A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE QUR'AN

IN SEARCH FOR A METHOD

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door

Roman Nazarenko,

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A Catholic Theological Perspective on the Qur'an. In search for a method.
Roman Nazarenko

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Promotores:

Em. Prof. dr. Marcel J.H.M. Poorthuis	Tilburg University
Prof. dr. Edward J. Alam	Notre Dame University, Louaize

Leden promotiecommissie:

Em. Prof. dr. Herman. L. Beck	Tilburg University
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Prof. dr. Frans J.S. Wijsen	Radboud University

I dedicate this dissertation to all the fallen soldiers, volunteers, and fellow citizens who gave their lives fighting the enemy during the Russo-Ukrainian War.

Eternal memory to them!

Glory to Ukraine!

Glory to the Heroes!

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[1] Ukraine may be rightly regarded as a *cradle* of interreligious dialogue and peaceful coexistence. In contrast to much of Europe, Muslims in Ukraine are not merely a minority but are an indigenous community with nearly a millennium of presence, particularly in Crimea. This unique history of cultural and religious integration distinguishes Ukraine as a context for rich interreligious engagement between Christians and Muslims, for exchange and communal harmony.

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Preface

Despite the numerous armed conflicts plaguing the world, we constantly hear calls for reconciliation and peace. The need for dialogue becomes particularly urgent in a globalized society where diverse cultures, religions, and values are increasingly intertwined. In my view, interreligious dialogue has a unique potential to effectively reduce tensions within societies. The shared values incorporated in the world's religions can serve as a foundation for understanding and trust among people, regardless of cultural or religious differences. Such dialogue can build bridges of understanding, promote social stability, and foster peaceful coexistence, especially in regions where religious or ethnic divisions exacerbate conflicts.

However, to achieve this, it is essential to avoid several associated pitfalls. One significant danger is so-called interreligious romanticism or the naive and excessive belief that interreligious interaction will solve all problems and eliminate all tensions. Proponents of this approach believe that the sole and key precondition is to focus exclusively on the things that unite us. Additionally, secularism, eclecticism, religious relativism, and similar issues can also be identified as potential threats to a genuine mutual understanding.

However, I am convinced that what divides us does not pose dangers but rather presents a wonderful opportunity and represents the greatest treasure for a representative of any religion. Dialogue can only be honest, successful, and effective when we are truly willing to listen to the voice of the other and remain open to it. This is not about all religions blindly merging into one religion; rather, by listening to the other, I can understand their perception of God, the sacred, and their paradigm of thought. Consequently, I can redirect the questions posed by my dialogue partner back to myself.

I am convinced that the Catholic tradition's commitment to interreligious dialogue can be expanded to including engagement with other sacred texts.

Real theology extends beyond a purely mystical or abstract study of the Bible and religious doctrines. It is a dynamic practice which should not be limited only to the past. It must be actively connected with the present, explaining the role of religion in the modern world and the reality of contemporary life. And what is perhaps the most important: theology must be oriented to the future. As a theologian, my theological framework should be far from static. So, theology should engage deeply with present challenges and anticipate future needs; it should not solely relate to tradition or past understandings, but actively explore how religion can shape and support modern existence. Thus, theology functions as a connecting link grounded in tradition yet extending outward to deliver meaningful and insightful guidance to a world striving for profound understanding.

In conclusion, my aspiration for this research is that it will serve meaningfully as a valuable contribution to Catholic theology and provide fruitful interreligious dialogue and interreligious engagement, particularly with the Qur'an. By employing Comparative Theology as a central method, this study aims to present a model of respectful and intellectually substantive dialogue that embraces both the integrity of faith and the pursuit of mutual understanding. I hope this research will inspire numerous theologians to engage in honest inner reflection within the Christian community and that it will also build a bridge between Muslims and Christians, respecting our theological differences and not hiding our differences.

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Introduction and research question

In the contemporary world, the relationship between Christianity and Islam presents itself not only as a social and political reality but also as an urgent theological question. Within Catholic theology, the issue has shifted from the question whether the Qur'an should be taken into serious consideration at all to the more demanding task of discerning in what way it should to be approached. The Qur'an stands as a religious text that has profoundly shaped the faith and identity of millions, while simultaneously functioning as a theological counterpart that raises fundamental challenges to certain Christian convictions, and as a testimony to humanity's persistent search for God. This challenge is felt with particular intensity in the Eastern-Catholic tradition, which has historically lived in close proximity *to*, and often *in* dialogue with, the Islamic world. It is within this context that the present dissertation explores the possible theological significance of the Qur'an for an Eastern-Catholic theologian, asking how such an engagement can maintain adherence to Catholic doctrine while also creating genuine space for interreligious dialogue with Islam.

Hence my central research question is:

What is the theological significance of the Qur'an for an Eastern-Catholic theologian?

In this formulation there is an explicitly personal element: the focus lies on *an Eastern-Catholic theologian*, not on Eastern-Catholic theology as such. It would not be possible nor desirable to presume to speak on behalf of a tremendously rich tradition that spans centuries of history, culture, and theological reflection. Still, the task of speaking as a theologian cannot be reduced to a merely subjective or autobiographical perspective. Theological inquiry is always embedded in a

particular tradition, drawing from its spiritual, liturgical, and intellectual resources, while at the same time contributing to its ongoing development. Thus, my position as an Eastern-Catholic theologian both situates and shapes the inquiry: it provides a horizon of meaning, but also demands accountability to the broader ecclesial community.

In what follows, I will therefore make explicit what parameters are indispensable for an Eastern-Catholic theologian when engaging with the Qur'an. These include fidelity to the Catholic tradition and its magisterial teaching, attention to the distinctiveness of the Eastern theological and liturgical heritage, and openness to learning through dialogue with Islam. They also involve a hermeneutical awareness: the recognition that one's own theological lens both illuminates and limits what can be perceived in the Qur'an. To ask about the theological significance of the Qur'an, then, is not to search for a definitive "Catholic" answer, but rather to explore how the encounter with the Qur'an might enrich, challenge, and clarify the vocation of an Eastern-Catholic theologian today, with respect to Islam and towards the world.

It seems a good choice for Catholic theology to take the Qur'an as point of departure. The declaration of the Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate* (1965) affirmed that Muslims believe in the one true God, but it has left open the logical follow-up question how Muslims may have arrived at that insight. Kenneth Cragg (1913–2012), the pioneer in Islamic-Christian relations, adopted another approach. In his frequent encounters with Muslims, he experienced that for them the central question to Christians was: "what do you think of Muhammad?" Cragg even devoted a whole book to answer that question.[2] Still, this question is bound to create

[2] Kenneth Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response* (London and New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984).

misunderstandings. On the one hand, the respect that Muslims have for the prophet of Islam is profound, but on the other hand, the Islamic concept of revelation dictates that Muhammad did not contribute anything of his own to the revelation of the Qur'an. This makes the question of the meaning of Muhammad highly complicated and in fact quite paradoxical. As will be explained in this dissertation, Catholicism and Islam depart from radically different concepts of revelation.

This is why it seems advisable to take the Qur'an itself as the point of departure. A modern Catholic theological perception of the Qur'an should account for the polemical and distorted views of the Qur'an during its history, especially in the Western world.

At this point, it is important to outline the structure of the research. The first chapter of this dissertation, *From Polemics via Religious Studies to Interreligious Dialogue*, offers an overview of that history, which has over the last hundred years or so eventually been replaced by interreligious dialogue, be it only partially. Obviously, in the light of this history, a Christian theological perspective of Islam and the Qur'an is bound to be treated with suspicion. As an offshoot of religious studies, Islamic studies claims to have an unbiased attitude to its object of study, Islam and the Qur'an. Indeed, it is very important to combat prejudice and discrimination. And still, despite the achievement of Islamic studies, the question remains (and it should be considered a legitimate question), what the meaning of the Qur'an can be for Christian theology. It is debatable whether it is even possible to claim a neutral position in the light of hermeneutics, which implies a kind of rehabilitation of a prior question. One could even speak of a rehabilitation of "pre-judice", i.e., a prior judgment that is bound to be refined by further study. This philosophical debate, raised by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), is also relevant for the relation between theology and religious studies.

The second chapter, entitled *The Theological Meaning of the Qur'an for an Eastern-Catholic Theologian: On the Way to a Method*, begins by addressing the strong reservations many Muslims express toward applying historical-critical methods to the Qur'an. These concerns are then contrasted with the diverse historical-critical approaches that have shaped modern Qur'anic studies. The chapter subsequently turns to Scriptural Reasoning, which is explored as a potential resource for interreligious engagement with sacred texts, while also recognizing its inherent challenges and limitations. From there, the discussion moves to Comparative Theology, which provides the main methodological framework for the research. The chapter further considers the Qur'an as a religious document in its own right—worthy of theological interpretation beyond purely historical or philological concerns. Finally, it clarifies the specific lens of an Eastern-Catholic theological perspective through which this research is undertaken. In this way, Chapter 2 provides the methodological grounding for the textual and theological analyses that follow.

The next three chapters—*Responsibility for the Loss of Paradise (Qur'an 2:30–39; Genesis 3:1–7)*, *The Annunciation Story (Qur'an 19:16–22; 3:42–47; Luke 1:26–35)*, and *Muhammad and Jesus Confronted with the Demand for a Miracle (Qur'an 4:153; Mark 6:4–6; Luke 11:29–32)*—all proceed according to the same structure. Each begins with a close reading of a selected Qur'anic passage: the account of Paradise, the Annunciation to Mary, and the role of miracles in the preaching of repentance. These are then placed in their broader Qur'anic context and compared with their Biblical counterparts. The Biblical texts serve to highlight my frame of reference as a Catholic theologian. The procedure should be distinguished form a mere comparison of Qur'an and Bible from an outsider's perspective. This is why the heart of each chapter is formed by a set of several theological questions.

Although a theological perspective should be distinguished form a historical critical approach to the Qur'an, it proved fruitful to take a side glance at that impressive and growing field of research. Hence the final question in each case (3.4.4; 4.4.5; 5.4.4.) engages in dialogue with modern Qur'anic scholarship, particularly the contributions of Angelika Neuwirth and Nicolai Sinai. Neuwirth's rehabilitation of typology shows a striking parallel with Catholic theological hermeneutics of the Bible. Her appreciation of Byzantine Christian traditions, roughly contemporaneous with the Qur'an, obviously deserves some attention in my theological approach. Still, her approach remains loyal to the historical-critical method in that she refrains from self-reflection of her theological position. Neuwirth's reservations about seeking pre-Qur'anic sources—at the expense of the Qur'an's own canonical context—contrast with Sinai's position. Yet I will argue that his search for pre-Qur'anic traditions may, in fact, benefit from a theological perspective (3.4.4; 4.4.5; 5.4.4.).

The sixth synthesizes the results of the comparative readings and offers a theological evaluation of the Qur'an from a Catholic perspective. It examines the Qur'anic and Biblical narratives on the three chosen themes before articulating five possible Catholic theological attitudes toward the Qur'an. It concludes by clarifying my own position on how the Qur'an may be approached theologically, and by offering final reflections on the potential and limitations of Christian–Muslim dialogue rooted in shared Comparative Theology. The Qur'anic narratives, by provoking reflection, do not threaten Christian identity but deepen it. They enable what comparative theologian Pim Valkenberg calls "mutual illumination"—the discovery of new theological insights through the light of the other's faith.[3]

[3] Pim Valkenberg, *World Religions in Dialogue: A Comparative Theological Approach* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2013), 28–32.

The final chapter summarizes the results of his research in some four conclusions.

Inter/intrareligious dialogue and the historical-critical method:

A preliminary clarification

Interreligious dialogue and *intrareligious dialogue* should not be treated as separate domains, as the dialogical moment is always double: it simultaneously involves both the *other* and the *self*. The engagement with Islam, therefore, does not merely serve to clarify what Muslims believe or how they interpret their sacred texts, but rather, it challenges me to re-examine how my own theological tradition interprets, expresses, and embodies its faith.

Interreligious dialogue presupposes the recognition of religious otherness as a positive and potentially enriching element within the divine economy of salvation. Intrareligious dialogue, by contrast, refers to the inner process that occurs within the believer or within a religious community when it reflects upon its own beliefs in the light of other traditions.[4] For an Eastern-Catholic theologian, this dual movement is particularly meaningful, since the Eastern theological heritage—shaped by patristic hermeneutics, liturgical imagination, and apophatic theology—is profoundly dialogical.[5]

Engaging with the Qur'an, therefore, becomes a moment of both interreligious encounter and intrareligious self-examination. In this sense, the Qur'an functions as a mirror: it reflects not only the image of the other but also aspects of my own tradition that had remained unarticulated or forgotten.[6] This process reveals that theological dialogue is never one-directional. By engaging with another tradition's self-understanding, I also participate in the renewal of my own. Thus, *interreligious*

[4] Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 12–14.
[5] John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1983), 15–20.
[6] Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, 12–14.

dialogue becomes the catalyst for *intrareligious dialogue*. Without this inner dimension, interreligious dialogue risks remaining superficial—a polite exchange of facts or an exercise in diplomacy. But when accompanied by intrareligious reflection, it becomes transformative: it reshapes theological categories, widens horizons, and deepens faith.[7]

This integrated dynamic differs from the historical-critical method, which has dominated much of modern Biblical and Qur'anic scholarship. The historical-critical approach, though indispensable for understanding textual origins, seeks primarily to reconstruct historical contexts, linguistic layers, and sources. It demands a methodological neutrality that brackets questions of faith. The dialogue it engages in is between *texts and history*, not between *believers and traditions*.[8] By contrast, my approach as an Eastern-Catholic theologian does not set aside faith but begins from within it. While I respect and make use of historical-critical insights, my ultimate concern is not to explain how a text came to be, but to discern what theological meaning it holds when read within the horizon of revelation and living tradition.[9] The distinction is crucial: the historical-critical method strives for 'objectivity' through distance; theological dialogue seeks understanding through participation. Where the historical-critical method isolates, dialogue integrates; where the first explains, the second transforms.

Therefore, interreligious and intrareligious dialogue form a hermeneutical circle that transcends mere dispassionate comparison. They recognize that understanding the Qur'an—or any sacred text—is not a neutral intellectual operation, but a relational and theological event. As Paul Ricoeur observed,

[7] Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 56–60.
[8] John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 21–24.
[9] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 412–16.

interpretation always involves a "second naiveté": a return to meaning through critical reflection.[10] Likewise, dialogue with Islam enables a "second naiveté" for the Christian theologian—a rediscovery of faith through the mirror of the other. Thus, what is at stake here is not the replacement of one method by another, but the transformation of theological practice itself.

From this perspective, the task of an Eastern-Catholic theologian is not to construct a synthesis of Islam and Christianity, nor to relativize their differences, but to allow the encounter itself to become a space of theological creativity. True theological vitality requires both: rootedness and openness, faithfulness and encounter. The interreligious dialogue thus becomes not merely a methodological choice but a spiritual discipline—a way of being Church in a pluralistic world.[11]

[10] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 351–52.
[11] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Truth Is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 7–10.

Chapter 1

FROM POLEMICS VIA RELIGIOUS STUDIES (INCLUDING COMPARATIVE RELIGION) TO INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

The relationship between Christianity and the other religions and the place of Christianity in the non-religious world are important questions posed by our time. Whereas Vatican II can be considered as the official beginning of the Roman Catholic Church's dialogue with Islam, this positive stand has not remained unchallenged. An increasing number of voices within the Catholic Church is skeptical about, or even hostile to, Muslim-Christian dialogue. There is a real threat of diminishing the considerable achievements of Muslim-Christian dialogue because of the strengthening of these positions.[12] Still, interreligious dialogue is always a challenging and complex effort.

In the remote past, Islamic-Christian exchange was mainly one of polemics. This, however, has not prevented present-day theologians who represent these religions from seeking mutual understanding and common values. Interreligious dialogue is indeed associated with a kind of risk. First of all, there is the risk that the dialogue will be interpreted by its initiators as an alliance of the two groups of participants against a third one, in this case secularism. Faced with challenges such as fundamentalism, secularism, and modernity, the Roman Catholic Church struggles with many uncertainties connected with interreligious, intrareligious, and ecumenical concerns.[13] The rapid development and establishment of Islam in Europe as a religion full of ideas about social, political, and religious renewal, in combination with the substantial decline of Christianity in Western Europe, has prompted the Roman Catholic Church to reevaluate and modernize its official position towards Muslims.[14] From the standpoint of the Church, interreligious dialogue constitutes an essential component of the mission of Christianity to foster

[12] James L. Heft, *Catholicism and Interreligious Dialogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 57.
[13] John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 298.
[14] Roman Nazarenko, "Hans Küng and John Paul II: Contributions to the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue between Islam and Christianity. A Comparative Analysis," STL thesis, Tilburg University, 2015, 4.

peace and solidarity among humanity (*Ecclesiam Suam* 94).[15] However, it has become a bone of contention within the Catholic Church whether these generous statements should be put into practice or not? In this sense, contemporary approaches to interreligious engagement cannot be understood simply as extensions of earlier dialogue frameworks. Rather, they arise as attempts to address long-standing obstacles and methodological limitations that have shaped inter-religious encounters in recent decades. These newer models seek to move beyond the impasses of classical dialogue—such as superficial consensus, theological dilution, or purely diplomatic exchange—while equally avoiding any return to the polemical posture that characterized pre-dialogical relations. What emerges is a more reflexive, textually and theologically grounded mode of engagement that invites partners in dialogue not merely to converse but to think, interpret, and discern together.

1. Four stages in Christian-Islamic relations

Christian-Islamic encounters date back to the rise of Islam in the seventh century. For numerous centuries thereafter, Christian and Islamic communities remained interconnected due to their diverse theological perspectives and geographical closeness. This connection endured through epochs characterized by significant tension, animosity, and outright conflict, as well as through periods of delicate tolerance, harmonious cohabitation, and collaborative endeavor.[16] It might even be said that debates on religion started right in the infancy of Islam in the year 615, when "the first group of converts to Islam arrived as 'religious migrants/refugees' at Aksum, where they were questioned with interest about their

[15] Paul VI, *Encyclical Letter*, 1964. Quoted in Heft, *Catholicism and Interreligious Dialogue*, 73.
[16] Charles A. Kimball, "Muslim-Christian Dialogue," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford Islamic Studies Online, 2010), 377, http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0567.

new faith by the Christian emperor."[17] Still, it is not exaggerated to state that from the early beginning on, Christians perceived Islam nearly exclusively in a polemical context and vice versa.

1.1 Polemics

Our information about Islam in Byzantine literature before the beginning of the eighth century is scant. It is well known that the spiritual and intellectual encounters between the prophet Muhammad and the first generations of his followers on the one hand and Christianity on the other took the form not of an official meeting with the Orthodox (Chalcedonian) Church but with Miaphysite and Nestorian communities, who made up the majority of the Christian population in Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia. "*The medieval centuries had no explicit concept of 'polemic,' and therefore did not develop textual genres clearly defined as such. However, instances of discourse we call polemical, were in many cases spread much further over different genres and discourses than just the classical formats of dialogues and disputations*," Sita Steckel emphasizes.[18] The Orthodox Church in the East was represented by the Byzantines. The first theoretical formulation of a Byzantine position with regard to Islam arose during the period from the mid-eighth to the ninth centuries (whereas the West hardly had any reliable information about Islam during that period). The Byzantine position was rather ironic and dismissive. This period marks a pivotal moment in the history of Christian-Muslim relations, as it was during this time that both groups first encountered each other's beliefs and

[17] Jan Abbink, "Religion in Public Spaces: Emerging Muslim-Christian Polemics in Ethiopia," *African Affairs* 110, no. 439 (2011): 257-58, https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adr002.
[18] Sita Steckel, "Verging on the Polemical: Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach to Medieval Religious Polemic," *Medieval Worlds Journal* VII (2018), https://www.medievalworlds.net/0xc1aa5576%200x00390b10.pdf.

religious assertions, while sharing the Arabic language. The attitudes formed during this era have continued to exert a profound influence up to the present day.[19]

Any list of Christian anti-Muslim polemicists is usually headed by St. John of Damascus (died December 4, 749 C.E.). In the eighth century, John of Damascus provided the first coherent treatment of Islam. He may have underestimated the importance of this new religion, seeing it as something frivolous. His administrative and military engagement with the Umayyad in Damascus caused him to develop a perspective in which Islam was not perceived as an alien religion, but rather as a heretical branch of Christianity.[20] An illustrative instance is that John, who was proficient in Arabic, undertook translations of certain Islamic doctrines which he characterized as "ridiculous."[21] Even before John of Damascus, the towering personality of the theologian Maximus the Confessor (580–662) witnessed the beginning of the Arab conquests. For him, the invasion of the Arabs was an attack on Christian civilization, and an unwelcome interference in Christological debates within the Byzantine Church. John of Damascus in turn saw Islamic monotheism as the revival of Jewish conceptions of God. He even dealt with the text of the Qur'an, without, however, concentrating on references about Jesus, looking instead at the general Islamic concept of God. John denied the prophetic status of Muhammad and the status of the Qur'an as a book revealed by God. This set the tone for the majority of the Byzantine polemists.

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[19] David Thomas and Barbara Roggema, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 1.

[20] Timothee Baciyunjuze Mushagalusa, *John of Damascus and Heresiology: A Basis for Understanding Modern Heresy* (Doctor of Theology dissertation, University of South Africa, 2008), 107.

[21] Daniel J. Janosik, *John of Damascus: First Apologist to the Muslims: The Trinity and Christian Apologetics in the Early Islamic Period* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 71.

Another important contribution to the polemic with Islam was made by Theodore Abu Qurrah[22] (750–830), one of the earliest Christian theological writers in Arabic. Abu Qurrah and some others wrote in Arabic to defend the Christian faith and to respond to critical questions that Muslims posed with regard to Christian theology. He further contended that Moses and Jesus were successful because of the numerous miracles they performed. Moreover, according to Abu Qurrah, there were no predictions from preceding prophets regarding Muhammad's activities.[23] He also criticized Muslims for their adherence to fatalism and their theological conviction attributing both good and evil to God.[24] Theodore Abu Qurrah, following an Arianizing interpretation of Islam, regarded Muhammad as a false prophet. This form of criticism was typical during that era, in which Islam was often interpreted through the lens of Christian "heresies."

Even after the Arab conquests, the interaction between Christians and Muslims continued to take place within the framework of ideological and religious conflict, shaping their perceptions accordingly.[25] In addition to polemical writings by Christian Arabs, accounts of dialogue exist, whether authentic or fabricated, between Christians and Muslims.[26] In the meantime, it is essential to highlight the initial attempts at cultural exchange between Christians and Muslims. One document from the early Abbasid era, studied by A. Mingana and Louis Cheikho in the original Syriac manuscript and by Hans Putman in the subsequent Arabic rendition, narrates a "dialogue" between the Nestorian Catholicos Timothy I (728–823) and the Caliph

[22] Theodore Abu Qurrah belonged to the Melkite community during the Abbasid kingdom in the ninth century.
[23] Yuriy Maksimov, ed., *Byzantine Writings on Islam (with Commentaries and Translations)* (Moscow: St. Tikhon's Orthodox University Press, 2012), 33-34.
[24] Ibid., 53.
[25] Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others: Relations in Context* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 133.
[26] Ibid., 139.

al-Mahdi (r. 775–785).[27] This dialogue,[28] which took place in 780/781 C.E., definitely shows courtesy to the Muslim leader, even if there is no hint of compromise. In addition to signifying the Islamic government's ongoing receptivity to respectful theological discourse during this era, the dialogue evidences Timothy's familiarity with the Christological tenets delineated in the Qur'an, which he strategically incorporated into his argumentation.[29] "These were the questions for Timothy to answer: on the nature of Christ, the three persons of God, circumcision, the *qibla*[30] towards Jerusalem for prayers, the supposed testimony of the Bible on Muhammad, the judgment given by Christians about Muhammad, the death of Christ (was it by his free will, if it happened on the cross?), Muhammad's appearance as a prophet after Christ, and the accusation of the corruption (*taḥrif*) of the Bible."[31] This apologetic methodology was distinctive of that time, as it used the language of the Qur'an and Islam.[32] In contrast to the preceding Greek apologists, the Arab-speaking Christians formulated their arguments within the religious framework of Islam and the traditions connected to Muhammad.[33]

Between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, the center of anti-Islamic literature shifted to the capital of the Byzantine Empire. The striking success of Islam and its broad spread became a nightmare for the Byzantines. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, polemics became more scholarly in nature. In disputes and

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[27] Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others: Relations in Context,* 111.
[28] Marcel Poorthuis, "The Three Rings: between Exclusivity and Tolerance," in *The Three Rings: Textual Studies in the Historical Trialogue of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. P. Valkenberg, B. Roggema, and M. Poorthuis (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 281.
[29] Daniel Janosik, "Trinitarian Controversy in the Court of the Caliph: John of Damascus on the Trinity in the Context of Mission," 2016, 11-14, http://danieljanosik.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/John-of-Damascus-on-the-Trinity-in-the-Context-of-Mission.ETS_Final.pdf.
[30] *Qibla* is the direction that a person should face during Muslim prayer.
[31] Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others: Relations in Context,* 112.
[32] Sidney Griffith, "Muslims and Church Councils: The Apology of Abu Qurrah," in *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 273.
[33] Daniel Janosik, "Trinitarian Controversy in the Court of the Caliph": John of Damascus on the Trinity in the Context of Mission, 12.

dialogues, the leading roles were taken by Byzantine thinkers, such as St. Gregory Palamas, and emperors, such as John VI Kantakouzenos. Firstly, the Byzantines continued to view Islam as a kind of revival of Arianism. Christian criticism of Islam and Islamic criticism of Christianity were primarily concerned with Jesus Christ and the dogma of the Holy Trinity. The traditional Christian polemic with Islam followed a quite fixed pattern and intended to demonstrate:

1) The failure of Islam compared to Christianity.

2) The groundlessness of Muhammad's claims to a prophetic mission.

3) The baselessness of the claims of Muslims that the Qur'an is the word of God.

4) The supposedly immoral lifestyle of Muslims.

5) And that the Qur'an itself confirms the Christian truth.[34]

The main goal of Christian polemics was to prove that Muhammad was a false prophet, based on five arguments:

1) There were no witnesses to buttress the claim that Muhammad had received a revelation. In contrast, when Moses received a revelation from God, the whole nation was a witness.

2) Muhammad slept alone in a cave when God allegedly spoke to him. In contrast, the Biblical God appeared in fire and storm.

3) None of the preceding prophets foretold the mission of Muhammad.

[34] Алексей Журавский, *Христиане и Мусульмане: Проблемы диалога*. Библейско-богословский институт св. апостола Андрея, 2008, 17. [Aleksey Juravskiy, *Christians and Muslims: The Problem of Dialogue,* St. Andrews's Biblical Theological Institute, 2008, 17].

4) Muhammad did not perform any miracles.

5) Muhammad could not predict the immediate future.

Obviously, the figure of Muhammad was the main object of criticism by Christian polemists. They pointed to what they perceived as the inherent sensuality, cruelty, and inclination to violence of Muhammad – qualities considered incompatible with a prophetic status. Most of the Byzantines believed that Muhammad served the cause of the Antichrist and that he was the sign of the End of Times. Later, these derogatory definitions were mitigated – at least in official texts. During this period, Western Europe actively engaged in polemics against Islam. The predominant issue in these polemics revolved around highlighting the perceived significant differences between the teachings of Jesus and those of Muhammad.[35] The outcome of the medieval controversy in its most negative form was summed up concisely by Martin Luther, who identified Muhammad with the Devil. He believed that Islam was fundamentally a false religion, representing evil itself.[36] Hence, according to the Christian polemicists, the Qur'an cannot be the word of God since it was believed to distort the Biblical narration by adding legends and conjectures. Although understanding of Islam was seriously flawed in Western Christianity in comparison with Eastern Christianity, in a way it was the Byzantine[37] polemicists who had identified the most sensitive and painful topics that have continued to haunt Islamic-Christian encounters until today – the prophetic status of Muhammad and debates about revelation. The polemic against Muslims can be characterized as follows: *prejudice*; *absence of genuine questions*; *lack of empathy*; *lack of self-reflection*. On

[35] Aleksey Juravskiy, *Christians and Muslims: The Problem of Dialogue*, 17.
[36] Jamal Malik, "Islamic-Christian Dialogue," *The Journal of Oriental Studies* 15 (2015): 131.
[37] It is obvious that Eastern Christianity has been more familiar with Islam because of the common borders, the shared Arabic language and close encounter with Islamic countries.

the other hand, Christians have become more acquainted with Islam, which enabled a more dialogical approach.

1.2 From polemics to mission

The transition from polemics to mission should not be understood as one stage following another. In general, a previous stage may remain more or less in force while new approaches develop. This is why this section still deals with the polemical stage, but in a new form in which mission becomes a central goal, together with a somewhat more positive attitude to Islam as such. In a way, this approach is closer to dialogue. We will see that religious studies as they arose in the nineteenth century also contributed, like missions, to the development of dialogue.

From the thirteenth century onwards, Christian initiatives seem to have sought to develop an understanding of the Muslim community aimed at promoting peace between the two religions and establishing an ideological framework for mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence.[38] Unlike Matteo Ricci's encounter with Confucianism and Buddhism in China, or Portuguese sailors' encounter with Hinduism in India, early modern Europeans with an interest in Islam had a rich body of medieval sources from which they could draw to develop their own knowledge about Islam: crusaders' chronicles, missionaries' travelogues, and translations of Eastern Christian polemical texts.[39] In Western Europe after the beginning of the Crusades, there was a notable lack of precise understanding of Islam, which was replaced instead by numerous misunderstandings.[40] Peter the Venerable, a prominent figure in Western Europe during the twelfth century, was the abbot of the

[38] Lewis R. Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story: In Search of Abraham's Other Son*, The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America No. 30 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 37.
[39] Lewis R. Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story: In Search of Abraham's Other Son*, 37.
[40] William Montgomery Watt, "The Study of Islam by Orientalists," *Islamochristiana* 14 (1988): 201.

Benedictine abbey of Cluny from approximately 1092 to December 25, 1156. He emerged as one of the earliest figures in the West to initiate a substantial dialogue with Muslims, marking a significant endeavor within the context of the Cistercian monastic reform movement. There is a hypothesis that Robert of Ketton, who began the first (partial) translation of the Qur'an into Latin in 1143, had been influenced by Peter the Venerable. Although it contains inaccuracies, Ketton's translation aimed to harmonize the language and style of the Qur'an with the literary conventions prevalent in Europe. This remained the standard Latin translation for four centuries. A hundred years later, St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) displayed an interest in the philosophical aspects of Islam, recognizing it as a monotheistic religion.[41] Still, he remained critical of Muhammad and Islamic religious observances. More frequently, Islam was perceived as a formidable competitor to Christianity, regarded as a heresy requiring opposition. In the fourteenth century, Raymond Lull from Mallorca argued that Christians should engage in a scholarly examination of Islam, emphasizing the importance of learning Arabic and establishing educational institutions to train Christian missionaries among Muslims.[42] Frustrated by the Latin Church's delayed response to his request, Lull established his own educational institution in Mallorca and dedicated his life to its development and to missionary journeys amongst Muslim communities in North Africa.[43]

These approaches to Islam may be distinguished from the utterly polemical attitude described above, as long as we keep in mind that the ultimate goal of the Christian scholars of the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance remained the mass

[41] David A. Kerr, "Christian Witness in Relation to Muslim Neighbours," *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984): 8-9.
[42] David A. Kerr, "Christian Witness in Relation to Muslim Neighbours," 8.
[43] Ibid.

conversion of Muslims and the combating of Turkish aggression. After the fall of Constantinople, the Ottoman Empire became a direct threat to Europe. As early as in the medieval period, scholars of both Islam and Christianity were chiefly concerned with showing the errors and weaknesses of the other religion.

Over the last two hundred years, scholars have proceeded towards a more positive appreciation of Islam, although ideological bias often remained the underlying pattern. Nonetheless, this optimistic perspective of Islam has been fostered by collaboration with Muslims, which has enriched Western scholars' comprehension of Islam.[44] Islamic texts were analyzed in their original linguistic contexts, and consultations with Muslims scholars were increasingly sought. The predominant discourse concerning Islam shifted from considering Islam as a Christian heresy to viewing it as an independent religion. This perspective emerged as the main paradigm in the academic study of Islam, gradually diminishing the centrality of the Christian perspective. Still, the missionary approach did not refrain from considering Islam as a Christian heresy. Obviously, it is important to differentiate this position from the dialogical approach, which will be discussed further on. In the second part of the seventeenth century, Ottoman expansionism and the battle of Vienna on September 12, 1683, gave rise to eschatological and even prophetic interpretations. It might be said that this influenced missionary endeavors targeting Muslims in the Islamic World and in Europe.[45] Toward the close of the seventeenth century, Europe witnessed a multiplication of literature dedicated to Islam, authored by the Jesuits.[46] Missionary efforts targeting Muslims notably began to employ handbooks aimed at facilitating conversions and addressing controversies.

[44] David A. Kerr, "Christian Witness in Relation to Muslim Neighbours," 9.
[45] Emanuele Colombo, "Jesuits and Islam in Seventeenth Century Europe: War, Preaching, and Conversions," in *L'Islam Visto da Occidente* (Milan, Marietti 2007), 315.
[46] See more Emanuele Colombo, "Jesuits and Islam in Europe," (Leiden: Brill 2007), 315.

These resources often featured transcripts of actual or fictitious dialogues between Muslims and Catholics.[47] The Dominicans had been the first to develop a thorough knowledge of Islam in order to foster mission (cp. the *Pugio Fidei* from 1270 C.E. directed both against Jews and against Muslims). However, from the inception of their order onwards, the Jesuits as well exhibited an extensive interest in Islam. The founder of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), emphatically articulated his views on mission to the Muslims. During his time as general of the Society, he established the *Casa dei catechumeni* in Rome specifically for Jews and Muslims, with the intention of converting them to Christianity.[48] This vision materialized through the establishment of an Arabic-speaking house in Messina, a college dedicated to Arabic studies in Montreal, an Islam study program in Malta, and in the planning of projects aimed at missions to Muslims in Beirut, Cyprus, and Tunisia.[49] In 1554, Ignatius instructed the Society's houses to acquire Islamic literature, and urged Jesuits to study the Qur'an and to engage in religious dialogue with Muslims.[50] By 1650, Jesuits were residing and operating in various regions of the Ottoman Empire, with the permission of the Sultan and under the protection of the French ambassador.[51]

"Ignatius also instructed the Jesuits that they should initiate interaction with Muslims through theology, music, and art".[52] Michel Nau (1633–1683), Tirso Gonzalez (1624–1705), and other prominent figures within the Society exerted

[47] See more Emanuele Colombo, "Jesuits and Islam in Europe," (Leiden: Brill 2007), 315.
[48] Damian Howard SJ, "Ignatius Loyola: Apostle to the Muslims," *Thinking Faith*, 2016, https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/ignatius-loyola-apostle-muslims.
[49] Damian Howard SJ, "Ignatius Loyola: Apostle to the Muslims," https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/ignatius-loyola-apostle-muslims.
[50] Thomas Michel, "Jesuit Writings on Islam in the Seventeenth Century," *Islamochristiana* 15 (1989): 60.
[51] Ibid., 61.
[52] Paul Shore, "Contact, Confrontation, Accommodation: Jesuits and Islam 1540–1770," *Al-Qantara* XXXVI, no. 2 (July–December 2015): 430.

considerable influence on the interaction between Islam and Christianity. Tirso Gonzalez authored an impressive Jesuit missionary study, entitled *Manductio ad conversionem mahumetanorum*, drawing from his firsthand experience of preaching to Muslims in Spain. He shows a remarkably accurate knowledge of Islam and of typical Muslim objections to Christianity. The idea presented by Gonzalez – to regard Islam as a heresy of Christianity – continued to be held by numerous Catholic theologians until the 1960s. Various elements of Gonzalez's interpretation of Islam echoed ideas that were endorsed within the Catholic Church throughout the twentieth century.[53]

In the seventeenth century, the Jesuit Michel Nau journeyed to the Holy Land. In his treatise *Religio christiana contra Alcoranum per Alcoranum pacifiche defensa ac probate*, presented in the form of a fictional dialogue, Nau demonstrates the contemporary attitude, characterized by respect for the interreligious partner.[54] Nau challenged the long-standing belief, prevalent since at least the sixteenth century, that engaging in religious dialogue with Muslims should be avoided in order to protect missionary endeavors in Islamic territories. Nau's argument was strengthened by his direct engagement with Muslims, promoting honest dialogue across religious boundaries.[55]

The Jesuit involvement in the Middle East and North Africa is associated with their missionary activities in the nineteenth century. The Jesuits' venture into Syria can be marked as one of the first missions undertaken by the Society after its restoration. It began in 1831 with the departure of three Jesuits – Paul-Marie

[53] Emanuele Colombo, "Even Among Turks: Tirso González de Santalla (1624–1705) and Islam," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 44, no. 3 (2012): 4.
[54] Damian Howard SJ, "Ignatius Loyola: Apostle to the Muslims," https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/ignatius-loyola-apostle-muslims.
[55] Bernard Heyberger, "Polemic Dialogues between Christians and Muslims in the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of the Economic History of the Orient* 55 (2012): 499.

