fully incomprehensible to relative beings, which includes human beings (Madjid, 2019, 44). All efforts to understand absolute reality, however good and proper they may be, are therefore inadequate for getting hold of the truth entirely (Aydın, 2019, 255), for God transcends our ability to comprehend it (Askari, 2002, 13).

The recognition of human perspectivity, especially in reference to the human ability to know the truth is a necessary condition for the cultivation of a pluralist attitude, and not only in the religious context. Only those who are aware of their own perspectivity can also encounter other approaches to truth in a respectful way and accord them the same legitimacy as their own. This may be why pluralist approaches have developed primarily in Islamic mysticism, i. e., Sufism. The humble attitude of the mystics (*sufis*) regarding absolute truth helped many of them renounce any claims to superiority and to see the good in other religions (Frembgen, 2013, 212). Even if this does not apply to all currents within Islamic mysticism – since it is as complex and multifaceted as Islam itself – Sufism can nevertheless claim to have cultivated pluralist approaches before the modern era

and have thus become a source of inspiration for Muslim intellectuals today (ibid., 211).

My remarks up to this point show that a respectful approach to religious plurality from an Islamic perspective is possible, though it is not self-evident. It is the product of a continuous struggle with Islam's own sources and doctrines as well with competing approaches that see a watering down of Islam's identity in the pluralist attitude and have the stronger argument when it comes to a literal exposition of the Islamic texts. My remarks up till now are all the more important for the theological situation of Islamic religious education. Finally, theology – in this case Islamic theology – is one of its central partner sciences. We will discuss the concrete consequences of the understandings of the relation here for religious education briefly in the next section.

4 Pluralist Approaches for Islamic Education

As already maintained at the beginning of this essay, the reality in which we live is increasingly stamped by worldview and religious plurality. If this plurality was still a limited peripheral phenomenon in a few large European cities a few years ago, it has in the meantime become an everyday reality in Western Europe. We encounter the cultural and religious other everyday – at work, at school, while shopping, and in the neighbourhood. Different cultures and religions are so closely interwoven that they can only be ignored with great difficulty. This new situation, which will crystalise further in light of current developments, confronts us with greater challenges than ever before. In particular, the plethora of cultures and religions, to use Mirjam Schambeck's words, raise the question of "How the confrontation with these cultures can succeed so that religions are taken seriously in their plurality, and this plurality becomes fruitful for good human co-existence" (Schambeck, 2013, 163). Thus, in addition to religious competence, the approach to other religions becomes a "fundamental competence for living in our world" (Schluß, 2015, 415). This approach becomes a fundamental competence not only because it is simply a condition for peaceful co-existence but also a condition for success in the international labour market where intercultural and interreligious sensitivities are always in demand.

At this point, the appeal to religion, as one of the basic pillars of society, offers to provide plausible answers to the question of the shape of a beneficial co-existence – namely, in the area of religious education and religious pedagogics associated with that. Given the changed circumstances, new approaches are needed to meet these circumstances and to enable a dialogue based on mutual dignity and willingness to learn, which not only serves the cultivation of a plu-

ralist society but also constitutes the foundation of a pluralist legal order. The new relations and the demand for the development of corresponding abilities and skills cannot be met by antiquated attitudes (Kunstmann, 2010, 262).

The appreciation of plurality and the concomitant differences is a matter of perspective and attitude – thus a perspective fixated on compliance will either conceal the differences or perceive them as a shortcoming (Kraml & Sejdini, 2015, 29). Precisely here religious education has to do justice to its role as the guide of processes of transformation and change if it is to make the promotion of an ability to deal with contingency and plurality its primary concern. The goal of religious education and thus of religious pedagogics cannot be to simply pass on theological truths; rather, as the newest theological discipline and the one most affected by change in the modern world, it is obligated not only to cultivate religious plurality but to make it the constitutive aspect of religious education (Kunstmann, 2010, 13). Finally, school is not only concerned with passing on material but also with teaching and living co-existence and thus lays the cornerstone for a respectful attitude for social life (Delory-Momberger, 2009, 298).

This situation presents Islamic religious education with the task of choosing and establishing a religious educational approach from among the theological approaches discussed above. The approach it chooses is the one that will most likely introduce young people to a respectful attitude towards religious plurality and thus create the conditions for a flourishing co-existence and the willingness to learn from each other.

The success of such a process of education in the sense of conveying an open attitude that meets the goal of religious education and is viable theologically and in a religious educational sense depends of course on taking a series of aspects into account. Here, this co-existence is threatened with the danger that it is not grounded in the conviction that plurality is willed by God and that all religions are in essence equal. Rather, at best it may be based on one of the current circumstances of forced tolerance of other religions. But tolerance alone of other religions cannot be the ideal of religious education, for it implies the inferiority of that which is to be tolerated. To guarantee a genuinely respectful approach to plurality, processes of religious education should be shaped according to some fundamental assumption. We will look at these below.

Concretely, the following perspectives emerge from the proposed approach by Muslim pluralists for Islamic religious education. These perspectives will make this approach fruitful for this area.

– The distinction between Islam as a religion, as we have known it since the Prophet Muhammad, and *islam* in the sense of devotion to God can be found in all religions but also needs to be made explicit in the framework of religious education. Based on many Qur'anic statements and supported by a

plurality of scholars, this approach offers an incontrovertible foundation for a respectful attitude to other religions. Here, on the one hand, the common origin and the essence of religion comes to the fore; on the other, it recognises that other religions can lead to salvation or are not excluded from it – and thus it also revises the widespread assumption by institutionalised Islam that all other religious traditions are null and void as potential paths to salvation. In fact, the appeal is thus issued to reflect on the common orientation to God instead of on formal differences. The perception of one's own religion as the consummation of the monotheistic tradition should not lead to denying other religions of the same tradition the right to existence. Rather, one's own religion should be seen as an alternative attempt to understand absolute truth anew in a specific historical context and to revitalise the common spirit of this religious tradition. Such an approach should be anchored in a confessionally oriented religious education to avoid slipping into exclusivism.

– This presupposes a corresponding approach to the Islamic sources, above all, the Qur'an as the revelation of God. And here we arrive at another important point that is of decisive significance for a respectful attitude from the perspective of religious education (Sejdini, 2016a). This aspect plays a more fundamental role than the others because the Qur'an is the court of appeal for all theological and religious educational reflections. This central source is not to be understood as a book of instructions but as communicative discourse. As such, it is not just that we need to take its context of origination and the needs of its first addressees into account in our interpretation. Rather, these factors have left a decisive imprint on the Qur'an itself. It is precisely with a view to the processes of religious education, the communicative aspect of the Qur'an is of enormous significance. On the one hand, this mirrors the Qur'anic reality, which is dialogical through and through. On the other hand, a way is therefore opened up for a constantly new interpretation of the fundamental Qur'anic idea that can also make the Qur'an an inexhaustible source of inspiration for religious education outside its context of origination as well. In contrast, a literal interpretation, which we see in most conservative circles, would thus not only create misunderstandings but also turn out to be an insurmountable obstacle to respectful co-existence in religious plurality. In addition to the communicative approach to the Qur'an, its ambivalent nature is also to be considered in the conception and shaping of the processes of religious education. Both aspects

have to be taken into consideration in religious education so that the pluralist potential of the Qur'an can unfold.[4]

- Connected with that – as another central aspect – is the thematisation of the fact that the absolute truth can be experienced. Even if it is generally assumed that God, because of his uniqueness, transcends all human ideas and that ideas about God say more about people than about God, the perspectivity and fragmentariness of all human attempts to experience God have to date not been taken sufficiently into account in religious education. All too often, the established teachings and interpretations of Islam are presented as unshakable eternal truths which means that all statements by other religions are heresies. This obtains, moreover, not only for the teachings of other religions but also for intrareligious deviations that are occasionally combatted more intensely than other religions. In the meantime, the notion of someone who is constantly searching, who sees her goal not in possessing the truth but – guided by humility given the infinity of the eternal – to strive unceasingly for it seems to be a meaningful one for religious education.
- As a final point, which is also connected with the preceding, the appropriate approach to the Islamic tradition as an important source of inspiration for Islamic theology and religious education should be mentioned (Sejdini, 2018). The Islamic tradition here means those approaches in theological and religious education that have been developed by Muslim scholars in a specific era and therefore necessarily accord with the spirit of the time. Precisely because these approaches do not arise in a vacuum, they must be linked up with one's own – in this case religious educational – tradition. Those models that are viewed as universally valid and, according to many conservative circles, need to be revived must be examined as well. This also concerns religious educational approaches to dealing with religious plurality that arose in a completely different context.
- These accomplishments are by no means irrelevant. Their significance, however, does not lie in their alleged function as models that should be followed by all succeeding generations. Rather, it lies in the evidence they produce that a tolerant attitude was more widespread among Muslims at that time than in other cultures and religions. In that way they could stimulate efforts to again take up the role of trailblazer and to reclaim their erstwhile position in the world as an important source of the recognition and promotion of religious plurality. In this context, the uncritical, glorifying adherence to the

4 A systematic analysis of *hadith* literature is of enormous importance here.

past would be damaging not only to the present but also to these models that doubtless had their merits in their respective contexts of origination and contributed to peaceful co-existence. An approach or model that has proved itself in a specific time and under specific conditions can still have the opposite effect under changed conditions – which does not change the fact that it was the best possible option at that time. From this perspective, Aziz al-Azmeh is right when he says:

> Muslim historical experiences can and indeed do inspire, but they inspire aesthetically, and perhaps in a general way normatively. What they cannot be allowed to do, however, is inspire the desire for their repetition. (Al-Azmeh, 2009, 15)

In other words, religious education also needs to take the dictum to heart that tradition does not offer ashes but passes on the fire.

The above-mentioned points, which can be expanded or completed, should offer stimulation for discussion and reflection – of course in the awareness of all the difficulties that are to be overcome in the establishment and implementation of pluralist approaches in religious education. That this is possible on the basis of the Islamic sources is indisputable, given the Qur'anic statements and the new pluralist approaches by Muslim scholars. Whether these approaches are rejected as a watering down and relativisation of the Islamic faith and Islamic identity or are taken sufficiently into account in present Islamic religious educational approaches is an open question (Vahiduddin, 1990, 6). What is needed above all is courage – according to the Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi (b. 1935) – "to formulate an alternative to what has been entrusted to us for a thousand years and is familiar" (Hanafi, 2013, 17).

Interreligious Dialogue from a Muslim Perspective

1 Introduction

Since the 1960s, Europe has experienced an increasing plurality of cultures and religions. In addition to entailing an enormous enrichment for society, this plurality has also presented a challenge for it as a whole. To use the opportunities offered by this cultural and religious plurality, there is, among other things, the necessity to confront the different cultures and religions and their varying – and to some extent contradictory – values and customs and to 'integrate' them into a community. This is not an easy undertaking because in addition to a recognition in principle and promotion of pluralism, common and binding basic values are also needed to be able to maintain a democratic and pluralist society (Sejdini, 2015c, 11–17).

In connection with this, religions are also challenged to contribute to a culture of the peaceful co-existence of various worldviews. Especially in times in which human life can be eliminated in the name of God, there is a need to counteract the latent suspicion that, because of their absolute truth claims and intolerance towards those of other faiths, monotheistic religions stand in the way of a pluralist society encompassing various worldviews (Assmann, 1998). Here such monocausal explanations of the phenomenon of violence mask the fact that religions are not "hermeneutically sealed off ... inner spaces" (Schmid, 2008) but are influenced by political, economic, cultural, and social factors. Therefore, such factors must also be kept in mind in interreligious dialogue so that it can yield results.

In full awareness of the complex structure and ambivalent character of the phrase 'interreligious dialogue', this essay presents a Muslim perspective that is based of course on my Islamic theology and work in pedagogics. Accordingly, the decision to use the term 'Muslim' instead of 'Islamic' is programmatic for my subject-oriented and contextual approach. This assumes that it is not religions as monolithic blocks that engage in direct dialogue but people who live in a certain context. Moreover, the subject-oriented approach is also even supported by the religious sources, which, in relation to interreligious dialogue, contain partly even apparently contradictory statements that people articulate (Abu-Zaid, 2008). Following Radtke, it can be said that, in addition to cultures, religions do not speak either, even if some explain themselves to their speakers (Radtke, 2011). In connection with this, the fundamental tendencies in the Qur'an, the

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most important Islamic source, will first be demonstrated so that we can then sound out the possibilities of interreligious dialogue from a Muslim perspective.

2 The Qur'an and the Monotheistic Tradition

Islamic theology relies on various sources. Next to the Qur'an as the word of God, the most important sources are the tradition of the prophet (Sunnah), the consensus (*ijmāʿ*) of scholars and argument by analogy (*qiyas*) (Rohe, 2009). The place of the sources within Islamic theology also emerges from this sequence. Viewed in this way, the Qur'an, which was sent to the Prophet Muhammad over a period of 23 years, is the primary source of Islamic theology. That is why in this essay we will look primarily at Qur'anic statements.

The sacred book of Muslims, the Qur'an, contains many statements about Judaism and Christianity or about Jews and Christians. This is not surprising, given that Islam sees itself as part of the monotheistic tradition. In Q 2:136 we read:

> Say: 'We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus, and that which has been vouchsafed to all the (other) prophets by their Sustainer: we make no distinction between any of them. And it is unto Him that we surrender ourselves.'

This verse clearly shows that Islam views itself as part of the monotheistic tradition and makes no distinction between the prophets who are part of that and, in the Islamic view, have been chosen by the same God and are tasked with the proclamation of the same divine message (Ateş, 1998, 16).

Belonging to the monotheistic tradition must have been decisive when the prophet Muhammad had the first Muslims emigrate to Abyssinia, where there was a Christian king at the time. The Meccan idolaters wanted the Muslims to be returned at any price. Muḥammad Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767 AD), Muhammad's first biographer, states that the preference for emigrating to Abyssinia was more a question of the justice of the king and the friendliness of the country. But even if that were so the answer[1] of the Abyssinian king, the Negus was a clear indication that the Christian faith of the king was nevertheless an important reason for choosing this place to emigrate to (Ibn Isḥāq, 2004, 65).

1 After the Negus had heard the Qur'anic statements about Jesus from the Muslims who had emigrated, he rejected the demand of the Meccan idolaters to hand over the Meccan Muslims who had fled, giving the following reason: "This revelation and the revelation of Jesus come from the same source."