Riccadonna (1799–1863), Benoît Planchet (1802–59), and Brother Henri Henze (1794–1848) – as they embarked on a journey to Syria.[56] Undoubtedly, the most significant achievement of this mission is the establishment of the Saint Joseph University in Beirut in 1875 C.E., which stands as one of the region's most prestigious universities. It continues to uphold its esteemed reputation and serves as a foundation of France's *francophonie* policy.[57] Following World War II, a practice emerged in which Jesuit archivists started publishing works based on the documents in their archives. The Jesuit archivist, Henri Jalabert (1913–99) published a description of the activities of the new province in 1957 and biographical profiles of the Jesuits in the Middle East and North Africa.[58] Sami Kuri, who succeeded as the head of the general archives after Henri Jalabert, was a former provincial who curated various documents of past missions of the Society and assembled correspondence in his work entitled *Histoire du Liban à travers les archives des Jésuites* (A History of Lebanon based on Jesuit Archives).[59]

The White Fathers are integral to discussions dedicated to the evangelization of Africa. While Catholic missionaries had had a strong presence in Africa from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the nineteenth century saw a new significant missionary effort led by Cardinal Charles Lavigerie. He established the Missionaries of Africa, also known as the White Fathers due to their distinctive white robes.[60] Cardinal Lavigerie established two missionary institutes in Algeria in 1868. By

[56] Chantal Verdeil, "The Jesuits and the Middle East from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day: A Historiographical Essay," in *Jesuit Historiography Online*, 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2468-7723_jho_COM_205617.
[57] Damian Howard SJ, "Ignatius Loyola: Apostle to the Muslims," https://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/ignatius-loyola-apostle-muslims.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Chantal Verdeil, "The Jesuits and the Middle East from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day: A Historiographical Essay," 2018, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2468-7723_jho_COM_205617.
[60] Dyron B. Daughtry, *The Changing World of Christianity: The Global History of a Borderless Religion* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010), 208.

1875, the initial White Father missionaries arrived, encountering only a French military presence and a few Berber villages. In addition to offering spiritual guidance to the soldiers, the White Fathers began studying local languages, such as the Berber dialect *Mozabit,* while also gathering ancient texts, scrolls, and photographs. [61]

In the late 1970s, the White Fathers established CIBEDO,[62] the Center for Christian-Muslim Encounter and Documentation.[63] In addition, they founded an extensive library that covered interreligious dialogue between Islam and Christianity, religious studies and Islamic studies. They also accumulated a valuable repository of documentation and correspondence.[64]

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries European scholars and intellectuals engaged in discourse concerning the role of religious and cultural aspects in the Middle East and North Africa, encompassing both Christian and Muslim perspectives. This interest did not remain without criticism. The well-known writer Edward Said developed the concept of *orientalism* to analyze and criticize the European depiction of Islam, considering it to be an intellectual component of European colonialism.[65] Bernard Heyberger's analysis, featured in *Islam visto da Occidente*, emphasizes that many early modern texts concerning Islam were not directed at an Islamic audience, but at European scholars.[66]

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[61] "AFRICA/ALGERIA – White Fathers' Cultural Centre bears witness to the 'universality' of the Church." *Information Service of the Pontifical Mission Societies since 1927*, 2018, http://www.fides.org/en/news/63977-AFRICA_ALGERIA_White_Fathers_Cultural_Centre_bears_witness_to_the_universality_of_the_Church.

[62] The initial motivation behind this initiative was above all to help the large number of Muslim guest workers who entered Germany in the 1960s and 1970s to gain access to German society and help them to create an infrastructure for their spiritual needs.

[63] Said Yazid and Lejla Demir, *The Future of Interfaith Dialogue: Muslim-Christian Encounters through A Common Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 252.

[64] Ibid., 252.

[65] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 368.

[66] Bernard Heyberger, "Polemic Dialogues between Christians and Muslims in the Seventeenth Century," 313-314.

As orientalist studies advanced, the importance for European scholars to acquire knowledge of spoken Arabic and other languages by which they could gain access to crucial texts became increasingly apparent. Speaking these languages would allow them to communicate directly not only with Arab-speaking Christians, but also with Muslims.[67] As Giovanni Pizzorusso indicates in *Islam visto da Occidente*, numerous new linguistic centers emerged from evangelization efforts, forming part of a broader cultural initiative in Catholic Europe aimed at converting all peoples to Catholic Christianity.[68]

1.3 Religious studies

Religious studies developed especially in the nineteenth century (with some earlier pioneers in the eighteenth century). The insufficient scholarly engagement with Islam can be attributed, in part, to longstanding polemical attitudes within Europe.[69] For centuries, Islam was often dismissed, without academic consideration, as a false religion. In the nineteenth century, many Islamic manuscripts were edited for the first time according to scholarly standards. The emergence of academic oriental studies on the continent was initiated by the Austrian scholar Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall with the establishment of an oriental academy in Vienna in 1754.[70] Even earlier, the Utrecht scholar Adriaan Reland (1697-1736) contributed to a more unbiased portrait of Muhammad, regrettably lesser known than his famous but biased contemporary Voltaire. It is necessary to acknowledge the impact of

[67] Nora Lafi, "The Eighteenth Century in the Arab Provinces of the Ottoman Empire: Perspectives for a Global History," in *Cultural Transfers, Encounters, and Connections in the Global 18th Century*, ed. Matthias Middell (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2014), 241.
[68] Emanuele Colombo, "The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600–1800," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600–1800*, ed. Ulrich L. Lehner, Richard Muller, and A. G. Roeber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 493.
[69] David Thomas and John A. Chesworth, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Volume 17: Britain, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia (1800–1914)* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 36.
[70] Arnoud Vrolijk and Richard van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands: A Short History in Portraits, 1580–1950* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 94.

Dutch scholars during the nineteenth century. Their remarkable contributions significantly enriched understanding of Islam through exemplary editions of texts and focused studies. Hendrik Arent Hamaker (1789–1835) was one of the first Dutch orientalist of the nineteenth century. He began cataloging Eastern manuscripts at the university of Leiden.[71] L.W.C. van den Berg (1845–1927), whose academic background encompassed both law and the Arabic language, holds the distinction of being the first Dutch orientalists to immerse himself in the Islamic world.[72] Nonetheless, perhaps the most notable Dutch Arabist of this period was Reinhart Pieter Anne Dozy (1820–1883), who concentrated on Spanish-Arabic texts.[73] Dozy traveled extensively across Europe to study manuscripts and he published his significant *Histoire des musulmans d'Espagne*[74] in 1861. This influential book, translated into multiple European languages, offered the first scholarly portrayal of the history of Muslims in Andalusia.[75] Dozy's notable contributions to oriental studies in Europe are exemplified by his efforts to establish and cultivate a global scholarly network through extensive correspondence with academics across the European continent.[76] Michael Jan de Goeije (1836–1909) and his disciple Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936), are considered to have been the

[71] Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 204. See for Reland: Christian Lange, "Follow the Light. Adriaan Reland (1676-1718) on Muhammad", in: *The Orient in Utrecht: Adriaan Reland (1676-1718), Arabist, Cartographer, Antiquarian and Scholar of Comparative Religion*. (The History of Oriental Studies; Vol. 10). Brill, Leiden 2021, 65-90.

[72] David Thomas and John A. Chesworth, eds. *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History Volume 17. Britain, the Netherlands and Scandinavia (1800–1914)*, 36.

[73] Arnoud Vrolijk and Richard van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands: A Short History in Portraits, 1580–1950*, 96.

[74] Reinhart Dozy, *Spanish Islam. A History of the Moslems in Spain* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).
Dozy characterizes Muhammad's military campaigns as marked by cruelty and aggression. Furthermore, he ascribes an excessive sensitivity to mockery to Muhammad, which, according to Dozy, accounts for the execution of a woman and a Jew. See more David Thomas and John A. Chesworth, eds. *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History Volume 17. Britain, the Netherlands and Scandinavia (1800–1914)*, 509.

[75] Arnoud Vrolijk and Richard van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands: A Short History in Portraits, 1580–1950*, 96.

[76] Ibid., 102.

preeminent Islamologists of their time.[77] Starting from 1870, De Goeije oversaw the editing of an eight-volume series entitled "Bibliotheca geographorum Arabicorum," also known as the "Library of Arabic Geographers."[78] It consisted entirely of editions of key geographical texts from the greatest period of the Abbasid empire in the ninth and tenth centuries. He describes the details of everyday life, although De Goeije never visited Mecca. That would be the prerogative of his disciple Snouck Hurgronje, and it marked an important transition in Islamic studies.[79] Snouck Hurgronje shifted the attention from editing old texts from cabinets in Europe to visiting and studying contemporary Islam, taking the living tradition into account. Snouck Hurgronje's book offers detailed ethnographic insights into the public and private aspects of life in Mecca.[80] In the Netherlands, Snouck Hurgronje appeared as an Islam expert, serving the colonial authorities, while at the same time, due to his numerous Muslim acquaintances, he was aligned with their interests and represented them against his Dutch superiors.[81]

Islamic studies were often conducted in separation from Christian theology, although Dutch missionaries exerted substantial influence on the study of Islam. Certainly, these Islamic studies fostered a more unbiased perspective on Islam, particularly from the late nineteenth century on.[82] However, it is important to acknowledge that their work was often influenced by the prevailing colonial discourse.[83] Historical manuscripts and contemporary Islam both became objects of

[77] Arnoud Vrolijk and Richard van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands: A Short History in Portraits, 1580–1950*, 105.
[78] Ibid., 111.
[79] Johannes Pedersen, *The Scientific Work of Snouck Hurgronje* (Brill Archive, 1957), 2.
[80] Arnoud Vrolijk and Richard van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands: A Short History in Portraits, 1580–1950*, 123.
[81] Johannes Pedersen, *The Scientific Work of Snouck Hurgronje*, 25.
[82] David Thomas and John A. Chesworth, eds. *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History Volume 17. Britain, the Netherlands and Scandinavia (1800–1914)*, 44.
[83] Ibid., 1.

study by travelers and anthropologists. Although the students of Islam were often Christians themselves, they aimed to minimize the influence of their religious convictions. Knowledge of Islam increased both by the publication of Islamic sources and by travels to Islamic countries, and it was fostered by the ideal, if not always the practice, of unbiased, objective, unprejudiced knowledge.[84] In a way, this research stage still defines the academic attitude to Islam. Still, many Islamic scholars remain suspicious of an explicitly Christian approach to Islam, fearing a return of prejudice and polemics. Another reason for suspicion comes from the Muslim side and is directed against the academic claim to reveal the "real" essence of Islam, which often runs counter to traditional Islamic convictions.

In the twentieth century, both the academic study of Islam and the encounter between religious orders or missionaries and Muslims in Arab countries influenced Christian dialogue with Islam. Overall, it is reasonable to assert that the Catholic Church has chosen a honest candid engagement with Islam, setting aside past prejudices while retaining its own Christian identity. A cohort of influential Catholics emerged, such as the monk Charles de Foucauld (1858–1916) and Miguel Asin Palacios (1871–1944),[85] whose exemplary dedication inspired the subsequent generation to develop and research the Islamic tradition.[86] Louis Massignon (1883–1962) stands out as one of the most significant scholars of Islam who held a prominent position in the intellectual discourse of his era.[87] One may even say that

[84] Dozy's highly critical attitude to Islam may serve as an example, fostered as it had been by his equally critical attitude to Catholicism. See more Marcel Poorthuis, "Reinhardt Dozy", in: David Thomas and John A. Chesworth, eds. *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History Volume 17. Britain, the Netherlands and Scandinavia (1800–1914)*, 509-515.

[85] A Spanish priest and expert in Islamic spirituality.

[86] Ariana Joyce Patey, *The Life and Thought of Charles de Foucauld: A Christian Eremitical Vocation to Islam and his Contribution to the Understanding of Muslim-Christian Relations within the Catholic Tradition*, PhD diss., Heythrop College, 2011, 45, https://charlesdefoucauld.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Patey-A-Thesis.compressed-pg-3.pdf.

[87] Anthony O'Mahony and Peter Bowe, *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Theology, and Spirituality* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2006), 154.

Massignon was one of the most important scholars of Arabic and Islam in the European tradition of the twentieth century. In 1962, Massignon wrapped up half a century of ongoing research of the life and mythology surrounding Al-Hallaj, contributed to the French government's efforts during two world wars, embraced Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence, established the *Badaliya* prayer movement, and participated in demonstrations advocating Algeria's independence in the streets of Paris.[88] He researched, translated, and published about Sunni and Shia Islam and traveled the Muslim world continuously. Massignon was also well-known for his talent in finding important ancient texts and manuscripts in libraries around the world.[89] He saw Christianity and Islam through the lens of the tragic figure of the mystic Hallaj (857–922). For Massignon, Al-Hallaj, who proclaimed to be the Truth and was martyred in Baghdad for heresy, represented a direct parallel with Christ and his passion. Therefore, Christianity and Islam in a sense had a common basis, Massignon suggested.[90] In Massignon's Christian-Muslim comparative writings, something of a broad and even mystical understanding of Islam emerges, always intrinsically connected to his understanding of the Church.

1.4 Interreligious Dialogue

Between the world wars, the Protestant churches especially made significant efforts through various missionary initiatives to establish closer connections with Muslim communities.[91] The great examples were three World Missionary Conferences, in Edinburgh in 1910, in Jerusalem in 1928, and in Tambaram (India)

[88] See more Dorothy C. Buck, *Louis Massignon: A Pioneer of Interfaith Dialogue.* (New Jersey: Blue Dom Press, 2017), Introduction.
[89] Christian Krokus, *The Theology of Louis Massignon: Islam, Christ, and the Church* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2017), 108.
[90] Anthony O'Mahony and Peter Bowe, *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality*, 151.
[91] Jamal Malik, "Islamic-Christian Dialogue," 132.

in 1938. These initiatives laid the foundation for the establishment of the World Council of Churches in 1948.[92] It is significant to mention that even as early as the 1950s, the term "dialogue" was used to describe interreligious engagement between Muslims and Christians. These initiatives began with the meetings of the Continuing Committee for Muslim-Christian Cooperation (CCMCC) in Bhamdoun, Lebanon, held in 1954 and 1956.[93] The intensity of the dialogue increased significantly in the late 1960s due to the activity of the Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council's declaration *Nostra Aetate* especially, for all its brevity, inaugurated a new perspective on Judaism, on Islam and even on the religions of the Far East.[94] In the wake of this declaration, Christian-Islamic dialogue received a new impetus. The official teaching of the Catholic Church, which was announced in the decisions of the Second Vatican Council, opened a new era in relations between Christians and believers of other religions or faiths.[95]

Interestingly, in the preparatory period before the Council, in 1960 and 1961, very few people spoke about the importance of a document about Islam. It was only decided during the Council to enlarge the so-called declaration on the Jews by incorporating the relationship with Islam in a text which would become the declaration *Nostra Aetate*. The role of Catholic religious orders in Islamic countries played an important role in the re-orientation of the Catholic Church towards Islam. Many Catholic scholars of Islam had stayed in religious houses in Islamic countries

[92] Jamal Malik, "Islamic-Christian Dialogue," 132.
[93] Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others: Relations in Context*, 426.
[94] Fred Morgan, "Jewish perspectives on Jewish-Christian dialogue over five decades." *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 48, no. 2 (2015): 3.
[95] Gerald O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council: Message and Meaning* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2014), 124.

for a longer period and their knowledge contributed significantly to this new awareness.[96]

The Islamic scholar Louis Massignon, mentioned above, as well as his disciples exerted considerable influence by introducing the concept of Abrahamic religions. Massignon acknowledged an authentic lineage in Islam, going back to the ancestral faith of Abraham and his descendants.[97] Throughout his life, he dedicated himself to fostering fruitful engagement between Christians and Muslims.[98] The fruits of his efforts may be seen in the references to Muslims in the Vatican II documents, in the constitution *Lumen Gentium* and the declaration *Nostra Aetate* (in which the figure of Abraham takes a central place), as well as in the ecumenical efforts of the present-day Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions and of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic Studies in Rome. Considering the position of the Roman Catholic Church with regard to Islam and to interreligious dialogue in general, it should be noted that besides *Nostra Aetate* and *Lumen Gentium*, other documents such as *Gaudium et Spes, Ad Gentes* and Paul VI's encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* were revolutionary and innovative too, as they these documents contain either direct or indirect references to Islam. The novelty of these documents consists in four fundamental principles:[99]

– Perhaps for the first time, the Catholic Church officially recognized the existence of authentic religious values within the Muslim beliefs.

[96] In addition to experts helping with the section on Muslims, two Jesuits helped with the rest of *Nostra Aetate*—Josef Neuner, who was living in India and had accompanied the Indian bishops to Rome, and Paul Pfister, likewise for Japan. They provided much of the initial draft of the first two sections of *Nostra Aetate*.
[97] Sidney H. Griffith, "Mystics and Sufi Masters: Thomas Merton and the Dialogue between Christians and Muslims," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 15, no. 2 (2004): 156.
[98] Ibid., 167.
[99] Mahmut Aydin, *Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims since the Second Vatican Council*, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series IIA, Islamic Philosophical Studies, vol. 13 (2002), 42.

– The Catholic Church acknowledged that Muslims and Christians worship the same God, albeit through different expressions of belief.

– The Catholic Church officially recognized the veneration of Muslims for figures such as Abraham, Mary, and Jesus.

– The Catholic Church encouraged Christians and Muslims to build a strong and sincere dialogue and engagement by setting aside past historical resentments.

As a result, the questions associated with the development of Islam found its continuation in the first-ever official document to deal directly with Muslims – namely, in the declaration about the non-Christian religions *Nostra Aetate*. In the third section of this document, special attention is given to religious practices that are similar in Islam and Christianity: fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. The document also emphasizes that similar concepts are present in both the Bible and the Qur'an, though it is noteworthy that *Nostra Aetate* does not explicitly refer to the Qur'an.[100] The declaration *Nostra Aetate* says that the Catholic Church regards the Muslims with esteem and then describes some elements Islam has in common with Christianity. The declaration asserts: "*The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day*."[101]

Proceeding in the spirit of the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, representatives of the Catholic Church understood the importance of the creation of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, which would develop initiatives in the field of ecumenism and

[100] Michael Cook, *Koran* (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2000), 39.
[101] See appendix №1 for the full text.

interreligious dialogue. From its inception, a dedicated section within the Secretariat has focused on Islam.[102] The Secretariat for Non-Christians is to be seen in the context of the Church of Vatican II. Pope John XXIII adhorted the Church to extend its focus beyond its own boundaries, while Pope Paul VI emphasized the importance of dialogue with all individuals, particularly in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*.[103] Later, Pope John Paul II renamed the Secretariat for non-Christians the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. According to the 1984 document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue,[104] four levels of dialogue can be distinguished, without intending to establish any order of priority among them:

a) The *dialogue of life* involves individuals of diverse religions endeavoring to coexist in a spirit of openness and neighborliness, sharing their joys, sorrows, human challenges, and concerns.

b) The *dialogue of action*, which entails Christians and believers of other religions working together towards the development and emancipation of individual people.

c) The *dialogue of theological exchange* involves experts from various religious backgrounds striving to enhance their comprehension of their respective religious legacies and to acknowledge the spiritual values of one another.

d) The *dialogue of religious experience* involves individuals deeply grounded in their own religious traditions sharing their spiritual wealth, such as insights into

[102] Michael L. Fitzgerald, "The Secretariat for Non-Christians is Ten Years Old," *Islamochristiana* 1 (1975): 87.
[103] Ibid., 88.
[104] Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (1991), https://w2.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html.

prayer and contemplation, faith, and methods of seeking connection with God or the Absolute.[105]

According to the proposed fourth form of dialogue, the theologian Marianne Moyaert suggests adding a fifth form of dialogue – *diplomatic dialogue*. This type of dialogue involves interactions among religious leaders and other officials of religious communities, potentially exerting considerable influence on their communities.[106]

At present, the dialogue between Islam and Christianity at the academic level is an interdisciplinary study, since it combines many scholarly methods: comparative religious studies, oriental studies, hermeneutics, and theological studies. The modern interreligious dialogue between Islamic and Christian scholars includes various research groups, committees, organizations, interreligious centers, faculties, and institutions around the world. It may also include broader cooperation in the Western and Islamic countries in order to protect human rights, minorities, the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and to search for ways to achieve justice and peace. There are various dimensions to this dialogue, but the main aims of dialogue itself should be clarified.

Dialogue seeks to: "*increase mutual understanding and good relations; identify causes of tension in religious relations that are often economic, social, or political rather than religious; build understanding and confidence; break down the barriers and stereotypes which lead to distrust, suspicion and bigotry*."[107] Hence, it

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[105] M. Thomas Thangaraj, *The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 95-96.
[106] Marianne Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue," in *Understanding Inter-religious Relations*, ed. D. Cheetham, D. Pratt, and M. Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 203-204.
[107] Nikhil Raj Gupta, "The Positives and Negatives of Interfaith Dialogue," Academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/35838668/THE_POSITIVES_AND_NEGATIVES_OF_INTERFAITH_DIALOGUE.

is important to clarify what interreligious dialogue is *not*: "*taking away or brushing aside differences. It does not aim at coming to a common belief; a way of converting the other. In dialogue, each party remains true to their own faith. It is about increasing mutual understanding and trust.*"[108] Several twentieth-century Catholic theologians have emphasized the distinction between two forms of interreligious dialogue: "external" (also known as exterior or interreligious dialogue) and "internal" (also referred to as interior or intrareligious dialogue).[109]

The Catholic priest Raimon Panikkar, sometimes called the "apostle of interfaith dialogue," introduced this term *intrareligious dialogue*, meaning dialogue within one's own religious community or even within oneself, as a meeting in the depths of one's own religiosity. This intrareligious dialogue is induced by interfaith dialogue and cooperation, by engagement with the believers of the other religions. To put it differently – true interreligious dialogue should be accompanied by intrareligious discourse.[110] The concept of *internal dialogue* is associated with several prominent scholars who propagate different spiritual and religious practices. One of the founders of internal dialogue is the Catholic monk Thomas Merton (1915–1968), who practiced Buddhist meditation. In his later years, Merton advocated a reform of Christian monasticism, suggesting the incorporation of a "contemplative dialogue" that involved Christians engaging with Buddhist spiritual practices.[111]

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[108] Menandro Sarion Abanes, *Ethno-religious Identification and Intergroup Contact Avoidance: An Empirical Study on Christian-Muslim Relations in the Philippines* (Berlin: LIT Verlag Press, 2014), 3.
[109] Thomas Hammarberg, "The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue," *Education and Culture Standing Committee*, 2015, https://rm.coe.int/168030654c.
[110] Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 1978), 40.
[111] Paul O. Ingram, "Christian–Buddhist Dialogue," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (2013), 387.

Another significant approach in understanding dialogue is offered by the Norwegian scholar Oddbjørn Leirvik. He states that there are two fundamentally different types of dialogue: a *spiritual* and a *necessary* one. Spiritual dialogue is based on personal motivation, to enrich the believer through acquaintance with another religious tradition. The purpose of necessary dialogue is to avert conflicts based on religious differences and to promote peaceful engagement and interaction between the members of different religions.[112]

At the same time, it is vital to realize that interreligious dialogue is not a tool to fix all problems. Interreligious dialogue clearly has its limits and boundaries. First of all, interreligious dialogue does not solve practical problems. In the context of modern discourse, it tends to merge with postmodern relativism on the one hand, and with religious universalism or syncretism on the other. Quite often, interreligious dialogue presupposes a pluralist (or even relativist) form of theology to which the participants are expected to adhere whether they like it or not. Recently, there have been complaints about the complexity of interreligious dialogue and the lack of objectives and focus. Although all participants should have a clear idea of the goals of interreligious dialogue, this is often not the case.

[112] Oddbjørn Leirvik, "Philosophies of Interreligious Dialogue: Practice in Search of Theory," *Approaching Religion* 1, no. 1 (2011): 16.

Chapter 2

THE THEOLOGICAL MEANING OF THE QUR'AN FOR AN EASTERN-CATHOLIC THEOLOGIAN: ON THE WAY TO A METHOD

2.1 The strong reservations against historical criticism among believing Muslims

The interest of Muslims in the Bible is modest but growing. Scholars such as Shabbir Akhtar, Mustansir Mir, and Asma Afsaruddin represent a contemporary Muslim scholarship marked by increasing engagement with Biblical texts. Their work demonstrates a readiness to integrate insights from the Bible into wider theological conversations - particularly those concerning revelation, moral reasoning, and interreligious dialogue.[113]

A fine and concrete example is Shabbir Akhtar's study of Paul's Letter to the Galatians,[114] which signals a willingness among some Muslim intellectuals to enter into significant exegetical dialogue with Christian texts. Still, the average Muslim often cherishes but a faint idea of what the New Testament is like. The *Injil*, as the Qur'an calls it, derived from the Greek word *euvangelion*, is often considered a book that has been promulgated by Jesus, comparable to the *Taura* of Moses, and the *Zabur* of David.

In the course of history, learned Muslim writers have dealt with the Bible itself, but in a kind of proto-critical way. Prominent Muslim polemicists and theologians, such as Ibn Ḥazm[115] (d. 1064), al-Qurṭubi (d. 1273), and others, pointed out undeniable differences between the synoptic Gospels and used these as evidence of textual corruption (*taḥrīf*), a view rooted in classical Islamic polemics and reinforced by centuries of religious boundary-marking. However, this Bible

[113] See more Mustansir Mir, "The Qur'an and the Bible: Some Modern Muslim Perspectives," in *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2008), 211-222; Asma Afsaruddin, *Striving in the Path of God: Jihad and Martyrdom in Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[114] Shabbir Akhtar, *The New Testament in Muslim Eyes: Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).
[115] Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Fiṣal fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Niḥal*, ed. Muhammad Ibrahim Nasr and Abdul Rahman Umayrah (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1985).

criticism invariably served a polemical goal, namely, to prove the unreliability of the Gospel texts.[116] This historical circumstance has contributed to the strong reservations against a historical-critical approach to the Qur'an, as the association with polemic lay at hand. Efforts to examine the Qur'an's compositional development, literary structures, or intertextual foundations are frequently regarded as challenging its divine authorship and compromising its sacred authority. Within many traditional contexts, such approaches may be seen as verging on blasphemy. This response should not be dismissed as mere fundamentalism, but rather as theological conviction aimed at preserving the sanctity and inimitability (*iʿjāz*) of the Qur'anic revelation.[117]

The Egyptian Muslim scholar Nasr Abu Zayd has attempted a kind of dialogical reading of the Qur'an but realized that he treads on dangerous ground. In his article: "The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'an"[118], he indicates which themes are highly controversial in Muslim circles:

1. A literary text is a human imagination whereas the Qur'an represents the Word of God that should not be compared to any human discourse
2. To deal with the Qur'an as a work of art suggests that it was written by Muhammad
3. Claiming that the stories in the Qur'an do not present actual facts, as the literary approach suggests, is committing the greatest blasphemy that amounts to apostasy
4. Claiming that the language and structure is historically formed is an insult to the Qur'an

[116] See more Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Muslim Arguments against the Bible", in: *Intertwined Worlds. Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism*, Princeton New Jersey 1992, 19-49. Notably Ibn Hazm (d. 1064) has a keen insight in the historical differences between the Gospels, but his scholarship has completely been motivated by polemics, which has prevented a similar scholarly approach to the Qur'an.
[117] Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 29–35
[118] Nasr Abu Zayd, "The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'an," *Journal of Comparative Poetics 23* (2003): 8-47.

It is well-known that this eminent scholar, in spite of his own careful approach to the Qur'an, had to flee from Egypt because of the accusation of apostasy. He found shelter in the Netherlands, together with his wife. His work is a careful and respectful approach to the Qur'an as a dialogical document, but the opposition against his work cannot be attributed to Islamic fundamentalism only. It reflects a deep suspicion in the milieu of believing Muslims against a historical-critical reading of the Qur'an, although perhaps not as rigorously as the above mentioned four points demonstrate.[119] The difference with Christianity, especially Catholicism is that a similar debate had taken place over the Bible, but more than one century ago.[120] Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* (1893) had promulgated that Bible science is permissible, although it should not be granted a monopoly. This standpoint has been elaborated at the Second Vatican Council, in the constitution *Dei Verbum* (1965). There it is stated that research into the historical background of the writers of the New Testament is fully legitimate, but this does not detract from the divine status of Scripture. This organic concept of revelation can be contrasted with a mechanic concept of revelation, in which a human contribution is denied.

Although this latter approach is virtually outlawed in the Western academic world, new currents such as Scriptural Reasoning and Comparative Theology (about which later) cannot be understood merely from a historical-critical perspective. Therefore, it seems wise to accept the existence of different approaches to the

[119] Still, the well-known author Tim Winter, alias Abdel Hakim Murad, argues that historical-critical scholarship is a product of Western Enlightenment, reductionism and Protestantism and "philologically inappropriate" for the Qur'an. See more Tim Winter, "Quranic Reasoning as an Academic Practice", in *Modern Theology* 22, (July 2006), 449-463 (*The promise of Scriptural Reasoning*). Obviously, Nicolai Sinai's argument that Bible and Qur'an are subjected to the same historical-critical method would not convince Winter. (See more N. Sinai, "Historical Criticism and Recent Trends in Western Scholarship on the Qur'an: Some Hermeneutic Reflections", *Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies* 38, no.1, (2020)). Ironically, Winter deals with the Qur'an, although, according to SR, as a Muslim, he should deal with the Bible. Unfortunately, his dissertation about SR is under embargo at the Free University library.

[120] This in itself was remarkably late, compared to the protestant world. Pioneers were the Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza and the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes.

Qur'an, without disqualifying one from the outset.[121] But let us first deal in some more detail with the historical-critical approach(es) to the Qur'an.

2.2. The historical-critical approach(es) to the Qur'an

The historical-critical method emerged in part as a response to religious polemics and inherited theological biases. It strives to reconstruct the historical meaning of a text in its original context, often bracketing theological assumptions altogether. Despite the variety of emphases, historical-critical approaches[122] share a concern for recovering what a text meant to its earliest audience, before later theological, liturgical, or dogmatic frameworks were imposed. While this method has provided important insights and freed research from many dogmatic prejudices, the historical-critical method does not ultimately answer theological questions that arise from Scripture. Even more, it often postpones or brackets them entirely. Its intent is not to interpret a sacred text as Scripture, but as a historical artifact. Thus, it stands in tension with theological approaches, especially those grounded in a tradition's self-understanding. However, this tension can be productive, serving as a point of departure for Comparative Theology and interreligious dialogue, where historical understanding and theological reflection can inform and refine one another. Still, the underlying presuppositions are radically different. In philosophy, a hermeneutical approach as coined by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), mentioned earlier, has argued that a supposedly "objective" approach always hides hidden presuppositions. A hermeneutical approach considers one's own cultural and

[121] See more for a clear introduction to the Qur'an from a historical-critical perspective: Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

[122] While aware of the different schools within the historical-critical tradition—including source, form, redaction, literary, and rhetorical criticism—this study does not undertake a detailed examination of each. For an overview, see e.g. John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 15-45; Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 4th ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).

religious convictions not as a stumbling block that should be bracketed, but as indispensable for a genuine understanding. There is no past without my present. Even "pre-judices" are indispensable for research, for otherwise there would be no real question, although these "pre-judices" will be substantially altered during the process of understanding. This holds good in the historical realm, but may also be applied to a theological understanding of the Qur'an.[123]

The historical-critical method has long been a foundational instrument in the academic study of sacred texts, particularly within the fields of Biblical and Qur'anic research. Emerging out of Enlightenment rationalism and modern historiography, this approach aims to reconstruct the original meaning of a text by situating it within its historical, linguistic, literary, and socio-cultural context.[124] It operates on the assumption that understanding a text's genesis - its sources, redactional layers, and the circumstances of its composition - is essential to any critical engagement with its message.[125] The method is not neutral in its implications. While it has provided indispensable insights into the development and composition of religious texts, it also raises questions that challenge traditional theological claims. In Christian contexts, for example, the historical-critical method was initially met with resistance for appearing to undermine the unity and relevance of Scripture.[126] However, it gradually found acceptance, especially within Catholic theology, after *Dei Verbum* - the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, at the Second Vatican Council (1965). This fundamental document affirmed the legitimacy of scholarly investigation into the historical context, literary forms, and intentions of the Biblical

[123] See more for hermeneutics in the field of Qur'an study: Bard Maeland, "The Purification Lane: Kenneth Cragg's Theological Relations to Islam Seen Through the Hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer," in *A Faithful Presence: Essays for Kenneth Cragg*, ed. David Thomas and Clare Amos (London: Melisende, 2003), 56-70.
[124] Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 2–6.
[125] John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 1–5.
[126] Raymond E. Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 9–14.

authors, while maintaining the divine origin and salvific purpose of Scripture. *Dei Verbum* signaled a decisive shift away from a purely literalist or dogmatic reading of the Bible toward a more dynamic and organic understanding of revelation - one that embraces both divine inspiration and human mediation.[127] This shift is most clearly articulated in paragraphs 11–12, where the Council affirms that Scripture faithfully teaches "that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation," while also acknowledging that "the interpreter must carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended."[128] This theological openness allowed Catholic exegetes to engage historical-critical tools as a means of deepening, rather than threatening, faith. Over time, such methods became standard in Catholic seminaries and universities, and have been integrated into theological education and Biblical scholarship.[129]

In Qur'anic studies, the application of historical-critical analysis is more recent. It remains the subject of significant debate, particularly given the sacred and untouchable status of the Qur'an within Islamic tradition.[130] Among the foundational figures in this field is Theodor Nöldeke, whose *Geschichte des Qorāns* set the stage for Western critical approaches to the Qur'an by proposing a chronology of the surahs based on style, content, and rhetorical structure.[131] John Wansbrough introduced a quite controversial literary-critical approach in his 1977 work *Quranic Studies*, contending that the Qur'an did not originate as a single, coherent revelation in the 7th century, but rather as a product of a much longer communal redactional

[127] John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 219–222.
[128] Vatican II. *Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*. 18 November 1965. §§11–12. Available at: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.
[129] Raymond E. Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible*, 15-35; see more Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Interpretation of Scripture: In Defense of the Historical-Critical Method* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), 1-20.
[130] Walid A. Saleh, "The Etymological Fallacy and Qur'anic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise, and Late Antiquity," *Arabica* 64, no. 5–6 (2017): 608–641.
[131] Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*, 23-27.

process, shaped by the theological and sectarian dynamics of Late Antiquity. His students, including Michael Cook and Patricia Crone, pursued these theories further, although not without controversy.[132]

In more recent scholarship, scholars such as Angelika Neuwirth and Nicolai Sinai have made significant contributions to the historical-critical study of the Qur'an by combining careful philological analysis with a respectful consideration of Islamic exegetical traditions. Angelika Neuwirth has been particularly influential in advancing the perspective that the Qur'an should be interpreted within the broader discursive and theological landscape of Late Antiquity. She argues that the text emerges in conversation with contemporaneous Jewish, Christian, and other monotheistic traditions, reflecting shared motifs and doctrinal concerns. Her influential monograph, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity* (2019), marks a critical turning point in contextualizing the Qur'anic message of its time. In addition, she seems to bridge the gap somewhat between historical-critical research and a theological hermeneutics of the Qur'an; but about that later.

Likewise, Nicolai Sinai's *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction* (2017) offers a highly accessible and scholarly introduction to this field. His work integrates literary analysis, theological reflection, and redaction-critical perspectives, making it a valuable resource for scholars engaging with historical-critical approaches to the Qur'an. Nicolai Sinai undertakes a lucid description of the basis of a historical-critical approach to the Qur'an:

I would insist on a principled distinction between interpreting a literary document within its historical context of origin on the one hand and examining its subsequent reception history on the other. The present work is exclusively concerned

[132] Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

with the former. (…) *I also aspire to having something useful to say to Muslim readers wanting to gain an understanding of how their scripture is being studied by contemporary Western scholars, many of whom are of course agnostic about whether the Qur'an does or does not constitute divine revelation.*[133]

Loyal to the historical-critical method, Nicolai Sinai puts both the actual meaning of the Qur'an and its religious status between brackets. As a method this is fine, but these are precisely two topics that are vital in Islamic theology and also, although differently, for my exploration of a Catholic theological perspective of the Qur'an. The question of what the meaning of the Qur'an constitutes for a Catholic theologian gets out of sight in historic criticism. Historical affinities between Bible and Qur'an as such do not solve this conundrum. Even pointing out similarities between the Qur'an and the Bible, or between the Qur'an and post-Biblical (Jewish) midrash, may serve wholly different purposes than fostering interreligious understanding. A fine example is the famous book by the Jewish scholar Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (1833). He points out many parallels between the Qur'an and Jewish midrash, but invariably interprets these as a relationship between a pure original (midrash) and a bad copy (Qur'an).[134] According to Geiger, the Qur'an has misunderstood many midrashic elements. This prevented Geiger from seeing the Qur'an *sui generis.*

Many studies have appeared since then, mainly from Jewish scholars, refining their approach by adducing midrash and Church Fathers as the real contemporaries to the Qur'an and closer to it, at least from a historical perspective. Especially Syriac Christianity has a lot to offer as transmitter and transformer of Jewish midrash to the

[133] Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*, 1.

[134] Geiger has also ignored Syriac Christianity as an important intermediary between Judaism and Islam. See for a striking example: Marcel Poorthuis, "About Naked Women and Adam's Body: The Syriac *Cave of Treasures* as a Source of Islamic Storytelling," in *Sanctifying Texts, Transforming Rituals*, ed. Paul van Geest, Marcel Poorthuis, and Els Rose (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 81-102.

Islamic world. In general, these studies should point out both differences and similarities between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Faithful to the principle of a neutral standpoint in religious studies, these studies generally do not betray a religious perspective, except perhaps unconsciously.[135] It may be that these studies – about texts often somewhat haphazardly chosen[136] - can serve as a kind of prolegomenon to a Catholic theological reading of the Qur'an, but that is not certain. One has to account for the strong rejection of such studies from Muslim side, which from the outset may prevent a proper understanding of the Qur'an in its traditional Islamic perspective. Obviously, due to the increasing number of Muslim scholars trained at Western universities, some of them may have come to appreciate some aspects of this method, by taking its axioms as methodical limitations, but not as principles. Even scholars who accept historical criticism point to the danger of ignoring the specific genre of the Qur'anic texts when pre-Qur'anic texts are somewhat haphazardly adduced as source. This is why a "canonical approach" in which the Qur'an as a whole is viewed as an authoritative text that mutually clarifies texts on an inner-Qur'anic level, has been developed alongside the earlier search for pre-Qur'anic parallels (cp. the adage: "Scripture explains Scripture").