Both the verse just mentioned and the tradition of the first emigration of the Muslims are two examples, among others, that point to the fact that the fundamental attitude of Islam in relation to Christianity in particular can be classified as positive. In other places, the Qur'an even goes a step further and advocates an inclusivist position regarding Jews, Christians, and adherents of other monotheistic religions. Thus, we read in the late Medinan[2] text, Q 5:69:

> [F]or, verily, those who have attained to faith (in this divine writ), as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians – all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.

There was no lack of attempts in the history of Qur'anic exegesis to exclude all non-Muslims from salvation despite the unequivocalness of this verse. But the clarity of this verse, which can also be found in Q 2:62, leaves no doubt that the Qur'an also permits an inclusivist attitude towards adherents of the religions mentioned. Muhammad Asad thus sees "a breadth of vision unparalleled in any other religious faith" (Asad, 2008, 21) in these verses. According to him, Islam thus advocates a fundamental teaching that salvation comes from faith in God, in the Day of Judgment, and depends on righteous acts. Accordingly, salvation does not depend simply on adherence to one of the religions mentioned but on the observance of the three conditions mentioned (ibid.). Through its statements, the Qur'an therefore refutes the exclusivist claim of the Jewish community at the time, according to which no one outside of Judaism would be able to enter Paradise (Q 2:111).

Another attitude that can be found in the Qur'an can best be characterised as a kind of 'differentiated' attitude towards adherents of monotheistic religions. Here it is a matter of places in the Qur'an that do not make general statements about other – in our case monotheistic – religions in their entirety but rather statements about specific individuals, groups within these religions. Here, good things are attributed to some people in Judaism and Christianity and less good things to other adherents of those religions. This differentiated attitude

2 The fact that this is a late Medinan text contradicts the reproach that it was only in its early period, when the Muslim community was still weak, that Islam emphasised its closeness to the monotheistic religions, and, when it became stronger in Medina, it showed its true face. This assumption still stokes fear in the discussion at present. The following statement can serve as an example here: "In Islam, it is precisely the other way around. Here intolerance, to the extent it is present, arises from the essence of Islam as a religion and the beginnings of its history; in contrast, tolerance arises as a strategic option and for pragmatic considerations in situations of weakness, which had to be defended over against its original charisma" (Rhonheimer, 2012, 339). For similar views see Nagel, 2005, and Raddaz, 2005.

of the Qur'an in relation to the adherents of Judaism and Christianity is found in particular in Q 3:113 – 115, where we read:

> [But] they are not all alike: among the followers of earlier revelation there are upright people, who recite God's messages throughout the night, and prostrate themselves (before Him). They believe in God and the Last Day, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and vie with one another in doing good works: and these are among the righteous. And whatever good they do, they shall never be denied the reward thereof: for, God has full knowledge of those who are conscious of Him.

In another verse we read:

> Some of the followers of earlier revelation would love to lead you astray: yet none do they lead astray but themselves, and perceive it not. (Q 3:69)

The differentiated attitude is most clearly expressed in Q 3:75:

> AND AMONG the followers of earlier revelation there is many a one who, if thou entrust him with a treasure, will (faithfully) restore it to thee; and there is among them many a one who, if thou entrust him with a tiny gold coin, will not restore it to thee unless thou keep standing over him.

Here the Qur'an expresses opposition to sweeping statements about monotheistic religions and points on the one hand to the heterogeneity of religious groups and on the other to the view that salvation is not restricted to a certain faith community. These verses thematise neither the faith nor specific doctrines of the monotheistic religions. Rather, here it is a question of clarifying that there are people among the adherents of monotheistic religions who act justly, even though they have a different understanding of God.

The third attitude concerning Judaism and Christianity, which can be derived in the Qur'anic context, is related to individual content and doctrines that are connected in the Qur'an with both religions.[3] Here the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, constitutes a central point of critique in the Qur'an. This doctrine is categorically rejected in several places in the Qur'an (Q 4:171; 5:72; 9:31). In Q 5:17 we read: "Indeed, the truth deny they who say, 'Behold, God is the Christ, son of Mary.'"

3 The formulation already points out that the Qur'an assumes some Jewish and Christian doctrines that are not present or not advocated in the respective religions. For example, the Qur'anic position that the Jew Ezra (Uzayr) is worshipped as the son of God (Q 9:30) is completely foreign to Judaism. That is why the commentators on the Qur'an assume that this belief was probably held by only a regional group that was present in the prophet's immediate area (Ayoub, 1986).

The above-mentioned attitudes do not claim comprehensiveness because it is impossible to subordinate all Qur'anic verses to them; they display an ambivalent attitude in the Qur'an to both monotheistic religions. That is why the verses in question can be used according to the standpoint of the interpreter, both for or against interreligious dialogue. Moreover, the ambiguity and various expositions of the Qur'an are further promoted by the lack of church-like structures (Schmid, 2012, 534). For this reason, a contemporary and contextual interpretation of the Qur'an is needed – especially the verses on interhuman relations – to make an encounter with the other possible that reflects human dignity. For, in addition to the verses cited above, there are other verses in the Qur'an (Q 2:120; 5:51; 5:82; 9:29) that would represent a major obstacle to interreligious dialogue in a non-contextual interpretation. These are verses that fundamentalists refer to today to recruit young people for their own cause. Viewed from this perspective, Islam's reference to the monotheistic tradition is both a chance to compete in doing good things on the basis of its common origin with them and also a major challenge, despite some mutually irreconcilable differences, to influence society in a positive way.

Nevertheless, referring to positive and appreciative verses in the Qur'an is not enough. The contradictory Qur'anic verses are numerous and need a particular hermeneutic if they are not to be understood as hostile to dialogue. In view of the ambivalent statements of the sources, constructive interreligious dialogue requires a multi-perspectival and contingency-sensitive attitude. Only through that can there be an interreligious dialogue that benefits all sides. To advance interreligious dialogue, various conditions need to be fulfilled, which we will explore in the following section.

3 Interreligious Dialogue: Yes, but How?

A look at human history shows that, with few exceptions, this history is characterised by faith (Smith, 1991, 156). That is why faith can be viewed as an existential phenomenon that is closely interwoven with human life (Schärtl, 2004, 164). This interwovenness of faith with human life makes faith and thus religions as institutionalised forms of faith essential partners in the process of ensuring peaceful co-existence in multicultural and multireligious societies. A few requirements and conditions need to be met to give shape to interreligious dialogue.

In his essay, *Hermeneutik des Dialogs aus islamischer Sicht* (The Hermeneutics of Dialogue from an Islamic Perspective), the Muslim writer Abdoldjavad Falaturi (d. 1996) analyses, among other things, the conditions or requirements for

successful interreligious dialogue. Falaturi sees empathy for the dialogue partner as the most important requirement.

> For one thing, every dialogue partner has to make the effort throughout the period of encounter to understand the other as closely as possible and to comprehend how he understands himself, and how he experiences his own religion. For another, every dialogue partner has to attempt to place himself in the situation of the other when he sets for himself the goal of understanding and feeling with the other in such a way that he understands him in his own religious awareness. (Falaturi, 2002, 74)

In addition to empathy, the revising of one's own truth claims, the expansion of the possibility of salvation outside one's own religions, and a critical approach to one's own faith doctrines, among other things, are important for Falaturi (ibid., 75). These requirements appear to be logical and comprehensible. As Hans Zirker rightly emphasises: "It is not self-defence of itself through apologetics that makes a religious community at least credible but the willingness to confront one's own reality critically" (Zirker, 1989, 167).

In this context, interreligious dialogue and, in connection with that, interreligious learning must be understood as a "general principle" (Böhm, Böhm & Deiss-Niethammer, 1999) for guaranteeing that interreligious dialogue has the required quality. Dialogue should not be seen as a watering down of one's own doctrines and as a loss of one's own identity (Müller, 2005, 145) but as the only authentic possibility to understand or to construe "what is of oneself" in the encounter with "the other" (Behr, Haußmann & Van der Velden, 2010, 221). Rabeya Müller also refers to the problem of a kind of 'detached approach' when she expresses the heart of the problem as follows:

> We emphasise our commonalities, not without immediately adding the assurance in a subordinate clause that we do so without wanting to blur our differences. What are we afraid of? Of having too much in common? Of being so close to each other? Of the loss of our own identity? (Müller, 2005, 145)

Alongside the requirements and conditions mentioned, which can be contextually expanded without further ado, taking into account the various levels of interreligious dialogue is an important factor in shaping a successful interreligious process. It is therefore important to take these levels into account because interreligious dialogue occurs on various levels, which can be quite different from each other. That is why the distinction between various levels is just as relevant as defining the requirements and conditions, for dialogue does not succeed equally at every level. That is why the various levels can help dialogue that

has become stuck at one level to continue at another without breaking the required contact.

As with the requirements, it should be kept in mind that the number and characterisations of the levels can vary according to the perspective of the observer. The levels here proposed are grounded in my own experiences in the field of interreligious dialogue and should be seen more as umbrella terms for various interreligious processes that can be conducted on the basis of their commonalities under the same characterisation. Given that it is impossible to represent all levels, we will suffice with mentioning two levels that appear to be significant in this context.

The first level concerns the personal encounters of people with different beliefs. At this level, which is often disparaged because it implies no theological content, which does not necessarily mean such content is excluded, the primary concern is to ensure the possibility of encounter for people with different beliefs and convictions who are confronted with a specific theme as needed. Here it is not the theme that is emphasised but the personal encounter, which should contribute to trust that again constitutes the foundation for further interreligious dialogue.

Another level is the so-called theological level. This is characterised by a substantive confrontation with theological and other content from one's own religious tradition. Here it is a question either of a comparative confrontation with theological content, such as belief in one God, the resurrection, salvation, etc., or general themes like protection of the environment or the neighbourhood, where common positions are mapped out. Whereas the personal encounter is emphasised more at the first level, at the second level the themes themselves are the focus.

Of course, these levels cannot be viewed in isolation, for there can be neither an encounter without content nor a discussion without an encounter. What is important, however, is the knowledge that, independent of the content of the interreligious dialogue, the human being stands at the centre with all her fears and needs and the success of which depends on the personal attitude of the individual, independent of all religious dogmas.

4 Conclusion

As emphasised several times in this essay, as a respectful and appreciative treatment of people of other religions, interreligious dialogue is the foundation of a multicultural, multireligious, and democratic society. Where there is no respect-

ful co-existence between different religions and worldviews, no culture of co-existence can thrive.

Given the ambivalent statements of the Qur'an on dealing with other religions, a serious internal Islamic confrontation with its own sources is needed to develop theological foundations that correspond to the present understanding of religious pluralism. That is why a new hermeneutical approach to the sacred texts is indispensable. This is so not because there are no foundations in Islam for a respectful co-existence with other religions but because the approaches available are meaningful only in the original context and need to be developed further and adapted to the present. Referring to a comparably tolerant approach by Islam to adherents of monotheistic religions in the past is not enough by itself. For even if, in comparison with the practices of other religions, the Muslim treatment of those of other faiths right into the Middle Ages can be correctly seen as tolerant, this does not correspond to the needs of our society. That is why the statements in the Islamic sources concerning the treatment of those of other faiths should not be viewed as static, unchangeable prescriptions fixed for all eternity but as ways of acting that were revealed in response to the context in which the Qur'an came into being. And they must be constantly interpreted anew so that a progression does not degenerate into a regression, as is unfortunately the case in many fundamentalist circles.

It is only through a contextual reading of our sources that we Muslims will succeed in entering into an honest and, for society, necessary interreligious dialogue and thus contribute to peaceful co-existence.

Foundations of Interreligious Learning from an Islamic Perspective

1 Introduction

Interreligious collaboration in religious education is a young field of research that has been gaining significance in recent decades in German-speaking areas. Interreligious approaches in educational contexts began in close conjunction with the increasing religious and worldview pluralisation of society. The constant increase in labour migration in German-speaking areas since the 1960s and 1970s led to intense discussions on how to do deal with non-Christian religions in the schools (Hellmann, 2000, 1f.; Auernheimer, 1990). These processes were also reflected in religious educational approaches in German-speaking areas, especially the countries of Austria and Germany. Our regional focus in this essay on these German-speaking areas is based on the principle of confessionalism that characterises religious education in German-speaking countries (Lüdtke & Pohl-Patalong, 2018; Lehner-Hartmann, 2020). This principle means that the officially recognised religious communities are charged with the task of giving confessional religious education at elementary and secondary schools and issuing a curriculum, and they are given the right to supervise and direct religious education and to appoint religion teachers. The state's role in religious education is limited to school organisation and discipline. The education of the religion teachers is generally done at officially recognised colleges or universities. Thus, interreligious collaboration in religious education at schools constitutes a particular challenge for German-speaking countries with their confessional religious education.

Consequently, approaches to interreligious collaboration in general and models for interreligious learning in religious educational contexts are the subject of intense discussion. Interreligious learning is understood below as forms of collaboration between various religious communities or confessions. This collaboration is concerned with the transmission, exchange, or appropriation of knowledge about different religions and the religious other in the school context and are oriented to standards of educational science (Schweitzer, 2015, 2f.). Interreligious collaboration can thereby mean various things. For example, various religious denominations can participate in the development of curricula, teachers from various faiths can transmit the content, or pupils from various faiths can take part in the teaching formats.

Again, interreligious learning is a matter of developing religious competences in connection with

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> intentionally controlled pedagogical processes in which spaces for encounter with religious testimonies are introduced whose religious background is differently constituted than that of the students and is based on a constructive encounter with and respect for the other. (Meyer, 2019, 19 f.)

The goal of interreligious learning is thus to have students look at their religion not only from the perspective of their own faith, as in the classical confessional or 'monoreligious' educational form, but also to include the perspective of other religions or those who have different beliefs (Van der Ven & Ziebertz, 1995, 264).

In recent decades, a plurality of various approaches to interreligious collaboration in religious-educational contexts has developed. In large part, these are related to the interplay between Christianity and Islam. Some of these approaches in which Christian and Islamic perspectives are related to each other are focused on theory while others are more strongly oriented to application (Kraml, Sejdini, Bauer & Kolb, 2020, 32–37; Kolb, 2021b). The approaches that have been developed, however, seldom define the anthropological and theological foundations and the understanding of education that are necessary to shape processes of interreligious education in an explicit way. Instead, most common approaches to interreligious education are dominated by the educational and didactic perspectives or by the socio-political relevance of such collaboration.

This finding applies in particular to Islamic perspectives, for, in developing interreligious collaboration, little attention has been paid until now to Islamic foundations. Muslim theologians and religious educationists also participate insufficiently in the conceptualisation and implementation of interreligious collaboration in German-speaking areas. The reasons for this may be completely comprehensible, but that does not change the fact that there is a certain asymmetry in this area that affects the conceptualisation of interreligious education. The purpose of this essay is therefore to close these gaps and outline basic building blocks for interreligious learning from an Islamic perspective that can serve as foundations for interreligious collaboration in religious educational contexts. Existing interreligious approaches can be developed further on this basis.

Before we turn to the Islamic basic building blocks for interreligious education, I will first give an overview of the state of research and the range of interreligious collaboration and approaches to interreligious learning in German-speaking areas. Subsequently, in connection with that, I will explain Islamic perspectives on forms of interreligious education. The next section will address anthropological foundations and the understanding of both theology and education from an Islamic perspective. In the discussion following that I will focus on various anthropological, theological, and educational implications for interreligious collaboration. Finally, the conclusion will present reflections that con-

tain ideas and perspectives for the further development of interreligious collaboration in religious educational contexts.

2 Interreligious Collaboration and Approaches to Interreligious Learning in Religious Education: An Overview of the State of Research

I will first provide an overview in this section of the state of research on interreligious collaboration and approaches to interreligious learning in German-speaking countries.[1] In the presentation of this research I will draw attention to the problem of asymmetry with respect to religion in the development of interreligious approaches: aside from a few exceptions, which will be explained more precisely below, the forms of interreligious collaboration and approaches to interreligious learning have until now been developed almost exclusively from the Christian side.

In relation to interreligious education and learning in religious educational contexts, various approaches on the elementary level (Fischer, 2005; Linger-Ali & Mecheril, 2016; Boll, 2017), on the secondary (Leimgruber, 2005, 2007; Behr, 2017; Grümme, 2017), and tertiary levels (Haußmann, 2005; Baumann, 2005; Simojoki & Lindner, 2020) have been developed. One focus here raises the question of how, under what circumstances, the encounter with the religious other can take place. There are various proposals available here: the xenosophical religious didactics approach (Streib, 2005), the double individual recourse model (Meyer, 2019), the difference-sensitivity approach (Peter, 2015), and the understanding of interreligious learning as a passage through the unfamiliar (Tautz, 2007, 2017).

In addition to these rather theoretically oriented approaches, there are also cases of interreligious collaboration that are used in educational praxis in secondary and tertiary education. A preliminary approach, which grapples empirically with the implementation of an interreligious educational project, came from Friedrich Schweitzer, Magda Bräuer, and Reinhold Boschki (2017). Developed at the University of Tübingen (Germany), this approach is concerned with the learning outcomes and the effectiveness of interreligious learning, the extent to which, for example, adoption of another religious perspective as a re-

1 Here I sketch interreligious approaches in which Christian and Islamic perspectives play a role. Approaches that focus on other religions cannot be treated here.

sult of interreligious teaching units can be ascertained in business schools (Schweitzer, Bräuer & Losert, 2017, 24).

Another instance of collaboration is the approach of the interreligious encounter learning developed by Katja Boehme (Heidelberg, Germany). In this approach pupils first work on a theme in their religion classes from the perspective of their subjects. Following that, the second step involves interreligious encounters on project days with pupils from other faiths. In a third step, the pupils exchange ideas on the themes they have worked on in mixed groups (Boehme, 2017; 2018; 2020).

The research group led by Jan Woppowa in Paderborn (Germany) (Woppowa, 2016) also looks at difference-sensitivity possibilities of interreligious collaboration in confessional religious education. Religious education connected with a specific religion is supplemented by interreligious encounter learning in several phases (Woppowa, Caruso, Konsek & Kamcili-Yildiz, 2020, 375). With his approach of dialogical interreligious learning, Thorsten Knauth (Duisburg-Essen) also tackles interreligious collaboration in religious education in confessional contexts (Knauth, 2019). This approach has students from various religious backgrounds take religious education together and learn from each other in joint discussions (Knauth, 2016, 7; 2020).

Other approaches to interreligious collaboration deal with tertiary education. Here we can mention the approaches of the research group led by the religious educationist Wolfgang Weirer in Graz (Austria) (Weirer, Wenig & Yagdi, 2019; Gmoser & Weirer, 2019) as well as interreligious encounter learning in the education of religion teachers at the University College of Teacher Education of Christian Churches Vienna/Krems (Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule Wien/Krems, KPH, Austria) (Garcia Sobreira-Majer, Abuzahra, Hafez & Ritzer, 2014; Garcia Sobreira-Majer, 2015; Boehme & Krobath, 2020; Krobath, 2020).

Finally, we can point to interreligious collaboration at the University of Innsbruck (Austria), which is carried out in the education and training of Islamic and Catholic religion teachers. Encounters with the religious other occur within the framework of practicums and courses. In line with the parity principle, the supervision of the courses is carried out by a mixed team of instructors, and Catholic and Muslim students take part together (Kraml & Sejdini, 2018; Kraml, Sejdini, Bauer & Kolb, 2020, 86 – 89). The interreligious collaboration includes not only collaboration in the education and training of religion teachers but also a common understanding of theological and anthropological basic assumptions from various religious perspectives (Sejdini, Kraml & Scharer, 2020).

If we look at the state of research, two tendencies emerge that characterise existing approaches to interreligious learning and interreligious collaboration. On the one hand, it is striking that these are almost exclusively conceived and

developed by Christian religious educationists. As a result, there is an asymmetry in these approaches: and they are dominated by the perspective of a specific religion. Generally speaking, Islamic perspectives are granted only subordinate significance; they remain underexposed or are left out of consideration. Only in a few exceptions – such as in the interreligious collaboration in Innsbruck – does the Islamic perspective form, in the sense of the parity principle, a constitutive part of the interreligious approach right from the start (Kolb, 2021b). We can therefore claim that interreligious collaboration and approaches to interreligious learning from an Islamic perspective need to be thoroughly substantiated.

This overview of the existing approaches, on the other hand, shows that the questions about the anthropological, theological, and educational foundations of the perspectives of the participant religious groups that would be necessary to make interreligious learning possible receive little attention. In contrast, the pedagogical or educational perspectives are dominant. Here we are arguing that, in addition to focusing the approaches to interreligious learning on educational points of view, it is of major importance that the Islamic concept of humanity and the Islamic understanding of theology and education be taken equally into account.

In the next section, I will therefore first formulate Islamic perspectives on interreligious collaboration and concepts of interreligious learning. In the section after that, I will then focus on Islamic foundations relating to anthropology, theology, and the understanding of education.

3 Interreligious Collaboration from an Islamic Perspective

From an Islamic perspective, there are various reasons that justify interreligious collaboration and interreligious learning. In addition to socio-political relevance, such collaboration appears to be theologically inevitable as well. This is so, above all, because Islam sees itself as part of or the completion of the monotheistic tradition. In the Qur'an, the chief source of Islam, there are numerous verses that point to and emphasise the common origin of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Q 2:136; 3:64; 3:84; 5:48). The intention of the Qur'an to persuade the people of the book – as Jews and Christians in the Qur'an are called – of their common origin cannot be overlooked. From an Islamic point of view, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad are messengers of the same God who is revealed in the Torah, the Bible, and the Qur'an.

The reference to the monotheistic tradition has led inevitably to Judaism and Christianity being dealt with more intensively than any other religion in the Qur'an. This is a spirited and ambivalent discourse that extends throughout

the entire Qur'an. The encounter is spirited because it concerns itself above all with the beliefs of Jews and Christians whom Muslims saw every day; and it is ambivalent because it is conditioned by the situation. The Qur'anic statements on Judaism and Christianity are dispersed throughout the whole Qur'an and are dependent on their respective contexts of revelation.

The fact that the Qur'an was revealed over a period of 23 years and is not arranged either thematically or chronologically has led to different interpretations. Over the course of time, Muslim scholars developed various approaches to the people of the book. In addition to the approach the respective scholars had to the Islamic sources, especially the Qur'an, these approaches were influenced decisively by the socio-political situation in which these concepts were formed. The dependence of these approaches on their context led to the former approaches being focused primarily on the question of salvation and the legal status of Jews and Christians in Muslim-majority societies. These approaches have retained historical value right up to the present because they provide information on how Muslims in the past dealt with these questions theologically. For the current context, however, especially interreligious learning, they are of only limited value – if at all. In addition to the many different interpretative possibilities and approaches, what is of decisive importance for interreligious learning from the Muslim perspective is that, on the one hand, the Qur'an explicitly prohibits any sweeping judgments being made of Jews or Christians (Q 3:75; 3:113); on the other hand, it does not exclude them from the possibility of salvation (Q 2:62). Reference is made at this point to the fact that Qur'anic statements are in no way purely exclusivist but also include inclusivist and pluralist positions (Pink, 2011).[2] For interreligious learning, the willingness to not exclude others from salvation is of enormous significance and an important sign of esteem, without which the processes of education have little chance of bearing fruit.

Despite this enormous significance, however, this field has until now not received the required attention it needs to shape interreligious education in an expedient way. Because of that, we will look below at the theological and religious-pedagogical foundations that are necessary for designing a stable basis for processes of interreligious education. Here we are concerned with basic principles whose absence would condemn any deep mutual learning in the interreligious context to superficiality.

Because the human being is at the centre of interreligious education, an analysis of the question of an appropriate concept of humanity as an important

2 For an extended discussion of this question see also the essay 'Religious Plurality from the Perspective of Islamic Religious Education' in this volume.

foundation for interreligious learning seems inevitable. Whether the Qur'an contains the anthropological foundations to develop a concept of humanity that can be used for interreligious education and how this concept of humanity can be developed will be determined below.

4 Foundations of the Processes of Interreligious Education

This essay is intended to sketch, from the Islamic perspective, the basic building blocks of interreligious learning that can serve as a foundation for interreligious collaboration in contexts of religious-educational contexts. There are three areas here that are to be emphasised individually: (4.1) basic anthropological questions, (4.2) the understanding of theology, and (4.3) the understanding of education. We should keep in mind that this division does not claim to be exhaustive, and hence it can be expanded or deepened as needed.

4.1 Basic Anthropological Issues

With interreligious work in educational contexts, some understanding of basic anthropological questions is needed to make substantive interreligious learning possible. In particular, the urgency of this consists first in the question whether interreligious collaboration in which the various faith communities participate as equals should occur at all. The second issue regarding its urgency is whether it is to be directed at learning about and from others and expanding one's own horizon.

Educational processes are stamped to a particular degree by concepts of humanity. Every educational approach is based on a certain concept of humanity. The orientation to this is important to the extent that a specific understanding of education can be developed through it in which adolescents can form their subjectivity. Only as the result of such can a conception be developed of how people can be led, through upbringing or education, to develop a self-understanding that corresponds to this concept of humanity (Ribolits, 2015, 170).

The religious conceptions of humanity are based above all on religious sources. In Islam, the foundations for such conceptions are found in theological sources, especially the primary source, the Qur'an, and the secondary source, the Sunnah. That is where we find the ambivalent statements on aspects of the concept of humanity that permit several options. This led to different and multifaceted concepts of humanity among Muslims, even though the religious sources are the same. The reason for this lies in the fact that perspectivity and

contextuality constantly play an important role when it concerns the interpretation of anthropological statements in the theological sources.

In the substantive determination of anthropological foundations, a connectedness with the Muslim tradition is to be preserved and concepts of humanity to be derived from the Islamic sources that can be connected to interreligious collaboration and approaches to interreligious learning. The following analysis is focused here on various features that are found in the Islamic sources and in the view of many scholars: human dignity and createdness (4.1.1), freedom and responsibility (4.1.2), and reason and learning (4.1.3). Conclusions can be drawn from this for interreligious education.

4.1.1 Dignity and Createdness

There are various passages in the Qur'an that point to an inviolable and God-given dignity of the human being. The most important direct reference is found in Q 17:70. Here dignity is described as one of the most fundamental properties of the human being, which is inalienable and should not be violated (Albayrak, 2019, 114 f.). The relevance of these verses lies in the fact that dignity not only belongs to Muslims but to all people. Ethnicity, race, gender, and faith or religion play no role here (Sejdini, 2016a, 22). Mohamed Talbi infers from that fact that: "We can also assume that all people are truly equal on the level of the spirit, whatever their physical and mental abilities may be" (Talbi, 1993, 57).

In addition to this direct reference to the inviolable God-given dignity of the human being, other verses in the Qur'an point to the special care God took in the creation of human beings (Q 55:10 – 14; 67:23). The Qur'an unmistakably underscores that a central role has been granted to human beings in creation. They are the viceregent of God on earth, which allows human beings "to get to know the universe, to reflect on existence, to name things, produce knowledge, and create culture" (Albayrak, 2019, 113).

Another fundamental anthropological feature that characterises the Islamic concept of humanity is the human being's createdness. According to the Qur'an, the human being, like all other creatures, is called into life by God (Q 16:4). He/she was created out of matter, which exists independently of and before him/her. The human being owes her/his existence not to her-/himself or to chance but to a higher entity who is independent of all things and whose existence depends on no one.

The connection of the human species to its creator represents, from the Islamic point of view, an important anthropological principle. The human being had gone through several developmental stages (Q 15:26; 32:7; 76:1 – 2; 96:2) before she/he became human through the divine spirit being breathed into her/

him (Q 15:29; 32:9; 38:72). This act filled the material form with life and gave humans the potential to acknowledge the existence of God and to be devoted to God (Q 30:30). It is that that constitutes the nature or disposition of the human being (*fitra*). Through having the spirit breathed into him/her, the human being is transformed from a damp clay paste into a spiritual being equipped with the divine spirit and with mental and spiritual abilities (Hajatpour, 2014, 79).

The dignity and createdness of the human being are closely connected with the human's special properties and abilities that are bestowed up her/him at creation. This includes freedom and responsibility, which will be discussed in the next section.