It should be noted that criticism of the historical-critical method does not automatically bring us to a pre-critical past. In Jewish scholarship on the Bible, criticism of source criticism on the Bible has been quite influential, especially by the towering figure of Martin Buber.[137] In addition, in Judaism, the world of midrash

[135] Compare the debate over the work of Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, John Wansbrough and more recently Christoph Luxenberg, who are suspected of ideological biases of different kinds.
[136] Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction,* 2.
[137] Interestingly, the strong ideological bias of historical-critical exegetes such as the 'father' of source criticism, Julius Wellhausen, did not escape notice of Jewish scholars. See more Solomon Schechter, "Higher Criticism—Higher Antisemitism," in *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers* (Cincinnati: Ark Publishing Company, 1915), 35–39. That this is not something from the past becomes clear in Jon D. Levenson, "Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology," in *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 33-61.

has not strictly been separated from a scientific study of the Bible, as is visible in the work of Umberto Cassuto and others.[138] There is a remarkable similarity between the accusation from Jewish side at the address of historic criticism to be entangled with antisemitism (e.g. Wellhausen), and the Islamic criticism of Western scholarship to be related to colonial and orientalist superiority.[139] Both run the risk to be a form of expropriation of religious tradition by Western scholarship. My point, however, is rather that a religious text should not be pressed into the frame of a relic from the past, as if it were archeology. This holds good both for Bible and Qur'an.

Hence it is not my intention to belittle the enormous scholarly work done by eminent scholars such as Angelika Neuwirth, Meir Kister, Uri Rubin, Nicolai Sinai and others. Historical-critical scholarship is by no means a monolithic entity. Some more recent tendencies even show a certain affinity with traditional religious hermeneutics of the Qur'an: the canonical approach and the rehabilitation of allegoric or typological reading. Both may be seen as criticism of a traditional historical-critical approach.

The work of Angelika Neuwirth on the inner-Qur'anic comparison of parallel texts has been inspired by Biblical scholarship, notably by Brevard Childs (1923-2007) with his famous theory about canon and community. The community produces the canon, and the canon produces the community. In this theory he argues that the final status of a holy text as canonical and its interrelatedness with the religious community should be an important point of departure for scholarship. The older practice to consider the sacred text as a hotch-potch of disparate sources, loosely put

[138] It is noteworthy that the widely acclaimed commentaries on the Torah by former chief rabbi of London, Jonathan Sacks does not show any influence of historic criticism. Nicolai Sinai, "Historical Criticism and Recent Trends in Western Scholarship on the Qur'an: Some Hermeneutic Reflections," *Journal of College of Sharia and Islamic Studies* 38, no. 1 (2020), has not noted this trend of post-historical-critical hermeneutics.

[139] See more Angelika Neuwirth, "Orientalism in Oriental Studies? Qur'anic Studies as a Case in Point," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9, no. 2 (2007): 115-127. Cp. Andrew Rippin, "Western Scholarship and the Qur'an," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 235-254.

together, should be abandoned, as it fails to account for the status and structure of the canon itself. Neuwirth has introduced this theory into the research on the many inner-Qur'anic parallels, claiming some sort of chronological sequence and redactional activity before the final canonization but within the Qur'an itself.[140] In addition, and even more surprisingly, the rehabilitation of allegory and typological reading by Neuwirth demonstrates that the meaning of a sacred text is not exhausted by pointing to its first historical context.[141]

My dissertation contains examples of both phenomena: the parallel accounts of the Annunciation to Mary in surah 3 and surah 19; the unbelief of the people of Israel towards Moses at Sinai and Muhammad's grappling with unbelief among his audience, in which Moses appears as a type of Muhammad. However, my research question leads me to other conclusions, in which chronological priority does not play a prominent role. To give an example which will find a more elaborate treatment at the proper place (Chapter 4 4.1.1): when surah 19:17 speaks about "Our spirit" and surah 3:45 about "the angels", a supposed "correction" of the former, namely Our (God's) spirit" by "the angels", does not exhaust its meaning for Catholic theology, as both statements are present in the Qur'anic canon. The Catholic theological question is both more global and reaches deeper: is it permissible to recognize the Holy Spirit in the Qur'an? And may one point to a certain playing down of the notion of "spirit" that even continues in post-Qur'anic commentaries and some Islamic

[140] Angelika Neuwirth, "Negotiating Justice: A Pre-Canonical Reading of the Qur'anic Creation Accounts," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2000): 25-41.; cp. the careful approach in Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: a Historic-critical Introduction*, 111-138. Obviously, the existence of differences in parallel accounts in the Qur'an may also be contributed to respect for the different, possibly orally transmitted messages about stories that were already familiar, and which defies a redactional activity. Incidentally, the supposed priority of the shorter version over the longer version is a highly debated issue in Biblical scholarship.

[141] Angelika Neuwirth and Judith Hartwig, "The Virgin Mary in the Liturgical Fabric of the Qur'an," in *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 133.

translations of the Qur'an, which bluntly render *Jibril* for *Ruḥ*?[142] In addition, how can a Catholic theological perspective of the holy spirit in the Qur'an avoid a wholesale apologetic and polemical attitude (as was the case in the past by Arab Christian authors, even before Muslim commentators)[143] that will not be recognized by believing Muslims, but without from the outset assimilating to an Islamic interpretation? And also, and to put it sharply: how does a possible Catholic-theological recognition of God's spirit in the Qur'an relate to the magisterial – but in itself debatable - claim that the Holy Spirit can only be understood in connection with Christ and the Church?[144] I will deal with that at the end of the chapter on the Annunciation.

Likewise and in view of the rehabilitation of typology, what is the meaning of a "Muhammadocentric" reading of Biblical episodes for Catholic theology?[145] Does this create a gap between the highly influential Christocentric reading of the Bible, a gap which cannot be bridged or should both be considered as a theological possibility and even as a challenge to Catholic theology?[146] I will deal with that question at the end of the chapter on miracles.

Although as a theologian I cannot share the axioma's of the historical-critical method as fully exhaustive, still the method can be helpful as an instrument for a theological reading of the Qur'an. Besides the examples already given: the inner-

[142] Peter Laffoon, "The Qurʾanic Word *Rūḥ* and Its Restricted Interpretations: An Analysis of Classical Tafsīr Tradition," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 34, no. 1 (2023): 53-88.
[143] Neal Robinson, 'The Dynamics of Sūrat Āl- 'Imrān (Q.3), in: Nicolai Sinai, (ed.), *Unlocking the Medinan Qur'an*, Brill: Leiden 2022, 410.
[144] See the quite polemical Vatican declaration *Dominus Iesus* (2000), §12, to be ealt with in 4.4.5. Still, one should realize that the *filioque* is not part of the original text of the Creed!
[145] I derive this felicitous expression from Martin Accad, "Muhammad's Advent as the Final Criterium for the Authenticity of the Judeo-Christian Tradition," in *The Three Rings: Textual Studies in the Historical Trialogue of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Marcel Poorthuis, Barbara Roggema, and Pim Valkenberg (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 217-236, esp. 225.
[146] One may think of a similar challenge in the case of Jewish readings of Biblical texts that differ from Christocentric readings such as psalm 22, applied to Esther. Think also of the many Jewish messianic interpretations of Biblical texts that appear in a Christocentric reading by Christians.

Qur'anic differences between texts and the typological reading, a third method consists of adducing pre-Qur'anic readings that may have influenced the Qur'an. Although Angelika Neuwirth has been quite critical about this method for its sometimes-haphazard choice of texts from Midrash and Church Fathers in a reductive approach, without taking into account the inner-Qur'anic literary genres, a theological reading may benefit from it. Not by claiming that the Qur'an has simply copied previous sources, but by documenting the transformations and even the deliberate omissions. This may betray Islamic theological preoccupations that are valuable for a proper understanding of the differences between Islam and previous religions. In conversation with the Islamic scholar Nicolai Sinai, I have demonstrated this at the end of the chapter on the Paradise story (Chapter 3, 3.4.4).

Still, it is clear that my research question leads to a landscape that differs from the historical-critical method(s), be it only because of the essential theological self-reflection my research question entails. My choice is to come closer to the Qur'an as a religious document and as a starting point for reflection as a Catholic theologian. Each method departs from a basic research question and its possibilities and limitations are intrinsically connected to it. Hence it is not my aim to disqualify the historical-critical method with its preoccupation with history and chronology, - I even apply it occasionally - but I want to remain loyal to my own research question: What is the meaning of the Qur'an for a (Eastern) Catholic theologian?

In that light I have to admit that the historical-critical method *as such* does not bring this specific research question much further.

As my research engages the Qur'an from a Catholic theological perspective, I draw upon the historical-critical method not as an end, but as a means of ensuring intellectual strictness and responsible contextualization, while remaining committed to the theological task. Even when all apologetics, prejudices and polemic have been

abandoned, in the end theological questions will return, hopefully free from polemic and prejudices. Nonetheless, it remains obvious that the theological approach is, in many respects, fundamentally different from the historical-critical research. Self-reflection forms an indispensable element of a theological approach. Hence, our method should be developed in the field of interreligious dialogue, especially when interreligious dialogue and intrareligious dialogue go hand in hand. Still, we will notice that a major issue will prevent the wholesale adoption of a relatively new and influential method in interreligious dialogue – Scriptural Reasoning. However, first I will lay out this method which definitely has inspired me, and then explain my position as a researcher into the Catholic perspective of the Qur'an.

2.3. The inspiration of Scriptural Reasoning

I have taken much inspiration from a quite new method in the field of interreligious dialogue: Scriptural Reasoning (hereafter SR). Beginning in 1994, a group of scholars of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity who also belonged to these respective religious communities themselves joined together to discover a way to conduct dialogue across the borders of the three Abrahamic scriptural traditions. They devised the *Textual Reasoning* approach, in which scholars studied small selections from the Scriptures of one of the three traditions. By examining its language, grammar, syntax, and semantics and discussing and debating how a fragment of Scripture has been read and interpreted from one historical period to the next, they developed a specific way of religious encounter. As a result, Scriptural Reasoning has emerged in this community of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim thinkers.

SR is a practice of group reading, when Jews, Christians, and Muslims come together to read the Scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Daniel W.

Hardly[147] underlines that SR often regards the debates about God and religion in the context of the concept of the Abrahamic religions. This implies some sort of an initial consensus, yet this is not obligatory within SR. Scriptural Reasoning does not primarily focus on identifying commonalities among different faiths, but rather allows for both disagreement and agreement.[148]

Scholars who use the methodology of SR are mostly Jewish, Christian, and Islamic academics. On the Christian side, the participant is often a specialist in Biblical studies and theology or active in the subdiscipline of systematic theology that studies the relationship with other religions. On the Jewish side, there is a stronger emphasis on ritual. In Judaism, rituals are considered a critically important conceptual and analytical category. Rituals form a substantial part of the commandments and are essential for Jewish self-definition. Likewise, in Islam, there is a special attention to religious law. However, these different emphases and theologies do not constitute a problem for SR since these different perspectives are part and parcel of the whole enrichment of Abrahamic religions.

SR is now practiced globally, including in places affected by religious wars and conflicts. Around the world, this practice has also involved Buddhists, Hindus, and many other religious communities who use it to develop understanding within their communities. It is not therefore limited to Abrahamic religions only. The practice of SR may take place with members of a minimum of two religious traditions, but the aim is generally to create a community of representatives from the three Abrahamic religions. While Steven Kepnes is clear about the fact that SR should not be confused with studies of the historical relationship between the

[147] Daniel Wayne Hardy (1930–2007) – Anglican priest, professor of Divinity in Durham University.
[148] Daniel W. Hardy, "The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning," *Modern Theology* 22, no. 3 (2006): 530.

Abrahamic religions, the acknowledgment of Abraham as a "source figure" requires some prior understanding that a historical relationship between these traditions exists.[149] It should be realized, however, that the figure of Abraham/Ibrahim may also constitute a significant disagreement between the three religions. Furthermore, SR involves acknowledging and engaging with these differences, although some fundamental shared understanding is essential for individuals to participate in Scriptural Reasoning groups and to be able to recognize these differences effectively.[150] The figure of Abraham/Ibrahim, with all its antagonisms and differences, may nevertheless provide enough common ground.

In the *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*[151] we come across descriptions of SR in which the members of the groups have focused on texts dedicated to various topics, such as revelation, law, economics, prayer, love, Biblical/Qur'anic figures and narratives, and much else. SR brings together academic tools of historical analysis, literary theory and philosophy while simultaneously drawing on the interpretative traditions of each of the texts. The foundational core of SR lies in the respectful and interactive engagement between members of various Abrahamic traditions in the study of their respective Scriptures alongside those of others.[152] The strong interreligious communication between the members of Abrahamic religion is both an essential challenge and an achievement. Susanna Ticciati suggests that this possible challenge will be further heightened by the participation of members of those traditions who interpret the texts and narratives on the same figures from the

[149] "A Handbook for Scriptural Reasoning," *Modern Theology* 22, no. 3 (2006): 367, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2006.00323.x.
[150] Sarah Bania-Dobyns, "Scriptural Reasoning in the Context of Limited Pluralism: The Unique Challenges of a Roman Catholic Context," *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 15, no. 2 (2016), https://jsr.shanti.virginia.edu/back-issues/volume-15-number-2-november-2016/scriptural-reasoning-in-the-context-of-limited-pluralism-the-unique-challenges-of-a-roman-catholic-context/.
[151] Jacob Goodson, ed., *The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 20, no. 1 (February 2023), http://jsr.shanti.virginia.edu/.
[152] Daniel W. Hardy, *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning,* 530.

Scriptures featuring in divergent ways.[153] The main task for those who practice the SR method of interreligious dialogue is to provide a deeper insight into how the holy text contains the primary discourse of God for the respective believers and how the human and the divine meet.[154] Although SR does not put forward an obligatory pluralist theology of religion, in a way it challenges the assumption that there is only one scripture that can justifiably be called the *real* and true Scripture. At least, SR forces the participant to acknowledge that the notion of holy Scripture is interpreted differently in the religions, a fact which will challenge *all* participants. It should be noticed here that this does not need to lead to relativism, but merely stresses the importance of accepting or hearing the other. This leads to the following questions: how does a participant understand his or her own Scripture and the Scripture of another participant? In what way should the text be interpreted? Is it possible for believers of one religious tradition to interpret the scriptures of another tradition in a way that acknowledges their religious significance for them and respects the origin of that tradition?[155]

SR presupposes not one perspective and one truth, but as many perspectives as there are participants. Undoubtedly, many Christians do not consider the Qur'an as revelation. In addition, the Muslim dialogue partner will not cherish the same Scripture as true as the Christian does. Should Christians give serious consideration to the Qur'an as the *Word of God*? As a Christian, I may believe that the Bible is the only one and *true* revealed Scripture. At the same time, I should admit that for Muslims this is not the same because, from the Islamic perspective, the revealed Scripture is the Qur'an (and in a qualified way, *Taurat* and *Injil*). I do not deny my

[153] Susannah Ticciati, "Scriptural Reasoning and the Formation of Identity." *Modern Theology* 22, no. 3 (2006): 435.
[154] Daniel W. Hardy, *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning,* 533.
[155] Magdalen Lambkin, "Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutic of Scripture: Problems and Possibilities," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe: Between Texts and People* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 103.

religious truth, and I may even believe, as a Christian, that the truth is fully present in my religion. Still, by doing SR, I realize that the religious truth is different for Muslims, a fact which I may appreciate with tolerance and an attitude of learning. It is precisely that element that goes beyond traditional interreligious activities, in which the main task is to learn about another dialogue partner and present or describe one's own tradition, while clearly defining the boundaries. However, the SR methodology suggests that the truth that I have and share, may not be the only one from the perspective of the other participant. This means that I assume, recognize, and accept that it is a firm conviction for my dialogue partner that their religion is true. In SR, one's own convictions are not considered wrong or obsolete, as long as one is prepared to listen to the other participant. The participants feel they could learn a great deal from one another when studying their scriptures together, although much remains unpredictable.[156]

The scholars who formulated SR are keen to stress that involvement requires no particular liberal theological stance with regard to other religions or obligatory changes in the participants' beliefs.[157] Experience proves that divine truth can be revealed by engaging with scriptures across religious boundaries.[158] David Ford advocates SR as a model for debate and a practice suited to twenty-first-century citizenship, as opposed to the rhetoric of pluralist religious dialogue.[159] He argues that SR does not conceal disagreements and conflicts but seeks to make them public in a nonviolent way. A fruitful aspect of SR lies in the collective examination of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scriptures that *releases sources of reason,*

[156] Magdalen Lambkin, "Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutic of Scripture: Problems and Possibilities," 103.
[157] Ibid., 103.
[158] Ibid.
[159] David F. Ford, "An Interfaith Wisdom: Scriptural Reasoning between Jews, Christians and Muslims," *Modern Theology* 22, no. 3 (2006): 345-366, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2006.00322.x.

compassion, and divine spirit to bring healing to the groups and participants in question.[160] According to the Christians in their understanding of the Bible, the SR methodology for interreligious groups of Christians and Muslims implies that Muslims do not have the final say in the questions which touch upon the understanding of the Qur'an, and neither do Christians have this in relation to their Bible. It means that the insights of Christians may exist side by side with Islamic insights when interpreting the Qur'an, and the same holds good for Jews or Muslims regarding the New Testament. Nicholas Adams mentions the following characteristics in order to render SR fruitful in the context of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: *understanding above agreement*; *collegiality above consensus*; *not one account of Scriptural Reasoning, but three.*[161]

Primarily, SR allows for diverse interpretations and outcomes by considering the participants' personal religious convictions.[162] This position differs from a neutral scholar's perspective that aims at establishing "objective" knowledge. No prior agreement is necessary about what theology to adopt or what level of pluralism to accept. What the participants agree upon or disagree about emerges only within ongoing interactive SR discussion; it is not presumed to be generally applicable to all Abrahamic traditions.

The groups include participants from Abrahamic traditions, though not necessarily in equal proportions from each tradition.[163] The person who is involved

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[160] Daniel W. Hardy, *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning,* 534.
[161] Nicholas Adams, "Scriptural Reasoning and Interfaith Hermeneutics," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe*, ed. David Cheetham (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 60, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401200370_005.
[162] Ann Rebekah Eklund, "The Goods of Reading: Theological Interpretation and Scriptural Reasoning," *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 9, no. 1 (2010), Duke Divinity School, https://jsr.shanti.virginia.edu/back-issues/vol-9-no-1-december-2010-the-fruits-of-scriptural-reasoning/the-goods-of-reading-theological-interpretation-and-scriptural-reasoning/.
[163] Nicholas Adams, "Scriptural Reasoning and Interfaith Hermeneutics," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe*, 60, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401200370_005.

in the process of SR first of all reflects upon the text taken from their sacred Scripture in general, and then discusses its meaning with the other members of a group.

A real element of innovation that SR brings is that every text is studied and read in an interreligious context. It is important that the other participants respect the attachment of the believer to his or her sacred text. That attachment is, however, not authoritative for the other participants. Respect and a non-judgmental attitude are essential in the search for mutual understanding and communication. Again, SR is not primarily oriented to reaching agreement, but to reaching understanding. That means that members of the small groups are not trying to reach a consensus about any topic. The central aim is to achieve a renewed comprehension of one's own traditions by appreciation of each other's traditions and by encounters concerning the topics that are discussed.[164] At the heart of SR lies this mutual *spiritual hospitality*, with each participant willing to act as host and as guest. Last but not least, the confrontation with the Sacred Scriptures and the explanation of another religion to which this gives rise may throw new light upon one's own convictions and upon the diversity of ideas within one's own religion.

It might be argued that in the encounter with adherents of other religions, Christians could still be suspected of attempts to convert the other. Again, abandoning a conversion theology is not mandatory in SR. Still, the following should be considered: the three traditions are likely to persist for a long time. There is no prospect of mass conversions from one tradition to another; no prospect of agreement on some of the core issues at the heart of the traditions' accounts of one another; no prospect of consensus on matters of interpretation of sacred texts. Acknowledging this, however, should not be a reason for Christians to change their

[164] Nicholas Adams, *Scriptural Reasoning and Interfaith Hermeneutics*, 63.

convictions and dogmas. The main task is not to adopt new theological truths but to respect each other's approach to the divine revelation. SR allows Christians to elucidate these approaches of one's other sacred Scripture and afterwards reflect upon the Bible and theology. Muslims who investigate the claim about Jesus' divinity and humanity are not constrained in the same way and should not impose their conviction upon the Christian, although their religion is fully aware that Christians may have a missionary obligation to spread his truth about Jesus. Incidentally, the reverse is true as well. An example may clarify this point. According to the Qur'an, Jesus has no share in divinity, which is the sole prerogative of Allah: "*He has neither a wife nor a son*" (Qur'an 3:62-62). The most significant difference between the Qur'anic account concerning Jesus and the Christian belief in Jesus Christ as Savior is present in surah *An-Nisa* 4:157.[165] This verse tells of Jesus' death and underlines – at least according to general Islamic understanding – that He did not die on the cross. In this context, I need to acknowledge that beliefs considered self-evident for me as a Christian theologian may be regarded as untrue by the Muslims and Jews. Conversely, self-evident principles within the Islamic or Jewish tradition may be viewed as untrue by Christians.[166] The religious, theological, and liturgical elements considered sacred within Christianity may hold little significance for Jews or Muslims, and, in accordance with SR methodology, may be approached with *respectful distance*.[167] Hence the ultimate goal of SR is not to impose one's perspective upon others or to adopt one another's perspective. This method of SR does not deny the missionary task of each religion as such.[168] That is

[165] Qur'an 4:157: "*And [for] their saying, "Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah." And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain.*"
[166] Nicholas Adams, *Scriptural Reasoning and Interfaith Hermeneutics*, 75.
[167] Ibid., 75.
[168] Susannah Ticciati, *Scriptural Reasoning and the Formation of Identity*, 421.

why the main task will be to reflect on the proposed topic and concrete texts from a personal religious perspective. In a way then there is a more orthodox point of view with regard to the relation between religions than is the general practice of interreligious dialogue, where a pluralist theology is often presupposed.

2.3.1 Challenges of Scriptural Reasoning and its limitations

Still, the scholarly debate about the possibility of *writing* about SR while doing justice to both religious convictions, has not been solved yet. It seems to me that SR rehabilitates a subjective religious perspective and hence one cannot but refrain from "objective conclusions" that would be equally valued and shared by both religions. This is why in my view the living group process of Muslims commenting on the Bible and of Christians commenting on the Qur'an cannot be done justice by one writer only, be (s)he Muslim or Christian, or neutral (which would turn the whole enterprise into *comparative religion*). The Christian theologian may describe his Christian point of view of the Qur'an but should refrain from appropriating the Muslim view of the Bible, I think. The transition from a group process to a scholarly article remains a difficult point. This is also why I consider my dissertation an invitation to a Muslim to do the same with the Bible.

Obviously, my practice as member of the interreligious committee in the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church for the relations with Muslims (who have lived in Ukraine for more than ten centuries), is an indispensable experience. Still, the scholarly opinion that writing about SR as an individual should include the Muslim perspective (about the Bible) from the outset seems to me a denial of the rehabilitation of subjective religious perspectives that SR implies. As such, SR is an open model that constantly invites future encounters. However, in order to solve this

scholarly conundrum, I have decided to resort to *Comparative Theology* as enriched by some elements from SR.

2.4. Comparative Theology

The contemporary discipline of Comparative Theology was theorized in the late 1980s and 1990s. However, it retrospectively includes earlier works that were categorized as "world theology" or "global theology."[169] Friedrich Max Müller is often regarded as the founding figure of "Comparative Religion" ("Vergleichende Religionswissenschaft") in the nineteenth century.[170] One of the earliest efforts to incorporate the study of the history of religions into theological discourse (particularly in the field of Biblical exegesis) was made by the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century.[171] This movement was centered at the theological faculty of the University of Göttingen, but still refrained from a theological evaluation.

Comparative Theology (mark the difference with Comparative *Religion*), as it developed in the late twentieth century within the Christian theological tradition, arose in part as a response to several pressing factors: the increasingly *global* character of Christianity, the lived reality of religious pluralism, and growing calls for a moratorium on the theology of religions.[172] It is also important to add, that nineteenth-century figures such as James Freeman Clarke, George Matheson, and

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[169] David Tracy, "Comparative Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 3 (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 446.
[170] Friedrich Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1882; repr., Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, Elibron Classic Replica Edition, 2005), 149.
[171] Reinhold Bernhardt, "Comparative Theology: Between Theology and Religious Studies," *Religions* 3, no. 4 (2012): 1120-1131, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel3041120.
[172] Axel Marc Oaks Takacs, "Comparative Theology and Interreligious Studies: Embracing and Transgressing the Dialogical Relationships Among Religious Traditions," in *A Companion to Comparative Theology*, ed. Pim Valkenberg, with Marianne Moyaert, Kristin Johnston Largen, James Fredericks, and Bede Benjamin Bidlack (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022), 563.

Abraham Kuenen genuinely believed that their comparisons, although claiming "objectivity", demonstrated the superiority of Christianity. In hindsight this can be clearly recognized, in spite of their claim to objectivity and their conviction of being grounded in scientific inquiry.[173]

Within European theological discourse, various expressions of Comparative Theology are frequently met with two primary criticisms. The first concerns its perceived indistinguishability from a pluralistic theology of religions, suggesting that Comparative Theology merely reiterates existing pluralist frameworks without offering a distinctive theological approach. The second critique points to its apparent convergence with certain strands of religious studies, raising questions about whether Comparative Theology operates more as a descriptive academic discipline rather than as a confessional and constructive theological enterprise. These concerns reflect an ongoing tension within the field regarding its epistemological status, methodological boundaries, and its relationship to both systematic theology and interreligious scholarship.[174]

According to the influential model proposed by Francis Clooney, Comparative Theology occupies a distinctive space between the non-theological comparative study of religion on one side and Christian theology on the other.[175] It is occupying a space between comparative religion and the theology of religions, clearly reflecting the academic context and disciplinary boundaries characteristic of the late 1980s and early 1990s.[176]

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[173] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 103-104.
[174] Aaron Langenfeld, "The Moment of Truth: Comparative and Dogmatic Theology," in *How to Do Comparative Theology*, ed. Francis X. Clooney, S.J., and Klaus von Stosch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 59.
[175] Ibid., 69.
[176] Aaron Langenfeld, "The Moment of Truth: Comparative and Dogmatic Theology," in *How to Do Comparative Theology*, ed. Francis X. Clooney, S.J., and Klaus von Stosch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 70.

The methodology of Comparative Theology has been shaped in deliberate contrast to other academic and theological approaches that address religious diversity. It distinguishes itself from the secular and historical approaches and from the Theology of Religions by its focus on actual comparisons between religious texts, teachings, or rituals, and from earlier, nineteenth-century approaches to comparative religion.[177] Comparative Theology constitutes an academic field and intellectual framework within theological studies; it does not necessarily require direct interpersonal engagement with believers from other religions. In contrast, interreligious dialogue centers on actual conversations between adherents of different faiths, although such dialogues often include a significant theological dimension.[178] The primary aim of Comparative Theology is to engage with another religious tradition in order to understand it more deeply and to place it in constructive comparison with one's own. At its core, this approach aligns closely with the principles of theological dialogue.[179] The foundational *principle* of Comparative Theology is the empathetic study of another religious tradition, as this involves a sincere effort to understand the internal methodologies and hermeneutical frameworks inherent to the tradition being examined, rather than imposing external interpretive paradigms upon it.[180]

An important challenge for Comparative Theology is defining its role in relation to traditional theological frameworks. Unlike the nineteenth-century approaches to comparative religion, contemporary approaches are marked by discovering truth within other religious traditions. Although Comparative Theology

[177] Catherine Cornille, "The Problem of Choice in Comparative Theology," in *How to Do Comparative Theology*, ed. Francis X. Clooney, S.J., and Klaus von Stosch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 27.
[178] Francis X. Clooney, "Comparative Theology and Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 53-54.
[179] Aaron Langenfeld, "The Moment of Truth: Comparative and Dogmatic Theology," 63.
[180] Paul Hedges, "Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics: A Gadamerian Approach to Interreligious Interpretation," *Religions* 7, no. 1 (2016): 1–20, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel7010007.

does not primarily function as apologetics, the pursuit of theological truth may still contain apologetic dimensions, particularly when addressing challenges posed by questions from different religions. Traditional theology is sometimes regarded, at most, as a repository of concepts or practices to be drawn upon in the construction of a more comprehensive or synthetic theological system.[181] Here the discipline of theology of religions plays an essential role. It establishes the theological foundation for engaging with other religions and for the possibility of learning from them.[182]

The discipline of Comparative Theology continues to grow both in scope and in methodological diversity. Although its roots are often seen within Christianity, and predominantly Roman Catholicism, it is now increasingly embraced by scholars from various Christian denomination as well as from non-Christian religious traditions. This broadening of participation reflects a growing recognition of the value of interreligious engagement for deepening one's own theological understanding.[183] At the same time, comparative theologians within any given tradition face an almost limitless options of choices: which religious tradition to engage, which texts or teachings to examine, and which theological themes to explore. This openness presents both an opportunity and a challenge, demanding careful methodological discernment to ensure that such comparisons are theologically meaningful. In addition to its methodological diversity, Comparative Theology offers a flexible framework for engaging with another religious tradition. This openness enables theological dialogue across religious boundaries and creates opportunities for fruitful contributions to the core disciplines of theology.[184]

[181] Catherine Cornille, "The Problem of Choice in Comparative Theology," in *How to Do Comparative Theology*, ed. Francis X. Clooney, S.J., and Klaus von Stosch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 32.
[182] Catherine Cornille, "The Problem of Choice in Comparative Theology,", 32.
[183] Ibid., 19.
[184] Such as ethics, systematic theology, pastoral theology, historical theology, and Biblical studies.

Moreover, the plurality of approaches within Comparative Theology allows practitioners to learn from one another, by fostering an internal dialogue that deepens methodological awareness and strengthens the discipline's intellectual coherence.[185] The discipline draws upon both the theoretical frameworks and methodologies of religious studies (such as comparative and historical approaches) and the resources of confessional theology, which remains primarily Christian in orientation. While not itself a form of interreligious dialogue, Comparative Theology can nevertheless inform interreligious encounters and be engaged within them, where its insights may serve as valuable points of reflection and learning.[186]

The term "internal dialogue" was coined, among others, by the Catholic monk Thomas Merton[187] and further developed in "Comparative Theology" by the Jesuit Francis X. Clooney.[188] Clooney regards Comparative Theology as a concept related to intrareligious dialogue. Comparative Theology, he argues, has its own Catholic grounding, even if it is by no means universally accepted or recognized by Catholics or restricted to Catholics only, and even if theologizing about other religions from a distance is obviously the preferred option for most theologians.[189] *Comparative Theology* involves a learning process by being confronted with the documents of another religion, but without departing from one's own religion, and not bracketing that as happens in *Comparative Religion*. Comparative Religion, often approached alongside disciplines such as the history of religions and the social sciences,

[185] Catherine Cornille, "The Problem of Choice in Comparative Theology,", 19.
[186] Axel Marc Oaks Takacs, "Comparative Theology and Interreligious Studies: Embracing and Transgressing the Dialogical Relationships Among Religious Traditions," in *A Companion to Comparative Theology*, ed. Pim Valkenberg, with Marianne Moyaert, Kristin Johnston Largen, James Fredericks, and Bede Benjamin Bidlack (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022), 563.
[187] Jacehan Park, *Thomas Merton's Encounter with Buddhism and Beyond: His Interreligious Dialogue, Inter-Monastic Exchanges, and Their Legacy* (Toronto: Regis College and the University of Toronto, 2018), 195.
[188] See more Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 182.
[189] Ibid., 118.

examines the beliefs, practices, symbols, and historical developments of two or more religious traditions. This field aspires to a posture of critical detachment, in which the scholar suspends personal theological commitments and seeks to analyze religious phenomena without advancing any particular confessional background.[190] For Comparative Theology, the emphasis lies less on providing conclusive answers and more on cultivating innovative and substantial questions.[191] Hence, an "internal (interior) interreligious dialogue" or rather an *intra*religious dialogue takes place.

Generally speaking, in Comparative Theology, the "other" is represented by a text, and not by a living partner. It should be noted that Comparative Theology does not aim to learn about one's own tradition as such.[192] Ultimately, the way Comparative Theology searches for truth and meaning, in combination with a strong adherence to the practitioner's own tradition, is what differentiates Comparative Theology from religious studies.[193] Still, Comparative Theology tends to be rather individualistic and introverted in its reading of other religions, as no living representatives of those other religions are involved. It often focuses on individual mystical treatises and highly complicated theological writings.

Francis X. Clooney has highlighted the significant methodological and theological overlap between Comparative Theology and Scriptural Reasoning, both of which prioritize deep, text-centered engagement across religious traditions while remaining rooted in confessional commitments.[194] Clooney argues that SR and Comparative Theology function as complementary methods. SR pursuits dialogical

[190] Francis X. Clooney, "A Catholic Comparativist's View of Scriptural Reasoning in the Anglican Context," *Journal of Anglican Studies* 11, no. 2 (2013): 221-222.
[191] Pim Valkenburg, *A Companion to Comparative Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 123.
[192] Betül Avci, "Comparative Theology: An Alternative to Religious Studies or Theology of Religions?" *Comparative Theology* 9 (2018): 6.
[193] Ibid., 6.
[194] Francis X. Clooney, "A Catholic Comparativist's View of Scriptural Reasoning in the Anglican Context," 219-222.

interaction between religions, while Comparative Theology contributes sustained, text-centered theological reflection, shaped by one's own religious tradition which can be deepened through the disciplined, hermeneutical characteristic of Comparative Theology.[195] Clooney emphasizes that SR and Comparative Theology both react to a *traditional* theological approach. While he acknowledges its merits, a *traditional* perspective cannot accommodate what is outside of the traditional perspective and attitude, according to Clooney.[196]

The main focus of Comparative Theology (at least Clooney's) is on individual mystical traditions and introverted reading, often of secondary theological sources.[197] In addition, my approach is directed to central sacred Scriptures, and is community-oriented, in which the Christian practitioner reacts to Islam as a religious community and vice-versa. Still, a "reader," a participant in the internal dialogue, not only learns about another religion but also changes the attitude toward one's own tradition by profoundly expanding one's worldview.[198] Comparative Theology, according to Clooney, thus combines tradition-rooted theological concerns with actual study of another tradition. It is not an exercise in the study of religion or religions for the sake of clarifying the phenomenon. It cannot be reduced to a theology about religions, or to the practice of dialogue, Clooney argues.[199] My choice for a method comes down to an adapted version of Comparative Theology

2.4.1. How I proceed?

[195] Ibid., 221-222.
[196] Ibid., 230.
[197] Betül Avci, "Comparative Theology: An Alternative to Religious Studies or Theology of Religions?", *Comparative Theology* 9 (2018), 1.
[198] Francis X. Clooney, "Comparative Theology and Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 57-58.
[199] Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 3-23.

From the perspective of a Christian theologian who deals with Islam in the realm of interreligious dialogue, it is necessary to select the topic, story, or problem and the relevant passage from the Bible and from the Qur'an that addresses the chosen topic.[200] It is important to read the Qur'anic text carefully, underlining the small details and the broader context. Then the Christian theologian turns to his/her own Scripture and reads it carefully, concentrating only on the text, without taking into account any theological background and previous knowledge about this passage that they might have. I call this "close reading".

Then the following questions arise: what are the possible roots of the various explanations and interpretations and what do they mean for me as a theologian? After extensive research, the chosen texts (3.1.1; 3.2.1; 4.1.1; 4.1.1.2; 4.2.1; 5.1.1; 5.2.1 and 5.2.1.2) from different traditions lead to deep and sometimes even remarkable reflections.[201] In short, the following steps constitute my *practice* of doing Comparative Theology.

1. Assessing the Qur'anic perspective

1.1 close reading of the verses of the Qur'an

1.2 the broader context of the verses of the Qur'an

2. Reflecting upon the Bible's perspective on the same topic

2.1 close reading of the verses of the Bible

2.2 the broader context of the verses of the Bible

[200] The Biblical text is necessary to clarify my frame of reference as a Christian theologian. The theological questions, however, concentrate upon the Qur'anic text.
[201] Marianne Moyaert, "Scriptural Reasoning as Interreligious Dialogue," 68.

3. Questions I ask myself as a Catholic theologian

4. Theological reflection: drawing up an inventory of theological questions raised by the reading of the Qur'an.

First, it is necessary to present the topic and explain why it was chosen. A text from each tradition is carefully selected to illustrate that the theme is both relevant in the Bible and in the Qur'an. The next step is the brief presentation of the story according to the Qur'anic verses. It is necessary to present a concrete *surah* from the Qur'an and to develop its textual meaning by close reading. After that, the textual boundaries of the narrative are demarcated, making it possible to describe the context of the verses in the whole *surah*, or at least the context between the previous and the following verses. This enables assessment of the pericope as a whole story, or rather as a reference to a story, often combined with admonitions. Secondary literature should be consulted sparsely and mainly to elucidate the Qur'an pericope itself, without dealing with post-Qur'anic developments.