4.1.2 Freedom and Responsibility

Human freedom is a recurring and controversial topic in Islamic theological debates (Wielandt, 1994, 101–103). This coheres above all with the fact that the Qur'an contains both statements that acknowledge the freedom of human beings (Q 6:164) and verses that give the impression that human beings are only doing what they are predestined to do (Q 9:51; 57:22).

Generally speaking, contemporary analyses represent the position that the Qur'an as a whole supports the principle of freedom and of free will as a fundamental human disposition. Here the argument is that a position that advocates that the human being is determined in all aspects of her/his life contradicts the principle of human dignity (Sejdini, Kraml & Scharer, 2020, 56). The human being's potential for development and change to which the Qur'an refers in various places is excluded in a deterministic concept of humankind. In principle, therefore, freedom can be understood from the perspective of Islamic theology as an essential property of the human being, which also distinguishes him/her from other beings and creatures. Freedom is thus characterised by an ambivalent character for it can lead to either well-being or disaster (Q 2:30).

There are limits to human freedom, however. Humans are not able to overcome the conditions of existence that were created for them or into which they were born. It is impossible for human beings to move into a different sphere of existence. Nonetheless, humans can act autonomously, however, in relation to their will, their decisions, their preferences, and actions (Albayrak, 2019, 113). Their free will includes the freedom to decide for or against God, to join a religion of their choice or to leave a religious community (Q 2:256; 18:29). In this connection as well, the Qur'an displays a pluralist approach to dissenters and other religious communities.

Closely connected with the principle of freedom is the responsibility that God has bestowed on the human species for itself and its environment and that the human species is always to meet. It can be concluded from the Qur'an that the human being has to assume individual responsibility. That cannot be shoved off onto a third party or God (Q 17:15; 35:18). Each person is responsible for one's own deeds and will give account of them in the afterlife (Q 67:2).

From an Islamic theological perspective, the human being has a special responsibility within creation. The world has been created in such a way that the human being can make use of it. Creation is not, however, at the unlimited disposal of humans, which they use as they see fit and without any consideration for its good; rather, creation is entrusted to them (Q 33:72). The concept of entrusting (*amana*) creation to humans indicates that it is not meant to be their eternal possession but at their temporarily limited disposal that includes a special responsibility (Sejdini, 2016b, 297 f.).

The human being is, moreover, summoned to care for creation so that justice is done to God's entrusting of creation to humans. God does give human beings a temporarily limited charge over creation but expects them to engage in this task in a responsible and careful way, and in the end they will have to answer for this (ibid., 298). This careful dealing with the world can be related both to the environment and nature as well as to groups and adherents of other religions or ethnic groups.

Freedom and responsibility are also closely related to other anthropological properties. Especially emphasised in the religious educational context are the gift of reason and the ability to learn, which we will look at briefly in the next section.

4.1.3 Reason and the Ability to Learn

The gift of reason and the ability to learn are central anthropological features that distinguish the Islamic concept of humanity. The Qur'an says that God forms the human being according to his will already in the mother's womb and gives him cognitive aptitudes, the ability to know, and reason (Q 16:78). The human being is given the ability to think, to understand, to know, and to draw logical conclusions (Q 39:9). The Qur'an indicates, moreover, that faith and reason are in no way opposed to each other but that the way to divine salvation proceeds via the use of reason (Q 38:29). It is only because of that that human beings can be addressed by the divine message, to recognise it, and to respond to it.

The human being is summoned elsewhere to explore his/her environment, to engage in communication with other people, and to aspire to new knowledge

that can again be put to the service of humanity (Q 6:32). In other words, the Qur'an repeatedly demands people use their reason to develop themselves and the world. Conversely, those who do not use their reason to reflect are reprimanded (Q 8:22; 10:100).

As already mentioned elsewhere, the Qur'an indicates that human beings have inclinations and drives like egoism, greed, impatience, or ingratitude that know no limits and can have negative consequences in social contexts (Q 14:34; 21:37; 59:9). Human reason and the description of humans as beings capable of learning (Q 96:1) is thus accorded an existential role that can be developed via upbringing, socialisation, and education. Muhammad Asad points out in his commentary that human reason also leads to the ability to accumulate knowledge and to gain insight and understanding "that the individual human being does not know on his own" (Asad, 2017, 1175). This clarifies the importance of this fundamental anthropological position for interreligious learning.

From the above, we can conclude that, from a Qur'anic perspective, human beings are creatures who have dignity bestowed on them and are open to change and further development. They can choose to move in the direction of good or bad (Albayrak, 2019, 112). Internal and external factors are decisive for development in a certain direction. That is why human beings need (religious) education – so that they can develop themselves in the direction of the good and to arrive at the phase of the cultivation of the self (Jensen, 1990, 205).

This anthropological approach presupposes that all people are equal because of their humanity, as creatures who are indeed dependent on their creator. But because of their special position, they are equipped with abilities and skills – like reason, freedom, and the ability to learn – that distinguish them from other creatures. Such an approach provides a solid basis for respectful interreligious approaches stamped by mutual inspiration.

In addition to a suitable concept of humanity, a process of interreligious education also requires an understanding of theology that, as a partner science of religious education, has enormous significance for the shape of interreligious education. Just as with the concept of humanity, so it is also necessary to explain which understanding of theology is needed to make the processes of interreligious education fruitful.

4.2 The Understanding of Theology

When situating religious education as a discipline, we encounter two different tendencies. The one is more strongly oriented to religious studies and considers, in addition to the educational sciences, religious studies to be the partner

discipline of religious education. The other tendency is confessional in nature and views theology as the reference field of study of religious education. Working from this, Michael Grimmitt distinguished between learning "in religion" as learning from the internal perspective of religion, and "from religion" or "about religion" (Grimmitt, 1981, 42–53) as learning from the external perspective. Because – aside from a few exceptions – the confessional type of religious education is established practice in German-speaking areas, theology is the most important partner science of religious education along with educational science. As such, the understanding of theology is of enormous importance for religious education, especially when it concerns processes of interreligious learning. Therefore, we will briefly look at what understanding of theology is needed to promote interreligious education.

Here, the first question is what theology adds specifically. In connection with this, people often think of a purely material understanding centred on content. That is, the theological is viewed as a clearly delimitable and explicitly religious field of study, as, for example, beliefs, explicit theological concepts, religious rites, actions of the religious community, etc. From the point of view of an experience-oriented religious pedagogy and for interreligious education, such an understanding falls short. For this, the nature of the theological is more a matter of the perspective from which something is examined and cannot be reduced to the material object.

For interreligious learning, two aspects are especially important with respect to Islamic theology. First is the awareness that theology, as God-talk, cannot have any claim to absolute congruity with its central theme. This is so, on the one hand, because God is beyond human control and no one other than God himself can speak in a suitable way about God. On the other hand, it is also because human beings by nature have no direct access to truth, and therefore their knowledge is always perspectival and fragmentary. Second, it is necessary to distinguish between personal faith and Islam with its doctrines, rituals, and traditions. Even if faith is influenced by theological reflection, as a personal act it remains more or less inaccessible to theology. That is why, in an academically situated theology, it can never be a matter of leading people to faith or converting them through propaganda, but one of critical reflection and appropriate interpretations of one's own religious tradition.

In principle, theology is to be understood here as an academic discipline or science that cannot count on a 'sure ground'. It should not take the place of truths of faith, and knowledge should only be thought of as such provisionally. In this sense, theology could be characterised more as having a questioning scientific character and – similar to Fritz Simon's formulation – as aware that knowledge limits one's sense of possibilities (Simon, 1999, 133, 157). Despite

all these peculiarities, subjectivity, and provisionality, however, theology is equally challenged to retain an academic and scientific character above all in the sense of transparency and the intersubjective verifiability of insights and results (Schärtl, 2004, 164).

This understanding of theology provides a solid foundation for processes of interreligious education. The awareness that God transcends every theological presentation and that speaking of God is always just one perspective among many also grants a certain validity to other theological approaches. This again is essential in initiating interreligious learning processes that are open to learning from each other and to appreciating other approaches. Moreover, the focus of such an understanding is more on presenting one's own experiences intelligibly and being inspired by similar efforts and not on leading other people to faith or conversion. For Islamic theology, this means:

> to explain in an academic setting ... the rationality and intellectual comprehensibility of the Islamic faith again and again in accordance with the horizon of the temporal experience of the present (Sanseverino, 2016, 174).

In addition to the concept of humanity and understanding of theology, another aspect of fundamental importance for interreligious learning is the understanding of education. The success of processes of interreligious education is decisively dependent on which understanding of education is being worked with. That is why we will discuss this briefly in the next section.

4.3 The Understanding of Education

Alongside anthropology and theology, the understanding of education is another important foundation for the processes of interreligious education. Here the question arises as to how education is to be understood in interreligious learning so that mutual learning is at all possible.

From an Islamic perspective, it is impossible to analyse the understanding of education without taking the Qur'an into account. The Qur'an is the foundation of Islamic religious education and also takes up the theme of education in various places.[3] Like all other themes, education is not dealt with systematically in the Qur'an. This is – as already stated above – due to the circumstances of how it came into being. A positive attitude to education can be found in the Qur'an in

3 If education is spoken of in general in the theological sources (the Qur'an and the Sunnah), religious education is also generally thematised or intended.

central statements. A special symbolic significance can be accorded to the first revealed verses of the Qur'an in this respect. These verses sent to the prophet Muhammad in 610 AD begin with the call *Iqra*, by which Muhammad is called to read or recite. We read:

> READ in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created man out of a germ-cell! Read – for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One who has taught (man) the use of the pen, taught man what he did not know! (Q 96:1–5)

Given the circumstances under which these verses were revealed, a simple interpretation of the call issued to the prophet cannot be established. Nevertheless, the passage cited is often understood as a call to all Muslims to educate themselves and to engage in self-development. This process of education implies a reflection on the entire creation, which is to enable human beings to know themselves, their surroundings, and their environment and to constantly develop themselves both spiritually and intellectually. In addition, there is a series of other Qur'anic statements that emphasise the importance of education in an indirect way (Q 2:266; 10:24; 13:3; 16:11; 30:21). They give expression to an affirmative attitude towards education.

As in the Qur'an, the theme of education is also treated in the vast traditions of the Sunnah that are called *hadith* in a plurality of contexts. The connotations of the theme are largely positive. The affirmative attitude towards education in the Sunnah is shown below by means of select examples. An important, very well-known *hadith* is that tradition in which striving for knowledge is viewed as a religious obligation (*fard*) (Ibn Māğa, 1998, 214 f.). This reading is supported by a second tradition in which Muslims are called to strive for knowledge and to acquire this, even if that knowledge is found in China (Al-Hindī, 2005, 1294).

In the Sunnah, education is generally viewed not only as desirable and Muslims are not only urged to acquire knowledge, but training and learning are also highly valued. The path to attaining knowledge – in other words, teaching and learning processes – have an important significance. One *hadith* from the collection of Muslim emphasises the importance of processes of acquiring knowledge: "for whoever follows the path of desiring knowledge, Allah makes the path to paradise easier" (Ibn al-Ḥağğāğ, 2006, 1242). The sources mentioned were used for centuries by Muslim scholars as evidence of the importance of education and as a foundation to develop various models (Günther, 2016, 54).

Having now looked at which understanding of education can be found in the theological sources and Islamic foundations for anthropology and theology, in the next section we will explore their implications for interreligious learning and interreligious collaboration.

5 Implications for Interreligious Collaboration and Approaches to Interreligious Learning

As already stated, there is a plurality of approaches to interreligious collaboration in German-speaking countries, each of which have their own focus on the theoretical orientation or the practical application in contexts of religious education. With a view to the existing approaches, it can be asserted that there is a need on the one hand to examine Islamic perspectives more deeply so that approaches to interreligious learning can be solidly grounded in the sense of a dialogue between equals. On the other hand, it turns out that basic anthropological foundations and the understanding of theology and education of the participating religious partners in general and Islamic perspectives in particular play only a secondary role. This contribution takes the position that processes of interreligious education have a chance at success only if concepts of humanity and understandings of theology and education are sufficiently clarified and reflected upon so that they can serve as a foundation for respectful interreligious learning. Moreover, an interreligious learning that is mutually inspiring and oriented to learning from each other needs an understanding of theology and education that is accessible and open to the other and not just viewed as a closed system.

In particular, I will here bring the basic Islamic anthropological positions and the understanding of Islamic theology and education to bear on the conceptions of interreligious approaches. I will then present some stimuli for interreligious collaboration and interreligious learning in anthropological and theological respects as well as in relation to educational perspectives.

With respect to *anthropology*, according to the insights afforded by the Islamic concept of humanity, the following implications for the processes of interreligious learning can be drawn.

- The embedding of the God-given and inviolable dignity of human being in Islamic anthropology is a central starting point for interreligious learning and collaboration. The inalienability of universal dignity – independent of gender, age, race, or religious affiliation – constitutes the most important foundation for grounding interreligious approaches from an Islamic perspective. The assumption of inviolable universal God-given dignity paves the way for viewing others as equal; the success of interreligious learning depends on this. This may sound trivial at first because the acknowledgement of others is self-evident. Closer examination reveals, however, that this is often not the case, even if it is not explicitly stated. Acknowledging the equality of others is indispensable for interreligious learning primarily because it relativises claims of superiority that have emerged over time through characteristics, attributions, and affiliations and thus makes learning with and from others

easier. It therefore contributes to eliminating asymmetries that form a major obstacle in particular for interreligious learning.

- Closely bound up with that is the consideration of human free will. It is particularly important for interreligious education to constantly keep in view that human beings can freely choose to decide for or against religion. This freedom – precisely like human dignity – is God-given and a characteristic of humanness. Accordingly, Islamic religious education should be cognisant of this freedom and understand faith as an option. Based on human freedom, the religious other should be acknowledged as he/she is and his/her decision respected. This approach, which is based in the Qur'an, opens up the possibility to treat a person's choice for a religion with respect and not to see it as misguided if that choice falls on another religion than one's own. It is not a question here of affirming or accepting the content of another religion but rather of granting to others the option to choose. If one holds that the goal of religious education consists primarily in supporting pupils as they become subjects and their faith unfolds independently so that they develop their own approach to faith, it then becomes clear that this is also of enormous significance for interreligious learning.
- Another aspect is the principle of educational orientation that characterises the Islamic concept of humanity. Equipped with reason, the human being relies on education for continuous self-development. As a creature capable of being educated, the human being is encouraged to use her/his reason to investigate her surroundings and environment and to acquire new insights to do justice to her responsibility for creation. The encounter with the religious other and the productive exchange and learning with and from each other is essential for one's own education. To go through educational processes – and this includes interreligious experiences – is thus, from the Islamic perspective, a natural part of human development.