For example, if the story about Mary has been chosen from the Qur'an, it is not necessary to do extensive research about the Islamic Mariology. However, the researcher should consult some studies on Mary in which the Islamic perspective is present. Sometimes some post-Qur'anic texts may be adduced to elucidate the Qur'an itself, but sparingly. The close reading stage should prevent a religiously biased (Christian) reading. At this stage, I am not yet trying to explain the Qur'an from my perspective, but I want to find the questions and issues that may contribute to my understanding of the issues in the Qur'anic text and that may push me to deepen my understanding of those or similar topics in my own tradition.

The following step includes the Biblical perspective and close textual reading of the proposed topic. It should be noted at the beginning that at this stage one deals only with the Bible, without additional theological or patristical explanation. Only when the Qur'anic text necessitates it, I draw upon post-Biblical texts. The same structure recommended for the close reading of the Qur'an (see no. 1 of the structure) could be used here. The textual 'boundaries' of the verses, the narrative, and a description of the context of the text should be presented.

The proposed Qur'anic narratives may lead to discussion and provoke theological questions by me as a Christian theologian. For example, in the Qur'an, we find the "Biblical" names of the prophets and narratives, commandments, and moral guidelines that will be familiar from our Christian tradition. However, the stories attributed to the prophets in the Qur'an are often completely different from their physiognomy in the Bible. In what way does the concrete *surah* challenge my understanding of the same topic from the Bible? In what way will it provoke my openness to deepen my knowledge of the Bible? In what way can this reading of the Qur'an be significant for Christian theology?

The last step, and perhaps the most important one, will include theological reflection from the perspective of one's own faith, by understanding, discussing, and debating how the Qur'an can be interpreted from one's own religious tradition. In my case, this concerns an (Eastern) Catholic perspective on the proposed topic.

A preliminary inventory of questions without a systematic order, but making the matter more concrete, may constitute the following:

Can a Christian understanding of the Bible stick to exegesis while dispensing with post-Biblical literature, or should my confrontation with the Qur'an bring me

to a renewed awareness of post-Biblical interpretations, e.g., by the Church Fathers and by so-called apocryphal literature? Following this train of thought, and referring to the patristic heritage and apocryphal literature, I should then reflect upon the authority of these texts for a modern Christian theologian. This view of the Bible within the continuity of the Christian tradition is significant to Christian theology, and is an issue posed by the confrontation with the Qur'an. We cannot find the full answers to difficult and significant theological issues in Bible exegesis alone. Relevant issues are original sin, baptism, and the sources of the roots of the feast of the Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple etc. – all issues that come to the fore in my reading of the Qur'an. It should be noted that with regard to the birth and early life of the Virgin Mary, issues vital for me as a Catholic theologian, these events are not recorded in the canonical Gospels. There is a wealth of ancient literature not included in the canon of the Bible, which is, however, often inspired by Biblical stories and contains details about the life of Mary, similar to those in the Qur'an, including the story of her presentation in the Temple. I will discuss the theological problems this entails extensively.

Here I encounter the interconnectedness of *inter*religious dialogue and *intra*religious dialogue. The key result is that my tradition may appear in a fresh light. What is the connection between the Biblical text itself and the theology I am familiar with? How significant and authoritative are the apocryphal narratives for Christian theology? I do not need to answer all these questions, but what is at stake here is not so much an exhaustive understanding of Islam, but that my Christian tradition appears in a fresh light, and my understanding of Islam has undoubtedly grown. The Qur'anic narratives may provoke me, but they will at least induce me to reflect more deeply on my own tradition. By studying the Qur'anic perspective, I am developing my theological reflection. The ultimate goal is not merely to clarify

Islam, but to raise Christian theological questions posed by the confrontation with Islamic texts as well. This is only possible from an insider's perspective, from the perspective of my own tradition and faith. This may refresh and revitalize our interreligious activities and engagement, allowing some sort of pluralism and rootedness in approaches and meanings, both interreligious and intrareligious. Hence, it is essential that inner-Christian debate is refreshed by developing an *intrareligious* dialogue and *internal dialogue* in which the various Christian currents play their role.

2.4.2. The Qur'an as a religious document

Like in Judaism (Talmud and Midrash) and in Christianity (Church Fathers and liturgy), in Islam a sea of post-Qur'anic stories (Hadith) and commentaries on the Qur'an (Tafsir) has arisen. I cannot claim a full command over this enormous sea of post-Qur'anic literature. Still, I realize that this literature is both a later development, after the Qur'an, with new themes and insights, as well as an explanation of the Qur'an. My close reading aims at the Qur'an itself, departing from the sacred Scriptures of Bible and Qur'an. However, I want to avoid the pitfall of a "Sola Scriptura approach", which may reflect a protestant bias against post-Biblical tradition. This model should not too rigorously be applied to the Qur'an. In order to do some justice to the Qur'an as an Islamic religious document I have used *The study Qur'an*, in which relevant texts from *hadith* and *tafsir* have been brought together as a traditional access to the Qur'an, although my use has been very sparingly in order not to obscure the Qur'an itself. For general information I have consulted works such as the *Encyclopedia of Islam* and the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, as well as some introductory works such as Nicolai Sinai's *introduction to the Qur'an* mentioned above, without, however, taking over the principles of historical-critical

exegesis. In addition, I have used some publications on the Virgin Mary in Islam and articles by Jane Damme Mc Auliffe and Said Reynolds and others, in which they enter into theological debates with reference to both Christianity and Islam. As stated earlier, some publications of Angelika Neuwirth that rehabilitate both inner-Qur'anic research and typology have been surprisingly relevant for my theological hermeneutics, a discovery that I will explain at the end of my theological reflection on Moses (chapter 5, 5.4.4) and on the Virgin Mary (chapter 4, 4.4.4.). Both issues will be dealt with in chapter 6 as well.

In essence, however, I want to focus upon the Qur'an itself, not upon the broad variety of post-Qur'anic interpretations. This is why I have adopted a *close reading* of the Qur'anic texts, added with an exploration of the immediate Qur'anic context.

As to the post-Biblical Christian tradition, which plays such an important role in my Eastern-Catholic tradition, both Church Fathers and liturgy, as stated before I have decided to adduce these sources only when the Qur'anic text necessitated that. This is why both the temptation by Satan in Paradise and the Marian cultic traditions do play a role in my discussion of the Qur'an from an Eastern-Catholic perspective, although the Bible itself is silent about them. To do justice to the actual dialogue I have used *inter alia* magisterial texts form the Second Vatical Council (1962-1965) and after for theological reflection.

The choice of the three topics dealing with Paradise, Mary and Miracles, may betray a Christian interest. Still, they are considered of central importance in Islam as well. The theological reflection upon these texts yields a deep theological insight, although one should keep in mind that my conclusions about the meaning of the Qur'an for Catholic theology are necessarily limited to these three topics. Secondary literature has been a help in understanding the Qur'an, but the main activity has been a close reading of the Qur'an itself, rather than the enormous literature devoted to

these three topics. This close reading may have a limited scholarly value, but is absolutely necessary for an Eastern-Catholic reflection upon of the Qur'an, for which I do claim scholarly and academic value. By an Eastern Catholic reading I mean a reading of a theologian who takes serious Bible, Church Fathers, liturgy and magisterial teaching, including the declarations from the Vatican Council *Nostra Aetate* (1965) and speeches by popes afterwards, notably John Paul 2.[202] No less important than this heritage from the past is a theological responsibility for renewal in the future. The Catholic teaching about the Islam is still a flower in its bud, which deserves to become a beautiful flower in the future. This will only happen by the contribution of responsible theologians.

2.5. The lens of an (Eastern) Catholic theological perspective

As an Eastern Catholic theologian deeply immersed in the Byzantine tradition, my theological inquiry and reflection are strongly influenced by this heritage. It serves as the lens through which I engage with the Qur'an from a distinctly Catholic perspective. My religious identity is rooted not only in the Biblical text but also in the broader ecclesial tradition, including patristic writings, liturgical practices, and sacramentology. Although limiting myself to the Biblical realm, this background will (and should!) surface. Within this framework, I aim to explore the potential of Comparative Theology as a tool to promote mutual understanding and dialogue between the Catholic and Islamic traditions. By doing this, I will be able to 'host' religious opinions that are different from my own.

[202] Obviously, *Nostra Aetate* §2 is not a summary of Islam, but a Catholic initiative to foster religious relations with Islam.

Still, it is necessary to further clarify what I mean by the term "Catholic perspective." Obviously, a Catholic theologian can do no more than offer *a* Catholic perspective, not *the* Catholic perspective. The Bible takes pride of place, but the continuity between Scripture and tradition is also a hallmark of Catholic theology, in marked distinction to some strands of Protestant theology. Protestant theology emphasizes the revelatory character of Scripture and views the Church as being under the verdict of Scripture. There are suspicions in Protestant tradition that the Catholic Church adapts Scripture to its own needs by its high appreciation of tradition. Nevertheless, I view the rich tradition of Church Fathers, medieval theology, and ultimately modern theology not as standing in competition with Scripture but as a privileged way to access the Bible.

There is an important difference in emphasis between Eastern and Western theology. Scholastic theology has emerged within the Catholic tradition and plays a significant role in Western theology. It is rooted in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventura, and St. Augustine of Hippo, who developed a systematic approach to theology. However, modern thinkers from the West, such as the personalist philosophers Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier, have received significant attention in Eastern Europe, mainly through the teachings of St. John Paul II (Karol Wojtyła). Additionally, the Catholic tradition of mystical theology, developed by St. Teresa of Avila, Meister Eckhart, and Julian of Norwich, has deeply influenced Catholic spiritual practices, especially concerning prayer.

Being in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, UGCC[203], as the largest Eastern Catholic Church, is primarily rooted in the Byzantine tradition, preserving its unique distinct rituals, patristic tradition, liturgical language, and

[203] The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is an Eastern Catholic church in full communion with the Holy See.

mysticism. This tradition places a strong emphasis on the Eastern Church Fathers and Byzantine heritage, including a particular focus on the study of iconology. Eastern Christianity pays considerable attention, alongside the appreciation of the Bible, to the role of the Church Fathers, especially St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Athanasius and St. Basil the Great. Moreover, Eastern Christianity also incorporates theological concepts that have uniquely emerged within its tradition. This includes Gregory Palamas's doctrine of *Theosis* (divinization), Sergei Bulgakov's Sophiology and Mariology, and the twentieth-century development of *Imiaslavie* (ὀνοματοδοξία). Consequently, for my Church and for me, an Eastern Catholic Patristic theology is of great significance.

The topic of the veneration of Mary is an extremely rich theme in Eastern Christian spirituality and it forms an important chapter of this dissertation. However, this is not commonly expressed through systematic theology but is prominent mainly in prayer and liturgy. In Sergei Bulgakov's work, we may even detect a certain tension between the Marian dogmas as a heritage from the West which calls forth criticism, and the deep mysticism of the Virgin Mary as the seat of Wisdom.[204] One of the most debated theological concepts within the Orthodox tradition is *Sophiology*. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian philosophers such as Sergei Bulgakov, Vladimir Solovyov, and Pavel Florensky have developed this doctrine. Bulgakov's Sophiology, which is his attempt to explain Orthodox devotion to Sophia, aims to highlight the Orthodox popular devotion and the liturgical veneration of Mary. Hence Mariology is integral to his Sophiology.[205] Although

[204] See more Sergius Bulgakov, *The Burning Bush: On the Orthodox Veneration of the Mother of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009). The matter is further complicated by the fact that Bulgakov became more inclined to Roman Catholicism, but was disappointed by the concrete encounter with Western Catholicism.
[205] Walter Sisto, "On the Acquisition of the Holy Spirit. Sergius Bulgakov and the Theotokos", *Logos: A Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 54, nos. 1-2 (2013): 13-32, 14.

Bulgakov has published only a few works on Mary, she is a central theological figure in his thought, culminating in his works *The Burning Bush* (1927) and his final reflection, *The Bride of the Lamb* (1946).[206] Both titles refer to the Virgin Mary as a divine fire that nevertheless does not destroy her creatureliness, and to Mary as the bride of Christ.

Bulgakov's influence extends beyond the Orthodox tradition, as he also has engaged with Catholic Mariological doctrines, including the Immaculate Conception. One of the basic questions he raises is whether the conviction that the Virgin Mary was untouched by original sin means that she did not require redemption in Christ? Initially, he reproached Catholic dogma for that, but later on, his mystical theology has forged a synthesis between both concepts. Indeed, his Sophiology has also resonated with Catholic theologians; for instance, Thomas Merton has praised Sophia in his poem *Hagia Sophia* (1963), and Valentin Tomberg who incorporated Sophiological insights in his *Meditations on the Tarot. A Journey into Christian Hermeticism*. It is important to note that this concept has faced significant criticism, and Bulgakov himself was officially condemned for his writings on the subject by Patriarch Sergey of Moscow in 1935. For instance, Vladimir Solovyov emphasized that we should refrain from dogmatizing the glorification of the Mother of God and instead respect the Church's silence on this matter.[207] This ongoing theological debate illustrates the dynamic nature of Mariology within both Eastern and Western Christian thought. This background forms the lens for me as an Eastern Catholic theologian which co-determines my perspective of the Qur'an. Still, my chapter on Mary in the Qur'an clearly could not

[206] Ibid., 14.
[207] Rowan Williams, *A Margin of Silence: The Holy Spirit in Russian Orthodox Theology* (Quebec: Lys Vert, 2006), 39.

enter into these intricate mystical debates. My aim is not to give a full Catholic Mariology but to give an account of what reading the Qur'an on Mary could mean for (Eastern) Catholicism. Here, another aspect of Catholic theology comes to the fore: a theologian should not just rehearse his tradition but should be open to today's issues and problems. Repeating yesterday's answers will not be sufficient to solve the questions of our society. It is clear that Islam forms a formidable challenge to Christian theology, and it is equally clear, at least to me, that the (Catholic) past as such does not provide ready-made answers, indispensable as the rich tradition may be.

Chapter 3

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE LOSS OF PARADISE: QUR'AN 2:30-39; GENESIS 3:1-7

The creation of the world by the one God, as depicted in the Bible, is one of the central tenets of the Christian faith. Numerous theologians and scholars have debated the theological and textual aspects of Genesis 1 and 2 and the differences and similarities between the two chapters. Typically, Gen. 1 is considered the "creation story," in which the whole of creation is in view, whereas Gen. 2 seems to focus exclusively on the "story of the creation of Adam and Eve," followed in Gen. 3 by the story of Paradise. Many theological and existential questions are connected to these stories. In a way, the human condition with its ambiguities of joy and sorrow is reflected in the tension between life in Paradise and being banished from it: labor, getting children, mortality, and even the altered relationship between man and wife and the impact on gender in general. Hence the Paradise story can be understood as an aetiological story.

In addition, existential questions may arise, such as: What is the origin of evil? What is the essential meaning of temptation in Paradise and who was the tempter? What is the relevance of these topics for modern religious thought? All these questions are as essential for a Christian as for they are for a Jew or for a Muslim, although in a very different manner, both because of the differences between Bible and Qur'an and, as far as Christians and Jews are concerned, because of the strongly differing hermeneutics of the Bible and its theological implications. Still, these three religions share a common respect for the figure of Adam, understood as the original Human Being. This may serve as a starting point for dialogue and, possibly, even for a new theological discourse, in our case between Islam and Christianity. Still, the issue of the creation stories and the story of Paradise, and especially the understanding of the process of creation and of the expulsion from Paradise have been interpreted very differently by Muslims in comparison to Christians. Indeed, there is also a whole plethora of different opinions and interpretations of the stories

of creation and of Paradise within Christianity itself. Hence the recognition of differences between the Bible and Qur'an can be fruitful for intrareligious dialogue as well. The various approaches to the story of the creation of the Human Being (I use this expression instead of the name 'Adam' to avoid an exclusively male understanding of this name, which often indicates 'human') may be quite beneficial to each side of the dialogue. Reflection upon both the Christian and the Islamic understanding of "who is the Human Being?" will enhance self-reflection. More generally, this procedure may remind the Christian theologian of the existing plurality of interpretations outside as well as within his own religion. The following provides some concrete examples of these challenges.

3.1.1 A close reading of the story of the Responsibility for the loss of Paradise – Qur'an 2:30-39

The story of the creation of the Human Being features in various places in the Qur'an, such as in surah *Al-Baqarah,* surah *As-Sajdah*, as well as in some other places. In the Qur'an, there is no continuing story of the creation as there is in the Bible. Apparently, the genre of a Bible story is different from the genre of the Qur'an. It seems to me that the Qur'an refers to the creation of the Human Being as a kind of admonishment, as if the people were already acquainted with the story and should merely be reminded of its message. There is no full-fledged narrative, and neither is there a chronological order of the stories. In addition, the context of the admonition of the people is not located in a remote past but takes place in the time of the prophet Muhammad himself. Unlike in Genesis, where the creation narratives occupy the first two chapters of the book, the creation accounts in the Qur'an are scattered throughout the whole book. Still, the story of the creation of the Human Being from *Al-Baqarah* is quite coherent in itself.

The story of the creation of the Human Being in Qur'an 2:30-39: (Sahih International)

"*And [mention, O Muḥammad], when your Lord said to the angels: –* "*Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.* "*They said:* "*Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we exalt You with praise and declare Your perfection?*" *He [Allah] said,* "*Indeed, I know that which you do not know.*" *And He taught Adam the names – all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said,* "*Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful.*" *They said,* "*Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise.*" *He said: – "O Adam, inform them of their names.*" *And when he had informed them of their names, He said: –* "*Did I not tell you that I know the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth? And I know what you reveal and what you have concealed.*" *And [mention] when We said to the angels,* "*Prostrate before Adam*"*; so they prostrated, except for Iblis. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers. And We said,* "*O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers.*" *But Satan caused them to slip out of it and removed them from that [condition] in which they had been. And We said,* "*Go down, [all of you], as enemies to one another, and you will have upon the earth a place of settlement and provision for a time.*" *Then Adam received from his Lord [some] words, and He accepted his repentance. Indeed, it is He who is the Accepting of Repentance, the Merciful. We said,* "*Go down from it, all of you. And when guidance comes to you from Me, whoever follows My guidance – there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve. And those who disbelieve and deny Our sign – those will be companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally.*"

A verse-by-verse close reading

2:30 "*And [mention, O Muḥammad], when your Lord said to the angels: –* "*Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.* "*They said:* "*Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we exalt You with praise and declare Your perfection?*" *He [Allah] said,* "*Indeed, I know that which you do not know*."

From the outset, we may note that this verse raises several topics that are not immediately clear. Why God decided to discuss the creation of the Human Being with the angels and what are their functions? God reveals to the angels that Adam will be His successive authority, his *khalif.* The word *khalif* خَلِيفَةً has the connotation of "vicegerent."[208] In this verse, and likewise in Qur'an 6:165,[209] the word "*khalifah*" appears to denote a universal human inheritance and responsibility, since Human Beings are in their inner reality considered to be the *khalifah* of God.[210] The rank of "khalif" – the governor of God – means the position of the Human Being is above the angels, whom God commands to prostrate themselves before Adam.[211] It is implicitly presented in the story that the Human Being(s) is/are the crown of all God's creatures. The Human Being ranks higher than all the living creatures, including the angels. The story contains a tension: on the one hand Adam is wiser than the angels in his wisdom about the names of the creatures, on the other hand it is God who has vouchsafed this wisdom to him, as the Qur'an explicitly emphasizes. Apparently, Adam's authority and wisdom are not from himself but derived directly

[208] John Penrice, *Dictionary of the Koran* (London, 2004), 44.
[209] Qur'an 6:165: "*And it is He who has made you successors upon the earth and has raised some of you above others in degrees [of rank] that He may try you through what He has given you. Indeed, your Lord is swift in penalty; but indeed, He is Forgiving and Merciful*."
[210] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (Harper One, 2015), 108.
[211] The explanation that the Human Being is the successor of the angels is probably prompted by a fear of anthropomorphism.

from God, and Adam must follow the will of the Creator and His commandments and cannot not just do as he pleases.

So, the word *khalifah* is endowed with a special meaning and conveys dimensions that are not transmitted by its synonyms in other languages. One of the translations of *khalif* is: a *successor*. If Adam was a successor, it means that there should be *someone* or even several persons before him, with Adam inheriting their throne or place. This idea is quite widespread in Islam, and it is sometimes supposed to refer to the angels. We may even see confirmation of this idea in the angels' reply. "*Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we exalt You with praise and declare Your perfection?*" Apparently, angels were created before the Human Being. It seems that the angels have a sharp awareness that the Human Being is prone to commit violence. This does not necessarily imply, however, that the angels consider themselves as creatures better suited to take Adam's place. Possibly the angels express astonishment and wonder rather than doubt. This interpretation departs from the idea that angels should be considered obedient, not doubting or rebellious. It also explains why the rebellious Iblis is generally considered a "jinn" (spirit), rather than an angel, in Islam.

Some commentators say that the word *khalifah* with the meaning of *successor* comes from the word *khalafa* ("to come after"), suggesting that Human Beings encompass all levels of existence within the human condition.[212] In addition, the word *khalifah* has been used quite often in the context of prophecy; the true messengers from God were also called *khalifas* of God.

[212] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary,* 108.

2:31-32 "*And He taught Adam the names – all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said,* "*Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful.*" *They said,* "*Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise.*"

It is not clear from the close reading of this verse whether God taught Adam all the names or whether God taught him a kind of new language. The exclusiveness of the Human Being is based upon his knowledge of the names of things/entities. According to Semitic tradition, giving a name to someone means to have authority over them. Still, the Qur'an emphasizes that God has given that knowledge to the Human Being; hence, it is not an inherent wisdom of humankind. Therefore, when God taught Adam the names, it means that He gave him unique knowledge. Because the context is creation, we may assume that the animals are the ones who received the names, although this is not stated explicitly. Anyway, this special wisdom of giving names comes from God and is granted only to Adam and not to the other creatures, like the angels or jinns.

After that the angels were asked whether they could demonstrate a similar divine wisdom. Does that imply that angels have the capability to reflect and to think over God's question, and that they are aware of their limitations and origin? The Qur'an states in a number of places, such as Qur'an 66:7[213], Qur'an 40:8[214] and Qur'an 22:76[215], that angels have no free will. God has asked angels about their ultimate knowledge, but the answer – their lack of knowledge about the names – was clear to Him and to the angels even beforehand. Hence, God's command to the

[213] Qur'an 66:7: "*They (the angels) do what they are bidden to do.*"
[214] Qur'an 40:8: "*They enforce the laws of nature and bear the Throne of God on their shoulders.*"
[215] Qur'an 22:76: "*They are bearers of Divine Messages.*"

angels is somewhat rhetorical, meant to emphasize the superior position of the Human Being.

2:33-34 "*He said: – "O Adam, inform them of their names.*" *And when he had informed them of their names, He said: – "Did I not tell you that I know the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth? And I know what you reveal and what you have concealed.*" *And [mention] when We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam"; so they prostrated, except for Iblis. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers.*"

These verses present God's command to the angels to serve the Human Beings. It is important to underline that although the angels prostrate themselves before Adam, according to Islam their obedience was only directed to the one God. Who was Adam? The first Human Being, possibly both male and female? God wishes to place Adam on earth, but later on the male and female Human Beings are ordered to descend, which by implication may suggest a place above earth. Obviously, the problem of veneration of a Human Being has bothered Islamic scholars. The Qur'an explicitly demands that prostration be before God alone.[216] Still, the Human Being possesses an authority above that of the angels, which is confirmed elsewhere in the Qur'an, such as Qur'an 95:5[217]. This demonstration of Adam's capacity shows the angels that Adam has been granted a special authority.[218]

Seeing that God had created the one who would be the viceregent on earth instead of Him, Iblis yielded to anger and became proud.[219] Verse 34, in which everyone prostates themselves except Iblis, provokes the following question: what

[216] Qur'an 41:38: "*Prostrate not yourselves before the sun, nor before the moon, but prostrate yourselves before Allah, Who created them.*"
[217] Qur'an 95:5: "*We have created man in the best of constitutions.*"
[218] Tagheem ul Qur'an. Surah 2 Al-Baqarah, http://islamicstudies.info/reference.php?sura=2&verse=31-33.
[219] Qur'an 7:12: "*I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay*."

is Iblis's origin? As has been seen in the commentary on Qur'an 2:31-32, angels have no free will. If Iblis has disobeyed God's commandment, he cannot be an angel, Islamic scholars argue. The word إِبْلِيس (*Iblis*) has a number of meanings: an evil spirit, devil, the chief of the wicked jinn, someone who remains in grief, someone who despairs of the mercy of God; someone who is broken in spirit. The term *Iblis* إِبْلِيس may have been related to *balasa*, "he despaired" or to the Greek Koine *διάβολος*.

According to the proposed verse, we do not know whether God's command to prostrate themselves was directed to the angels only or also to all other creatures. The close reading method suggests that this commandment was directed to the angels only. However, if Iblis was not an angel, then it is not clear why Iblis should also prostrate himself. We know this only from other verses in the Qur'an, such as Qur'an 7:13: "*What prevented thee (O Iblis,) from submitting (to Adam) when I commanded thee?*". It could be argued on the basis of these other places in the Qur'an that Iblis was a jinn.[220] If so, the question arises: does the divine commandment apply to all jinns, or only to Iblis? The answer to this somewhat speculative question can be found in post-Qur'anic literature.

For our purpose, which is to conduct Comparative Theology, it is not necessary to pursue this debate further. Appropriate questions and remarks for further theological evaluation will come up within the framework of our method.

2:35-36 "*And We said, "O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers.*" *But Satan caused them to slip out of it*

[220] The Qur'an speaks of *Iblis*, saying: "*He (Iblis) was one of the jinn (a secret creation); then he chose to disobey God's order*" – Qur'an 18:51.

and removed them from that [condition] in which they had been. And We said, "*Go down, [all of you], as enemies to one another, and you will have upon the earth a place of settlement and provision for a time.*"

Iblis struggled to accept that despite being created from clay, the Human Being was created in the most excellent form and received part of God's spirit and was appointed as the representative *khalifah* of God.[221] The Islamic tradition is not unanimous about the nature of Iblis. Our verse speaks here about Satan, but is Iblis identical with Satan? According to the text, it is Satan who betrayed Adam, possibly not Iblis, who was mentioned in the incident of refusing to bow down because of his pride. (Incidentally, the word *Shaitan* is etymologically not quite identical to our word *Satan,* but we should leave this question aside). The word *Satan* has a much broader significance than *Iblis*. Satan is the main enemy of the Human Being, who, according to the Qur'an, will attempt to lead him to eternal fire in hell. It is also possible here to follow another track: Iblis is the entity before his rebellion, Satan afterwards, when expelled from Paradise.

Two other aspects of this verse deserve mention: for the first time, Adam and his wife are mentioned separately. Either the creation of the woman was previously presupposed without being mentioned, or Adam as the first Human Being initially symbolized both male and female. In that case the name "Adam" in this verse has the more limited connotation of the male Human Being.

Another aspect concerns the tree of Paradise. Apparently, according to the Qur'an there is only one tree. It is not clear from the text what kind of tree that may

[221] Badru Kateregga and David Shenk, *Islam and Christianity* (Nairobi: Uzima Publishing House, 1980), 20.

have been.[222] The word *Jannah*,[223] which occurs in this verse refers, perhaps, not to a simple *garden*, but to the *Garden* Al-jannah, "well known" as the Garden of Paradise.[224]

2:37 "*Then Adam received from his Lord [some] words, and He accepted his repentance. Indeed, it is He who is the Accepting of Repentance, the Merciful.*"

This verse possibly describes the Human Being while still in Paradise, as the command to descend is repeated after this verse. God had promised eternal bliss to the Human Being but had asked them not to approach the forbidden tree. After the temptation by Satan, the Human Being sinned. Now, Adam/the Human Being asks for forgiveness from God and He accepts their prayers and forgives them. The translation "He accepted his repentance" could also be rendered as: "He/he turned towards him/Him", leaving unspecified whether the Human Being turned to God or God to the Human Being. After the Human Being was deceived by Satan, he realized his mistake and wanted to return to God by asking forgiveness, realizing his mistake and wrongdoing.

2:38-39 "*We said, "Go down from it, all of you. And when guidance comes to you from Me, whoever follows My guidance – there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve. And those who disbelieve and deny Our signs – those will be companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally.*"

This verse presents the word of God when He sends Adam and his wife away from Paradise. However, it is not clear from the text whether these words are directed to

[222] Elsewhere, the Qur'an makes mention of two kinds of trees, a good tree and an evil tree, but the context there is a parable rather than Paradise – see surah *Ibrahim* 14:24, 14:26.
[223] John Penrice, *Dictionary of the Koran*, 29.
[224] The biblical 'Gan' (Eden) is related to the Arabic 'Jannah'.

Eve (whose name is not mentioned, but for convenience's sake we will call her by that name) as well. Nevertheless, the plural suggests it; even Satan may have been included here.

The expression "when guidance comes" may be interpreted as meaning a kind of revelation, referring to future Scripture and/or to prophets who will be sent to humankind. It means that Adam was not simply sent into "exile" to the earth without any help. Instead, he would receive guidance and divine signs which would be able to lead him to salvation. Hence the earth, in this sense, does not appear merely as a place of punishment, but also as a place to serve God.

3.1.2. The broader context of the Qur'anic story – Qur'an 2:30-39.

Al-Baqarah is the longest chapter in the Qur'an, with 286 verses. This surah was revealed at Medina in the first year of the Hijrah[225] and deals with a number of issues related to guidance for the Muslim community. The title of the chapter *Al-Baqarah*, was derived from the cow that occurs in verse 67 of this chapter. This chapter occupies a special place in the Qur'an, as it follows after the opening chapter *Al-Fatihah*. This first chapter ends with a prayer and *Al-Baqarah* as it were contains an answer and continuation of it. The chapter *Al-Baqarah* starts with a general idea of what is hidden in the world and the role of the concrete prophets. *Al-Baqarah* also contains descriptions of the foundation of fundamental rituals, such as: rules for *Hajj* (pilgrimage), fasting during the month of Ramadan, the direction of prayer (*qibla*) and so on. Then the chapter turns to the creation of the Human Being and his

[225] Hijrah – migration or withdrawal. Typically, it refers to the migration of Muhammad and his Companions from Mecca to Medina in 522 C.E., the first year in the Islamic calendar. See more John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam,* 112.

Fall/banishment from Paradise, and in addition describes the status of angels, the role of Iblis, etc.

It should be noted that the story proposed in Qur'an 2:30-39 runs parallel to similar stories that are scattered throughout the whole of the Qur'an. When viewing the broader context of the story, it becomes possible to see the parallels which may throw some light upon our text, although some of them are in places far removed from Qur'an 2:30-39.

In the broader context of the story proposed, we find that the Human Being was tempted by Iblis. Nevertheless, there is no general consensus regarding the origin of this name, and the term itself does not appear prior to the Qur'an. Iblis arrogantly asserted that being created from fire is superior to being created from clay, as is the case with the Human Being.

However, there is no general agreement about the root of this name, and the name itself does not occur before the Qur'an. According to Islam, Iblis's rebellion is the source of evil. Iblis leads a rebellion against God and refuses to obey God's will. The Qur'an describes how both the Human Being and Iblis are expelled from Paradise: "*[Allah] said, "Descend*[226] *from it [i.e., Paradise], for it is not for you to be arrogant therein. So get out; indeed, you are of the debased*." On earth, Iblis thenceforth tries to lead the believers astray from the *straight path*. Several attributes of Iblis are enumerated in the Qur'an. Qur'an 2:33 refers to "the known and unknown of the heavens", and some suggest this may refer to Iblis, who cannot fully be known by humans.[227] That corresponds with the surah Qur'an 15:42, where it is pointed out that Iblis will have no power over the righteous, but only over those who fall into

[226] Or another translation – "*go down all of you.*"
[227] Stephen Vicchio, *Biblical Figures in the Islamic Faith* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 177.

error. Qur'an 7:156 suggests that Iblis cannot affect anyone who follows God's laws, but that those who follow Iblis will be punished by fire.[228]

Iblis's identity may be angelic after all, as is suggested in the Qur'an, which states that all the *angels prostrate, except Iblis* (Qur'an 2:34). Theological objections are generally raised against this identification: as stated above, according to Islamic understanding angels, unlike the jinn, are supposed not to have a free will. Qur'an 18:50 calls Iblis a jinn. As servants of God, angels can only be good; they cannot choose because they can only do what God says. According to Islamic belief, God has such absolute authority that it is impossible to imagine that angels could refuse His will, only jinn can do this. This explains the dominant opinion in Islam that Iblis is a jinn.[229] God says that "*Iblis was one of the jinn*, and God says of the jinn: *And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.*" (Qur'an 51:56). Still, there is a clear distinction between angels and jinn, a distinction made by the angels themselves (see Qur'an 34:40-41). The Qur'an also reports that the father of the jinn was created from a smokeless fire: "*And He created the jinn from a smokeless flame of fire*" (Qur'an 55:15).

In Qur'an 2:35-36 we note the reference to the forbidden tree. The Human Being has received a commandment from God not to approach this tree. According to our methodology, reflection on the meaning of the forbidden tree with all its consequences will be conducted last – at the stage of theological reflection. However, we may already underline here that the symbolism of the tree has broader ramifications in the Qur'an, which are important for the proposed topic. In general,

[228] Stephen Vicchio, *Biblical Figures in the Islamic Faith* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 177.
[229] Stephen Vicchio, *Biblical Figures in the Islamic Faith*, 178.

trees are prominent in the Qur'an; several specific types of trees are described in the book:

"*And near above them are its shades, and its [fruit] to be picked will be lowered in compliance.*" (Qur'an 76:14).

"*And he certainly saw him in another descent at the Lote Tree of the Utmost Boundary – near it is the Garden of Refuge. When there covered the Lote Tree that which covered [it]. The sight [of the prophet] did not swerve, nor did it transgress [its limit].*" (Qur'an 53:13-17).

In addition, there is one more tree mentioned in the Qur'an, the Tuba tree. According to Islamic eschatology, this tree likewise grows in Paradise. The Tuba tree is mentioned only once in the Qur'an, not specifically as a tree but in the context of blessedness: "*Those who have believed and done righteous deeds – a good state [Tuba] is theirs and a good return*" (Qur'an 13:29). The only source that speaks about Tuba as a tree is the Hadith of Muhammad: "*Narrated Anas bin Malik: The Prophet said, "There is a tree in Paradise (which is so big and huge that) if a rider travels in its shade for one hundred years, he would not be able to cross it*."[230] In addition, in the Qur'an, the good tree may denote a good person and the bad tree a bad person like in a parable.[231] In this context, then, these trees symbolize different types of people.

[230] *The Translation of the Meanings of Summarized Sahih Al-Bukhari*, book 1, hadith 1 (Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam Publishers & Distributors; al-Madina: Islamic University, 1996), 650.
[231] Qur'an 14:24-25: "*Do you not see how God compares a good word to a good tree? Its root is firm, and its branches are in the sky; it yields its fruit in every season by God's leave. God speaks in parables to mankind so that they may take heed. But an evil word is like an evil tree torn out of the earth and shorn of all its roots.*"

The Biblical account of the Paradise story

The Biblical passage of the Paradise story in the book of Genesis 2:4-3:24 is, without a doubt, one of the best-known narratives in the whole Old Testament. Still, this story has provoked numerous discussions and even misunderstandings within Christianity itself.

At first glance, it may seem that the Qur'an and the Bible are largely in agreement about the Paradise stories. The differences are nonetheless considerable, as we will note. In the Old Testament, direct references to the Paradise story can be found both in the book of Genesis chapter 2 and chapter 3. It is essential to emphasize that, in addition to the story itself, which is interpreted very differently among different Christian denominations, there are echoes of the story in several pages of the New Testament. The meanings and versions of this story there vary significantly, depending as they do on what methodology of hermeneutics we apply: metaphorical (allegorical) or literal.

As a Christian theologian, I feel I cannot ignore the New Testament understanding of the Paradise story by merely considering the Old Testament texts and its exegetical interpretations. For Christians, the Old and New Testaments are equally important, thus forming the whole Bible in an organic interconnectedness. However, this introduces a methodological challenge. Adding the New Testament narrative to the close reading, can that still be considered close reading proper? And how do we deal with the New Testament allusions and parallels, which, again, are crucial for Christianity, especially when it comes to a theological evaluation? This organic unity of Scripture becomes especially relevant when we turn to the numerous interpretations of the stories of Paradise within the *post-Biblical* Christian tradition. According to our methodology, we should stick to Sacred Scripture, which for

Christians of course encompasses both the Old Testament and the New Testament, but this does not seem possible when it comes to the role of Satan in the Paradise story.

From a practical point of view, the following question arises: should this unity of Scripture, which is especially important in the Paradise story, be treated in the *broader context* stage or rather in that of the *theological discussion*?

This whole hermeneutical problem introduces another very important insight: should we not assume a similar connection between Qur'an and post-Qur'anic commentaries as vital to Islamic identity? And if so, in what way it can be maintained as a useful contribution to getting to know each other's religious identities? I will discuss these dilemmas in the final chapter of our study. For the moment I will seek to understand the Paradise story in the broader context of the New Testament and of subsequent Christian tradition. In the second stage, however, when dealing with the close reading, I will limit myself to close reading of the Biblical account of the Paradise story in Genesis 3:1-7. While dealing with the broader context, we will adduce the New Testament and some Church Fathers as well.

3.2.1. A close reading of the Biblical account of the story of the Responsibility for the loss – Genesis 3:1-7.

The Paradise story from the Bible: Genesis 3:1-7

"*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman,* "*Did God say,* '*You shall not eat from any tree in the garden*'*?*" *The woman said to the serpent,* "*We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said,* '*You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle*

of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" *But the serpent said to the woman,* "*You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil*." *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves*."

A verse-by-verse close reading

3:1 "*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden*'*?*"

This verse is one of the most significant accounts in the Paradise story. The question arises whether this story should be read literally or interpreted in a metaphorical and allegorical way? Who is the serpent and where does he come from? The Bible explicitly states that the serpent[232] was a "creature", possibly to combat metaphysical dualism. In this passage *more crafty,* the word "crafty" ("arum") is a Hebrew play on words, connecting *arum* with *arom*, which means "naked". What is the origin of the serpent? Did the serpent enter Paradise or was he there from the outset? Incidentally, the story is popularly known as the Paradise story, but even that is already a specific interpretation. In fact, Genesis speaks about a garden, a notion that does not necessarily imply supernatural connotations.

[232] See other passages that include snakes in the Bible: Exodus 4:3; Leviticus 11:41-45; Numbers 21:8; Job 26:13; Psalm 58:4; Isaiah 27:1; Matthew 10:16.

The story presupposes a certain distance between Adam (the male Human Being) and Eve (the female Human Being). She is approached by the serpent, while Adam was apparently not in the immediate neighborhood. In this passage we see that the serpent addresses Eve directly, but not Adam. Perhaps we may see in this a clear attempt of the serpent to circumvent Adam's leading role.[233] The serpent opens up the conversation with the woman in a treacherous way: *Did God say…?* He exaggerates by suggesting that God has forbidden *all* trees, thereby spreading doubt about the commandment. The serpent may have realized that the woman had only heard of this commandment from Adam, for at the moment God gave the commandment Eve had not yet been created. The serpent is clearly portrayed as an extraordinary creature, craftier than all others. The serpent appears suddenly, without any explanation of why he is able to speak (or did all animals initially possess that faculty)? He chose the moment when Eve was alone, without Adam. What was the serpent's motive to tempt the woman?

3:2-3 – "*The woman said to the serpent,* "*We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said,* '*You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.*'"

In these verses, we see the woman's reply to the serpent. It is interesting that, starting from Genesis 2:23-3:20, Eve is called "the woman", but not Eve. We may suppose that in this passage the use of "We", and not "I", "can be explained by the fact that at that time, she did not consider herself a separate individual yet but regarded herself as part of her husband instead."[234]

[233] See 1 Tim. 2:14, which presupposes male superiority. However, the serpent's strategy may also be understood as consciously avoiding Adam, who had been given the prohibition before the creation of Eve. The serpent could change the wording without Eve noticing it. We will deal with that (Rabbinic) interpretation presently.

[234] Sergey Lagunov, "Following the Traces of the Serpent in the Old and New Testaments and the Early Jewish Interpretation: Genesis 3:1–15 in Light of Its Reception History" (PhD diss., Protestant Theological University Amsterdam–Groningen, 2019), 32.

As stated before, she did not hear this commandment from God directly, as Adam did. That is – according to a specific interpretation – why the serpent manages to confuse Eve. She replies that it is forbidden to "*eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden.*" She also states that God did not allow them to touch the tree, but in the original commandment to Adam this element is lacking. An intriguing interpretation argues that Adam added this to God's command, in order to protect Eve from sin, but by doing so offered the serpent the opportunity to mislead Eve. Touching the tree did not cause any harm, hence Eve may have thought that the whole commandment was merely Adam's invention.[235]

In addition, Eve mentions only one "forbidden" tree in the center of the Garden. She does not specify it by name. This raises questions, because in the previous chapter, in Genesis 2:9, two trees are mentioned, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, both in the middle of the Garden. In contrast, in 3:2-3, Eve speaks of only one tree, apparently the Tree of Knowledge. We do not know the reason for this. Additionally, we are not sure why Adam tried to draw her attention away from the tree. Or did she intentionally avoid giving the tree a name, as that was Adam's role?[236]

3:4-5 "*But the serpent said to the woman,* "*You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*"

In this verse, the serpent refutes Eve's statement. In the perspective of close reading, we may suppose that the serpent was right, because after Eve took some fruit, she

[235] Marcel Poorthuis, "Who is to Blame – Adam or Eve: A Possible Jewish Source for Ambrose 'De Paradiso' (XII56)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 50, no. 2 (1996): 125-135.
[236] Nathan MacDonald, Mark W. Elliott, and Grant Macaskill, *Genesis and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 97.

did not die immediately. Whether Adam and Eve would have been immortal without the forbidden fruit remains unclear. The following verses reveal the meaning of the passage "*You will not die.*" The serpent tries to put pressure on the woman with logical chains. Probably because of the prohibition, the fruit and the tree appear especially attractive to Eve, as the next verse underlines. The serpent seems to suggest that God would be jealous of the capability of Human Beings to acquire divine wisdom. The serpent is hence presented as a brilliant tempter, who (refraining from mentioning the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil or the Tree of Life), even knows the weak spots and is gifted with remarkable psychological insight, as someone familiar with the nature of Human Beings.

3:6 – "*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.*"

The serpent's words in the previous verse captured the woman's attention and confused her heart and mind. Possibly it was not the first time that Eve saw the tree and the fruit. However, at that moment, the fruit appeared in a new perspective: "*good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes.*" It looks as if all other trees recede into the background and only this tree remains in full focus. Doubt is suggested rather than explicitly mentioned: what if God does not love his creatures, hiding some secret of wisdom? Perhaps that might be the implicit suggestion to Eve. The serpent does not even explicitly tell the woman to eat the fruit from the forbidden tree. He uses insidious ways that present him as a great tempter and strategist. From

this verse onward, the serpent disappears from the story, except for a few mentions.[237]

3:7 – "*Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves*."

This verse confirms the statement that the promise and the mission of the serpent has been fulfilled. "*Then the eyes of both of them were opened*" – apparently only after the transgression. Adam and Eve realized their nakedness, although they may have been naked before that as well. Perhaps the nakedness here can be understood as shame before God. There are many interpretations of the clothing even before the discovery of nakedness, as well as of the exact nature of this nakedness. Before they transgressed God's command, they were naked, but this apparently did not lead to shame. Some Christian interpretations speak about the clothing of virtue with which they were clothed and which they subsequently lost. Fig leaves are apt for covering because of their considerable size.

3.2.2. The broader context of the Biblical account of the story.

The book of Genesis is the first book of the so-called *Pentateuch*. This is the first section of the Bible that includes five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Genesis serves as a kind of introduction to the whole section. There are various debates about the structure of this book and many methods and approaches have been applied to Genesis. Erich Zenger[238] presents three main parts

[237] "Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate." – Gen 3:13.
The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head and you will strike his heel." – Gen 3:14-15.

[238] Эрих Ценгер, *Введение в Ветхий Завет*. Библейско-богословский институт св. апостола Андрея, 2008, 83. [Erich Zenger, *Introduction to the Old Testament*. St. Andrews's Biblical Theological Institute, 2008, 83].

of the chapter: 1-9:29 *the ancient story*; 10:1-36:43 *the initial history of Israel and its neighbors*: 37:1-50:26 *Jacob and his sons/Joseph and his brothers*. Instead, we wish to propose the following, rather more theologically motivated, structure: – Gen. 1:1-11:29 *The Sovereign Call of God*; Gen. 11:30-25:18 *The Embraced Call of God*; Gen. 25:19-36:43 *The Conflicted Call of God*; Gen 37:1-50:26 *The Hidden Call of God*.[239]

The book of Genesis contains two major sections: *the story of Adam and Eve and their descendants* (2:4-11:9) and *the story of Abraham and his descendants* (11:10-50:26). The difference in atmosphere (e.g. universal versus particular) has led some scholars to speak of an "Urgeschichte", followed by human history proper as the ancestral history of the people of Israel.

The primary Biblical creation texts are contained in two narratives in the first and second chapters of Genesis. The first creation story takes up the entire first chapter of Genesis and the beginning of the second chapter.[240] The second creation story is contained in the second chapter of Genesis, starting from the fourth verse. The text tells of the Garden of Eden and two trees in it: the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil; the first commandment was given to man – not to eat the fruits of the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil, and it also contains a story about the creation of Eve from Adam's rib (Gen. 2: 4-25).

[239] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1982), 8.

[240] The two creation stories are only the first part of Genesis and, despite not being the central points of the book, they may serve as the foundation for the whole Old Testament. It describes the process of creation in the form of six days of work and a day of rest (Saturday). The narrative concludes with the first three verses of the second chapter of Genesis, where it is said that the Creator "rested on the seventh day from all the works that He did," and "God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, for in it He rested from all his works, which God created and made" (see more Gen 1:1-2:3). See more Cyril Orji, *An Introduction to Religious and Theological Studies*, 2nd ed. (Cascade Books, 2021), 35.

God's creation of the world is also mentioned in many other places in the Bible (in the books of the Prophets, the Psalms, the book of Proverbs, the book of Job, in the deutero-canonical and non-canonical books of the Old Testament, as well as in the books of the New Testament), but not as extensively as in the book of Genesis.

In the story presented in Genesis 3:1-7, the figure of the serpent is described as "*more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made.*" It is difficult to define the nature of the serpent in the Paradise story clearly. He appears and disappears from the story abruptly and suddenly, without any explanation from the Biblical author.

As we have underlined at the stage of *close reading* (3.2.1.) – there is no direct identification of the serpent with Satan in the book of Genesis. If we understand the broader context in a diachronical sense, things start to change. Christian tradition has considered the notion of Satan in the Bible as vital to understanding the role of the serpent in the Paradise story and the life after the expulsion from Paradise. However, the theological meaning of the figure of the serpent as it is presented in the topic presented (Gen. 3:1-7) will be discussed at stage 4 (3.4.2). In the New Testament, Satan and his demons have the power to enter and possess people; this is said to have happened to Judas (Luke 22:3; John 13:27; cf. Mark 5:12-13; Luke 8:30-32). However, when the apostle Paul refers to the story of Adam and Eve, he places the blame on the humans (Romans 5:18; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:21-22) and not on fallen angels or on the serpent as Satan. Yet, many later Christian authors, such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, Irenaeus, and Augustine, naturally assumed that the talking snake in Eden was Satan.[241] Possibly this New Testament text should already be understood as containing the same vein of interpretation: "*You are from your*

[241] Cyril Orji, *An Introduction to Religious and Theological Studies*, 35.

father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" – (John 8:44).

The Bible in general does not give much information about Satan. Satan is presented as the enemy of Jesus. A detailed portrayal of the devil is nearly absent in the New Testament canon. In contrast, medieval Christian art lends anthropomorphic and zoomorphic features to the devil, turning him into a monster. In the epistles of the apostle Paul, it is the Antichrist which is associated with Satan. Obviously, questions such as: what is the origin of evil? Why do a Human Beings suffer? What is the role of the devil? exist at the heart of human existence and have continued to haunt Christian tradition.

The serpent from Eden is shown in the Bible as "the cleverest of all animals." The devil is absent in Genesis 2-3 for a very simple reason, because when the story was written, the concept of the devil had not yet been developed. In the Old Testament, the word *Satan* appears only in 1 Chronicles 21:1. The Book of Job, which was written much earlier, gives more information about Satan, especially in Job 1-2, where he is called a son of God. Obviously, we should take seriously the Christian interpretation of the serpent in Paradise as Satan, but we should also realize that there may be a tension between this interpretation and its original meaning.

3.3. Responsibility for the loss of Paradise: Questions of a Catholic Theologian posed to the Qur'an.

The responsibility for the loss of Paradise.

Whereas the Qur'an deals with Iblis in the context of the creation of the first Human Being, the Bible narrates the creation of Adam and Eve without any interference of temptation. It is only afterwards that temptation appears. The explicitly distinctive roles of Adam and Eve in the Bible have no counterpart in the Qur'an. It should be realized that the emphasis upon Eve's role in the temptation has led to a downgrading of women in Christianity, possibly already in the New Testament. Nonetheless, some interpretations instead emphasize Adam's patronizing role (sharpening God's command by adding the touching of the tree to the prohibition) which enabled the serpent to deceive Eve.

The Qur'an does not make a specific distinction between the male and female Human Being, a fact which can be explained by the characteristic brevity of the Qur'an. However, it can also be interpreted as an equal sharing of their culpability. In addition, the Qur'an does not seem to envisage any permanent guilt that might be attached to Adam and Eve as a result of their transgression. Even though Adam and his wife were expelled from Paradise, God already seemed to have forgiven their sins. Consequently, future generations, according to Islam, are not held responsible for the sin which Adam committed in Paradise, although the consequences do affect humankind. There is no such thing as "original sin" in Islam, Islamic commentators emphasize, even if the mortality of the Human Being is regarded as a consequence of the first transgression. The first sin in Islam is conceived as the original sin, only insofar as it opened the way to all subsequent sins. Obviously, Christianity, especially post-Biblical authors such as Ambrose and Augustine, has emphasized

the notion of original sin quite strongly. When Islamic scholars reject original sin, they do so because they consider it as a pessimistic and gloomy view of humankind. In addition, they may feel that because of original sin, salvation would become the sole prerogative of baptized Christians. Obviously, these two arguments can explain the Islamic rejection of the doctrine of original sin, all the more so because Islamic scholars refuse to see a connection with redemption at all. According to an authoritative Islamic interpretation, widely shared by Muslims, the Qur'an denies the crucifixion altogether.[242] Some post-Qur'anic commentators interpreting this text hold that someone else who looked precisely like Jesus was crucified.[243] In addition, our Qur'anic text speaks of the repentance of the first Human being and the guidance and signs which God promised. Although Muslim commentators see this as an indication of forgiveness on the spot, it could also be interpreted as a future help. Anyhow, the exiled Human Being is not left without divine help. In a way this is also the Christian conviction!

In the Genesis story, we read that Eve ate the fruit first. We might conclude that this makes Eve mainly responsible for the original sin. At the same time, in the New Testament, it is stated that it was Adam who caused sin to enter the world.[244] What were the accompanying circumstances, and has God already forgiven Adam and Eve before they were punished? The Bible does not say anything about

[242] Qur'an 4:157: "*And [for] their saying, "Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah." And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain*."

[243] The matter is complicated by the fact that some gnostic sources already speak of a stand-in who was crucified, obviously because a docetic Christology could not allow a genuine death of Christ. We will leave this matter here as lying outside the scope of SR.

[244] See more Romans 5:12-20.

forgiveness "on the spot".[245] In what way would this transgression affect future generations? Christian theology sets out how God imposes the penalty for Adam and Eve, but promises the possibility to be restored and reunited with Him. The Biblical account underlines that God does not curse Adam and Eve immediately, as He did with the serpent. It is also a challenging and curious fact that Adam does not speak at all during the period of the dialogue that takes place between the serpent and Eve. Another question is whether Gen 3:1 can be understood as using the "language of appearances," describing how the "serpent" appeared to Adam and Eve, without describing the whole scene.[246]

Another remarkable feature is the Christian interpretation of the serpent. At an early stage, the serpent came to be seen as merely the vehicle used by Satan to tempt the Human Being. The Biblical notion of the serpent as one of the animals yielded to a far more demonic portrayal of Satan. However, even Satan is "one of the sons of God", as the book of Job states.

The figure of Iblis in the Qur'an as compared to the serpent in the Bible

Islamic tradition is not always uniform about the nature of Iblis. In the Qur'anic accounts, we can see that Adam and his wife are tempted by Iblis. Iblis is a jinn, and, unlike angels and Human Beings, is made from fire. In that sense, we can underline that according to the Qur'an, Iblis is endowed with free will, in contrast with angels.

That recalls the Biblical story, in which the only tempter in Paradise is the serpent. Reflecting upon the origin of evil in the Genesis story, we realize that its

[245] Post-biblical Christian apocryphal narratives do know about the "repentance of Adam and Eve", see more *The books of Adam and Eve*, and *The combat of Adam and Eve with Satan*. This repentance is often combined with the future promise of salvation, sometimes realized by oil from Paradise, mysteriously in possession of Christ later on. John L. Rolling, *The Curse on the Serpent (Gen. 3:15) in Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics* (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1997), 127.
[246] Ibid., 127.

significance there is somewhat different from that in the Qur'an. Despite the fact that the figure of Satan is not mentioned in the creation story, in post-Biblical literature, the serpent is always connected to Satan. The Church teaches that the source of sin and evil is the fallen angel, Lucifer, becoming Satan, the devil. Satan was created as an angel, who then turns against God. We may suppose – as many early Christian texts do – that Satan subsequently entered into the body of the serpent to tempt Adam and Eve. What is the origin of evil, in this case? Satan and the fallen angels constituted the origin evil, exculpating as it were the serpent as merely a vehicle.

Yet there is no Biblical evidence – at least not in Genesis – that any entity entered the serpent to make it do what it did. It is not precisely clear in post-Biblical Christian narratives whether the devil took on the visible appearance of the serpent[247] or that the devil took possession of a real living serpent, encouraging him to take the action he did. The Bible speaks about the serpent as a creature, especially his encounter with Eve, but is the demonic presented as real?[248] This challenging of God's doings may even raise questions as to the authority of these post-Biblical stories: should they be considered part of the Biblical revelation or be dismissed as merely human-made interpretations? To put it in a more general way: what is at stake here is the relationship between Scripture and tradition. This becomes especially acute when we wonder how the serpent became Satan. In our case, the striking similarity between the Qur'anic account about Iblis and post-Biblical narratives about the serpent and Satan, forces us to rethink the relevance of the Qur'anic account in the light of Christian revelation. Should we stick to the Bible and ignore all post-Biblical Christian elaborations, even if they show a strong affinity (or

[247] Similarly to Exodus 7:12.
[248] Mt. 8:28-34, Mk. 5:6-13, shows that demons can enter animals and people, and Lk. 22:3 shows that Satan can enter a human being.

contrast) with Qur'anic accounts? This raises the intrareligious issue of the relationship between Bible and tradition, as well as the interreligious issue of the possible meaning of the Qur'an *for Christians*.

What is the relevance of this inner-Christian debate about the relationship between Scripture and tradition for our understanding of the Qur'an? Clearly, the Qur'an shows many affinities with early Christian motifs, which consists of the "larger story" referred to above. For a Muslim the story of Paradise is strictly revelation as it is part of the Qur'an. For a Catholic, a similar story is part of the authoritative tradition, whereas Protestants may feel less prompted to debate or even challenge details of the Qur'an, which will appear for them more as a matter of another religion than for Catholics.

Paradise trees: The Tree of Knowledge of good and evil and the Tree of Life.

Unlike the Biblical account, the Qur'an mentions only one tree in Paradise, from which God specifically forbade the male and female Human Being to eat.[249] Satan did manage to tempt both to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. The Qur'an states that after eating the fruit, both Adam and Eve realized they had become naked (Qur'an 7:22). There is no interval between the tempting of Eve and that of Adam in the Qur'an. Noticing that Iblis had tricked them, they despairingly covered their nakedness with leaves from the trees.[250]

Beyond the mention of their utility, trees are significant enough for the Bible (as well as for the Qur'an[251]) as a symbol and metaphor.[252] One example is a Tree of

[249] Oliver Leaman, *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia* (Routledge, 2006), 11.
[250] Qur'an 2:35: "And We said, O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat there from in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers."
[251] Qur'an 2:35: "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree; they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon."
[252] Psalms 1:3 "He is like a tree planted by a stream of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prosper."

Life, which is mentioned in the Garden of Eden as well as in the eternal afterlife.[253] In the Bible, too, the notion of *the Tree of Life* occurs, alongside *the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil*. At first glance, it is just a related element of the story. At the same time, however, it might open an unexpectedly rich perspective for fruitful theological reflection. Indeed, the Tree of Life has become the subject of profound reflection within Christianity. Perhaps one of the most important debates concerns whether or not the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is the same tree as the Tree of Life, just symbolizing the flip side of it? Other perspectives point to the fact that the Tree of Life became inaccessible after the transgression, hence the Tree of Knowledge, if approached properly and at the right time, might have given access to the Tree of Life.

Does the rivalry between angels and Human Beings as Vorlage for the figure of Iblis, throw new light upon the Qur'an itself?

The Qur'an repeatedly presents the figure of Iblis within the context of creation (Qur'an 2:30–34; Qur'an 7:11–18). A striking point in these passages is the protest of the angels when God announces His intention to place humankind upon the earth. But what theological significance does this motif hold within the Qur'an itself? Can the rivalry between angels and humans serve as a key to better grasp the Qur'an's distinct message? And more precisely: how does this Qur'anic narrative compare with Christianity's interpretation of Adam, which does involve angelic rivalry, but in which Adam's dignity is bound up with Christ as the "second Adam"?

These questions are crucial because they touch on the very heart of Muslim–Christian theological difference. In Christian theology, Adam's exalted status lies in

[253] Lytton John Musselman, "Trees in the Koran and the Bible," *Unasylva* 213, Vol. 54 (2003): 48.

his being createdd in the image and likeness of God. This is not merely anthropological but Christological: Adam prefigures Christ, whose incarnation, death and resurrection restore humanity. In this perspective, angels lose much importance; the decisive horizon is Christ's redemption.

The Qur'an, however, deliberately reshapes the story. In this case, Adam's lofty status does not come from divine likeness but from God's act of teaching him "all the names." The command to the angels to prostrate before Adam is not a recognition of his messianic status but an affirmation of God's sovereignty. Iblis's refusal is thus theologically different from Christian accounts: the drama concerns obedience and disobedience to God, not the anticipation of Christ in Adam. In rejecting Adam's exalted priestly, and kingly roles as it is known in Christian tradition, the Qur'an severs any typological link between Adam and a redeemer figure.

3.4. Responsibility for the loss of Paradise: Theological reflection on the Qur'anic story.

3.4.1. *The responsibility for the "Paradise lost".*

In the Qur'an, God holds both Adam and his wife equally responsible for the sin of eating fruit from the tree that He had commanded them to stay away from. However, they ask for forgiveness, and God grants this. The Qur'an does not distinguish between male and female in this Paradise story, neither in respect to the transgression nor in respect to the reward it promises.[254] It should be noted that Adam cannot blame Eve, as happens in the Bible (and nor can Eve blame the serpent),

[254] Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 14.

because they are not addressed separately in the Qur'an, as in Genesis. Adam's wife is not presented as a temptress in the Qur'an, because they both seem to listen to Iblis at the same time. Although the male and female are essentially contingent characters in the creation of humankind, no specific cultural functions or roles are defined at the moment of creation.[255] Concerning the details of the Paradise story in the Qur'an, as a Catholic theologian, I realize that there are similarities but also significant differences with the Biblical account. The Qur'an does not distinguish between the disobedience of Adam and that of his wife, whereas we can find a clear distinction between both in the Biblical account. The serpent reassured Eve that she could eat the forbidden fruit, which she also gave to her husband, who ate. The question therefore arises: Is a woman solely responsible for sin? Whose fault was it, according to Christianity? In fact, there are several places in the Bible and in the early Church Fathers (such as St. Jerome, who blames women for the fall from grace)[256] that assign the blame to Eve:

– "*From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die*" – Sirach 25:24.

– "*In such a form, he [the devil] entered paradise and corrupted Eve. But he did not contact Adam*" – 2 Enoch 30:17; 31:6.

– "*I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor*" – 1 Timothy 2:12-14.[257]

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[255] Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, 26.

[256] *Letter 71. To Lucinius*, § 3 – "Through abstaining from sex a woman can become 'a man'." *Against Jovinianus,* Book 1, §27 – "Woman's punishment, incurred through Eve's sin, may be undone through childbearing." *Against Helvidius*, § 23 – "Holy women who are married are holy because they live like virgins." *Letter 22. To Eustochium,* §18 – "A life of virginity overcomes the sentence passed on Eve."

[257] It is debatable whether this edict that women should not teach or have authority over men was merely a disciplinary norm that need not be observed today. It may even be understood as a confirmation that women did teach.

– "*Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is something they want to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church*" – 1 Cor 14:34-35.

Passages such as these may be interpreted as meaning that women cannot fully participate in the liturgy, at least not in the Catholic and Orthodox Church. Blaming the woman is, however, not the whole story, as the New Testament knows of redemption from sin. In that light, Mary came to be regarded as "the second Eve," parallel to the idea of Christ being the "Second Adam", because she submitted to God, she was the means through which salvation entered the world, just as Eve, in her disobedience, was the instrument of the Fall.[258] Eve forfeited privileges by sin, so Mary earned benefits by fruits of grace; Eve was disobedient and did not believe, so Mary was obedient and believed; as Eve was the cause of ruin to all, Mary was a cause of salvation to all.[259] However, it remains the question whether this rehabilitation by Mary corrects the negative attitude to women in the early Church. Even in the liturgical traditions and in individual liturgical hymns, such as the *Salve Regina*, we can see a complete contrast between Eve and Mary, which still may lead to blaming the woman for the temptation and Fall:

> "O, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
>
> Hail our life, our sweetness and our hope.
>
> To thee do we cry,
>
> Poor banished children of Eve;

[258] Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, 26.
[259] See more Saint Irenaeus *Against Heresies*, book III, chapter 22.

To thee do we send up our sighs,

Mourning and weeping in this valley of tears."

The hymn *Salve Regina*, also known as the "Hail Holy Queen," is a Marian antiphon in the liturgical calendar of the Roman Catholic tradition.

As a Christian theologian, I realize that such a negative portrayal of Eve, as if she alone was responsible for the transgression, may lead to a discriminatory attitude towards women in general. Still, when observed more closely, it becomes clear that the Paradise story is not unequivocal. If we consider the broader context of the story, several aspects arise. When God talked to Adam and Eve after their disobedience, He turned his attention first to Adam, who cast the blame upon Eve, although God had given him the woman as a unique gift. Adam's attitude is marked by ingratitude and the attempt to search for an alibi, which clearly adds to his guilt. God asked Eve only subsequently, and, finally, the serpent. We may assume that this was not just a coincidence. Apparently, Eve was not the only guilty party. On the one hand, we may suggest that the serpent certainly was the source of all disobedience, since he instigated the transgression. If Eve came next and Adam only after her, does this not imply that she may have been more guilty than the serpent but less guilty than Adam?[260] On the other hand, God starts a conversation precisely with Adam and only later turns to other characters. It sounds logical, because God specifically told Adam not to eat from the tree; not Eve. In addition, when it comes to punishment, God first announces this to the serpent, then to Eve, and only in the end to Adam (Gen. 3:14-19). We may suppose that God turns to the person who is the most

[260] James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 101.

responsible – Adam – with the final word. This, in a sense, is a crucial moment for understanding the real impact of the blaming of Eve.

Some interpretations go even further by exculpating Eve altogether. Eve did not hear the conversation between God and Adam about God's command (Gen. 2) because she had not yet been created at that moment. So, when the serpent asked Eve about God's commandment to Adam, she gave a slightly different answer: *The woman said to the serpent,* "*We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said,* "*You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.*" Gen. 3:2-3. However, in Genesis 2:16-17, we read: "*And the Lord God commanded the man,* "*You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die*." It is not clear from the text why Eve added an extra clause to God's words. Some Rabbinic interpretations suggest that Adam made this addition in order to prevent Eve from sinning, but this precisely offered the opportunity for the serpent to tempt Eve! The restriction that Adam and Eve were not even allowed to touch the tree was not a part of God's commandment. In a vivid scene, the serpent even touches the tree in order to prove that nothing happens. The serpent brilliantly uses word plays and dizzies Eve with a tricky questioning.

In spite of the ingenious interpretation, blaming both seems to be the most logical interpretation, as it is about the Human Being and his plight. After Adam and Eve were expelled, God does not blame them individually, but both. Genesis 1:27 likewise states that Human Beings were made in the image of God, but adds a new element: "*so God created the human being in His own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them*."[261] Adam appears in two roles in

[261] James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible* (Harvard University Press, 1998), 101.

this story. On the one hand, he is a male, separate from female, and on the other the *Human Being* (both male and female, as a united Human Being). This understanding also forms a cornerstone of modern theology.

Another significant moment is that in the Qur'an, Adam and his wife ask God to forgive their sin. Despite the fact that God expelled them from Paradise, He, as we mentioned above, accepts their repentance: "*But Satan caused them to slip out of it and removed them from that [condition] in which they had been. And We said, "Go down, [all of you], as enemies to one another, and you will have upon the earth a place of settlement and provision for a time*" – Qur'an 2:36.

As a Christian theologian, I acknowledge that this story is significant, although very different from the Biblical account. In the story in Genesis, Adam and Eve did not ask for forgiveness, instead attempting to shift responsibility to each other. Moreover, if we look at the text carefully, we may even feel that Adam does not put the blame upon Eve but upon God: "*The man said,* "*The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate*."" (Gen. 3:12). Indeed, when God took a rib[262] from Adam, He did not discuss it with Adam, but created the woman without Adam's permission or agreement.[263] Adam seems to be complaining about that. *The woman You gave me*, said Adam to God, excusing himself, and as if challenging God's creation of the woman.

[262] This understanding is absent in the Qur'an. However, during the first centuries of Islam Ibn Ishaq reports "on the authority if the people of scripture", that when Adam first saw his wife, he said, "My flesh and my blood and my mate." – Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception Vol. 1, Aaron–Aniconism, Walter de Gruyter: Berlin/New York 2009, 1223.
Ibn Ishaq, as cited in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, Vol. 1, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/New York, 2009, 1223.

[263] "*So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh*" – Gen 2:21.

Yet, in contrast to the Qur'anic account, in the book of Genesis, both Adam and Eve try to shift the responsibility; this constitutes an important moral message. Some feminist scholars argue that the Qur'anic account should be considered superior to the Biblical account, mainly because Eve is not mentioned in a separate role.[264] However, subsequent Islamic literature has assimilated the Biblical account, possibly by oral communication, and retells the story as we know it from the Bible. Obviously, this creates a complicated hermeneutical puzzle: should post-Qur'anic interpretations be considered of less authority than the Qur'an, because they fail to do justice to the Qur'an itself? It is tempting to stick to the Qur'an itself (and to the Bible), but again this creates a hermeneutical dilemma, which deserves to be treated more fully at the end of this dissertation.

Absence of original sin in the Qur'an.

Although some Islamic feminists prefer the Qur'anic account because it does not distinguish between Adam and Eve, they miss the important moral message that Adam and Eve's attempt to shift the onus of their responsibility onto someone else is a sign of a bad conscience.[265] The Bible lingers longer with the description of a false conscience, which means the person is driven by guilt and blames the other, whereas the Qur'an already points to forgiveness. Still, the Qur'anic account opens up a significant discussion for Christian theology. The Qur'an relates how the first couple was expelled from Paradise, but without a universal sin which is transmitted to the next generations, because God has forgiven them "on the spot". The Qur'an raises a really sensitive point: everyone is accountable for his or her own deeds, but

[264] See more Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 76. See more Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[265] It should be added that post-Qur'anic literature dose made a distinction between Adam and Eve in its commentaries on the Paradise story.

also, in addition: people tend towards sin and unbelief.[266] The Qur'an, like the Bible, describes the Fall of the ancestors. However, the Qur'an does not give this fact such universal significance as the Bible does in Christian perception. Adam repented and was forgiven and his ignorance was remedied, the sin disappeared, although not the consequences.[267] Thus, each Human Being has to face the same moral choice as Adam, to obey or disobey God's command, in an equal position and with equal opportunities.

The first sin in Islam is conceived as "original", in the sense that it opened the way to all subsequent sins. However, the Human Beings are not "fallen" in the Qur'anic perspective, and hence there is no reason why they need to be saved "from outside".[268] There are many Islamic scholars, such as Ismail al-Faruqi, Shabbir Akhtar and others, who argue that the concept of original sin is wholly absent in Islamic theology. Interestingly, they conclude that the message of the Qur'an is superior to the Bible in this respect.[269]

As the Qur'an has no place for a doctrine of original sin, it has no place either for a doctrine of redemption.[270] However, Mahmoud Ayoub notes[271] that the Shia tradition has always given a significant place to redemptive suffering, but not in the sense this takes in Christianity.[272] Jesus (even if he is given the title, or name, of Christ) appears in the Qur'an not as redeemer but as a prophet who (like other

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[266] Gabriel S. Reynolds, "Original Sin and the Qur'an," *Islamochristiana* 46 (2020): 197–218.
[267] Qur'an 2:37 – "*Then Adam received from his Lord [some] words, and He accepted his repentance. Indeed, it is He who is the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful*."
Qur'an 2:122 – "*Then his Lord chose him ˹for His grace˺, accepted his repentance, and guided him rightly*."
[268] For Qur'anic soteriology see more Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung* (Keio University, Tokyo, 1964).
[269] See more Damian Howard, "The Nature of the Human in Contemporary Christian-Muslim Relations," in *Routledge Handbook on Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. David Thomas (London: Routledge, 2018), 320-328.
[270] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 19.
[271] See more Mahmoud Ayoub and Irfan A. Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2007).
[272] Charles Tieszen, *Theological Issues in Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (Pickwick Publications, 2018), 26-42.

prophets) preaches submission to the one God.[273] "No Muslim scholar would have absolved Adam and Eve from blame, but there was a clear tendency among exegetes to make light of Adam's sin. Evil in Islam is "accidental" rather than a "structural" element of human nature."[274] According to Islam, God says to the Human Being that everyone who has done good deeds will receive his reward and everyone who has done bad deeds will be punished.

This issue is highly sensitive for Muslims. Apparently, Muslims want to avoid possible parallels with Christianity, by emphasizing that God had forgiven Adam, and that from that moment on Human Being(s) were restored to a pristine innocence. However, we noticed at the close reading stage that, according to Qur'an 2:38-39, God had promised to send special *guidance* to the Human Being(s), apparently in the future. We may suggest that this guidance consists of the prophets and the messengers. Muslims, perhaps, will add the Qur'an here too.[275] We may ask therefore: if it is necessary for Human Being(s) to receive guidance and recommendations, does this mean that the nature of Human Being(s) by the banishment is not fully restored to the nature as possessed in the Garden? Even within Islam, the debate about the impact of the first sin remains open.

In this case, an argument made by the scholar of Islam Gabriel Said Reynolds is highly relevant. He points to several verses[276] that confirm the impossibility of sharing the burden of sin.[277] However, he also argues that to completely "*deny the Qur'an's emphasis on the sinfulness of humanity and the consequences of Adam's*

[273] Gabriel S. Reynolds, "Original Sin and the Qur'an." *Islamochristiana* 46 (2020), 197.
[274] Christian Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions*, 4-5.
[275] One should realize, however, that the Christian conception of original sin is also connected to a deed, not to an inherent human nature. Hence, viewing Islam as a "natural" religion in contrast with Christianity as a revealed religion does not seem right.
[276] Qur'an 2:286, 4:111, 29:12, 35:18, 39:7, 53:38-42, 82:19.
[277] Gabriel S. Reynolds, "Original Sin and the Qur'an." *Islamochristiana* 46 (2020), 204.

fall is wrong."[278] Indeed, there is an enigmatic line – put in Abel's (Habil's) mouth – Qur'an 5:29, which says: "*Indeed, I want you to obtain [thereby] my sin and your sin so you will be among the companions of the Fire. And that is the recompense of wrongdoers.*"[279] Although Reynolds does not mention this quotation to try to find roots of *original sin* in the Qur'an, he underlines that the Qur'an also teaches that "humans incline principally towards evil", which is directly connected to the fall of Adam. Because of Adam's transgression, humanity has become predisposed to violence, as it is presented further on, in surah *Al-Ma'idah* 5:30 about Cain [Kabil]: "*And his soul permitted to him the murder of his brother, so he killed him and became among the losers.*"[280]

The issue about the universal impact of the first transgression has engendered an extensive theological debate within Christianity as well. The fact that original sin is absent in the Qur'an and in traditional commentaries prompts me to reflect on my Christian understanding of this concept and to find new insights and explanations. By applying Comparative Theology, this Qur'anic story resonates with the creation story from the Bible.

As we have shown above, in the Islamic perspective everyone is responsible individually and Muslims may argue, like Christians, that Adam and Eve were born without sin. Indeed, what is significant is that this understanding is not contrary to

[278] Gabriel S. Reynolds, "Original Sin and the Qur'an." *Islamochristiana* 46 (2020), 218.
[279] In addition to Qur'an 5:29, see also:
a) "*Those will have lost who deny the meeting with Allah, until when the Hour [of resurrection] comes upon them unexpectedly, they will say, "Oh, [how great is] our regret over what we neglected concerning it [i.e., the Hour]," while they bear their burdens [i.e., sins] on their backs. Unquestionably, evil is that which they bear*." Qur'an 6:31.
b) "*And leave [i.e., desist from] what is apparent of sin and what is concealed thereof. Indeed, those who earn [blame for] sin will be recompensed for that which they used to commit*" – Qur'an 6:119.
c) "*That they may bear their own burdens [i.e., sins] in full on the Day of Resurrection and some of the burdens of those whom they misguide without [i.e., by lack of] knowledge. Unquestionably, evil is that which they bear*." – Qur'an 16:25.
[280] The reference is to Cain (Kabil) who killed his brother Abel (Habil).

Christianity. For Christians, evil is not inherent in human nature; it is not a substance but is rooted in a deed. Death is one of the consequences of Adam's transgression. It was the position of the late Augustine that a genuine guilt was transmitted from one generation to the other and from birth on; an interpretation challenged by his opponent Pelagius, with both referring to Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans chapter 5.[281] Some theologians have argued that we should not speculate about the sinful condition of humankind separated from the joyful redemption in Christ. The Paradise story leads us to the consequences of the Fall, but also, and perhaps immediately so, to the joyful redemption in Christ. It is the *felix culpa*, the 'happy guilt' of the Human Being, which necessitated this joyful redemption. Hence, in Christianity the first transgression is a genuine Fall with consequences for subsequent humanity, but the full realization of this goes hand in hand with the redemption by Christ.