Starting from fundamental *Islamic theological positions*, we can also formulate the following stimuli for interreligious learning.

- It follows from the discussion until now that human beings do enjoy a central place in creation and are equipped with special abilities and skills, but their ability to gain knowledge, like their existence, is not absolute. According to Islamic theology, everything but God is contingent. Everything can exist but does not need to. Their possible existence, in contrast to what is necessary – i. e., God – depends on a power that transcends them. That is why human knowledge as such is always fragmentary and perspectival. Human beings do not have access to knowledge that is not humanly stamped – which does not mean, however, that such knowledge does not exist.

The fragmentary character of human knowledge is particularly clear in theology, which is concerned with talk about God, because the absolute, i. e., God, transcends human thought. Thus, God-talk says more about the human being than it does about God. It is a requirement of createdness to respect other approaches to God and to grant to them that they have just as much right to develop their own theological ideas that can be just as insightful and legitimate as one's own. The cultivation of one's own perspectival attitude in epistemology is indispensable for interreligious learning, especially those with a confessional character and a strong connection to theology. On the one hand, this tack makes a conciliatory attitude towards other theological approaches easier; on the other, it prevents the absolutisation of one's own theological doctrines in the awareness that it is not a question of the truth as such. Rather, one is faced with contextually stamped interpretations of the truth that are continually changing. This view impacts the understanding of truth, which plays a central role in interreligious education and should therefore be discussed next.

- Religious truths and truth claims are an important characteristic of most religious communities (Sejdini & Kraml, 2020). What is particularly central here in interreligious education is what understanding of truth is presented to those of other faiths. The approach to theology sketched above and the concept of humanity make clear that it is legitimate to make a truth claim, but others can do so as well. It is important not to confuse the truth claim with truth as such and to distance oneself from the notion that one possesses the truth. In our context, the claim to be the sole possessor of truth means representing the only true faith. If we made such a claim, it would no longer be possible to respect the spiritual experiences of those of other faiths as possible ways to the truth. But this respect is as such a condition for interreligious truth. Instead of claiming to have sole possession of the truth, it is better for interreligious learning to view ourselves as seekers of truth who are aware that the path to truth is inexhaustible and the perspectives of others unavoidable if we are to make progress and come closer to truth. This basic attitude towards truth makes a respectful attitude to plurality easier, which brings us to another implication.
- Whoever is aware of the finiteness and limitation of human knowledge and the inadequacy of truth is more open to religious and worldview plurality. Here, it is important to understand this plurality not as an artificially created situation that must be overcome but as a constellation that corresponds to creation, i. e., is normal. From the perspective of Islamic theology, religious plurality and social diversity are to be viewed as ordained by God. From this perspective, the Qur'an does not represent any claim to supremacy that lifts

it and what belongs to it religiously above other faith communities but acknowledges the claim to salvation in other religions to be equal in rank (on this, see also Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, 2019). Accordingly, from a religious educational perspective, it is important to take this claim into account if we are to avoid approaches that assume the superiority of one's own religion or exclude other forms of salvation. This can substantiate religious educational conceptions that are aimed at the development of a capacity for plurality or interreligious approaches that are oriented to religiously heterogeneous students or to social heterogeneity.

Finally, there are still implications to be drawn from the *Islamic understanding of education*. Here as well, other stimuli for interreligious learning and interreligious collaboration can be inferred.

- A first implication for interreligious learning that can be concluded from the Islamic understanding of education is the process character of education. Education is understood in the Islamic perspective as a permanent process to which human beings are called. They are called to educate themselves constantly and to discover the new. In this sense, education is also to be seen as a contribution to personal development that reinforces the self-confidence of younger people and enables them to trust their convictions and to stand by them. From an Islamic perspective, education can neither be closed nor happen in isolation. It requires an exchange, also with the unusual or the new. Accordingly, people are constantly encouraged to encounter the religious other in interreligious education or interreligious collaboration and to learn from the other.
- Another stimulus that can be inferred from the Islamic understanding of education is the perception of education as a comprehensive task. The Qur'an describes the human being not only as a creature capable of learning but also as able to appropriate knowledge and to reflect on it. Education is thus accorded a central role in equipping people to do justice to their responsibility to creation, and not least of all to be able to be cognisant of their individual responsibility for their decisions and actions. According to the Qur'an, human beings are encouraged to investigate their environment, to acquire new insights and take various perspectives into consideration. With respect to religious education, these objectives can be attained only if doubt or criticism is permitted in the educational process and an encounter with other religions and learning from and with those of other faiths is taken into account. It is especially through interreligious collaboration or interreligious learning that an Islamic religious educational approach can do full justice to the principle of education as a comprehensive task.

– A final aspect is concerned with the relation to other individuals. From the Islamic perspective, education is always to be understood as relational. Human beings do not educate themselves alone and only for themselves but in exchange with others and with the goal of being able to act and decide in responsibility for others as well or for the entrusted creation. The inalienable dignity of all people indicates, moreover, that a claim to superiority towards people of other faiths is out of place. It can be concluded here that the objective is that human beings should develop a basic attitude as a result of educational processes, that humans can be different from each other, that we can acknowledge what is other, understand religious plurality as the norm, and develop the willingness to learn from the religious other. To attain this objective, human beings are encouraged to go through interreligious learning processes and to engage in discussion with the religious other. Only by stepping outside, only by opening up, taking the risk, in the encounter and relation with others or those of other faiths and leaving one's own shore can such an understanding of education be fulfilled (Kraml, 2003; Sejdini, 2016a).

6 Conclusion

The goal of this essay was to contribute to existing interreligious approaches in the confessional context. It was argued that educational perspectives or those of the education sciences play a dominant role, whereas anthropological foundations of the religious communities involved do not receive sufficient attention. This concerns especially Islamic perspectives. Because of this, this essay focused on the analysis of central basic assumptions of Islamic anthropology (such as the createdness and dignity of human beings, freedom, and responsibility, as well as reason and the ability to learn), and those of the Islamic understanding of theology and education.

The existing instances of interreligious collaboration and approaches to interreligious learning should be encouraged to include Islamic perspectives in a more conceptual way in the sense of a dialogue between equals. This can happen in interreligious education in the form of various implications that can be drawn from anthropological, theological, and educational foundations.

In this way, interreligious collaboration and approaches to interreligious dialogue can be supported in promoting recognition and respect of other religions and people of other faiths (Sejdini, 2017a, 176). This is, however, not an easy undertaking, even if it is urgently necessary. A respect for religious plurality based on theology and religious educationally is made difficult by the latent truth

claim that religions raise in one form or another. In line with the anthropological foundation of human freedom, a possible way out of this difficulty may be to point out that faith is to be understood as a personal experience. As a personal experience that people have to take a pursue in accordance with their own convictions, without fear of any consequences whatsoever. This approach forms the key to a respectful attitude towards the other in a multicultural and multireligious democratic society.

Jesus Christ in the Perspective of Islam

1 Introduction

> Say: 'We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus, and that which has been vouchsafed to all the (other) prophets by their Sustainer: we make no distinction between any of them. And it is unto Him that we surrender ourselves.' (Q 2:136)

The common origin of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is one of the central messages of the Qur'an. That is why it is not surprising that biblical content, narratives, and individuals also appear in the Qur'an. Even if this 'relation' gives the impression that the Qur'an is a 'duplicate' of the Bible, Muslims view these similarities, in line with the verse cited above, as additional proof of the common source of all monotheistic religions. Among the most important foci of both revelations are, among other things, the stories of the prophets that, despite different accentuations, are very similar. The story of Jesus assumes a special role in this connection which is treated in detail in the Qur'an.

In comparison with the Christian picture of Jesus, the Qur'anic statements are quite ambivalent (Sejdini, 2015d, 62f.). On the one hand, the Qur'an contains statements that agree with the Bible; on the other hand, some stories do deviate from the biblical presentation or contradict them (Hamdan, 2014, 51). This is grounded in the Islamic self-understanding that views Islam not only as a part but also as a further development of the monotheistic tradition (Q 5:3). In this respect, the Qur'an not seldom has its own approach to shared narratives or persons that differs from the biblical presentation. This is true in particular for the Jesus story. Viewed in this way, "the Christian and the Muslim images of Jesus ... are very similar in many respects – and they differ in fundamental ways" (Reinbold & Mohagheghi, 2016, 129).

Before we look more closely at the Qur'anic presentation of Jesus, some particularities of the Qur'anic approach should be explained that provide a better understanding of the Islamic view of Jesus. Here it seems particularly important to mention the following points.

– As in other Qur'anic narratives, the Qur'an also remains faithful in its narrative to the story of Jesus. The story of Jesus is not given as a whole in the form of a biography in a separate chapter but is scattered throughout various Qur'anic contexts and narrated in fragments. In this respect, there are direct or indirect statements about Jesus and his story in several places in the Qur'an (Von Stosch, 2014).

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- Islam deals with the person of Jesus from an internal perspective. Thus, from an Islamic point of view, Jesus is not only an important person from a religion that preceded Islam but a messenger of the one and the same God who also entrusted the task of prophecy to Muhammad. The belief that Jesus is one of the prophets is one of the basic beliefs of Islam (Q 5:75). Whoever denies the prophecy of Jesus is an apostate. This also explains to some extent why Islam has a different view or its own view of the story of Jesus.
- Prophecy is given a different place in Islam than in Christianity (Von Stosch & Işık, 2013). In the Islamic context, prophecy is the highest level that a human being can reach. That is why the classification of Jesus among the prophets is, in the eyes of Muslims, the greatest honour that can be bestowed on a human being.

The principles mentioned are important conditions for understanding the Qur'anic approach and thus also for a fairly objective classification of the place of Jesus in Islam. The story of Jesus will be presented below in light of these principles and the Qur'anic statements.

2 Mary, the Virgin

The story of Jesus in the Qur'an begins with the narrative about Mary (Maryam), Jesus' mother. The earliest Qur'anic statements about Mary are found in the third *sura*, which is named after the ancestors of Mary, Al ʿImran (The House of Imran). Thus, the Qur'an stresses that Mary and Jesus belong to the family of earlier prophets who are part of the monotheistic tradition. That they are part of this will illustrate the connection and continuity within the monotheistic tradition. In the Qur'an, we read: "BEHOLD, God raised Adam, and Noah, and the House of Abraham, and the House of Imrān above all mankind" (Q 3:33).

The following verses in the same *sura* tell us that Mary's mother had wanted God to give her a male child so that she could dedicate him to God's service (Q 3:34). Contrary to her expectations, however, she gives birth to a girl. But this did not keep her from dedicating her daughter, whom she called Mary, to the service of God. She did this to protect Mary and her child from the curse of Satan (Q 3:36). Mary grows up in the care of Zachariah, who was also a prophet (Asad, 2008, 85).[1] He looks after Mary but soon notices that she is a very spe-

1 Following the great commentary by aṭ-Ṭabarī (d. 923 AD), Muhammad Asad explains that Zachariah was not only Mary's relative but also a priest who belonged to the temple.

cial person, for he repeatedly finds food provided for her and does not know where it comes from. When he asks Mary about the origin of the food, she points to God (Q 3:37).

The Qur'anic emphasis on Mary's devotion to God and that of her ancestors has to be understood in the entire context of the story of Jesus, if the Qur'anic statements about her are to be properly understood. The special place Mary occupies, which on the one hand is indicated in various verses (Q 3:42 – 44; 21:91) and underscored on the other by her being given a name (Schimmel, 1996, 143)[2] and naming the 19th *sura* after her, serves primarily to legitimise Jesus as part of the tradition of monotheistic messengers and to confirm the immaculacy of the conception (Q 21:91). These are important basic conditions for being able to communicate the divine message in a credible way, especially when it is thought that, because of the miraculous birth of Jesus, Mary could be accused of fornication, which the Qur'an categorically rejects (Q 66:12). In the following section, we will examine the miraculous birth of Jesus.

3 The Annunciation, Conception, and Birth of Jesus

Mary plays a central role in the rest of the Qur'anic story of Jesus up until his birth as well. With regard to this, the 19th *sura*, which is named after her, narrates in detail the annunciation, the conception, and the birth of Jesus (Q 19:16 – 40). According to the Qur'an, Mary had retreated into the temple to devote herself to prayer. One day the angel of revelation suddenly appeared to her in human form. Mary was afraid and "exclaimed: 'Verily, I seek refuge from thee with the Most Gracious! (Approach me not) if thou art conscious of Him!'" (Q 19:18). Then the following conversation between Mary and the angel of revelation takes place:

> (The angel) answered: 'I am but a messenger of thy Sustained, (who says,) "I shall bestow upon thee the gift of a son endowed with purity".' Said she: 'How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me? – for, never have I been a loose woman!' (The angel) answered: 'Thus it is; (but) thy Sustainer says. This is easy for Me; and (thou shalt have a son,) so that We might make him a symbol unto mankind and an act of grace from Us.' (Q 19:19 – 20)[3]

This Qur'anic presentation also constitutes the foundation of the Islamic belief in Mary's virginity, which is undisputed among Muslims. That is why the notion that some Christians no longer believe in the virgin birth is incomprehensible to

2 She is the only woman who is named in the Qur'an.

3 Q 3:47 also relates this event.

many Muslims, and why some Muslims even see themselves as better Christians (Schimmel, 1996, 10).

Aside from pointing out that Mary had withdrawn to a distant place, there is no other information about the period between the annunciation by the angel of revelation and Jesus' birth (Q 19:22). The next verses (Q 19:23 – 33) narrate the birth and the accompanying events that are briefly presented here following those verses.