We should admit that there is no clear indication in the Genesis story as such of original sin, or that everyone is held responsible for this sin. Yet, the doctrine of original sin, as a sin inherited by all humans from Adam on, is based on the story of the Fall in Genesis, as well as on several other texts of the Old Testament, but also and even more so on Paul's Letter to the Romans.[282] Nevertheless, there is not one single concept of original sin as inheriting guilt that is unambiguously taught in the Bible. How, then, did the concept of original sin surface in Christian theology? This theological concept was developed in the writings of early church theologians[283] as a way of explaining the universality of human sinfulness, and hence the necessity of

[281] Later, this question was even taken so far as to ask whether the devil might be also saved.
[282] See more Romans 5:12-18.
[283] In particular, in Tertullian, Origen, Augustine of Hippo.

Christ's universal forgiveness.[284] The Christian debate on original sin has especially been connected to certain passages in Paul's letters.[285] Notably, the apostle Paul developed the doctrine of "the first Adam" who sinned through disobedience[286], juxtaposed to "the second Adam," who offered redemption from this sin.[287] The Church began to dwell on the question of "original sin" somewhere in the third century with the discussions on the state of the Human Being in Paradise and on the loss of this state. St. Augustine, as well as the Eastern Fathers of that time, played an important role in those debates.[288] The debate centered upon the question whether only the consequences of guilt (such as death) had been transmitted to all humankind or that the guilt itself had been transmitted. The concept of original sin gave rise to a complicated debate within Christianity itself, and especially concerning Augustine's theology, perhaps less so in Eastern Orthodox theology. Noteworthy shifts in interpretation occurred. The impression that Augustine completely identifies original sin with sexuality is one-sided, if not wrong. He even argues that there could have been sexual desire in Paradise, so he does not espouse a total demonization of sexuality as original sin. According to most Church Fathers, Adam and Eve left Paradise as virgins! According to Augustine, concupiscence as the root of evil refers to all kinds of greed and material cravings, which, he believes, typify

[284] Wiley Tatha, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, and Contemporary Meanings* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 171.
[285] "*Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind*" – Ephesians 2:3. "*Therefore, as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned*" – Romans 5:2.
[286] "*Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned*" – Romans 5:12.
[287] "*For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous*" – Romans 5:19.
[288] The strictly juridical metaphor used by Augustine in combination with the biological metaphor of contagion differs from the Eastern theological approach, which instead emphasizes the *theosis* as the ultimate destiny of humankind. Although we are primarily concerned with the challenge of the Qur'anic account, we will come back to this somewhat later.

the post-lapsarian existence.[289] The late Augustine writes that there might have been sexual desire in the Garden, one that neither precedes the will nor goes beyond it – and that is therefore completely under control.

Christianity interprets several aspects of human life as consequences of original sin. The creation account in Genesis 1 highlights the dignity of Adam's race. As mentioned above, Adam is not directly described as the son of God in the creation narratives. However, we can guess why Luke would call Adam thus in the genealogy of Jesus.[290] As we indicated above, being made in the image and likeness of God is the unique description of sonship and of dominion. The fact that the angels pay homage to Adam can be explained as an expression of this unique position of the pre-lapsarian Adam. In a way, the glory of the first Adam before the Fall is comparable to the glory of the second Adam, Christ. Obviously, Islam vehemently rejects this Christian interpretation, although the story of Iblis emphasizes Adam's glory and is very similar to preceding Christian stories.

We may understand that mortality was the main punishment for Adam and his wife: "for on the day that you eat of it you shall die." Most Christians believe that the same punishment was passed on to all later Human Beings, either because mortality is hereditary, or even – in the Augustinian line – because sinfulness has been transmitted to each generation of humans. However, the verse-by-verse reading shows that the serpent, in a way, was right, because Adam and Eve did not die, at

[289] There are at least five different descriptions of the Paradise story and its consequences in Augustine; this testifies to the intensive intrareligious debates but cannot detain us further here. See more Michael Müller, *Die Lehre des hl. Augustinus von der Paradiesehe und ihre Auswirkung in der Sexualethik des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts bis Thomas von Aquin* (Pustet, 1954). Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Twentieth-anniversary edition with a new introduction (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 504.
[290] Christian Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions,* 4-5.

least not immediately, at that moment – "for on *the day* that you eat of it, you shall die." Perhaps the word *day* refers not to an ordinary day.[291]

The original sin was the first conscious attempt of Human Beings to become equal to God. As a result, expulsion from Paradise should be considered a punishment, not just for transgressing God's commandment but also for the Human Being's pride, which, according to Gregory the Great, is the root of all evil.[292] On closer scrutiny, Human Being has fallen away from the intimate connection with God, which, however, enabled the joyous redemption in Christ. Although the doctrine of original sin may have had gloomy consequences for many believers, this was caused by treating original sin in separation from the perspective of redemption. In a way, original sin should be taught together with redemption and should not be understood without that joyful perspective. God's willingness to take man back is reflected very appropriately in the concept of *felix culpa*.[293]

The problem of anthropomorphism in the Paradise story, both in the Bible and the Qur'an.

It is obvious that the main emphasis of the creation story falls upon the role of Human Being(s). The question of the nature of the Human Being has always been regarded as being the most central. Adam's role as the father of humanity is regarded with high respect by Muslims and Christians. As it was presented at stage the *close reading*, the prophet Adam, as he is considered to be in the Qur'an, is believed to have been the first Human Being on earth. Muslim understanding of Adam and his wife is based on the Qur'an, the Hadith, and other religious texts. Undoubtedly,

[291] Church Fathers refer to Psalms 90:4 to solve this question.
[292] See more Charlotte Emily Kingston, *The Devil in the Writings and Thought of Pope Gregory the Great (590-604)*, PhD thesis, University of York, 2011.
[293] *Summa culturologiae. Encyclopedia II Vol.*, Moscow/Saint Petersburg: Center for humanitarian initiatives, 2017, 559.

Biblical and later Christian stories about Adam and Eve were already familiar to Arab peoples at the time Islam began in the seventh century.[294]

The problem of anthropomorphic speaking about God is felt more acutely in the Qur'an than in the Bible. The Qur'an explicitly denies that God *rested*, but a similar debate also existed within Christianity about anthropomorphic speaking about God. Within Christianity, this problem was known to the Church Fathers, who rejected the explanation that God's resting implied that God was tired. God does not need to restore His power, but instead, He stopped creating the Universe and by doing so proclaimed a day of rest for all creation. We may suggest that this concept of "rest" as developed in the patristic heritage also leads to an eschatological understanding of "rest" as eternal beatitude. In the Gospel of Matthew 11:28, God's rest on the seventh day is interpreted typologically as the rest the Christians may find in Christ. In addition, the seventh day of God's rest has not yet ended. In the previous six days, each day has a morning and evening, but not so the seventh day; it is believed that that day will go on until the end of time, inaugurating the final bliss. Hence the supposedly anthropomorphic concept of God can only arise in a superficial reading that ignores deeper meanings. This "pseudo-anthropomorphic" allusion therefore does not necessarily deny God's omnipotence; in fact, it describes His special care for human salvation.

Nevertheless, the anthropomorphism which the Qur'an adamantly avoids, remains a serious problem for the Church Fathers. Some of them have suggested that the Bible and speculative theology are on a different level, which can explain the anthropomorphic expressions in the former. Allegorical interpretations may explain the deep theological truths dressed in the garb of anthropomorphic expressions.

[294] Juan E. Campo, *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York, 2009), 12.

However, modern Biblical scholars tend to reject allegorical interpretations of Biblical texts. This creates an additional debate on the relationship between exegesis and theology. The problem here is that the allegorical approach is likely to treat the elements of the creation story as symbolic rather than to accept them in their own realm. Indeed, the classic argument against patristic exegesis is its use of the allegorical method of interpretation, which draws moral implications from the text that seemingly lie beyond the original author's intent. For the Church Fathers, allegory did not conflict with good exegesis[295], and they quite often distinguished different levels of interpretation, the so-called *sensus Scripturae*. The confrontation with the Qur'an may induce the modern Christian theologian as well to reflect more thoroughly upon major issues of Christian theology concerning Biblical hermeneutics, such as the *sensus Scripturae*. Hence, confrontation with the Qur'an is fruitful not only for a solid understanding of Islam, but also because it recalls and illuminates intra-Christian perspectives and debates. God's resting is a fine example of this.

Studying the Qur'anic narratives may bring Christians to a more precise analysis of the Bible and subsequent tradition. The Qur'an rejects anthropomorphic allusions to God, such as we can find in the expression '*image and likeness*' of God in the book of Genesis, an expression consciously avoided in the Qur'an. Hence, we see here an issue similar to that of God resting after creating the universe (Gen 2:1). Instead of the expression 'image and likeness', the Qur'an uses the expression *khalif*, as we have seen at the close reading stage. Nonetheless, both expressions seem to convey a similar notion of a universal dignity of the Human Being which enables them to be master of creation. The universal dimension of being a 'khalif' of God

[295] The Alexandrian school resorted frequently to allegorical explanations, whereas the Antiochene school was much more restrictive. These historical nuances will not be considered further here.

for His creation can be found also in 'image and likeness'.[296] Yet, there is no mention of the loss of the dignity of being a 'khalif' in spite of the transgression of God's command.

The terms "image" and "likeness" in the Bible convey a shared sense of dignity and responsibility. According to Christian theology, the status of 'image and likeness' is seriously compromised by the transgression, although the extent to which this is the case remains a point of debate. The similarity between 'khalif' and 'image and likeness' is nonetheless considerable: both 'image and likeness' and 'khalif' should be seen as a responsibility conferred upon humankind by God, a responsibility for the whole of creation rather than an inherent ontological status of superiority. Numerous approaches have been dedicated to the concept of "image and likeness". "*Some ancient Jews and Christians came to interpret this Biblical verse as revealing, in rather matter-of-fact fashion, that God is a giant human-shaped Being so immense that His body fills the universe or is the universe*."[297] The Greek Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria exercised an important influence on early Christian interpretation.[298] In an allegorical interpretation of Genesis 2.1-3.19, he argued that God first made God's image, the Logos, and then created humanity "after the image", i.e. resembling the Logos rather than God's own self.[299] We see throughout Scripture the focus on humanity as central to the purposes of God.[300] The words "God created the Human Being in His own image" do not refer to a rational or spiritual essence, but rather to the power conferred upon Adam over other creatures and, directly, over the animals.[301] Still, it might be argued that being

[296] We leave aside interpretations that relegate different functions to 'image' and to 'likeness'.
[297] James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 81.
[298] Norman Solomon, Richard Harries, and Tim Winter, *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conversation* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 157.
[299] Ibid., 157.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Ibid.

created 'in the image and likeness' does not imply a status but rather a relationship between God and Adam. Currently there is a stronger emphasis on the relational aspect, an emphasis that can be found in Augustine as well: being created in the image of the triune God means that humans can relate to God and to each other in a meaningful way, just as the persons of the Trinity relate to each other. Though this capacity for relationship has been marred by the Fall, it is restored in Christ, the true image of God. "Thus, the incarnate Christ, the second Adam, is the only true 'image of God', but Christians can come to resemble him through imitating him in their ethical behavior."[302] In the Gospels, Jesus Christ is referred to as the true image of God.[303] Again, what is the status of the "divine image" of the Human Being after sin? Clearly, being attached to Christ renders the Human Being as image and likeness of God visible again. What is the connection between God and the sinful nature of Human Being? It is a major dispute both in Pauline literature and Church Fathers.[304] Paul states that believers will be "*conformed to the image of this Son*" (Rom. 8:29), transformed "*into the same image*" (2 Cor 3:18).[305] "In Pauline thought, the figure of the image is used in at least three connotations."[306]

[302] Norman Solomon, Richard Harries, and Tim Winter, *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conversation*, 158.
[303] Matthew 22:15-21.
[304] Deification passages are nonetheless also present in the Gospels:
"*The kingdom of God is within you*" – Luke 17:21.
"*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* – Matthew 5:48.
"*Is it not written in your law, "I said you are gods*"? – John 10:34.
[305] Vladimir Kharlamov, ed., *Theosis II: Deification in Christian Theology* (The Lutterworth Press, 2012), 21.
[306] "In Pauline's thought, the figure of the image is used in at least three connotations:
First it appears in 1 Cor. 11:7: "*For a man ought not to have his head, forasmuch as he is the image of the glory of God*." The second one is in 2 Cor. 4:4: "…*in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*." The third one is in Rom. 8:29: "*for whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son*." Still, in the New Testament, the understanding of Christ as the true image of God bolsters the belief in a Logos who is the intermediary between God and humanity. See more Vernon McCasland, "The Image of God' According to Paul," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 69, no. 2 (1950): 85-100; Norman Solomon, Richard Harries, and Tim Winter, eds. *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conversation*, 158.

In this context, the Orthodox tradition adds a significant contribution. This may be surprising given the rich apophatic tradition of hesitance to describe relations between God and Human Beings in a positive descriptive way in the Orthodox tradition. John of Damascus stressed that what God is, in God's self, is totally unknowable and incomprehensible.[307] Nonetheless, within Eastern Christian tradition, there is a way to know about God through God's "energies". All Human Beings are made in the image of God and are called to grow into God's likeness in a process called "theosis" or divinization.[308] Andrew Louth, Vladimir Lossky, and John Meyendorf have promoted a new wave of interest in the famous 13th-century Byzantine theologian Gregory Palamas.[309] Lossky argues that the "Eastern" understanding of mystical theology and deification which emerges from Palamas's writings is more adequate and therefore preferable to the "Western" view of divine activity, grace, and the human knowledge of God. Again, the notion of "image and likeness" should not be rejected as anthropomorphic, but on the contrary, it constitutes the heart of Orthodox theology.

To conclude this reflection, we may wonder whether the Christian concept of "image and likeness" allows for a universal dignity of the Human Being. Do non-Christians share in this dignity, even if not baptized? And do pagans share the dignity of *khalif*? The universal dignity of Human Beings, expressed in the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, constitutes a challenge for both religions, so it seems. Delving into the concept of "image and likeness", prompted by the confrontation with the Qur'anic concept of "khalif", brings us both to interreligious and intrareligious reflections.

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[307] Norman Solomon, Richard Harries, and Tim Winter, eds. *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conversation*, 175.
[308] Ibid., 178.
[309] Vladimir Kharlamov, ed. *Theosis II: Deification in Christian Theology (Volume 2)*, 183.

Summing up, the Qur'anic account of the creation story is important for Christian theology not because of the answers it gives. I do not think the Qur'an really properly *answers* Christian questions. However, the *questions* a Christian reading of the Qur'an raises should be taken seriously. Various theological, social, and cultural efforts to bridge the gaps of misunderstanding between religions, searching for differences and similarities, have made serious contributions to interreligious dialogue. One of the salient insights has been that the Qur'an, which dates from the 7th century, is closer to current theological reflection than the still older Bible. This may explain the anti-anthropomorphic attitude of the Qur'an. Christians should not adopt the rejection of "image and likeness" in the Qur'an as too anthropomorphic, but reflection on the underlying issue of how to maintain God's transcendence while emphasizing paramount human dignity remains fruitful for Christians.

3.4.2. *The figure of Iblis in the Qur'an compared to the serpent in the Bible.*

For both Islam and Christianity, the theological issue of the origin of evil is one of the most central issues. How do Christians and Muslims deal with evil according to the creation story and the temptation in Paradise? Quite a few narratives, figures, names, and events occur both in the Qur'an and the Bible. Even theologically, both Scriptures have a lot in common. However, there are essential differences as well.

In accordance with our research topic, the following question was raised: can the Qur'anic version of the creation story be relevant for Christian theology? When looking at the details of this story, we came across more specific questions, such as the connection between the devil and the serpent in interpretations of Genesis. We noted that the creation story in the book of Genesis does not have a clear parallel between the devil and the serpent. The passages in the Qur'an dedicated to Iblis all

emphasize that he refuses to bow down before Adam. References to the prostration of the angels before Adam appear in no fewer than seven different chapters,[310] suggesting that this is an account of fundamental importance to the Qur'an. It also uses this account to illustrate the high status of Adam and, thereby, of humanity. It is this human dignity that Iblis challenges. God said, "*What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?" [Shaytan] said, "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay*."[311]

It is obvious that Iblis refuses to obey God because of his pride. Ironically, it could also be argued that Iblis was the only one to understand God properly, because by refusing to bow down, he refused to commit idolatry. Prostration before Adam looks like worship, which is against the prescriptions of the Qur'an. Hence, to put it boldly, Iblis may appear as 'the first and true Muslim' because he refused to worship someone other than God in order not to commit idolatry. Still, it is obvious that this issue contradicts Islamic theology. The prostration in the Islamic interpretation should therefore not be identified with veneration.

Islam does not identify Iblis as an angel, but the identification of Iblis with Shaytan is also problematic. Indeed, the devil as a celestial rebel against God, as the leader of evil beings in heaven (see Qur'an 26:95), is named Iblis, whereas the devil as the tempter of humans on earth (see Qur'an 7:20; 20:120; 41:36; 114:4), is named Shaytan.[312] As described in the close reading, in Qur'an 2:34, the devil is Iblis, but two verses later, when he has entered into the Garden, he is Shaytan.[313] Apparently, the name *Iblis* is used mainly in the context of pride, as he refuses to acknowledge

[310] See Qur'an 2:34, 7:11-12, 15:28-33, 17:61-2, 18:50, 20:115-116, 38:71-78.
[311] Qur'an 7:12.
[312] Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext* (Routledge, London, 2010), 54.
[313] Ibid., 40.

the Human Being's high status. The figure of Iblis in Islam is simply that of a tempter who takes advantage of the human inclination to self-centeredness, which can deteriorate into evil.[314] Shaytan seeks to bring the Human Being down from their elevated status. In one way or another, the Qur'an postulates that evil forces have their own limits and boundaries which were established by God. This is clearly confirmed in the Qur'an as there is no conversation between God and Iblis, but God merely speaks to Adam about Iblis and his intentions[315]. This can be seen as a kind of warning against future temptations.

The Qur'an relates how, immediately after his sin, Adam asks for forgiveness, and God grants him that. In turn, before being expelled from Paradise, Iblis had asked to delay the punishment until the day of Judgment and for permission to tempt people and turn them away from worship of God. This is how Iblis began his war against all the people. But God clearly underlines that Iblis will go to Hell with his followers.[316]

This whole notion of the origin of evil and the nature of Iblis provokes an extensive discussion in the interreligious and intrareligious context. As has been described above, it is clearly presented in the Qur'an that Iblis, as a jinn, was in the garden with the Human Being(s). Our close reading and the broader context of the verses in question from the Qur'an leads to an important discussion about the

[314] Charles Mathews, *Understanding Religious Ethics* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 248.
[315] Qur'an 20:120.
[316] "*And We have certainly created you, [O Mankind], and given you [human] form. Then We said to the angels, "Prostrate to Adam", so they prostrated, except for Iblees. He was not of those who prostrated. [Allah] said, "What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?" [Satan] said, "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay." [Allah] said, "Descend from Paradise, for it is not for you to be arrogant therein. So get out; indeed, you are of the debased. [Satan] said, "Reprieve me until the Day they are resurrected." [Allah] said, "Indeed, you are of those reprieved." [Satan] said, "Because You have put me in error, I will surely sit in wait for them on Your straight path. Then I will come to them from before them and from behind them and on their right and on their left, and You will not find most of them grateful [to You]. "[Allah] said, "Get out of Paradise, reproached and expelled. Whoever follows you among them – I will surely fill Hell with you, all together.*" – Qur'an 7:12-18.

connection between the devil and the serpent and perhaps the theological reasoning concerning them.

As we have indicated above, there is no mention of Satan tempting Adam and Eve in Biblical narratives about the creation story. The identity of the serpent in the story was certainly tied to the overall meaning of the story. In the Biblical text itself, the serpent appears to be merely a clever animal who leads the human astray.[317]

In the Qur'an, we can find a clear answer about Satan (the serpent is lacking), which induces us to wonder about the roots of the identification of the serpent as a Satan in Christian theology. From the beginning, it should be noted that in the Genesis story, the snake plays the role of a trickster, who tempts the woman with words into breaking God's commandment and eating the forbidden fruit. But this crime is itself ambiguous. The snake says that the forbidden fruit will make them "*like gods, knowing good and evil*" (Genesis 3:5). God later expels them from the Garden precisely because they have "*become like one of us, knowing good and evil*" (Genesis 3:22). The snake tricked the humans into disobedience, but he was not completely lying about the result. Since the snake was guilty of causing the human transition to a world of pain and mortality, which God will overcome by defeating the forces of darkness, it was only natural to postulate a link between Satan and the snake. Nevertheless, we may suppose – as many early Christian texts do – that Satan entered the body of the serpent to tempt Adam and Eve. However, again it is not clear from the Bible whether Satan influenced the serpent.

Although the Bible tells us that 'Satan himself is transformed into an angel of Light,' or 'masquerades as an angel of light' (2 Corinthians 11:14), there are

[317] James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 98.

difficulties with assuming that something like this happened in the Garden of Eden. In the book of Genesis 3:1 it is written that the serpent was one of the *beasts of the field*. We may suppose that he originally possessed legs or wings, as he is eventually condemned to slither about on his belly (Gen. 3:14). The identification of the serpent as the one whose body Satan used raises further questions, such as: does Satan speak audibly? Another issue may be raised: if God knew that the being we now call Satan and some of the other angels, and ultimately Adam and Eve, would rebel against Himself, why then did He 'interrupt' eternity and proceed with creation in the first place?[318] When Satan, *the ancient serpent*, is destroyed, humanity may 'return' and finally eat from the Tree of Life and be immortal in Paradise, in God's presence. In the New Testament, the snake is identified with Satan. How did the smartest "creature of the field" come to be identified with the devil?

This identification comes to us from later interpretations. The Church Fathers, commenting on the Fall of the first Human Being affirm that the serpent in Paradise which tempted both Adam and Eve is associated with the devil. Possible confirmation of this theory can be found in the apocryphal literature, the patristic tradition, and in the Bible, especially the book of Revelation 12:9:

"*The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.*"

This identification not only explains why this particular snake could talk and was smarter than all other creatures, but it also confirmed by God's words to the snake at the end of the story: "*I will put enmity between you and the woman and between*

[318] See more Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraph 7, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p1s2c1p7.htm.

your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel"" – Gen 3:15.[319] However, the authentic narratives in the book of Genesis do not mention the devil. This episode is known to Christians because of the later interpretation of the serpent as the devil proposed by the Church Fathers, but it has led to a misunderstanding of the devil's presence in Paradise. Although Genesis only speaks of a serpent in the Garden, some Jewish texts suggest that the serpent is to be identified with Satan, and Christian texts make that identification explicit. The Qur'an seems to continue this exegetical development by doing away with the serpent altogether and having only Satan in the Garden.[320] Accordingly, the creation story that is in the Qur'an may encourage Christians to acquire insight into the tradition history of the Paradise story.

Regarding the snake itself, we only know that "*the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made*" *(Genesis 3:1).* It may be noted that when it comes to snakes communicating by speech, Biblical commentators rightly point out that in the post-lapsarian world the gift of speech belongs to human beings only. John of Damascus in particular has argued that the relationship between humankind and the animal world before the Fall was freer than after it.[321]

3.4.3. *Paradise trees: The tree of the knowledge of good and evil* and *The Tree of Life.*

As we have indicated at stage 2 in the broader context of the story, trees are prominent in the Qur'an. Several specific types of trees are described in the Qur'an,

[319] James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 99.
[320] Gabriel S. Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, 59.
[321] See more Daniel J. Sahas, *John Damascus on Islam. The* "*Heresy of the Ishmaelites*" (Brill: Leiden, 1972).

however the main tree mentioned in the creation, as presented in *Al-Baqarah*, is the forbidden tree, located in the middle of the Garden in Paradise. In Qur'an 20:120, it is called the tree of immortality, from which God forbade to Adam and his wife to eat:[322] – "*Then Satan whispered to him; he said, "O Adam, shall I direct you to the tree of eternity and possession that will not deteriorate?*" Shaytan did manage to tempt both Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. The Qur'an continues by saying that after eating the fruit, both Adam and Eve realized they were naked. It should also be mentioned that there is no interval between the tempting of Eve and that of Adam. Noticing that they had been tricked by Iblis, they despairingly covered their nakedness with leaves from the trees. "*And We said, O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat there from in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers*." (Qur'an 2:35). Still, the mention of the second tree is absent in the Qur'an, while it is present in the Bible, and there are other differences between the creation stories. An example is a Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, which is explicitly mentioned in the Bible.[323] The message of the Bible can be summarized by the symbolism of three trees. The first was the Tree of Life in the Paradise of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:22-24), the second tree is the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, whose fruit Adam and Eve ate, resulting in the Fall (Genesis 3:4-6, 17-18), and thirdly, the cross of Jesus is referred to as a "tree" and linked to Deuteronomy 21:22-23.[324]

In the Bible, we read that God allowed Adam to eat from all the trees except the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, warning him that the result would be death. "*And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the*

[322] Oliver Leaman, *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, 11.
[323] Lytton John Musselman, *Trees in the Koran and the Bible*, 48.
[324] Ibid., 48.

garden, but of the tree of the Knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." (Genesis 2:16-17). After being tempted by the serpent, Eve ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil, and Adam did the same: "*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.*" (Genesis 3:6-7). God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food – and in the middle of the Garden stood the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:8-9). So, according to the Biblical account, the existence of these two trees is clear: *The Tree of Life* and *The Tree of Knowledge*.

It is worth noting that in the formation process of Christian theological thought, Genesis had an invaluable influence on the later works of the Church Fathers, as patristics scholars have shown. Working on the Qur'anic texts and on the questions it poses to the Biblical accounts, we find it necessary to consult additional Christian literature to deepen our reasoning. The Qur'anic view of Adam has echoes in Christian theology. In Qur'an 3:59, the Qur'an relates: "*the likeness of Jesus before God is as the likeness of Adam*."[325] Although the Qur'an does not have the same Christology, it does reflect something of an Adam-Christ typology.[326]

Both Biblical creation stories are parts of a larger story – revealed in Scripture and Tradition – and cannot be fully understood apart from it. The first creation

[325] Lytton John Musselman, *Trees in the Koran and the Bible*, 52.
[326] Ibid., 53.

receives new significance in the light of the new creation in Christ. So, Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 become part of a larger story, and as Christian theologians we cannot fully understand the meaning of the trees without knowing the purpose and the end of the story. This salvation history-oriented perspective is one of the reasons why John started his Gospel with reminiscences of the creation story, but in view of the Logos. "*In the beginning was the Word…all things came into being through him, …The light shines in the darkness…and the Word became flesh and lived among us.*" John's deliberate use of language from Genesis helps readers see Jesus Christ's coming as a new creation. This is not, as in Genesis, the beginning of creation, for creation comes in verse 3. Rather, the "beginning" refers to the period before creation, as pre-existnce, and is a designation, more qualitative than temporal, of the sphere of God.[327] It also helps us understand God's purpose in creation from the beginning.

In general, the Tree of Life plays an essential role in Christianity. The Tree of Life symbolizes that eternal life which would have been Adam's had he not sinned. Many theologians throughout church history have suggested that "the Tree of Life" is nothing less than a symbolic description of Christ Himself, or more specific the cross of Christ as a source of blessing, of atonement and of salvation. To be spiritually nourished by Christ for all eternity is the essence of eternal life. The cross of Jesus is referred to as a "tree" and is linked to Deuteronomy 21:22-23. As mentioned above, the Tree of Life is absent in the Qur'an, and obviously there is no parallel to the cross of Christ. However, in Genesis there is no explicit mention of the cross of Christ either, as this belongs to a post-Biblical interpretation.

[327] Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel according to John (i-xii)* (Doubleday & Company, New York, 1966), 4.

Curiously, there has been an extensive discussion within heterodox Christianity about the cross: is it a sign of torture coming from the devil or a sign of salvation? Some currents of Christianity, such as the Bogomile sect or the Cathars, rejected the concept of the cross as a means of salvation, viewing it instead as an instrument of torture, belonging to the devil. This discussion finds its counter voice in the Eastern Orthodox liturgical tradition, in which the identification of the Tree of Life with the cross appears in some religious services, such as the Great Vesper or Matins:

Great Vespers: "*Hail, life-giving Cross, an unconquerable trophy of godliness, door to Paradise, the succor of the faithful, rampart set about the Church.*"

At Matins: "*In Paradise of old, the wood stripped me bare, for by giving its fruit to eat, the enemy brought in death. But now the wood of the Cross that clothes men with the garment of life has been set up in the midst of the earth, and the whole world is filled with boundless joy. Theotokos, thou art a mythical Paradise, who untilled hast brought forth Christ: therefore, at its Exaltation on this day, we worship Him, and thee do we magnify.*"[328]

The Garden of Gethsemane and eternal Paradise, the Tree of Life, and the cross of Christ can never be far asunder, and they are inseparably linked to each other.[329] The tree of death and the Tree of Life are, after all, but one; the glory of the latter can never be disjoined from the shame of the former.[330] Hence for Christians, to eat from the restored Tree of Life (the Tree of the Cross) is, one may suggest, the

[328] Donnel O'Flynn, *Holy Cross Life-Giving Tree* (Church Publishing, New York, 2017), 102.
[329] See more Horatius Bonar, *The Book of The Last Days: The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Editora Oxigênio, 1st edition, 2015), Chapter I.
[330] Horatius Bonar, *Light and Truth: Or Bible Thoughts and Themes: the Revelation* (Robert Carter & Brothers, 1872), 106.

perfect act of worship. Furthermore, a parallel could even be observed with the Eucharist.[331] The famous speech by Pope Francis presents this Christian paradigm from a grandiose perspective. Jesus Christ humbles himself for all people and sacrifices himself out of love for humanity. In disobeying God, Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree. Is not, however, responsibility for knowing good and evil the ultimate destiny of humankind, especially when, as God expels our original forebears from Paradise, He repeats the snake's message to Eve that, in knowing good and evil, man and woman are like God?[332]

To sum up, this whole symbolism of the tree of Paradise embodying Christ and the cross of salvation cannot be found in the Qur'an. Muslim theologians argue, often in polemic with Christianity, that atonement has no place in Islam. The hidden presupposition is that atonement would serve as justification or as alleviation of one's responsibility. This, however, remains the question. Undoubtedly, the meaning of the cross as a symbol of atonement and of salvation is a fruitful topic for debate between Muslims and Christians.

3.4.4. *Does the rivalry between angels and Human Beings as* Vorlage *for the figure of Iblis throw new light upon the Qur'an itself?*

The practice, well-known since Abraham Geiger, of demonstrating Jewish sources of the Qur'an has often been marred by ideology: as if the Qur'an were no

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[331] Angelina Galassi, *The Revelation of the Tree of Life: The Theology of Divine Perfection* (2015), 221.
In this context, I recall the words of Pope Francis in his morning meditation on the tree of the Cross in the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae on Saturday, 14 September 2013. Pope Francis said that the Church Fathers "always contrast the tree of Paradise with the tree of sin; the tree that bears the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, of knowledge, with the tree of the Tree of Life." The tree of Paradise "did such great harm," whereas the Tree of the Life "brings us salvation and health, and pardons that harm." // Pope Francis. *Morning meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae. The tree of the Cross*, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20130914_tree-cross.html.

[332] Brayton Polka, "The Fall of Adam and Eve: A Transformative Critique of Culture," *The European Legacy* Vol. 17, No. 7 (2012): 935.

more than a badly understood epigon of Bible and Midrash. In addition, the inner-Qur'anic literary forms tend to be ignored by these studies.[333] Still, from a theological point of view, such studies are indispensable, even if they do not succeed in exploring the theological issues in any great depth. I will show the theological relevance of pre-Qur'anic sources by treating some elements in the story of Iblis. It will become clear that some major theological differences between Islam and Christianity can be traced back to the Qur'anic treatment of both Jewish and Christian sources. Especially when scholars realize that not the Bible as such, but the post-Biblical literature of Talmud, Midrash, and Syriac Church Fathers are contemporaneous with the Qur'an, studying these sources will contribute to a theologically refined understanding of the Qur'an. Even if historical-critical research adduces inner-Qur'anic parallels and pre-Qur'anic sources, the theological reflection often lags behind.

In his book *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, Peter Schäfer has collected the most important Jewish texts about the jealousy of the angels.[334] The influence of Jewish (and Christian) texts upon the Qur'an should not be understood in a reductive way, nor as a form of copying, but as a transformation of the material. Besides the historical-critical issues, this topic allows us to delve somewhat deeper into theological questions.

In the midrash God consults the angels about the creation of the Human Being. "When the Holy One, blessed be He, wished to create the Human Being, He first created a company of ministering angels and said to them: "Is it your wish that we

[333] This point is well-taken in Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: a Historic-critical Introduction*, Edinburgh 2017, 142.
[334] Peter Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen: Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorstellung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975).

make the Human Being in our image?"[335] They answered: "Lord of the world, what will be his deeds?" He replied: "So-and-so will be his deeds". Thereupon they exclaimed: "What is the Human Being that Thou would be mindful of him" … (Psalm 8:4)? Thereupon He stretched out His little finger among them and consumed them with fire (Bab. Talmud Sanhedrin 38b).

This midrash answers both the delicate question of the plural: "Let *us* make the Human Being" (Gen 1:26, namely because of consulting the angels) and that of the creation of the Human Being in God's image. In addition, the angels quote Psalm 8:4, but in a completely different mode: not by emphasizing human insignificance in comparison to the cosmos, but, as angels are wont to do judging according to the principle of justice only. This is why the angels condemn the future Human Being. God, however, also applies the measure of compassion (*middat ha-rahamim*). This is clear for whoever understands a midrashic reading of the Bible, and it coincides with the Qur'anic statement that humankind will be a shedder of blood. In content, there is no difference between the Biblical quotation in the midrash and the explicit statement in the Qur'an. This means that in the transmission, this midrash must have been communicated orally by a Jewish spokesperson, who undoubtedly explained the meaning of Psalm 8:4. The continuation of the psalm praises the Human Being in his glory:

"Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:5). Still, God's report to the angels about the human deeds must have been utterly negative as well.

It is important to note that quoting the Bible, as the angels do, should not be understood merely as a battle of texts: there is an anthropological position behind

[335] It may well be that the midrash attempts to shift the issue of jealousy from God (which is a gnostic conviction about the jealous Demiurge / creator-god) to the angels by reinterpreting 'elohim' (Gen 3:22, plural!) by 'angels'.

this: the Human Being is capable of much wickedness, but he is also capable of doing good by obeying God's wishes.[336] Hence, the anthropological dimension is not added by the Qur'an, but is merely made explicit by it.

Apparently, bodily existence constitutes the human paradox of being lower than the angels, but, precisely because of this, being capable of establishing justice and of caring for the other Human Beings. This paradox of extolling bodily human existence in contrast with spiritual angelic existence even forms the background to the paradox of the existence of Christ which transcends that of the angels (*Letter to the Hebrews* 2:7, quoting the same Psalm 8).

Let us now turn to our Qur'an text quoted before[337]:

"*And [mention, O Muḥammad], when your Lord said to the angels: –* "*Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.* "*They said:* "*Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we exalt You with praise and declare Your perfection?*" *He [Allah] said,* "*Indeed, I know that which you do not know.*" *And He taught Adam the names – all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said,* "*Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful.*" *They said,* "*Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise.*" *He said: – "O Adam, inform them of their names.*" *And when he had informed them of their names, He said: –* "*Did I not tell you that I know the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth? And I know what you reveal and what you have concealed.*"

[336] See the much more elaborate arguments both from Scripture and from anthropology in which Moses is prevented by angels from talking the Torah from heaven to Mount Sinai: labor, business, honoring parents, are all activities that have no meaning for angels. Moses's arguments allow him to take the Torah with him (Bab. Talmud Shabbath 88b).
[337] See for all the Qur'anic texts: Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 39-54.

First it is clear that the angelic protest is highly similar to that in the midrash, although the Qur'an avoids the suggestion of angelic cooperation in the creation. The notion of the Human Being created in God's image is likewise absent. As happens more often, the Biblical argument in the midrash, which, as I have shown, also contains an anthropological dimension, in the Qur'an becomes an anthropological argument only: the potential wickedness of the Human Being.[338]

This midrash is then glued to another topic: the naming of "all of them" (possibly the animals). In contrast with Gen 2:19, where God Himself seems curious how Adam will name the animals, the Qur'an makes sure that all the knowledge comes from God: He himself taught Adam all the names, possibly without the angels knowing this; they do not know the names.[339] After these episodes the disobedience of Iblis is related.

And [mention] when We said to the angels, "*Prostrate before Adam*"*; so they prostrated, except for Iblis. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers.* (Qur'an 2:34).

The angelic protest is collective and endes with a clear victory of the Human Being who will be created by God. The matter becomes more complicated once the moment when the Human Being has in fact been created. The angels pay homage to the Human Being, but one being, Iblis, refuses. Our Qur'anic texts relate this episode right after the protest of the angels (plural) and the naming of the animals, whereas in Jewish texts these stories feature separated from each other.

[338] This does mean that the Qur'an is not the first to introduce the anthropological element, as Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: a Historic-critical Introduction*, 148, states. Undoubtedly, this proves that there was a possibly oral clarification of the Psalm verse from a Jewish perspective.

[339] As is rightly emphasized by Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: a Historic-critical Introduction*, 149. This aspect is similar to that in Genesis Rabba 17:4. Note that according to the Bible, even God Himself seems to be curious to hear what the names will be! It is clear that the notion of God being curious how Adam should give names, has been utterly transformed in the Qur'an.