Continuing the story, the Qur'an tells of Mary's distress shortly before the birth of her child. When her labour pains begin, her distress increases so much that she wishes that she had died before this and had been completely forgotten. Nevertheless, she is not abandoned to herself. A voice speaks to her from under the palm tree to which she had fled:[4]

> Grieve not! Thy Sustainer has provided a rivulet (running) beneath thee; and shake the trunk of the palm-tree towards thee: it will drop fresh, ripe dates upon thee. Eat, then, and drink, and let thine eye be gladdened! (Q 19:25 – 26)

Furthermore, Mary is urged by the same voice not to speak to those who asked about the birth. After she has given birth to Jesus, she returns with the child to her people who think she bore an illegitimate son. She is therefore greeted with the following words: "O Mary! Thou hast indeed done an amazing thing! O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a wicked man, nor was thy mother a loose woman!" (Q 19:27 – 28)

But Mary obeys the command not to speak and points to Jesus. While the people are still agitated and wondering how they should speak to a child who is still an infant, he turns to the people and speaks:

> Behold, I am a servant of God. He has vouchsafed unto me revelation and made me a prophet, and made me blessed wherever I may be; and He has enjoined upon me prayer and charity as long as I live, and (has endowed me with) piety towards my mother; and He has not made me haughty or bereft of grace. (Q 19:30 – 32)

Although the narrative is open to different interpretations and there are points of disagreement among Muslim scholars, this narrative is intended primarily to show that the birth of Jesus is a unique divine miracle and that he must therefore be seen as both a special human being and a worthy messenger.

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4 The voice is said to belong to Jesus or to an angel (Bauschke, 2001, 23).

In addition to the detailed story of the birth of Jesus, there are also reports in the Qur'an about his acts and his preaching, which we will look at in the next section.

4 The Life and Deeds of Jesus

The Qur'an reports next to nothing about the time between Jesus' birth and when he begins to proclaim the divine message. Instead of presenting a biography of Jesus, the Qur'an concentrates more on his message, his miracles, and his death. That his death has a special significance both in Islam and in Christianity will be discussed in the following section. In this section we will look at his miracles and the message he proclaimed.

As with all prophets, Jesus' primary task was to lead those who had strayed from the right path to faith once more in the one and only God and thus to confirm earlier messages by God (Q 61:6). Despite his special history, Jesus' function and nature places him among the other prophets who are mentioned in the Qur'an (Q 17:94 – 95). Precisely like the other prophets, Jesus was also a human being who was chosen by God the Exalted to proclaim his message. This does not, however, restrict Jesus' role, who is characterised in the Qur'an both as a prophet (Q 19:30) and a messenger (Q 4:171; 5:75), to the confirmation of earlier messages. The Qur'an reports that, beyond the confirmation of the basic message of all prophetic proclamations, i. e., that there is no God but one, Jesus also introduced new elements. These include, among other things, the easing of certain laws and the elucidation or clarification of controversial issues. Concerning this, the Qur'an reads:

> And (I have come) to confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of the Torah, and to make lawful unto you some of the things which (aforetime) were forbidden to you. And I have come unto you with a message from your Sustainer; remain, then, conscious of God, and pay heed unto me. (Q 3:50)[5]

On the one hand, this verse confirms the continuity with and the innovations in the divine message that Jesus proclaims on the other. Furthermore, Jesus, whom the Qur'an uniquely designates as the "Word of God" (Q 3:45; 4:171) and "spirit of God" (Q 4:171) as a sign of regard, also proclaimed the sending of his successor Muhammad. We read:

5 Cf. also Q 43:63.

> And (this happened, too,) when Jesus, the son of Mary, said: 'O children of Israel! Behold, I am an apostle of God unto you, (sent) to confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of the Torah, and to give (you) the glad tiding of an apostle who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.' (Q 61:6)

For Muslims, this Qur'anic statement is a confirmation that the prophet Muhammad also belongs to the same prophetic tradition as Jesus. That is why there are increased attempts by Muslims to confirm this Qur'anic statement in Christian sources as well (Asad, 2008, 982).

Because the communication of the divine message and the concomitant claim to be the messenger of God is not an easy task and can lead of course to rejection – since theoretically anyone can make this claim – the true messengers, like Jesus, were also supported by miracles. Every prophet was able to perform different miracles with the help of God to prove that God had sent them and that God was the origin of their proclamation. Here the individual miracles that the messengers performed were dependent on their own context.

In comparison to other miracles that were associated in the Qur'an with various prophets, special miracles were ascribed to Jesus. Admittedly, Jesus' story as a whole is a miracle, but the Qur'an also contains statements that point to individual concrete miracles. It should be stated here that, according to Islamic understanding, no human being has the ability to perform miracles on their own, not even the prophets. Rather, miracles are acts performed by God through the prophets to confirm or support the authenticity of the message (Q 5:110).

Some miracles that are ascribed to Jesus are, among other things, his ability to speak when he is only an infant in the crib (Q 3:46), to give life to animals, to heal lepers and the blind, and to raise the dead (Q 3:49). Even if some Muslim commentators on the Qur'an, such as Asad, understand these miracles as metaphors (Asad, 2008, 88), there are many who take them literally. In addition, the Qur'an reports on another miracle performed by Jesus. Here it concerns a table or meal (*al-Ma'idah*) that Jesus asked God for at the request of his disciples so that their hearts might be convinced concerning his message (Q 5:112–115).

To correctly classify all these miracles Jesus had performed, "one should guard against overemphasising Jesus' uniqueness" (Von Stosch, 2016a, 22). I agree with Klaus von Stosch when he states concerning this that "the Qur'an is not concerned with the perfection of Jesus that separates him from other prophets but with a specialness that more closely qualifies what constitutes prophetic presence" (ibid.).

As with all other prophets, Jesus' proclamation did not meet with any particular approval in the beginning. To the contrary: it encountered intense resistance. Not only did his enemies refuse to acknowledge his message (Q 3:52),

they also conspired against him, without anticipating that God would disrupt these plots (Q 3:54). Here their intention was to kill him so as to eliminate the danger once and for all. Precisely here we come up against a problematic issue for the Qur'anic presentation of Jesus, which is controversial not only in an interreligious sense but also in an intrareligious one. Jesus is distinguished here from many other prophets not only by his birth and miracles but also by his mysterious departure from this world, which we will briefly explore in the next section.

5 The Death of Jesus

The most difficult but also most important part of the Qur'anic story of Jesus is certainly his death. The difficulty lies in the ambivalent statements found in the Qur'an and the controversial interpretations of Muslim scholars on Jesus' death. The importance, in contrast, rests on the dogmatic relevance of this event, especially in the Christian context and thus also for Christian-Muslim dialogue. Without wanting to go too deeply into this theme, we will discuss this theme by means of specific central Qur'anic statements.

It should be mentioned first that the Qur'an contains no information about the place and kind of death Jesus underwent. Other relevant details about Jesus' death, such as his age, are not mentioned either (Bauschke, 2001, 104). In addition to the ambivalent Qur'anic statements on his death, the lack of concrete information has contributed considerably to the rise of various views among Muslim scholars regarding the death of Jesus.

Next to the Trinity, which is categorically rejected in the Qur'an (Q 4:171), Jesus' crucifixion is also one of the permanent differences between Islam and Christianity. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, Muslim scholars also have differing views of Jesus' death. The central statements that constitute the foundation of these different views are the following Qur'anic verses:

> [A]nd their boast, 'Behold, we have slain the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, (who claimed to be) an apostle of God!' However, they did not slay him, and neither did they crucify him, but it only seemed to them (as if it had been) so; and, verily, those who hold conflicting views thereon are indeed confused, having no (real) knowledge thereof, and following mere conjecture. For, of a certainty, they did not slay him. (Q 4:157)

> Lo! God said: 'O Jesus! Verily, I shall cause thee to die (*mutawaffīka*), and shall exalt thee unto Me (*rāfiuʿuka*), and cleanse thee of (the presence of) those who are bent on denying

> the truth; and I shall place those who follow thee (far) above those who are bent on denying the truth ....' (Q 3:55)[6]

Here the terms *tawaffa* and *rafʿ* used in the latter verse play a central role in the interpretation of these verses. If *tawaffa* is understood as 'causing to die' and *rafʿ* as 'exalting', then it can be assumed in line with Q 4:157 that Jesus was neither killed by his enemies nor crucified. Rather, he found his way to his creator through a natural death and was thus given a higher position. But these terms can be understood as a 'removal' and as a 'material or physical taking to himself' by God. Though this is a difficult reading given the Qur'anic statements, it is not completely impossible. It could therefore be concluded that that Jesus did not die. Instead, God took him to himself to send him to earth before the Day of Judgment once more as a sign of the end time. Both interpretations of this verse are advocated by different Muslim groups.[7] The interpretation of the terms cited has led inevitably to the fact that various theories about Jesus' return developed in the Islamic tradition, which report on Jesus' return shortly before the last day with amazing accuracy. Despite differing views on the death of Jesus, Muslim scholars are nonetheless agreed that whoever was crucified, it was not Jesus.

For interreligious dialogue, this means:

> Whatever the case may be with Jesus' death and whatever may have happened to him after his death – this death did not and does not have the last word on his life and work on behalf of God. This death was much more a passage, a transition, a way back in the presence and nearness of Who sent him. (Bauschke, 2001, 110)

6 Conclusion

Independent of the various views about the nature and function of Jesus, the Qur'an unmistakably expresses its appreciation for Jesus and his mother Mary in many places. The critical remarks in the Qur'an on the crucifixion and the Trinity, which are often thematised in this context, are not related to the person of Jesus but to the dogmas themselves. In summary, from the Islamic perspective, Jesus is one of the most important Qur'anic prophets, whose birth, life, and death represent one single miracle. As the messenger of God, the belief that he was sent as well as the belief in the authenticity of his message is one

6 For similar statements in Jesus's words, see Q 5:117.

7 The problems around Jesus' death are so extensive that it would be impossible to discuss it without going beyond the limits of this essay.

of the pillars of faith in Islam. Even if the Muslim view of Jesus does not correspond on all points with Christianity and even contradicts some of them, its respectful attitude is a solid foundation for interreligious dialogue.

Human Rights and Islam: Another Perspective

1 Introduction

The themes 'human rights and religions' in general and 'human rights and Islam' in particular are without a doubt among the most complex and problematic themes of our time. From a general perspective, the difficulty of these themes is connected with the origin of human rights, which was characterised in Europe by the long resistance of Christian churches to the idea of human rights (Bielefeldt, 1999, 14). This historical development of human right led in the European context to the establishment of these rights being viewed by a considerable portion of society as a sign of the triumph of the Enlightenment over institutionalised religion and is still viewed that way to a certain extent. Even if the subsequent assent of the major Christian churches to human rights appears to have mitigated the critique somewhat, the latent suspicion of a fundamental irreconcilability of religion with human rights has survived in the collective thinking of many Europeans. This also had an impact on the discussions on the theme of human rights and Islam.

In distinction from a general problem, the difficulty in the specific Islamic context lies not so much in the past but in the present. Events like the worldwide attacks by Muslim terrorists, the foundation of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and the inhuman practices in some Muslim countries have contributed decisively to a hardening of the existing prejudices and to the rise of an extremely negative image of Islam. It is therefore not surprising that the idea that Islam cannot be reconciled with human rights is gaining increasing acceptance. Even if this essentialist way of looking at Islam, which is propagated in the media and pushed by certain academics, is neither historically nor academically tenable, it nevertheless shows how complex and difficult but no less necessary an objective approach to this theme, which has become so emotionally charged in the meantime, is.

To do justice somewhat to the claim of an objective approach, a short explanation is needed first about the perspective behind this essay, a perspective that also constitutes the foundation of the methodical procedure of this essay. In view of the plurality of possible approaches, our approach can be seen as one that is oriented more to theology and religious education. Here, the issue is not that of the reconcilability of Islam with human rights but developing an understanding of Islam that does not contradict the claims of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights but sees human rights as universally valid values that can be grounded in Islam, without thereby raising a claim of reconcilability.

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To be able to demonstrate what concepts in theology and-religious education are needed for an approach from the Islamic perspective that is compatible with human rights, we will look at internal Islamic plurality. Our purpose here is to call attention to the dangers of an essentialist presentation of Islam. In the next section, the historical encounter of Muslims with human rights will be discussed to give insight into the circumstances that have led to a hostile attitude toward human rights among some Muslims. In the third section, I will present a concept in theology and religious education that can serve as a foundation for an approach from an Islamic perspective that is in line with human rights.

2 There is no 'Islam as Such'

Given the current discussions on Islam, it would not be an exaggeration to say that without a doubt the most important condition for an objective encounter with Islam lies in taking leave of the converging image of Islam that is strongly operative at present. This omnipresent essentialist understanding contradicts not only Islamic history with its several law schools and schools of thought and various, among other things, mystical and rationalistic currents. It also misjudges the generating role of the subject in the developmental process of religious traditions and doctrines (Bauer, 2011). A consequence of this procedure that should not be underestimated is the *Verdinglichung* (objectification) (Bielefeldt, n. y., 3) of Islam and, connected with that, the assumption that there is one binding interpretation of Islam for all Muslims, which does not tolerate any deviation.[1] What is questionable in connection with this is also the fact that both conservative Muslims and opponents of Islam, if for different reasons, support the idea of an 'original Islam' that corresponds to their own ideas. They thus create an instrument by which they stamp any deviation from their own concept of Islam – pro or contra – as un-Islamic (Sejdini, 2016a, 17). Bassiouni situates this shared mindset of the apparently irreconcilable positions of Muslim fundamentalists and Islamic opponents in the discussion on the theme of Islam and human rights when he says:

> As paradoxical as it may sound, the sharpest critics of Islam and its most ardent defenders are united on most points.... Both start from similar concepts of Islam, both are subject to

1 In connection with this, Abu-Zaid and Sezgin speak of the necessity of a "de-mystification" of the "idea of an alleged Islam as such everywhere, of the same way of being Muslim" (Abu-Zaid & Sezgin, 2008, 215).

> the same conception of Islamic law, both negate the synthesis of Islam and human rights, and both see Islam as the antithesis of the West. (Bassiouni, 2014, 81)

This essentialist attitude, which also dominates the current discussion on human rights and Islam, makes the access to actual problems more difficult and thus stands in the way of possible solutions that are urgently necessary.

The sensitisation to the internal Islamic plurality and against an essentialist perspective should not hide the fact that there are commonalities that allow Muslims to be part of one community and that this also includes ones that could be classified as problematic. This plurality should only make one aware that, despite these commonalities, they can be perceived and interpreted in different, even contradictory ways. Thus, for example, all Muslims accept that the Qur'an is the word of God, but that does not mean that there is consensus among Muslims on what can be understood as God's word, how this should be interpreted, and which of its sayings are normative and which are not (Özsoy, 2016). The list of controversies on an adequate approach to the Qur'anic text can be expanded at will. It should not be forgotten here that the various opinions regarding the Qur'an as the primary source are not a modern phenomenon but arose already shortly after the death of the prophet and continue today (Krawulsky, 2006).

This means that even if Muslims make use of the same sources, they understand them in very different ways. On the one hand, this is because the individuals who 'bring up' (*zur Sprache bringen*) these texts (Radtke, 2011), differ in many respects. On the other hand the texts themselves are sometimes formulated ambivalently and thus allow several possible interpretations (Sejdini, 2015d).

Viewed in this way, the word 'Islam' becomes an umbrella term for an enormous number of diverging opinions and currents that, because of serious differences in doctrine in some cases disqualify each other from having any connection with Islam (Abu-Zaid, 1996). If it is also kept in mind that Islam has no church-like structures and thus no magisterium (Schmid, 2012, 534) and, historically speaking, a high "tolerance for ambiguity" (Bauer, 2011, 56) has been documented, it seems difficult to reduce Islam to a monolithic block.

To counteract this perception, as with every analysis concerning the theme Islam, including in the area of human right, a sensitisation is necessary. For one thing, this becoming aware of Muslim plurality will help prevent the problem of Muslims from being automatically 'Islamised' and allow it to be understand it in a much broader context. For another, it makes the plurality within Islam and the difficulty, not to mention the impossibility, of speaking of 'Islam as such' manifest. In his discussion of the Muslim positions regarding the secular constitutional state, Heiner Bielefeldt refers to this problem when he says:

> Here the question arises as to what is to be understood as a Muslim position. Should all statements that Muslims make on politics, the state, and society be assessed as 'Muslim positions'? Or is such a qualification to be made only if an explicit reference is made to Islamic sources or to Muslim self-understanding? (Bielefeldt, 2003a, 59)

Linking up with what has been said above, it can be maintained that, also in the encounter with the theme of human rights and Islam, no 'Islam as such' can be presupposed. One can only assume various Muslim positions that range from complete rejection to an unconsidered adoption of human rights. Bassiouni writes:

> Muslim views of the relation between Islam and human rights are so diverse and complex that it is very difficult to work out a valid generalisation on this theme. In fact, it is impossible to predict on the basis of religious affiliation what the position of a Muslim will be regarding human rights. (Bassiouni, 2010, 177)

3 The Encounter with Human Rights

The attitude of many Muslims to human rights, especially of those who live in Muslim countries, cannot be adequately explained if they are not seen in the light of the general relations between the 'Muslim world' and the West. There are several reasons for this. One of the most important reasons is that the relations between ,the 'Muslim world' and the West is strongly coloured by the colonial period. Even if relations were not entirely free of conflict prior to that period, the colonisation of the 'Muslim world' has stamped in the collective memory of many Muslims the image of 'the West' and everything associated with it decisively and subsequently (Abu-Zaid & Sezgin, 2008, 207). This colonisation – and other negative events – led to a hostile attitude to all Western ideas. Any adoption of ideas and ideals stamped by the West were understood as a kind of capitulation:

> When the colonised began to rise against their colonisers, they despised the values for which they stood. Naturally, it was important to cast off the colonialist regime, but it also resulted in a detour in the political-ideological area. If the colonisers declared themselves in favour of democracy, democracy could not be worth striving for, so it was argued. For as soon as one begins to fight against an oppressor, one also fights against the culture and mindset that is associated with the oppressor. (Ibid., 211)

This general hostility to Western approaches can also be found in the discussion around the theme of human rights and Islam. For human rights also originated in the West and were viewed – for that matter not only – by Muslims as specif-

ically Western. The exclusivist claims of the West to human rights as a genuine Judeo-Christian achievement do not make the adoption of human rights for other religious and cultural circles simpler. Bassiouni writes:

> The power imbalance with which social and political values are debated cannot be denied. The dominance relation becomes apparent too clearly in the opposition between Western progressiveness and Islamic backwardness, the dualism between Western peacefulness and Islamic willingness to commit violence too strongly, the idea of a specific Western rationality beyond Islamic piety is too rooted, and the view of freedom and tolerance as features of the Western and shortcomings as those of Islamic culture too obvious. (Bassiouni, 2014, 12)

In addition to the historical development and Western appropriation of human rights, there are also other world political events that reinforce the historically stamped aversion to everything that is Western. Not seldom, global political events that are initiated by Western states without any or little consideration for human rights are perceived by many Muslims as examples of the relativisation and instrumentalisation of human rights by the West itself. This leads to the assumption that the West uses human rights to put pressure on Muslims (ibid., 16). Colonisation and the current global political situation are not enough, however, to explain this hostile attitude. The religious component should not be left out of consideration here. In the encounter with human rights, it plays a very important role. Not seldom, the rejection of human rights is explained by saying that universal human rights cannot always be brought into harmony with Islam or with *Shariah* law. Following the reference to two important phenomena that are important for understanding the Islamic context, the next section will discuss the encounter with the theme of human rights and Islam.

4 Attitudes towards Human Rights

In view of the internal Islamic plurality, the question cannot be whether Islam can be reconciled with human rights, but which attitude should be taken to develop an interpretation of Islam that takes human rights into account. With respect to human rights, there is a broad range among Muslims of different opinions that are based on different premises (Bielefeldt, n. y., 1). Even if the number of those who assume a fundamental compatibility between Islam and modern human rights is constantly increasing, there are quite a few divergent views. According to Fred Halliday's approach, they can be categorised as follows:

I. Rejection of the argument that human rights are not compatible with Islam and thus need to be rejected.
II. Irreconcilability: the view that Islam cannot be brought into agreement with human rights.
III. Appropriation: the view that human rights are valid only 'within the framework of *Shariah* law'.
IV. Harmonisation: the argument that there is no problem in reconciling Islam and human rights. (Bassiouni, 2010, 178)

All four attitudes can be classified in one way or another in one of the two opposed theological positions that dominate the current discourse on human rights in Islam and can be traced back to the early beginnings of Islam: a rather 'static' understanding of religion and theology on the one hand and a more 'dynamic' one on the other (Güler, 2002).

In the static view, religion and theology are seen as closed truths. Accordingly, the task of Muslims is seen as perpetuating what has already been said. The role of the subject in the origin of theological content is not taken into consideration, with the result that Muhammad's only role in the process of revelation is nothing more than passing something on in its pure form. An analysis of religious dogma grounded in rationality is viewed at the very least as superficial, and occasionally, however, as watering down or heresy. Independent thinking is tolerated under the condition that it is used to underpin the present truths to support them additionally through new methods.

This approach to religious or theological truths cannot lead either to maturity or to a compatibility with the modern understanding of human rights (Mette & Schweitzer, 2002, 37). For this attitude is opposed to any innovation and despises everything that, in the view of adherents of this view, cannot be directly derived from the religious sources. Progression is not pursued. Tradition is not seen as passing on the fire from one generation to the next but as passing on the ashes. "The independent interpretation in the area of religious doctrines or religious stories is denied and can lead to the accusation of apostasy" (Abu-Zaid, 1996, 82)

Adjustment to the circumstances is not the focus of theological reflections, but the authority of the previous scholars. That is why it is not surprising that advocates of this position view human rights not as Western but as genuine Islamic achievements that were present in the form of religious freedom in the early period of Islam and had been implemented in Medina, long before the West (Wielandt, 2007, 58). Even if the "Muslim model of dealing with those of other faiths provided an amount of tolerance and safety, to which medieval Christianity had nothing comparable to put beside it" (ibid., 56), it cannot be viewed as a substitute for universal human rights.

A good example of the consequences of a rather static understanding of theology in the context of human rights is constituted by the attempt of a few Muslim-majority states to develop an alternative 'Islamic' declaration of human rights. The 1990 Cairo Declaration of Human Rights can be seen as an illustration of this problem, which was accepted by the foreign Ministers' Conference of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) but has not yet been ratified by the Organisation itself and therefore is only accorded the status of a draft (Bielefeldt, n.y., 4). An analysis of this declaration strikingly reveals that through the fundamental principle of restriction of content to agreement with *Shariah* law in a number of articles, this declaration counteracts the reproach of the irreconcilability of Islam with human rights less than it reinforces it. For this reason, this declaration is right viewed as incompatible with the idea of universal human rights (Wielandt, 2007, 64). In the words of Mahmoud Cherif Bassiouni,

> [w]hat is required indeed is not more detailed mention of the fact that some human rights were decisively limited when they are pressed into the framework of traditional *Shariah* (Bassiouni, 2010, 193).

In contrast to the static approach, the dynamic understanding of religion and theology, which no longer finds reception among Muslims, does not pursue a literal understanding. Rather, it concerns itself with decoding the principles underlying the texts while taking the context of its origin into account. The contextuality and subject orientation of the religious texts are given special significance. They are no longer understood as independent of the reality of the people addressed and as pre-existent truths but as the revelation of God stamped by human reality and language (Abu-Zaid, 1996, 165). A concrete revelation that is written down, like the Qur'an, is seen here not as the full word of God but as a "specific manifestation of the word of God" (Abu-Zaid, 2000, 3) that is inexhaustible even if all trees are changed into pens and the seas into ink (Q 18:109; 31:27).

Through concentrating on the principles behind the Qur'anic statements, the possibility of a continuous adjustment of the intentions, especially those that order interhuman relations, are left open. This attitude is necessary to be able to respond at all in a positive way to modern values like human rights and democracy. This attitude is of enormous significance especially in confessional religious education. It generates the necessary sensitivity among the pupils as early as possible.

5 Human Rights in Islamic Religious Education

In light of what has been said until now, it is clear that a fundamental change in Islamic education is needed. This includes above all an 'anthropological turn' in Islamic theology, from which an understanding of revelation that is useful for a dynamic understanding of religion can be developed (Sejdini, 2015b). This 'anthropological turn' would also have a positive effect on the Islamic understanding of law, which appears to be a major hindrance in this connection for the compatibility of human rights with Islam if Islamic law is not contextually understood and explained. Viewed in this way, a simple commitment to human rights in curricula or textbooks with the note that they have always been part of Islam and can therefore not be contradicted is not conducive because it stands in the way of an urgently necessary encounter.

If human rights are also to be internalised by Muslim pupils, something is indispensable for the preservation of a pluralist society, more is needed than a simple encounter with the theme in Islamic religious education. An Islamic religious education is needed that is committed to the values, in line with its own sources, that constitute the foundations of human rights. Here the following principles are of enormous significance (Sejdini, 2016a, 27–29):

- All people are equal in dignity (Q 17:70).
- Faith is a personal experience and an offer by God (Q 18:29).
- Compulsion destroys faith and religiosity (Q 18:26).
- Faith does not exclude reason and science (Q 6:32).
- Not everything can be found in the revelatory texts (Renz, 2005)
- Maturity in the sense of taking the initiative understood as a principle of religious education.

Secularism and democracy are constitutive ideas of religious education. Viewed in that way, the most important human rights can be justified on those principles from the Muslim perspective. Moreover, there are numerous other verses in the Qur'an that ground human dignity with theological and philosophical arguments. Thus, human dignity is expressed in the presentation of the human being as the successor and viceregent (caliph) of God on earth and at the same time in the dispensation of maturity to him/her as a rational being who is capable of instituting social and political order through his/her understanding (Sejdini, 2016a). Moreover, the prohibition against violating human dignity is often emphasised (Wielandt, 1993, 187). In this connection, reference is also made to religious freedom as a fundamental human right that is closely connected to human dignity and thus also constitutes the foundation of a multicultural

and multireligious society.[2] The fundamental principle of no coercion in matters of faith is very clear especially in *sura* 2:256, on which Muhammad Asad comments in his translation to the effect that any attempt at coercion regarding faith is already a serious sin (Asad, 2008, 70). The fundamental right to religious freedom is expressed in *sura* 10:99, and elsewhere, undeniably as willed by God. There we read:

> And (thus it is:) had thy Sustainer so willed, all those who live on earth would surely have attained to faith, all of them: dost thou, then, think that thou couldst compel people to believe. (Q 10:99)

In line with this and similar Qur'anic verses, which refer to both freedom and responsibility of every human being, the Muslim thinker Mohamed Talbi comes to the following conclusion in his treatment of religious freedom:

> So from a Qur'anic perspective we may say that human rights are rooted in what every man is by nature, and this is by virtue of God's plan and Creation. Now it goes without saying that the cornerstone of all human rights is religious liberty. (Talbi, 1985, 102)

Even if the Qur'an contains a series of verses that speak clearly of and emphasise religious freedom, that there is no coercion in faith and everyone is left to his/her own religion, the practice of some Muslim-majority countries clearly shows that this spirit has not penetrated everywhere into the Muslim world. In this connection, the European context is a good opportunity for us Muslims to deal in a self-critical way with this theme and to develop new religious education stimuli that can flow into Islamic religious education.

2 Unfortunately, we are more often witnesses of attempts that aim at limiting the religious freedom of the other by appealing to sacred scriptures. Paradoxically, such attempts often presuppose many religious revolutions from which a higher sensitivity to religious freedom would be expected. Even if these limitations of religious freedom, especially in Muslim contexts, in which even the locals should not enjoy human rights to their full extent, are often to be traced back to the political establishment, it should still be emphasised that the limitation of religious freedom is firmly contradicted by the Qur'anic teaching on faith.

Secular and Religious: Challenges for Islamic Theology

1 Introduction

To discuss the theme 'secular and religious' from a theological perspective is certainly not an easy undertaking. This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that the theme is a very complex one and, on the other, to the fact that the concepts 'secular' and 'religious' are often used in opposition to each other. The issue becomes even more explosive when it is discussed in the context of Islam. Moreover, some additional challenges become apparent that are conditioned partly historically but also partly by the contemporary debates on Islam. In particular, the metatheme of the compatibility of Islam with Western values plays a crucial role and has determined the direction of public debates for years. Even if the discussions – with some exceptions – are conducted too emotionally, unreflectively, and one-dimensionally, current developments in Europe leave no doubt about the urgency of a substantial debate on this theme. To be able to approach this thematic complex better, we will first discuss a few central aspects.