The command by God to the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam may have to do with his exalted status, although we have seen that the Qur'an carefully removes the lofty traits that the midrash attributes to Adam.[340] This becomes even more obvious when we direct our attention to a parallel text in the Qur'an, which provides the argument for Iblis's refusal:

God asked, "What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you?" He replied, "I am better than he is: You created me from fire and him from clay." (Qur'an 7:12).[341]

This argument has been derived from the fourth-to-sixth-century Syriac Christian document, the *Cave of Treasures* 3:2.[342] This context, possibly ignored by, rather than unknown to the Qur'an, makes clear why Adam deserves this honor of obeisance from the angels: he is king, prophet, and priest and has been modelled by God's own hands after God's image and likeness (2:12).[343] Adam should not be regarded as similar to all Human Beings: Adam is image and likeness of God and this description of his pre-lapsarian glory should be explained as a typology of Christ.[344]

[340] Related to this is the attempt to interpret the command to prostrate oneself (*sajada*) as a normal token of respect, comparable to the bowing down of the brothers of Joseph before Joseph.
[341] See about this: E. Beck, Iblis und mensch, Satan und Adam', *Le Muséon* 89 (1976), 214.
[342] See more Su-Min Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors: Les deux recensions syriaques* (Leuven: Peeters, 1987), 11.
[343] Note how the creation of Adam by God's own hands and from virgin soil is another typological trait for Jesus, according to the Church Father Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III.18, 71. The Qur'an emphasizes how Adam has been the only human being created from soil and compares Adam to Jesus (Q. 3:59). Cp. Gabriel Said Reynolds, 'The Islamic Christ', Francesca Aran Murphy (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook to Christology*, 186. Whether this means an upgrading of Jesus as born miraculously like Adam, or a downplaying – Jesus as a creature, just like Adam – may remain in the middle here. David Marshall, "Mary in the Qur'an," in *A Faithful Presence: Essays for Kenneth Cragg*, ed. David Thomas and Clare Amos (London: Melisende, 2003), opts for the latter interpretation, but ignores the originally cosmic status of Adam.
[344] Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: a Historic-critical Introduction*, 148, equates Adam's (pre-lapsarian) glory with that of *all* Human Beings, but overlooks the Messianic component of the description of Adam.

Even Jewish descriptions of Adam mention his cosmic dimensions: his height from earth to heaven and his body taken from the four corners of the earth, which grants him Messianic allure.[345] Hence not everything attributed to Adam's glory is meant to apply to humankind in general. These divine prerogatives are lost after the expulsion from Paradise. However, divine prerogatives for Adam do not fit into the Qur'anic perception. Hence it is vital not only to show what the Qur'an adopted from Jewish and Christian predecessors, but also what the Qur'an has left out, although this is obviously difficult to ascertain. These transformations of Jewish and Christian backgrounds explain the specific position of the Qur'anic image of the first Human Being: although deriving elements from Jewish and Christian predecessors, the Qur'an consistently diminishes the status of the first Human Being or tries to relativize it. In short, and this is consistent with the wider Islamic position: the first Human Being is not a type of a Messianic figure or Redeemer.[346] Hence, there will be no second Adam who will be adorned with the same glory of priest, king and prophet as the first Adam in his pre-lapsarian state, a glory that, incidentally, tends to be obscured in the Pauline fixation upon sin.[347]

Still, the Qur'an did adopt elements from the description of the "first Adam", albeit in transformed version. Even if the Qur'an was not conversant with the literal wording of the *Cave of Treasures*, some awareness of the exalted status of Adam as king, prophet and priest may have been present and hence consciously rejected.

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[345] The parallels between pre-lapsarian Adam and the Messiah form a recurring theme in Rabbinic literature. Adam is also a type of Moses. See the studies by Benjamin Murmelstein, "Adam: Ein Beitrag zur Messiaslehre," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 35 (1928): 242–275; and 36 (1929): 51–86. Still, Rabbinic tradition also knows of downplaying Adam, this in reaction to Christianity.

[346] See for a more elaborate description of typology chapter 5 (5.4.4.) dealing with the question: *How should we in Catholic theology evaluate the typological connection between Moses and Muhammad?*

[347] See more Marcel Simon, "Adam et la rédemption dans la perspective de l'Église ancienne," in *Types of Redemption*, ed. C. J. Bleeker and R. Z. Werblowsky (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 62-71. He mentions the *Pseudoclementine writings* and the *Cave of Treasures* as paralleling Adam and Christ while these documents more or less ignore original sin. Note the parallel between the threefold ministry of Adam and Moses in the Jewish philosopher Philo, *De vita Moysis* 134-145.

This transformation and diminution of pre-Qur'anic motifs has severe consequences: the Tree of Life is lacking and does not serve as a type of the cross; there is no hint of a theology of original sin, whatever its specific detail. Still, from a theological point of view, it would be too hasty to attribute to Christianity a more gloomy perspective of humankind than in Islam, as is often done. The Christian perspective of post-lapsarian existence does not exist in a vacuum, but only in connection with the perspective of the redemption in Christ. To answer the question posed at the beginning of this paragraph:

Yes, the rivalry between angels and Human Beings as *Vorlage* for the figure of Iblis, does throw new light upon the Qur'an itself.

It is clear that studying the Qur'an together with pre-Qur'anic sources may yield important insights for a theological perspective. On the one hand, a reductive approach should be avoided, but on the other, one should be aware of the sometimes reductive approach to Jewish and Christian sources which the Qur'an itself takes. The aim is not to draw the Qur'an into the Christian (or Jewish) field, as has often been done in the past, but to better grasp the sensitivities that live within Islam about Christian (or Jewish) convictions.

Conclusion

The Qur'an contains an extensive version of Paradise story. At first glance, as it was stated earlier, the story in the Qur'an looked quite similar to the one described in the Bible. Nevertheless, when compared, there are essential contradictions and disagreements between the two stories. The Qur'anic account indirectly urges me, as a Catholic theologian, to reflect upon my own tradition and to deepen my understanding thereof. This then gives rise to the logical question: How should I treat this *theological impact*? As a Christian theologian I may believe that the Qur'an

is not on the same level as the Bible when it comes to divine revelation. Perhaps I can reflect upon the Qur'an and treat its message as significant apocryphal literature. This raises the question: what is the relationship between Scripture and tradition, the Bible and the apocryphal literature or Patristic texts? Perhaps post-Biblical Christian literature may be considered essential for theological interpretations of the Bible. Ironically, these post-Biblical interpretations are closer to the Qur'an than the Bible itself.

The same question about the relationship between Scripture and tradition can be asked about the Qur'an. Should post-Qur'anic interpretations be considered to be of less authority than the Qur'an? Perhaps similar hermeneutics are at stake, which means that limiting ourselves to the sacred texts only raises new questions. Because if we stick to the Bible and to the Qur'an respectively, the example of the Paradise story shows, that this has turned out to be nearly impossible. This has created a hermeneutical dilemma, which deserves to be treated more fully at the end of this dissertation (see 7.2).

Again, it is not my purpose to offer exhaustive answers to these questions, but it cannot be denied that this discussion has enriched my own theological heritage. So again, as a conclusion, the main purpose is not to offer the Christian theologian an extensive understanding of Islam, but the main result is that my Christian tradition appears in a fresh light and my understanding of Islam has undoubtedly grown too.

Chapter 4

THE ANNUNCIATION STORY: QUR'AN 19:16-22; QUR'AN 3:42-47; LUKE 1:26-35

Christian theology is increasingly aware that interreligious dialogue may have a strong impact on Mariology. Mary is fully emblematic of what it means to be a Christian or rather a Catholic. Introducing her as an issue in interreligious dialogue may lead to an exploration of fundamental questions about the nature of religion and religious experience.[348] Holy Mary is highly venerated by most Christian denominations. However, the figure of Mary, the mother of Jesus, appears extensively in the Qur'anic scripture and in Islamic post-Qur'anic exegesis and narratives as well. There is no doubt that Mary is highly venerated in Islam. In this section, I will ask what this presence of Mary in Islam signifies for me as a Catholic theologian. In order to answer this question, I will examine the Annunciation story in the Bible, as rendered in the Gospel of Luke 12:26-38, followed by a discussion of the same episode in several places in the Qur'an: surah *Al Imran* 3:42-47 and surah *Maryam* 19:16-35. Before dealing with the first stage, which consists of close reading of the Qur'anic verses, it is necessary to determine a specific topic in Bible and Qur'an. This is what I have now done concerning the topic of Mary.

4.1.1. A close reading of the first Qur'anic account of the Annunciation story – Qur'an 19:16-22.

The Qur'anic story of Mary can be found in three Meccan and four Medinan surahs.[349] I will limit myself to the section of the Annunciation story. The Qur'an contains two narratives of this: one in surah *Al Imran* 3:42-47 and one in surah *Maryam* 19:16-35.

[348] John Borelli, "The Virgin Mary in the Breadth and Scope of Interreligious Dialogue," *Marian Studies* 47 (1996): article 7.
[349] Barbara Freyer Stowasser, "Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation," *Islamochristiana* 69 (1994): 67.

The Annunciation story in the Qur'an 19:16-22.

"*And mention, [O Muhammad], in the Book [the story of] Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place toward the east. And she took, in seclusion from them, a screen. Then We sent to her Our Angel*[350]*, and he represented himself to her as a well-proportioned man. She said,* "*Indeed, I seek refuge in the Most Merciful from you, [so leave me], if you should be fearing of Allah.*" *He said,* "*I am only the messenger of your Lord to give you [news of] a pure boy.*" *She said,* "*How can I have a boy while no man has touched me and I have not been unchaste?*" *He said,* "*Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me, and We will make him a sign to the people and a mercy from Us. And it is a matter [already] decreed.' So she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a remote place.*"

A verse-by-verse close reading

19:16 – "*And mention, [O Muhammad], in the Book [the story of] Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place toward the east.*"

This passage begins by describing Mary as traveling on her own to some undisclosed location in the east. This verse does not reveal why Mary withdraws from her family. Is it because she does not want to bring her family into disrepute? This presupposes that Mary already foresaw her pregnancy, which is not what the story seems to imply. This (first) withdrawal may have to do with Mary's stay in the temple, which may be strengthened by the location "in the east". I take this as a symbolic place, both referring to Paradise which is assumed to be in the east, as well as the eastern gate of the temple, which was considered the entrance of the Messiah to come. Still,

[350] In Arabic language, the word ruḥana رُوحَنَا, means literally: our spirit.

the atmosphere is also of a serene contemplation, probably because of Mary's desire to commune with God in a lonely place. The text is shrouded in mystery, and we have to be satisfied with conjectures. Still, the many references to cultic symbolism are unmistaken.[351]

19:17 – "*And she took, in seclusion from them, a screen. Then We sent to her Our Angel, and he represented himself to her as a well-proportioned man.*"

One of the angels appeared before Mary in the image of a beautiful Human Being. He fulfilled his mission in accordance with God's will. Interestingly, there is a parallel with Qur'an 67:1, where God speaks: "*Blessed is He in whose hand is dominion, and He is over all things competent*." Obviously, both passages are not directly connected, but at the same time, it helps better to understand God's power as present in the story of Mary.

There is another curiosity in this verse. The word "screen" renders the Arab word *hijab* which may create another association with the temple, in which the Holy of Holies had been separated by a veil or curtain. In addition, apocryphal texts have it that Mary, while in the temple precincts, had been involved in weaving that curtain, reason why some paintings portray Mary with a shuttle for weaving. The translation speaks about "Our angel", who appeared before Mary in the image of a well-proportioned Human Being. However, in the Arabic text, [352] the emphasis is on the word روحَنا (*ruḥana*).[353] Despite what various Islamic translators render, the word

[351] See more Angelika Neuwirth and Dirk Hartwig, "The Virgin Mary in the Liturgical Fabric of the Qur'an. On the Necessity to Take Qur'anic Philology Seriously", *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 34/2 (2024), 142; and Rita George-Tvrtković, "From Billboards to Mosques: Maryam. Do Muslims Today Call on Mary with Devotion?," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 34, no. 2 (2024): 237-256, who especially emphasizes the sharing of sacred places devoted to Mary between Eastern Christianity and Islam. Criticism of such popular devotion exists both in Christianity and in Islam.

[352] فَٱتَّخَذَتْ مِن دُونِهِمْ حِجَابًا فَأَرْسَلْنَآ إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا (Fa-ittakhathat min dunihim hijaban fa-arsalna ilayha ruḥana fatamaththala laha basharan sawiyya)

[353] See the parallels with 21:91; 66:12, where God blows of His Spirit into Mary for the conception of Jesus.

"spirit" seems to be closer to the original meaning than the word "angel". Still, angel is the translation preferred by several leading Islamic sources. The emphasis on 'angel' can be explained as an attempt on the Islamic side to avoid the Christian connotation of Spirit. The Qur'an is supposed not to confirm Christian convictions and hence Muslims apparently want to avoid any Christian connotation that may remind of the Trinity.

Another interpretation which likewise avoids a Christian connotation, interprets *rūh* as "breath". This is the basis for the Islamic view that the divine messenger somehow breathed into Mary (generally described in translations as "in her sleeve"), and so caused her pregnancy.[354] This idea is supported by what is said in Qur'an 21:91: "*And [mention] the one who guarded her chastity, so We blew into her [garment] through Our angel*[355]*, and We made her and her son a sign for the worlds*". In spite of the many rich meanings of words in Arabic we should again realize that the most appropriate translation of the word روحَنا (*ruḥana*), is "Our spirit," and not "Our angel". Moreover, in several places in the Qur'an "Our spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit (*Rūḥ al-Qudus*)[356] or to the *Trustworthy Spirit* (Qur'an 26:193).[357]

19:18 – "*She said, "Indeed, I seek refuge in the Most Merciful from you, [so leave me], if you should be fearing of Allah.*"

When this *well-proportioned man* interrupts Mary's solitude, she is deeply horrified. She appeals to God's protection but also begs the stranger to let his devotion to God

[354] John Kaltner and Younus Mirza, *The Bible and The Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 114.
[355] Here also, we have "our angel", but in Arabic the word رُوحَنَا, means our spirit. Again, the Qur'an wants to correct Christian ideas.
[356] Qur'an 2:87; 2:253; 5:110; 16:102.
[357] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (HarperOne, 2015), 1393.

prevail over his possible wish to assault her as a woman on her own. It is evident that Mary thinks the man poses a threat, because she does not know him. Mary hopes he will act responsibly. Up to this point, Mary does not realize that the visitor is a messenger from God. Eventually, he tells her about his great mission. This passage in the Qur'an implies that Mary was right in relying on God, like the prophets and saints do. Indeed, this type of behavior we can see among prophets and saints as well. The Qur'an describes that they turn their thoughts to God in times of temptation and fear.

19:19 – "*He said, "I am only the messenger of your Lord to give you [news of] a pure boy.*"

In this context, the word زَكِيًّا (*zakiyya*) means "purity," "growth," "blessing." Mary found confidence when the angel spoke to her. The term رَسُول (*rasul*)[358] may refer to both angelic and prophetic messengers.[359] Because the angel speaks to Mary, some interpreters consider her to be a prophet, but the question of Mary's prophethood remains hotly debated among Muslim theologians. The following words make her anxious again – the stranger tells her that God is going to give her a son who is "pure", probably meaning: pure in body and soul, and with impeccable behavior.

19:20 – "*She said, "How can I have a boy while no man has touched me, and I have not been unchaste?*"

[358] In the Qur'an, the terms "nabi" and "rasul" are used interchangeably. The same individual is sometimes referred to as a "nabi" (one who receives information from God) and at other times as a "rasul" (one who conveys the message to humanity). See more Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Religion of Islam* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1994), 165.
[359] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, 1394.

The word بَغِيًّا (*baghyan*) can be translated in this section as someone who is "unchaste". The Qur'anic story of Jesus' birth is told in verse 19; the birth of Isaac and Jakob in verse 49. Verse 7 recounts the announcement to Zechariah that he will have a child. Childbirth is considered a great blessing in the Qur'an. Mary trembles, for she cannot imagine that it should be possible for her to bear a child without the usual sexual intercourse between man and woman. This announcement indicates that she will bear a son who will possess the most admirable qualities and who will be entirely free from negative traits.

19:21-22 "*He said,* "*Thus [it will be]; your Lord says,* '*It is easy for Me, and We will make him a sign to the people and a mercy from Us. And it is a matter [already] decreed*' "*So she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a remote place.*"

Mary's response to the angel's message is not interpreted as a protest. Instead, she is regarded as having placed herself completely at God's disposal. According to traditional Islamic understanding, she enquires about the further course of events.[360] A messenger from God in the image of a man appears before Mary, speaks to her, and she conceives. After that, she takes (again?) refuge in a remote place, because she is afraid of accusations from the people. According to the Qur'an, there is no doubt that the birth of Jesus without a father happens by the will of God. Mary feels the presence of a promised son who is destined to become a prophet, and who will become a sign, *ayah*, to the people. According to the Qur'an, the whole episode unfolds itself in solitude: no Human Being is there to witness the event, except for Mary herself.

[360] Seyyed Hossein, Nasr, *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, 1395.

We now turn to the second place in the Qur'an where the story about Mary is told, albeit somewhat differently from the one in surah *Al Imran*.

4.1.1.2. A close reading of the second Qur'anic account of the Annunciation story – Qur'an 3:42-47

The Annunciation story from Qur'an 3:42-47:

"*And [mention] when the angels said, "O Mary, indeed Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds. O Mary, be devoutly obedient to your Lord and prostrate and bow with those who bow [in prayer]. "That is from the news of the unseen which We reveal to you, [O Muhammad]. And you were not with them when they cast their pens as to which of them should be responsible for Mary. Nor were you with them when they disputed. [And mention] when the angels said, "O Mary, indeed Allah gives you good tidings of a word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary – distinguished in this world and the Hereafter and among those brought near [to Allah]. He will speak to the people in the cradle and in maturity and will be of the righteous.*" *She said, "My Lord, how will I have a child when no man has touched me?*" *[The angel] said, "Such is Allah; He creates what He wills. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, 'Be,' and it is. And He will teach him writing and wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel And [make him] a messenger to the Children of Israel, [who will say], 'Indeed I have come to you with a sign from your Lord in that I design for you from clay [that which is] like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird by permission of Allah. And I cure the blind [from birth] and the leper, and I*

give life to the dead – by permission of Allah. And I inform you of what you eat and what you store in your houses. Indeed in that is a sign for you, if you are believers."

A verse-by-verse close reading

3:42 – "*And [mention] when the angels said, "O Mary, indeed Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds.*"

This verse shows that angels, here plural, can communicate not only with God but with Human Beings as well. Meanwhile, Mary, according to Islam, is a good example of the possibility to achieve such a degree of holiness that God addresses her with a message. It is important to point out the twofold usage of the word اصطَفاكِ (*istafaki)* that can be translated in this verse as a "chosen you". It probably emphasizes that Mary was chosen by God because of her numerous virtues, and this is why she was promoted above all women. The interpretation of this verse by a series of Qur'anic commentators, both Sunni and Shia, has ensured a profound appreciation of the place of Mary in Islamic thought.[361]

3:43 – "*O Mary, be devoutly obedient to your Lord and prostrate and bow with those who bow [in prayer].*"

In this verse, the angels remind Mary that true worship of God is required. Perhaps these verses have served as one of the regulators of ceremonial moments related to women. These verses may even have influenced the place of women in mosques, and

[361] Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Chosen of All Women: Mary and Fatima in Qur'anic Exegesis," *Islamochristiana* 7 (1981): 201.

they have also served as a good example for Muslims how to behave during prayer, because Mary was "*chosen above the women of the worlds.*"[362]

3:44 – "*That is from the news of the unseen which We reveal to you, [O Muhammad]. And you were not with them when they cast their pens as to which of them should be responsible for Mary. Nor were you with them when they disputed.*"

This passage mentions another circumstance of the story about Mary and Zechariah. For Muslims, it emphasizes that ultimate knowledge is to be found exclusively in the Qur'an, which was given to the Prophet Muhammad. According to the Qur'anic account, the almighty God in this verse reveals the true knowledge to Muhammad and his followers, which they did not know themselves. In addition, another example in Qur'an 37:140-142, which recounts the Jonah[363] story, shows that casting lots was regarded as helpful in case of endless bickering and unsolvable situations.

The mention of the casting of pens refers to a situation in which the temple priests or caretakers were deciding who would assume the responsibility of caring for Mary and who would be honored with assuming the role of being her guardian. Casting lots was a traditional method used to make significant decisions when agreement could not be reached, highlighting the great respect and esteem in which Mary was held.

3:45 – "*[And mention] when the angels said, "O Mary, indeed Allah gives you good tidings of a word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary – distinguished in this world and the Hereafter and among those brought near [to Allah].*"

[362] Qur'an 3:42

[363] "[Mention] when he ran away to the laden ship. And he drew lots and was among the losers. Then the fish swallowed him, while he was blameworthy." (Qur'an 37:140-142).

In this verse Jesus is called *Al-Kalima*, – "word / Word,". It is not the only place in the Qur'an. For example, in surah *An-Nisa* 4:171 we find:
"*The Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, is God's messenger and His word/ Word".*
Many Islamic translations try to town own the meaning of this verse, e.g. by adding "no more than", or "but (a messenger)" and translating the last clause by "and a soul created by Him". This may again be a proof of a polemic against the Christian notion of Jesus Christ as the Logos. Still, the phrase "*distinguished in this world and the Hereafter*" refers to exclusively to Jesus – no one else enjoys the privilege of being called thus. And according to our verse 3:45, Mary, being a woman, takes such a high and honorable position that God addresses her.
Note also that Jesus receives his name before birth. It happens more often in the Qur'an that God gives the names of saints even before they have been born.

3:46 – "*He will speak to the people in the cradle and in maturity and will be of the righteous.*"

According to the Qur'an, Jesus' very first miracle was his speech to the people from the cradle. Another reference to Jesus speaking in the cradle can be found in surah *Maryam* 19:28-34.[364] The second prediction tells us that Jesus will preach in his adulthood. According to the logic of the story, if God grants Mary a virgin birth, He can also allow her son to speak even in the cradle. If God wishes to protect a person from unfounded accusations, He can give a speechless baby the power of speech.

[364] Mary is associated with Miriam, Aaron's sister. "O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a wicked man nor was thy mother a harlot." Then she pointed to him. They said: "How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?" He said: "I am indeed a servant of Allah. He has given me the Book and has made me a prophet. And has made me blessed wheresoever I may be and has enjoined upon me prayer and almsgiving so long as I remain alive, And (has made me) dutiful toward her who bore me, and hath not made me arrogant, unblest. Peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive! Such was Jesus, son of Mary: (this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt." (Qur'an 19:28-34).

3:47 – "*She said,* "*My Lord, how will I have a child when no man has touched me?*" *[The angel] said,* "*Such is Allah; He creates what He wills. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it,* '*Be,*' *and it is.*"

This verse presents Mary's astonishment and confusion upon hearing the divine message that she would bear a child despite being a virgin. Her question, "*how will I have a child when no man has touched me?*" reflects a natural human response to an apparently impossible situation.

The phrase *'Be,' and it is* (*Kun fayakoon*) is a powerful expression of the concept of divine command. God can deprive a thing of its essential attribute or give it some special meaning. Zechariah received a very clear answer: "*God does all that pleases Him.*" Mary hears a slightly different answer: "*God creates what He is willing to create*." The difference in meaning between "to do" and "to create" is explained in the Qur'an to underline that when a woman bears a child without sexual intercourse, that is a bigger miracle than the birth of an heir to an elderly couple.

4.1.2. The broader context of the stories from the Qur'an.

According to the surah *Al Imran*, the righteous Maryam and her family had always been known as deeply religious people, sincerely devoted to God. Mary is introduced as the daughter of Imran and his wife, who prays, *I have named her Mary, and I seek refuge for her in You, and [for her descendants from Satan, the expelled [from the mercy of Allah] the outcast* (Qur'an 3:36). This description occurs in *Al Imran*, where the Qur'an declares that God selected Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of Imran above all others (Qur'an 3:33).[365] Thereafter the

[365] "Indeed, Allah chose Adam and Noah and the family of Abraham and the family of 'Imran over the worlds." (Qur'an 3:33).

Qur'an turns to Imran's wife, and, without any further introduction, relates how she dedicated her unborn child to God (Qur'an 3.35[366]). The Qur'an here, in 3:36,[367] implies that Imran's wife was not only surprised to discover that her child was a girl, but was also disappointed. The description of Mary's birth in *Al Imran* is followed by allusion to her extraordinary upbringing (Qur'an 3.37[368]). At the same time, the Qur'an does not provide any information regarding whether Imran was alive or dead before Mary's birth.

Surah *Maryam* can be divided into three sections: verses 2-40, 41-65, and 66-98. The first section recounts the narrative of the prophet Zechariah and the birth of his son, and the story of Mary and the birth of Jesus. The second part tells of Abraham's departure from his family's idolatrous ways and recounts the stories of many other prophets. The last part describes the Day of Judgment.[369] This surah primarily focuses on the aspects of prophethood. Another topic in surah *Maryam* constitutes the divine missions of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.

The figure of Mary and the Annunciation story occupy a key place in the Qur'an. "The lyrical depiction of Mary is by far the most complex and nuanced female portrait in the Qur'an, where the main motifs are sketched in tones of respect and sentiment in surahs three and nineteen (*Al Imran* and *Maryam*)."[370] Surah *Al*

[366] "[Mention, O Muhammad], when the wife of 'Imran said, "My Lord, indeed I have pledged to You what is in my womb, consecrated [for Your service], so accept this from me. Indeed, You are the Hearing, the Knowing." See for more Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 130.
[367] But when she delivered her, she said, "My Lord, I have delivered a female." And Allah was most knowing of what she delivered, "And the male is not like the female. And I have named her Mary, and I seek refuge for her in You and [for] her descendants from Satan, the expelled [from the mercy of Allah]." (Qur'an 3:36).
[368] So, her Lord accepted her with good acceptance and caused her to grow in a good manner and put her in the care of Zechariah. Every time Zechariah entered upon her in the prayer chamber, he found with her provision. He said, "O Mary, from where is this [coming] to you?" She said, "It is from Allah. Indeed, Allah provides for whom He wills without account." (Qur'an 3:37).
[369] *The Meaning of Surah 19 Maryam (Mary from the Holy Qur'an: Bilingual Edition English & Spanish)* (Jannah Firdaus Mediapro, 2018), 5.
[370] Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Chosen of All Women: Mary and Fatima in Qur'anic Exegesis." *Islamochristiana* 7 (1981): 201.

Imran and *Maryam* are indeed the main sources for this. In addition, references to Mary are "scattered" throughout the Qur'an. However, with respect to the Annunciation story, we should firstly address the broader context of the story, as told in surah *Al Imran* and surah *Maryam.*

Mary (in Arabic, Maryam the daughter of Imran) is the only woman mentioned by name in the entire Qur'an. In addition, it is worthwhile to note that Mary is one among only eight people honored with a chapter bearing their name. In the Qur'an, Jesus and Mary hold a very high and exalted status. Mary is mentioned by name in the Qur'an 34 times in 32 verses. It is interesting that of these verses, 23 define Mary as the mother of Jesus (Isa, ibn Maryam), but do not provide any further information about her.

Verse 23 vividly relates the pains of parturition, and subsequent verses recount the miraculous nourishment which Mary received while giving birth. This entire section of the Qur'an is remarkable for its dramatic effect and humane tone.[371] Of the remaining eleven references, six are part of the account of Mary's own birth and the announcement of her pregnancy as told in Qur'an 3:35-47.

Chapter 19 of the Qur'an, which contains another passage that speaks of the birth of Jesus, is named after Mary.[372] The Qur'an does not usually mention names of individuals unless they are prophets. When a name is mentioned, it is usually meant to honor the person and to show the exalted status. The Qur'an mentions many great women, such as the mother of Moses or Pharaoh's wife. Mary, though not explicitly described as a prophet in the Qur'an, is mentioned with a reverence that is reserved only for the most exalted prophets.[373] Among all figures in the Qur'an, only

[371] Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Chosen of All Women: Mary and Fatima in Qur'anic Exegesis*, 201.
[372] John Kaltner and Younus Mirza, *The Bible and The Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 112.
[373] Ejaz Naqvi, *The Quran: With or Against the Bible?* (Bloomington, IN, 2014), 202.

the names of Moses, Abraham, and Noah are cited more frequently than Mary's.[374] Qur'an 5:75[375] honors Mary with the title *siddiqa*, "a supporter of the truth," pointing to her sincerity as a true believer and a righteous woman of pious character, a paragon of chastity.[376]

The Biblical account of the Annunciation story

4.2.1 A close reading of the Biblical account of the Annunciation story – Luke 1:26-35.

The Biblical story of Mary occurs in the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Matthew 1:18–23, with a separate brief Annunciation given to Joseph. The main section of the Annunciation story in the synoptics consists of the Gospel of Luke 1:26-35.

The Annunciation story from the Gospel of Luke 1:26-35:

"*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said,* "*Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.*" *But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her,* "*Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your*

[374] John Kaltner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac: An Introduction to the Qur'an for Bible Readers* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1989), 207.

[375] "The Messiah, son of Mary, was not but a messenger; [other] messengers have passed on before him. And his mother was a supporter of truth. They both used to eat food. Look how We make clear to them the signs; then look how they are deluded." (Qur'an 5:75).

[376] a) *O Mary! Worship Your Lord devoutly: Prostrate yourself, and bow down (in prayer) with those who bow down.* (Qur'an 3:43).
b) And Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into (her body) of Ours spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Revelations, and was one of the devout (servant). (Qur'an 66:12).
c) And (remember) who guarded her chastity: We breathed into her of Our spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples. (Qur'an 21:91).

womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." *Mary said to the angel,* "*How can this be, since I am a virgin?*" *The angel said to her,* "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.*"

Luke 1:26 – "*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth.*"

The temporal reference in v.26 refers to "the six months" of Elizabeth's pregnancy and in this way connects the Annunciations of John the Baptist and Jesus. The archangel Gabriel is the same angel who announced the conception of John the Baptist (Luke 1:19).

Luke 1:27-28 – "*To a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said,* '*Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.*'"

To be thus greeted implies an exalted status among women. This calls to mind the parallel, or rather the contrasting episode, from the Old Testament. God spoke to Eve: "*Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow, thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee*" (Gen. 3:16). Now the angel announces to the woman: "*Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee".* According to several theologians, these words were the first blessed "announcement" to humankind after

the Fall. But a close reading should not be overly theological: suffice it to state here that the greeting renders a special dignity to Mary.

Luke 1:29 – "*But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be*."

Mary was confused when she heard the angel's words because of the sudden appearance of the heavenly messenger. Zechariah was confused too, when the angel appeared in front of him in the temple to announce the birth of a son – the Forerunner of Christ. Zechariah felt fear and mistrust, and Mary was embarrassed, not because of the appearance of the angel, but because of his greeting – she couldn`t understand the meaning of that sign.

Luke 1:30 – "*The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.*"

The angel, firstly, soothes her heart from fear, so that she accepts the divine answer in a calm position; for in a state of embarrassment, she could not properly have listened to the message. Then the angel says: "*You have found favor from God.*" For to be gracious means to receive grace from God, that is, to be agreeable to God. However, this happiness is common, for many others have also received grace from God, but the salutation brought to Mary is unique. First of all, the angel keeps her heart calm to receive God's answer in an imperturbable position, because, in a state of embarrassment, she may not properly comprehend all that is happening with her. Later the angel said to Mary: "*You have found grace with God*."

Luke 1:31 – "*And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.*"

A parallel with the prophet Isaiah 7:14 is visible here: *Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a young woman shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*" No other woman has ever received such a blessing. Verse 31 does not explicitly say anything about virginal conception and some scholars interpret it as referring to a normal pregnancy.

Luke 1:32-33 – "*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*"

According to this account, there is only One, who is the Son of God. Here we can take into account how Scripture refers to the house of Jacob, this is: the descendance from the twelve sons of the patriarch Jacob, and in addition the successor of king David, representing Messianic status. These verses affirm the divinity of Jesus, confirming that His birth from Mary was promised in Old Testament. Luke wants to ensure we understand why she is favored and blessed. One may suggest *that the throne of David* in this verse is connected to messianic passage from 2 Samuel 7:8-16, that confirms Jesus as the realization of the prophecy by identifying Him as Messiah.[377]

Luke 1:34-35 – "*Mary said to the angel,* "*How can this be, since I am a virgin?*" *The angel said to her,* "*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.*""

[377] Richard Thomas France, *Luke: Teach the Text Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 17.

The Virgin Mary said: "*How can this be*?" We may suppose that she asked this not because she did not believe, but because she genuinely wished to receive an answer. The angel therefore forgives her and does not condemn her, as the angel did with Zechariah. Her question was not a manifestation of disbelief, as it was with Zechariah (vv. 18–20), but an indication of natural perplexity. The Virgin Mary believed in the words of the angel, as the Holy Spirit himself testified through the mouth of the righteous Elizabeth (1:45), and therefore she does not require a sign from the angel, in contrast with the demand by the priest Zechariah. Her invariable love for the purity of virginity prompts her to ask the angel: "*How can this be, since I am a virgin?"*

4.2.2. The broader context of the Biblical account of the Annunciation story – Luke 1:26-35.

The Virgin Mary is portrayed in the Gospels as a person who had been chosen by God to bear His son. She is already betrothed to Joseph in what appears to be a normal marriage arrangement and the angel Gabriel appears to her in Luke 1:26-38 explaining that she will bear a child despite being a παρθένος or "virgin" (Luke 1:27).[378] To begin with, it is important to present the structure of the Gospel of Luke, so as to realize the significance of the Annunciation story.

A. 1:1-4 Prologue

B. 1:5-2:52 Early years narrative

C. 3:1-9:50 Jesus and His ministry in Galilea

D. 9:51-19:27 Road to Jerusalem

E. 19:28-21:38 Ministry in Jerusalem

[378] Chalsi Eastman, "Mary's Honour in *The Protoevangelium of James*" (master's thesis, University of Waterloo, 2016), 47, http://hdl.handle.net/10012/10700.

F. 22:1-23:56 The Last Supper, His death and resurrection

G. 22:1-24:53 The appearance of the Risen Jesus in Jerusalem[379]

The verse Lk. 1:26-35 appears in the context of the early years narrative. The first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke can be briefly outlined in this way:

a) The Annunciation to Zechariah (1:5-25), and to Mary (1:26-38), the visit of Mary to Elizabeth, the song of Mary (1:39-56).

b) The births: of John – circumcision – the song of Zechariah (1:57-80); of Jesus – circumcision – the song of Simeon (2:1-40); visit of Jesus and family to the temple (2:41-52).[380]

Luke records Jesus' birth from Mary's point of view, while Matthew records the birth from Joseph's perspective.

The Gospel of Luke gives us a broader historical perspective at the time of Jesus compared to the other Gospels. Notably, Luke recounts more historical facts about Jesus in the early years than do the other Evangelists. The introduction of the Lukan story is very elaborate, particularly in the prologue (1:5-2:52), where Luke's prose approaches poetry. Reading Luke's prologue, we should remember that it was written not before, but after the rest of Luke-Acts and that it represents Luke's most mature reflection on "*the events that have been fulfilled among us*" (1:1).[381]

Generally speaking, such Annunciation stories are well-known in the Bible. Thus, there is the announcement of the birth of Isaac (Genesis 17) and that of the birth of Samson (Judges 13).[382] Luke opens the story of the Annunciation by situating the event in time: "*In the sixth month*." That is also how he began the previous story, the Annunciation to Zechariah: "*In the days of Herod, King of Judea*" (1:5). And it

[379] Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Moscow: BBI, 2007), 260.
[380] Ibid., 260.
[381] Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Annunciation to Mary: A Story of Faith Luke 1:26-38* (2004), 35.
[382] Ibid., 36.

is how he begins the next story, Mary's Visitation to Elizabeth: "*During those days*" (1:39). Every story in the prologue begins like this. The Annunciation story opened a new moment in salvation history. Just as the opening expression of the story of the Annunciation to Mary, "*in the sixth month*," the appearance of the angel Gabriel connects the story of the Annunciation to Mary with the story of the Annunciation to Zechariah, making the two events part of the same story.

4.3. The Annunciation story: questions of a Catholic theologian posed to the Qur'an.

Can we consider the story of Mary in the Qur'an as relevant for Catholic theology or even as revelation?

The figure of Mary is extensively presented in the Qur'an. This Islamic heritage is especially significant for me as a Christian. It is evident that there are numerous parallels between the Christian and the Islamic narratives about Mary. The Qur'an even presents some narrative elements that are lacking in the Bible. What does it mean for me as a theologian that Mary appears so often in the Qur'an, even more often than in the Bible?

Mary is portrayed with special devotion in Islam. Such special veneration is striking to me as a Catholic theologian and it makes me realize that veneration of Mary may be more unanimous in Islam than in Christianity, where differences exist between Christians in this regard, such as between Catholic and Protestant. There are substantial theological and dogmatic differences between the attitude toward Mary among Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants. Having said that, and if we accept that the Qur'an includes "additional" information about Mary that might be significant and useful for Christianity (for example, the story of the Presentation of

Mary in the prayer chamber), does this mean that we can consider the Qur'an as revelation? We could follow the spirit of Nostra Aetate §3, which says that Muslims believe in the one true God and that the Church appreciates their devotion to Mary: "They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion". The alternative from the past, to consider the Qur'anic account as heretical and distorted, does not seem viable, at least not when it concerns the accounts of Mary. Should we then compare the Qur'anic account of Mary with the status of apocryphal gospels, with which, as we will note later on, it shows a striking resemblance? However, in spite of the considerable influence that the apocryphal gospels have exercised upon the life and the art of the Church, they have often been branded as heretical as well. Hence the question of the status of the Qur'an for Christians is a formidable theological challenge that brings us to the second question.

How do we evaluate the passages on Mary in the apocryphal gospels and what consequences does this have for our appreciation of similar stories about Mary in the Qur'an?