It seems appropriate, first, to point out that the Islamic theological approach to secularism is embedded in a wide historical framework and can only be understood against that background. The encounter of Muslims with secularism cannot and should not be viewed in an isolated way. Rather, it is part of a series of events that Muslims have been confronted with in the wake of the decline in power of the 'Islamic empire'. The relation of the 'Muslim world' to secularism was stamped in a lasting and decisive way by the circumstances of this encounter, which did not happen everywhere at the same time. And subsequent developments – like the colonisation of Muslim areas, attempts at institutional and social reform in line with the Western model, abolishing the caliphate and the installation of authoritarian regimes controlled from abroad, secularism interpreted and implemented in its most repressive forms – reinforced this. Obviously, this also influenced Islamic theology. This other history or experience of Islam with secularism, which is different from the European experience, must always be kept in mind when discussing the Islamic approach to this theme.

The second aspect, which should be discussed briefly at the outset, concerns the different variations of the concept of 'secularism'. This ambiguity often leads to misunderstanding and confusion, which – apart from any analysis of the content – can end in a sweeping rejection of secularism. That is why I should point out here that this essay focuses more on constitutional secularism. Thus, here

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I will explore the question of how constitutional secularism is to be assessed from the perspective of Islamic theology and what this can mean for the Muslim community in Europe.

Another question that arises in this connection is what can be considered to be a position of Islamic theology at all (Bielefeldt, 2003a, 59 – 84). In the first place, there are various Islamic currents that advocate even partly contradictory positions, such as in the case of the Sunnites and the Shiites. In the second place, these groups are very heterogeneous, which means that they already contain various approaches to secularism; their orientation depends above all on what law school and school of thought they belong to, as well as the tradition of knowledge with which the scholar feels affiliated and the context in which he lived. That is why it is not unproblematic to view any one of these positions as more authentic than any other (Damir-Geilsdorf, 2016, 447). Such a mistake is often made in current debates on Islam, especially when fundamentalist positions are presented as the only truly authentic Islamic positions.

Finally, it should be noted that the debates on Islam until now have contributed significantly to the myth about the alleged irreconcilability of Islam with secularism becoming established in many minds. It has also in the meantime come to be considered scientifically verified. If, in the past, this essentialist perspective was limited to Muslim fundamentalists, self-proclaimed experts on Islam, and ignorant journalists, today it is more often found among academics. This tendency is represented in exemplary fashion in a quote from the book *Christentum und Säkularer Staat* by the Catholic professor Martin Rhonheimer. There we read:

> In its earliest manifestation, during Muhammad's exile in Medina, Islam was by nature more than simply a religion: it was a political-religious social, legal, and ruling system. That is why it is presented as a – completely religion-based – alternative to the secular and pluralist political culture of the democratic constitutional state of the West. (Rhonheimer, 2012, 329)

Rhonheimer does establish commonalities between Islam and Christianity regarding the 'claim to religious absoluteness and universality'. But in the same sentence he suggests a totalitarian claim for Islam that, in his view, distinguishes it fundamentally from Christianity (ibid.).

Given the situation portrayed above, an Islamic-theological approach to the theme first requires a look at the Muslim sources to investigate the issue whether Islam – as is often suggested – prescribes a concrete model for governance to which all Muslims are forever obligated. The clarification of this question has central significance for further discussions because accepting a preset model of governance would mean that it was no longer a question of religious *and* sec-

ular but of religious *or* secular. That is why we should now take a brief look at the Muslim sources to explore this question of a political Islamic system.

2 The Muslim Sources

There is wide agreement that Islam is dependent on four sources. In addition to the Qur'an as the word of God, the other three are the Sunnah, i.e., the acts and sayings of the prophet Muhammad, the consensus of scholars (*ijmāʿ*), and argument by analogy (*qiyas*). In contrast to widespread belief, the Islamic sources, especially the Qur'an, the primary source of Islam, do not give any concrete specifications for a certain kind of political system. Nor do these sources define the properties of a ruler. All we find are general statements that can be understood as conditions for political actions. These include above all ensuring justice (Q 16:90; 49:9), seeking advice (Q 3:159; 42:38), as well as the principle of entrusting tasks to those people who are best suited for those or most competent (Q 4:58). These conditions have neither a direct nor indirect relation to an Islamic theory of the state. Here we find nothing more than important fundamental principles that are to be taken into consideration not only for choosing leaders for the community but also as general conditions. What the concrete implementation of these fundamental principles looks like, what can thus be understood as justice, what the advice should be with regards to both content and form, what competences the leadership of the community would need – none of these issues are defined more specifically and are thus left to people to decide.

There are of course Muslim voices that see the foundations for the inseparability of Islam and politics in the Qur'an and thus necessarily do not share the view just described above. Because the Qur'an – like all other books – does not itself speak but, as a written text, is brought to speech by individuals, this divergence is not surprising. But it is striking that advocates of political Islam often ignore the context of the Qur'an and assume that the Qur'an contains answers to all concrete situations. This anachronistic reading of the Qur'an inevitably opens up the possibility of using the Qur'an to address one's own interests. Two examples here will illustrate this point.

One of the reference points for the assumption that the Qur'an provides the foundation for a genuine Islamic political system is the verse Q 24:42, which reads: "for, [sic] God's is the dominion over the heavens and the earth, and with God is all journeys' end." The word dominion (*mulk*) in this verse constitutes the foundation of the view that God also provides political dominion. Nevertheless, as the Turkish theologian Hasan Elik correctly states, this word does not have a political connotation. Viewed in its entire Qur'anic context, it refers

to the sovereignty of God as creator and as the source of natural law. In this sense, the sovereignty of God is not to be understood politically but ontologically (Elik, 2012, 182). This obtains similarly for another citation from the Qur'an in which this connection is used. Q 5:44 says that those who do not act according to the judgment of God (*hukm*) lack faith. In this case as well, the equivocal concept of 'judgment' is given a political connotation, whereas the entire Qur'anic context makes clear that it concerns more an ethical and legal dimension that only prescribes finding a just solution in the case of disagreement (Elik, 2012, 183). Without going any further into the discussion here, it should be clear from these examples as to how much reinterpretation is needed to derive a political system from the few Qur'anic verses.[1]

Concrete references to a particular political system cannot be found mentioned by the prophet Muhammad either. Although the fact that he was both a messenger of God and the ruler of a state serves as a foundation among Islamists to propagate their rhetoric of the inseparability of Islam and politics, one cannot derive a concrete political system either from his statements or his actions. It is noteworthy that – contrary to some later interpolations – Muhammad did not name a successor or prescribe any specific tasks for such a successor. This was an important reason why there were discussions sometimes about his successor even before his burial, which reached its climax in the war between the fourth caliph ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661 AD) and the Syrian governor at the time Muʿāwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 680 AD) (Akbulut, 1992).

A look at Islamic history also makes it clear that classical Muslim scholars had divergent views of this as well. Norbert Campagna locates four types of discourse that formed around the Muslim political system (Campagna, 2012, 36). These were the following: the discourse among the Muslim philosophers, the discourse in the mirrors for princes, the discourse among legal scholars, and that of a so-called sociological approach. These discourses were distinguished from each other by their objective and methodology. In the previous century as well, there were also, in addition to the protagonists of a political Islam, such as Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) and Abū l-Aʿlā Maudūdī (d. 1979) (Klevesath, 2012), a series of scholars who strongly advocated secularism or a separation of religion and state. The Egyptian scholar ʿAlī ʿAbd ar-Rāziq deserves to be mentioned here. He was a defendant of secularism, and in his work on politics in Islam he argued that there was no single piece of evidence to be taken seriously in the known Islamic sources that specified a certain system of government for Muslims (ʿAbd ar-Rāziq, 2010, 57). In addition to what has already been dis-

1 For the different positions on secularism, see Wielandt, 2009.

cussed, we should keep in mind "that in Sunni Islam religious scholars had no political power like a Christian clergy and institutions like those present in the Christian church" (Damir-Geilsdorf, 2016, 432f.). Given that, it becomes clear that the issue of political Islam reflects personal views or interpretations by scholars that are nether binding for all nor beyond question.

3 Consequences

From what has been said until now, the following consequences emerge regarding results for Islamic theology, especially in the European context.

a) Even if Christians and Muslims are confronted with similar challenges, the frameworks for the discussions are nevertheless different. If, at one level, the issue is the redefinition of the relation between the religious and the secular with respect to the post-secular context, the discussions concerning Islam have to do with Islam in general or the compatibility of Islam with secularism. Even if there are different demonstrable reasons for that, which were explained in part, it needs to be kept in mind that there are two different types of discourse here that partly overlap but are nevertheless differently situated.
b) Theologically, nothing and no one – beyond themselves and the interests of particular groups – stands in the way of Muslims not only accepting secularism but also promoting in an appreciative way. They can do so in such a way that it becomes clear that an institutional separation of religion and state is not a threat for Muslims but rather a unique opportunity to remain in dialogue with other religions and worldviews, to develop themselves, and to participate in social life.
c) Despite the various historical developments, I find it extremely irresponsible, even dangerous, if referring to the specific non-Islamic context of the origins of secularism entails an attempt to withdraw from this discussion (Bielefeldt, 2003a, 16). After all, even if it has been established that Islam prescribes no concrete political system and Muslims have no church-like structures, we should not conclude that Muslims are not confronted with similar challenges. A look at the current situation would suffice to argue for these similarities despite different conceptualities and notions. After all, on the one hand, it is a sad fact that Islam is currently one of the most politically instrumentalised religions. On the other hand, various events and practices show that a not inconsiderable number of Muslims living in Europe still see secularism as an anti-religious substitute for religion. This fact could have unforeseeable consequences for our European context.

That is why new Islamic theological concepts are needed that see secularism as a foundation for a religious and worldview pluralism and are able to cultivate it from their own sources.

d) The secularism of the constitutional state is, namely, an important guarantee of the equality of all people and thus also for the guarantee of freedom of religion. Conversely, in my view, freedom of religion is the most important condition for the realisation of faith. Where there is no freedom to choose for or against faith without any fear of consequences by the state, there can be no 'true' faith as a personal decision. Coercion in religion destroys the relationship to God and contributes to mere pseudo-religiosity. Coercion does not lead to faith but rather to people turning away from God because faith in his name is imposed on them. And because the personal freedom to decide is a constitutive part of faith, this is also demanded by the religions themselves, as in Q 2:256, where we read: "THERE SHALL BE no coercion in matters of faith." This verse does not mean that a confession cannot be forced but that what is forced cannot be faith in a true sense. If the condition for a sincere faith is therefore one's personal decision, there are currently no more appropriate frameworks than the secular democracy of the constitutional state. It is both an important foundation for religious and worldview pluralism and protection for the autonomy of the individual faith communities as well as against any political instrumentalisation by the state. Therefore, it ought to be in the interest of all believers to operate within the secular framework of the constitutional state to develop their own religiosity. The fact that there are also forms of secularism that attempt to suppress religions for ideological reasons – even to get rid of them completely – should not tempt us to reject the separation of religion and state in principle, just as it would not be appropriate to reject religions in principle just because people commit atrocities in the name of religion.

In conclusion, it can be stated that, because of the complexity of this theme, it is not easy to treat all aspects within the framework provided. It should be emphasised here once more that there is no other rational solution for a peaceful co-existence in a pluralist world, other than one in which the religious and the secular are not viewed as opposites but as mutually complementary and supporting factors that constitute the foundation for our society. On the one hand, in order to cultivate basic values, the secularism of the constitutional state is dependent on the support of individual worldviews and religions; on the other hand, the religions need the secular context to achieve the necessary level of reflection that makes it possible for them to cultivate a pluralist society.

Closing Remarks

It is a long road that Islamic theology and religious education will have to travel before it is integrated into the European academic landscape and, through new impulses and synergies, independent and authentic Islamic approaches arise and establish themselves. A new kind of theological thinking can neither be artificially produced nor arise overnight. Rather, it needs time and space to flourish and produce fruit. It cannot and should not be standardised. Just as various understandings of Islam exist, there will and should be various theological and religious educational approaches in the European context. For experts in the Islamic knowledge tradition and academic work in general this is nothing new: it constitutes the essence of academic and scientific work.

With a view to Islamic theology and religious education, some challenges arise for the future that are addressed in one way or another in this volume. One of these challenges is adherence to the academic and scientific standards as an important presupposition for integrating themselves into the academic landscape in Europe as well as being taken seriously in the academic and scientific community. An isolated Islamic theology that resists meeting this requirement because of specific peculiarities would not only lose its right to a place at the university but also not be able to address European Muslims.

Another challenge that is raised in various essays in this book is the innovative character of theological thinking. Even if the tradition and therefore the past unquestionably represents an indispensable source for Islamic theology and religious education, the objective now should not be to repeat this *ad infinitum*. This contradicts both the spirit of research as well as that of (Islamic) scholarship. Theological approaches that arose in earlier times cannot be taken over without modification today. The goal of contemporary Islamic theology must be to develop theological approaches that produce a similar or better effect in the present than past ones had previously in the contexts in which they arose. It is neither meaningful nor possible to copy the past. These essays should – as the title of this book *Rethinking Islam in Europe: Contemporary Approaches in Islamic Religious Education and Theology* suggests – lead to thinking Islamic approaches in Europe anew.

Another important challenge is *contextuality*. To develop theological approaches that are important for one's own community as well as for society as a whole, the contemporary context must be the most important reference point. For European Muslims, Europe constitutes the ultimate context. Contextuality does not imply an assessment but a bridge to the reality lived by those who are to be addressed. Theological approaches must be constructed in a

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way similar to how the life conditions of those first addressed in the Qur'an were taken into consideration to produce a connection with the people addressed. The consideration of the contemporary context does not restrict the universality of the message; to the contrary, it is all the stronger the more firmly anchored it is in a local context.

The final important challenge that should be mentioned in these closing remarks is what is often mentioned in this book: *contingency sensitivity*. This term means that, as people and as academics, we remain aware that our ideas and concepts, just like we ourselves, are transient and fleeting by nature. They do not reflect the truth as such but what we perceive as a truth. That is why our ideas, concepts, and academic knowledge do not have any absolute validity but merely constitute small pieces in an infinite puzzle. This obtains in particular for our knowledge of God. This awareness does not diminish the relevance of research but goes hand in hand with contingency-sensitivity and provides demonstrable results without thereby forgetting that it could be other than what it is.

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