The Qur'an contains numerous narratives about Mary. Some of them have no equivalent in the Bible, which makes the Qur'anic accounts both significant and puzzling for me as a Christian theologian. It is obvious that many Islamic texts, in various ways, were influenced by apocryphal literature on the one hand, and the Christian tradition itself on the other. We may accept that the figure of Mary goes far beyond the New Testament narratives and Christian tradition. This opens both interreligious and intrareligious perspectives and forms an important theme for dialogue. At the same time, it raises a significant theological issue. Although the Church has rejected numerous apocryphal texts by denying them the status of revelation (some of these texts are similar to the Qur'anic accounts), the Church has

also judged that apocryphal texts may contain useful and edifying information for Christianity. The similarity between the narratives on Mary and Annunciation stories in the Bible, in apocryphal gospels and in the Qur'an therefore ask for more in-depth historical research. At the same time, and more importantly for us, this raises the theological question of the authority of apocryphal texts for Christian theology.

How do I as a Christian theologian evaluate the Islamic idea that Mary can be compared to some other women?

The figure of Mary plays an important role in Islam. Numerous verses from the Qur'an and secondary sources, such as *sunnah* or *hadith*, confirm it. Furthermore, we have seen that there is a debate within Islam on whether the title of prophet can be granted to Mary. Mary is presented as one of the greatest women in the Qur'an. Surprisingly, a similar role is given to Mary in modern Christian theology, especially in the theological debate about the importance of the Biblical matriarchate. Still, we should note the differences as well: whereas in Christianity, Mary is connected to the women who lived before her, in Islam the greatest women of all time live after Mary. In Christianity, the Jewishness of Mary is especially emphasized by connecting her to the women in the Hebrew Bible, whereas in the past this element was deemed less important for Christian theology. In a way, Mary was viewed as a Christian woman or even portrayed as a religious nun, rather than as a Jewish woman. In Islam, a similar process takes place: Mary is Islamicized by comparing her to Islamic women who lived after her. This constitutes a theological puzzle: how should this be evaluated? Should both these forms of adapting Mary to later religious tradition be rejected in favor of an "original" Jewish Mary, who, ironically, does not play a role in Jewish religion? Again, this question is relevant in order to deepen my understanding of Mary and her distinctive role in the salvation of Christians and

Muslims respectively. Again, we face the theological challenge whether to accept Islamic piety of Mary as a relevant theological fact.

What are the implications of Mary's association with prayer and with the temple?

The implications of Mary's association with prayer are profound enough in the Qur'an. Her association with the temple, possibly mentioned in Qur'an 3:45-48 and Qur'an 19:11, underscores Mary's dedication to a life of piety and divine service from a young age, symbolizing purity and devotion. Simultaneously, her spiritual significance and elevated status is confirmed against the background of the three Abrahamic religions. This connection elevates her as a model of faith and obedience, revered not only for her role as the mother of Jesus but also as an exemplar of sanctity and prayer. Furthermore, alongside the "Islamicized" portrayal of Mary, the context of the temple also raises questions about Mary's Jewish background, which holds significant importance for Christians. What is the relevance of the Jewish background in comparison to the Islamized of Mary, in which the Jewish background features as well?

How should Catholic theology evaluate the fact that according to one version the Annunciation to Mary happens through God's Spirit (Qur'an 19:17)? Is it theologically possible to view the Holy Spirit as uniting Christians and Muslims?

The Qur'an repeatedly associates the *Rūh* with God's life-giving and activity. God breathes His Spirit into Adam, making him a living being (Qur'an 15:28–29; 38:71–72). The Spirit is likewise present at the Annunciation to Mary, and the conception of Jesus is attributed to the action of God's Spirit (Qur'an 19:17; 21:19; 66:12). The *Rūḥ* also inspires the prophets and is linked with the transmission of

revelation to Muhammad (Qur'an 16:102; 97:4). In several passages, the Spirit is closely associated with Jesus' prophetic role and miraculous works (Qur'an 2:87, 253; 5:110). Yet, alongside this emphasis on the Spirit, the Qur'an at times describes the Annunciation in terms of an angelic visitation (Qur'an 3:42, 45). How, then, should Catholic theology evaluate the fact that at least one Qur'anic version places the Spirit at the heart of this decisive moment in salvation history?

This question is significant because it touches on the possibility of convergence between Christian and Muslim understandings of divine action. In Christian theology, the Holy Spirit is not only the Giver of life and the Inspirer of the prophets but also the One who unites the conception of Christ with the mission of the Church. The New Testament underscores this connection: the Spirit overshadowing Mary (Luke 1:35), the descent at Jesus' baptism (John 1:32), the promise of the Paraclete (John 14:26), and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). Catholic tradition thus sees the Spirit as inseparably bound to the mystery of Christ.

The Qur'an's reference to the Spirit in connection with Mary (Qur'an 19:17), however, invites a further question: can Christian theology recognize this testimony as an authentic witness to the Spirit's activity outside the visible boundaries of the Church? If Christians confess that the Spirit "blows where He wills" (John 3:8), would it be theologically possible to view the Spirit's role in the Qur'anic Annunciation as a sign of God's work in Islam? This would not imply equating the Qur'an with Christian Scripture or resolving the deep differences concerning the Trinity and Christology. Yet it raises the possibility that the Spirit may be encountered in the faith and devotion of Muslims, particularly in their reverence for Mary and in their recognition of Jesus as uniquely sustained by God's Spirit.

4.4. The Annunciation story: theological reflection on the Qur'anic story.

4.4.1. *Can we consider the story of Mary in the Qur'an as relevant for Catholic theology or even as revelation?*

The figure of Mary, her religious status, and her exemplary piety are clearly presented in Islam. The information about Mary's genealogy and childhood is quite detailed: God has predestined Mary and has purified her; thus, it is not surprising that the Islamic religion recognizes the virgin birth. The virgin birth is even beyond dispute, according to the Qur'an. According to the Qur'an, Mary grows up under direct divine protection while nourished daily by angels, and her childhood is surrounded by miracles. Her father is identified as Imran, the person after whom surah 3 is named. Interestingly, Mary's mother is unnamed in the Qur'an. It happens more frequently that names in the Qur'an differ from those in the Bible or in the apocryphal gospels. This is also the case with the name Imran, which is closer to Amram (the father of Miriam, Aaron, and Moses) than to Joachim, Mary's father in the Protoevangelium of James. Even Mary herself is referred to as "*the sister of Aaron*" (Qur'an 19:28), reflecting possible confusion with Miriam, although Muslims will point out that the terms brother and sister may denote all kinds of kinship. Indeed, parallels can be drawn between Miriam and Mary, as both fulfill a prophetic role and both safeguard a child who is destined to become a liberator.

In the Qur'an, the story of Mary, who is surrounded by miracles of divine favor, is intertwined with that of her guardian, the prophet Zechariah.[383] An important reference to Zechariah can be found in Qur'an 3:38-41, where an angel foretells the birth of his son John the Baptist and then rebukes Zechariah for asking the angel for a sign as proof. There is a close relation in the Qur'an between the birth

[383] Barbara Freyer Stowasser, "Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation," *Islamochristiana* 69 (1994): 67.

of Yahya / John the Baptist and Jesus, because of the close connection between these two storylines, both supported by miracles. The birth of John from an elderly father and a barren mother was already a miracle, but the birth of Jesus, who had no father at all, should be considered an even greater miracle. The Qur'an states that wisdom and prophetic gifts might be given to a person even from their early years, or even from the cradle, as was the case with Jesus. Both stories are seen as a manifestation of the power of God. However, this material is not connected with the birth of Jesus in any Christian infancy sources.[384] In addition, the story of Mary is intertwined throughout the Qur'an with the birth of Yahya to Elizabeth and Zechariah.[385] The Qur'anic announcement of the angel regarding the birth of John (Qur'an 3:39) is almost identical to that of the birth of Jesus (Qur'an 3:35). The words of Zechariah and Mary, questioning the possibility of such an extraordinary birth are also very similar (Qur'an 3:40 // Qur'an 3:47).[386] Still, Islamic commentators emphasize the difference between the two reactions, by pointing out the lack of belief in Zechariah, whereas Mary only inquires how things will happen.

This explicit presence of the Annunciation story, described with even more details than in the Bible, may be greeted with joy by a Catholic theologian. This prompts me also to turn to the Bible again and to reflect upon its theological sources and implications. There are several topics in the Qur'anic account of Mary that are not presented or just briefly mentioned in the Bible, but that have been strongly emphasized in subsequent Christian theology. What does this constellation imply for a Christian theologian? I should acknowledge as a Catholic theologian that Mary appears far more frequently in the Qur'anic text than in the entire New Testament.[387]

[384] Barbara Freyer Stowasser, "Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation," *Islamochristiana* 69 (1994): 67.
[385] Bahar Davary, "Mary in Islam: 'No Man Could Be Like This Woman'," *New Theological Review* (2010): 29.
[386] Hakkı Yılmaz, *Mary and Jesus in the Qur'an* (Istanbul: Fecr Publishing, 2010), 3.
[387] Barbara Freyer Stowasser, "Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation," 67.

In the New Testament, Mary is mentioned especially in the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke, but she is mentioned only incidentally in the remainder of the Gospels. Still, she is a central figure and symbol in Christianity. In the birth narratives of the canonical Gospels, Mary is presented as a virgin of child-bearing age (at least in Matthew), betrothed to Joseph, and becoming a dedicated mother.[388] The Gospel of Luke mentions her name twelve times, whereas the Gospel of Matthew refers to her by name only five times. Mary is presented in the Gospel of Matthew as the woman from whom Jesus must be born to become Joseph's earthly/adopted child and to be part of the genealogical line of king David.[389] In the Gospel of Mark, Mary is mentioned by name only once. In other passages, Mary is addressed only in connection to Jesus.[390] John's Gospel does not mention Mary by name at all, although there is a reference to her as "the mother of Jesus."

Reflecting on the idea of the virginity of Mary in the Gospel of Matthew, we may realize that its significance is substantially different from that in the Qur'an. The Biblical story wants to highlight the divine status of Jesus and God's involvement in Mary's pregnancy. The story is focused on Jesus, not on Mary as such. Although later developments in Christianity may have extolled Mary's virginity in such a way that the connection with Jesus as Son of God may have become somewhat obscured, the Biblical foundation of the virgin birth is undoubtedly Christ-centered. We should note also that in the tradition of icon representations, Mary is the *Hodegetria*, pointing towards Jesus, not to herself. Mary's virginity should be understood in the same vein, as pointing toward Jesus as

[388] Chalsi Eastman, *Mary's Honour in the Protoevangelium of James* (master's thesis, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Canada, 2016), 48.
[389] Ibid., 48.
[390] Mark 6:3 "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him."

the Son of God. Obviously, this is not the case in the Qur'an, for the simple reason that Jesus is not considered the Son of God. Hence Mary's status remains that of "*the chosen one among women"*, but the Christocentric meaning of her virginity is obscured. Instead, the emphasis in Islam is on Mary's purity – or even her purity as an inherent trait.

This gives us a fine example of how interreligious dialogue may be fruitful for intrareligious dialogue and vice versa. In a way, Protestant criticism of Catholic veneration of Mary has more or less the same aim: Protestants fear that Mary's lofty status might obscure the paramount and unique role of Jesus as Redeemer of humankind. Although the general reluctance in Protestantism (Lutheranism excepted) when it comes to the veneration of Mary does not constitute a particular challenge for Catholic theology in my perception, the theological argument does. Hence the interreligious challenge of the Qur'anic view of Mary's virginity for Christian theology is related to a certain extent to the intrareligious challenge of the theological debate between Catholicism and Protestantism (although Protestant theologians are not very much inclined to acknowledge a basic similarity between the Islamic view of Mary and their own view, both considering Mary's virginity as an inherent trait, the first accepting it, the last rejecting it). It may well be that the Protestant reluctance concerning Mary evaporates when Protestants start to realize how highly Mary is valued in Islam. A certain "jealousy" may contribute to a more profound theology of Mary in Protestantism.

Furthermore, the profound esteem of Orthodox Christians and Eastern Catholics in the Middle East for the Virgin Mary is well known. There are many

places of devotion and pilgrimage[391] dedicated to Mary in the Middle East, especially in Egypt and Lebanon, often shared by Muslim and Christian women. For some Christians, devotion to Mary as the *Theotokos* constitutes an integral part of their liturgical life.[392] In Lebanon, the feast of the Assumption of Mary known as *Eid Al Saydeh*, has been a national holiday since 2010. This is obviously a unique practice, one in which Christians and Muslims not only join because of solidarity or as an interreligious meeting, but in which they celebrate and pray to Mary together, or at least in each other's presence.

We can see also how strongly the cult of Mary is embedded in the core of Eastern Christian tradition when it comes to art and rituals. There is a tremendous richness of Marian thought in the liturgy.[393] In the Coptic Church, Mary is presented as the chosen one. In the liturgy in particular, poetical hymns and songs, so-called *theotokia*, play a central role.[394] The Byzantine liturgy has a rich heritage of Marian sacred art and Marian feasts.[395] In addition, many liturgical prayers are dedicated to her.[396] In contrast to the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Christianity does not

[391] The great example is the celebration of Nativity of Mary, which plays a significant role in the religious life of Christians and Muslims in Egypt. Another example are the apparitions of Zeitun, in the spring of 1968, and of 'Ard Babadeblu Shubra, in 1986, where apparitions of the Virgin Mary were attested both by Christians and by Muslims. See for more Otto Friedrich Meinardus, "A Note on the Apparition of the Holy Virgin in the Spring of 1986," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 25, no. 4 (1986): 337.

[392] See more J. W. McPherson, *The Moulids of Egypt (Egyptian Saints-days)* (Cairo: Ptd. N.M. Press, 1941).

[393] "Today, the most pure temple of the Savior, the precious bridal chamber and Virgin, the sacred treasure of God, enters the house of the Lord, bringing the grace of the Divine Spirit. The Angels of God praise her. She is the heavenly tabernacle." (The Kontakion of the Entrance of the Theotokos).
"All of creation rejoices in you, O full of grace: the assembly of angels and the human race. You are a sanctified temple and a spiritual paradise, the glory from whom God was incarnate and became a child; our God, existing before all ages. He made your womb a throne, and your body more spacious than the heavens. All of creation rejoices in you, O full of grace. Glory to you." (The Divine Liturgy of saint Basil the Great).

[394] Here we can add the House of the Virgin Mary at Ephesus, where Muslim and Christian women pray together. See more in Otto Friedrich Meinardus, "The Virgin Mary as Mediatrix Between Christians and Muslims in the Middle East," *Marian Studies* 47 (1996): 97.

[395] The figure of Mary, who is connected with the mystery of Jesus, is significant to the Eastern Christian tradition.

[396] See more Alexander Schmemann, "Mary in Eastern Liturgy," *Marian Studies* 19 (1968): 86.

officially recognize several specific dogmas[397] on Mary, such as the Immaculate Conception and Mary's Assumption into Heaven. The fact that these theological convictions are not officially recognized as dogmas does not mean, however, that they do not play a role in the faith of the believers, or are rejected, on the contrary.

According to Byzantine liturgical tradition, there are twelve major feasts, four of which are dedicated to Mary: The Annunciation, the Nativity of the Virgin, the Presentation of the *Theotokos* in the Temple, and the Dormition. Three of the four liturgical feasts of Mary are similar to motifs in apocryphal literature. In addition, there are various liturgical traditions that refer to the events of the *Entrance of the Virgin Mary in the Temple*, mostly in Armenian and Georgian sources, but it is outside the scope of this study to provide a detailed analysis of these. This story is likewise similar to that in apocryphal gospels. Hence there is a strong resemblance between Qur'anic accounts of Mary and devotion to Mary in the Eastern Orthodox liturgy, which calls for further reflection.

4.4.2. *How do we evaluate the apocryphal gospels on Mary and what consequences does this have for our appreciation of similar stories about Mary in the Qur'an?*

As was stated above, the Annunciation story is reported twice in the Qur'anic text, in 19:16-35 and 3:42-7, with remarkable variations. The Annunciation is also found in the Gospel of Luke and the Protoevangelium of James. Surah Maryam 19:16-22 agrees on the major themes and apparently originates in the Gospel of Luke 1:26-38, whereas surah *Al-Imran* 3:45-49 may have been influenced by the

[397] Jan Knappert in his article "The Legend of the Virgin Mary in Islam", and Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad in their article 'The Virgin Mary in Islamic Tradition', both discuss the understanding of Jesus' birth from the Virgin Mary, which is a central dogma in Christian theology. See more Bilal Gökkir, *Form and Structure of Surah Maryam: A Study From Unity of Surah Perspective* (University of Süleyman Demirel, 2006), 6.

Protoevangelium of James. It should be noted, however, that historical influences are not as such authoritative for Muslims; nor do they completely solve the question of the theological meaning of the Qur'anic accounts of Mary for Christian theology.

Suleiman A. Mourad, in his article "On the Qur'anic Stories about Mary and Jesus", points out the parallels between the Gospel of Luke and surah Maryam (Qur'an 19). The Gospel of Luke 1:26-8 and surah *Maryam* 19:17 both relate how God sends the angel Gabriel to Mary. Mary expresses her fear at his appearance (Luke 1:29 // Qur'an 19:18); the angel announces to Mary that she will conceive a son (Luke 1:30-1 // Qur'an 19:19), and Mary doubts the possibility of pregnancy (Luke 1:34 // Qur'an 19:20).[398]

It is also surprising how many elements the Annunciation story in the *Protoevangelium of James* and surah *Al Imran* share. The following parallels between the Qur'anic story and the Protoevangelium of James can be pointed out:

- *Mary's chosenness* (Protoevangelium of James 11:1 // Qur'an 3:42)
- *Mary doubts the angel's speech* (Protoevangelium of James 11:2 // Qur'an 3:47)
- *Mary will conceive the word of God* (Protoevangelium of James 11:2 // Qur'an 3:45)
- *Mary receives instructions on how to name the child* (Protoevangelium of James 11:3 // Qur'an 3:45).

These two Qur'anic stories can be better understood if we examine still other parallel elements. Thus, there is the story of Jesus' presentation in the temple by Mary, which can be found both in the Protoevangelium of James 15:2 and in Qur'an 3:37. In the Gospel of Luke 2:21-40, the presentation of Jesus in the Temple

[398] Suleiman Ali Mourad, "On the Quranic Stories about Mary and Jesus," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 1 (1999): 17.

happened at the occasion of his circumcision. However, in the Protoevangelium of James, a kind of presentation occurs during Mary's pregnancy when the high priest questions her regarding her condition.[399] Just as the temple accepted Mary and permitted her to live in the holy place, so did the *Theotokos* receive Christ and consented to His dwelling in her womb.[400] The metaphor of the temple used for a person also occurs in the New Testament. Paul in 1 Cor. 6:19 regards the body of every believer as a temple of the Holy Spirit, and this became an important theme throughout later centuries.[401] The temple is a type of the Church in Christianity and of the prayer chamber in the Qur'an. The temple / the prayer chamber is the place of God's Spirit and hence becomes a type of the Virgin Mary as well. The significance of typology such as this has been highlighted by Angelika Neuwirth, especially in relation to the temple.[402] The narrative emphasis upon the temple is already obvious in the whole narrative of Luke 1, but is even stronger in the Proto-gospel of James 10-11. The Annunciation there takes place in the direct vicinity of the temple, comparable to the Qur'anic version of the Annunciation in the prayer niche (*mihrab*). In addition, Mary's own female body serves as the presence of the Holy Spirit.[403] It is striking how close Neuwirth approaches traditional theological themes in insisting upon a proper approach to the Qur'anic text.[404] In historical-critical

[399] Suleiman Ali Mourad, "On the Quranic Stories about Mary and Jesus," 22.

[400] Maura Hearden and Virginia M. Kimball, eds., *Mary for the Love and Glory of God: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 72.

[401] Ibid., 71.

[402] In the next chapter we will extensively demonstrate the long neglected significance of typology in relation to Moses.

[403] Cp. the Litany of Mary, or litany of Loreto, in the Roman Catholic liturgy in which Mary is invoked as Ark of the Covenant, in which the divine presence rests: Tower of David, pray for us./ Tower of ivory, pray for us./ House of gold, pray for us./Ark of the covenant, pray for us. The Akathistos hymn (lit. The hymn during which one does not sit), is even more exuberant: Rejoice, Tabernacle of God the Logos / Rejoice, holy one, holier than the holies / Rejoice, Ark that was gilt by the Spirit.

[404] Angelika Neuwirth and Dirk Hartwig, "The Virgin Mary in the Liturgical Fabric of the Qur'an: On the Necessity to Take Qur'anic Philology Seriously," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 34, no. 2 (2024): 127-191. See for early Marian devotions also Stephen Shoemaker, "Mary", in *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity,* vol. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 455–463.

research the importance of typology has often been undervalued. Mary as the sister of Aaron (Qur'an 19:28) does not only render Miriam into a type of Mary, but also enhances Mary's cultic status: Aaron was the high priest and the initiator of the Aaronic priesthood in Judaism.

The priest Zechariah as the mentor of Mary enhances the cultic aspect even more. In the time of the New Testament, a Jewish priest was supposed to serve only a limited time of the year, corresponding to a specific "division" in Palestine, where the priest lived and who had to go to Jerusalem, when it was his turn (cp. 1 Chron. 24 and Lk. 18). This explains why Zechariah, according to the New Testament, did not live in the vicinity of the temple. However, due to an increasing attentiveness to a cultic notion of holiness, already the Proto-gospel of James seems to suggest that Zechariah actually lived near or in the temple and served not just as priest, but even as high-priest. Likewise, the Qur'an portrays Zechariah as permanently in the precincts of the *mihrab*.

The casting of lots ("pens") in order to determine who would be the guardian of the young Mary explains why Zechariah ultimately received that honor. In the Proto-gospel of James, the casting of lots charged Joseph with that responsibility, but the Qur'an has obscured Joseph's role altogether.[405]

Still, there are numerous narratives about Mary in the Qur'an that are absent in the Bible. Some of the Qur'anic accounts were influenced by the apocryphal Christian literature and Christian tradition. Beyond the *canonical* texts of the Bible, numerous writings contain passages on Mary which go far beyond the New Testament or even, in some cases, contradict it.[406] When asking the (intrareligious) question about the relevance of the apocryphal literature for the Bible, we often

[405] In post-Qur'anic literature, the casting of lots in relation to Joseph resurfaces.
[406] Jens Schröter, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Jesus Tradition Outside the Bible* (Early Christian Apocrypha 9, 2021), 1.

encounter an attitude of downplaying or qualifying this relevance. The formation of the canon of the Bible *authorized* these texts as revelation, and other texts that were not included in the canon were later rejected by the Church[407] and Church Fathers.[408] One of the most significant sources on the question of the status of apocryphal literature may be Pope Leo I's letter to Turibius. In this letter, the pope admits that there might be some truth in apocryphal literature, but that it also contains "many falsehoods and lacks any canonical authority".[409] Nonetheless, when dealing with apocryphal literature, we need to be aware that if we reject this or that text, we might also be rejecting elements of truth.[410]

At the same time, apocryphal texts may constitute useful or edifying reading for Christians (even though their supposedly heterodox character may simultaneously inspire caution), but they should not be considered revelation. Still, their significance for intrareligious and interreligious dialogue cannot be overlooked. Many of the apocryphal writings have influenced[411] later generations of Christians,[412] especially in Eastern Christianity.[413] My main purpose in presenting an apocryphal text is not to change or *correct* my understanding of the Annunciation story or the

[407] J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal Jesus: The Legend of the Early Church* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.
[408] For example, Athanasius wrote in 367 that only canonical texts, and not apocryphal texts, should be used by Christians: "There should be no mention at all of apocryphal books created by heretics, who write them whenever they want but try to bestow favor on them by assigning them dates, that by setting them forth as ancient, they can on false grounds be, used to deceive the simple. – Festal Letter 39.7" – Quoted in Tony Burke, *Secret Scripture Revealed: A New Introduction to the Christian Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 3.
[409] Els Rose, *Ritual Memory: The Apocryphal Acts and Liturgical Commemoration in the Early Medieval West (C. 500-1215)* (Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2009), 74.
[410] Ibid., 73.
[411] The question of the canonical status of these books for Christians came from Saint Jerome, who noticed the differences between the Hebrew collection and the Septuagint. See more in Jack Suggs, Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, and James R. Mueller, eds., *The Oxford Study Bible: Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 1006.
[412] J.Keith Elliot, *The Apocryphal Jesus: The Legend of the Early Church*, 4.
[413] Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev, *Apocryphal and Esoteric Sources in the Development of Christianity and Judaism: The Eastern Mediterranean, the Near East, and Beyond* (Brill, Leiden, 2021), 2.

figure of Mary in general, but to reflect upon these "secondary" sources and to learn more about my own tradition and about the Qur'an.

The Christian theologian should realize that the apocryphal gospels are full of stories about the life of Mary, sometimes similar to those in the Qur'an. Here and there, the Qur'an even seems to approximate the Christian account more closely than Muslims realize. However, the Christian theologian should not polemicize with Muslims by claiming a better understanding of the Qur'an than Muslims themselves. This re-appropriation of sacred texts from Muslims was characteristic of the Arab Christian debate with Muslims in the Middle Ages, in which Christians wanted to prove the dependency of the Qur'an on the Bible. Although the knowledge of these Arab Christians of the Qur'an was sometimes surprisingly thorough, most of the time this knowledge led to polemics, not to mutual understanding. A polemical stand should be avoided.

I now face a double theological issue: the similarity between the Islamic and the Biblical account of the Annunciation may contribute to mutual understanding but also raises questions regarding the authority of apocryphal texts in Christian theology.

Some manuscripts of the apocryphal gospels date back centuries before Muhammad's time, whereas other manuscripts are somewhat later than the Qur'an. This historical question need not involve us, but the theological question of the authority of these gospels and of the Qur'an for Christian theology does concern us. Some of these gospels have exercised great influence on the Christian tradition, such as the Protoevangelium of James, the gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, the Arabic gospel of the Infancy, the gospel of Gamaliel, the gospel according to the Egyptians, the gospel of St. Peter, the gospel of St. Thomas and many others. The parallels between these Christian texts and the Qur'an are considerable, although some of the miracles

attributed to the young Jesus continue to baffle the Christian reader due to their bizarre and sometimes violent character. This may have contributed to a general downplaying of their significance, but, as stated before, the Qur'anic stories about Mary cannot simply be discarded without further ado. Hence, although theologically we should account for the difference in status between canonical and apocryphal texts, we should not discard the latter altogether.

What does it mean for Christian theology that the Qur'an presents specific narratives from the life of Mary, such as the passage about the miraculous way in which she receives food from the angel in the Temple, and in general provides more details about Mary than the Bible does, showing in these narratives and details a remarkable similarity to apocryphal accounts?

Apocryphal literature was one of the most important sources of Marian iconography and liturgical hymns. Art in the Middle Ages was heavily influenced by these texts, and even the Orthodox Christian liturgy contains many important parallels. For Eastern Christians, the Virgin Mary plays a valuable role as one of the central "objects" of worship. This is reflected in the liturgical texts, as well as in sacred art. The feast of *the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple*[414] and her serving in the Temple, in connection with the Annunciation story, is solemnly celebrated. This story is present in the Qur'anic narratives, is wholly absent from the Bible, but is present in the apocryphal sources, mainly in one of the most significant sources for Mariology – the Protoevangelium of James.[415] No doubt the Protoevangelium of James had a great impact on the development of Mariology in

[414] The Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Eastern Catholic Churches celebrate it on November 21, as one of the twelve Great Feasts. The Roman Catholic Church celebrates it on December 4.

[415] The text uses James, understood as the brother of Jesus, as a pseudonym for its author, and therefore presents itself as an eye-witness account. James likely died in approximately 62 CE, so even if other evidence might lead one to think James was the true author, the dependence of the Protoevangelium on Matthew and Luke makes it very unlikely that James could have written it.
See more Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (Polebridge Press, 1995), 9.

Catholic theology.[416] "This Gospel focuses on Mary's purity, which is ultimately highlighted by her virginity before and after the birth of Jesus".[417]

The Proto-gospel of James was held in high esteem and dates from a time in which the distinction between "canonical" and apocryphal" was not yet clearly established. Although it is considered apocryphal, it has been widely studied as one of the most authoritative sources for the birth and upbringing of the Virgin Mary. Unlike the four canonical Gospels, the central character of this narrative seems to be not Jesus, but his mother. The Protoevangelium presents the social background of Mary's family in detail. It relates important details about Anna's pregnancy, Mary's early years, and several circumstances of her life. Although this text is not in the *canon* of any Christian denomination, it would be a misrepresentation to classify it as irrelevant for all branches of Christianity.[418]

According to the text, Mary lived in the Temple from the age of three up to twelve. Without going into detail, we can see a striking parallel between the stories about the young Samuel serving in the temple at Shiloh and Mary. Mary bringing Jesus into the world may be compared to Hannah giving birth to the prophet Samuel, who, in turn, appoints David as a Messianic king.[419] 1 Sam. 1:19-28 says that when Samuel was twelve years old, he heard a voice calling him, God's voice. Another interesting parallel is that both Hannah and Mary were not expecting to become pregnant. Samuel's and Mary's mothers share the same name, Hannah/Anna. The passage about the connection between Mary and Samuel in the Protoevangelium of James has little historical value in terms of the actual events it reports, but it does

[416] It is much more elaborate about Mary, who is described not only as a unique or chosen woman, but as the central character, being pure and set apart from the very beginning by God in order to give birth to Jesus.
[417] Chalsi Eastman, "Mary's Honour in *the Protoevangelium of James*" (master's thesis, University of Waterloo, 2016), 48.
[418] Paul Foster, *The Non-Canonical Gospels* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 124.
[419] Chalsi Eastman, *Mary's Honour in the Protoevangelium of James*, 54.

provide a fascinating window to the piety of late second-century or early third-century Christianity.[420]

There is another important parallel of the Annunciation story in the Gospel of Luke that can be found in the Protoevangelium of James. According to this text, Mary visits Elisabeth. The same statement can be found in Luke 1:39-45, where Elisabeth humbles herself, asking why Mary would choose to visit her while bearing the son of God. In a small contrast, in the Protoevangelium of James 12:5, Elisabeth states, "the baby inside me has jumped for joy and *blessed you*." This description varies slightly from Luke's account, making Mary even more the center of this interaction.[421] Several times throughout the text of Protoevangelium of James, Mary's virginity is questioned, and every time she proves to be honest and pure: even Joseph accuses her, but then God sends him a message. The temple priests do not believe her, and she and Joseph are forced to take the bitter water test.[422]

The status of apocryphal literature can be described as follows: it is fit for religious edification, but does not belong to the canon and hence should not be considered revelation. Within Roman Catholicism, this poses a formidable theological puzzle, as the Marian dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Mary's Assumption are clearly similar to and even dependent upon apocryphal stories. Probably these Marian dogmas may be legitimized not by explicit reference to the apocryphal gospels but by the argument that the tradition of the Church, transmitting the faith of the believers, should be considered a relevant source of Christian belief. This puzzle may be solved to some extent by referring to the continuity between Scripture and Tradition. In addition, it is clear that in many respects, the Biblical inspiration of the apocryphal stories is obvious, as in the story of the prophet Samuel

[420] Paul Foster, *The Non-Canonical Gospels*, 110.
[421] Chalsi Eastman, *Mary's Honour in the Protoevangelium of James*, 59.
[422] Ibid., 78.

and his mother Hanna compared to Mary's mother Anna and Mary's own dedication to the Temple. Arguing that the Biblical stories are historically true, whereas the apocryphal literature is not, would compromise the authentic genre of Biblical stories, in which historical accuracy is not the main purpose and often gives way to conveying a meaningful message. As we have seen, the influence of the apocryphal stories about Mary on Eastern Christianity is immense (as it was on medieval Western Christianity). If we accept that apocryphal literature is fit for Christians to meditate upon, this may raise serious questions about the status of the Qur'an for Christians. Even if we accept that the Qur'an cannot be called revelation for Christians, leaving aside for the moment whether Christians could accept the Qur'an as revelation *for Muslims*, should we then consider the Qur'anic stories about Mary as being on the same level as our apocryphal gospels relating Mary's life? I think we should admit the relevance of this question. It would make clear that the Islamic veneration of Mary is not a matter of indifference to Christians. Conceding the relevance of that question would create a certain religious bond between Muslims and Christians. Such a bond may be compared to the bond that the person of Abraham / Ibrahim creates between the Abrahamic religions, according to some theologians. Here too, the Qur'an conveys the message of Abraham / Ibrahim as the friend of God in a way that should not be meaningless to Christian theologians.

In the past, apocryphal literature was often branded heretical, but the acceptance of apocryphal literature for edification has put an end to that assessment. Our question unavoidably poses the same question regarding the Qur'an. In the past, Islam could be branded a Christian heresy (John of Damascus) precisely because mutual similarities were recognized. It may be a challenge to ponder the possibility that we have entered a new era in which mutual affinities can be recognized without resorting to labels of heresy. As a Catholic theologian, I feel it is necessary to

underline that the tradition of the Church is also relevant outside Christianity. As stated earlier, the Assumption of Mary, her presentation and presence in the Temple and various other important feasts in Christianity are based upon apocryphal literature, but can best be explained as elements in the venerated oral tradition of the Church. All this raises intra-Christian theological debates with undeniable repercussions for our view of the Qur'an. Following this line, we may wonder whether we may regard the Qur'an, in a way, as a part of a standing oral tradition of the Church? Should we consider the Qur'an as being on the same level as apocryphal literature? If we want to avoid the association with apocryphal literature, may we consider Qur'an as a form of inspiration, comparable to that which allows Catholics to accept various Marian dogmas? This question is related to the issue of divine inspiration outside the Christian Church. In that sense, the Qur'an can be seen as part of the oral tradition of the Church, comparable to the generous acknowledgment by the Church of non-Christian inspiration as "sparks of truth", although in this case the affinity goes further. Indeed, *Nostra Aetate* states that *Muslims adore the one God*.[423] Following this idea, we may accept that there must be divine truth in the Qur'an, because how would Muslims adore the one God without that? It means that Qur'an may be considered somehow as a revelation. And perhaps we can go further by not just emphasizing "*the sparks of truth*" to which *Nostra Aetate* refers (albeit in the context of the non-Abrahamic Eastern religions), but by accepting that Biblical persons such as prophets and patriarchs play an important role outside the Bible too.

My questioning, nevertheless, avoids a facile pluralism which would result if the Qur'an were to be recognized as revelation not only for Muslims, but also for Christians. Still, admitting the affinity between the Qur'anic account of Mary and

[423] NOSTRA AETATE: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," in *Documents of the Second Vatican Council*, edited by Walter M. Abbott, S.J., 739-742 (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1966).

apocryphal stories, which have influenced liturgy and dogma, is relevant both for interreligious and intrareligious dialogue.

4.4.3. *How do I as a Christian theologian evaluate the Islamic idea that Mary can be compared to some other women?*

The Qur'an presents Mary as the holiest, saintliest woman in the world, as chosen by God, and as the highest of all women.[424] The Islamic scholar Mona Siddiqui devotes an elaborate section to the meaning of the Virgin Mary / Maryam for her personally and for Islamic piety. She describes how for many Muslim women, devotion to Mary is connected to fertility and pregnancy, which explains why her mother advised her to recite the surah *Maryam* during her pregnancy.[425] Although she professes not to have felt a strong devotion to this practice personally, she does give an intimate portrait of Mary. She describes how Mary lived in the temple until her twelfth year, an element possibly derived from apocryphal gospels.[426] Siddiqui states that Mary has no eschatological role in history, as she has in Christianity. However, she sees ample possibilities for further rapprochement between Muslims and Christians, together facing Mary's lofty status.

The theological issue concerning whether Mary was one of the highest among women, has occasioned heated debate among Muslim commentators. Some of them advocate the idea that Mary was the highest of women in the past, but not of all women living after her. There are four holy women mentioned in the *hadith.*[427] The other three are Khadijah (the first wife of Muhammad and also the first who believed

[424] "And when the angels said, "O Mary, indeed Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds." (Qur'an 3:42).
[425] Mona Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims, and Jesus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 149-170.
[426] Her passing remark that this cannot be true historically because of purity regulations ignores the fact that, according to apocryphal accounts, Mary had to leave the temple upon becoming adult, i.e. at the age of 12.
[427] See in numerous collections of tafsirs, such as "*Tafsir al-Manar*", "*Tafsir al-Kurthubi*", and "*Tafsir al-Kabir*".

that God was speaking to her husband), Fatima (the daughter of Muhammad and wife of caliph Ali), and, from the Biblical past, Asiya (the pious wife of Pharaoh, who, according to the Qur'an, was the one to pick Moses from the river Nile). According to this Islamic point of view, Mary is not significantly different from other women in history, being superior to them only in piety. This would precisely be why she was chosen to give birth to Jesus, according to Islam. This conviction is based on secondary Islamic sources, but not on the Qur'an as such and is relevant, because it implicitly highlights the singularity of the Qur'anic message:

- "*Abu Musa reported Allah's Messenger as saying: There are many persons amongst men who are quite perfect but there are not perfect amongst women except Mary, daughter of 'Imran, Asiya wife of Pharaoh, and the excellence of 'Aisha as compared to women is that of Tharid over all other foods*".[428]

– "*Narrated By 'Ali: I heard the Prophet saying,* "*Mary, the daughter of 'Imran, was the best among the women (of the world of her time) and Khadija is the best amongst the women (of this nation).*" [429]

– "*He Messenger of Allah drew four lines on the ground, then he said,* "*Do you know what this is?*" *The Companions replied,* "*Allah and His Messenger know best.*" *He then said:* "*The best of the women of Paradise are Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, Fatimah bint Muhammad, Maryam bint 'Imran and Asiya bint Muzahim, the wife of Pharaoh.*"[430]

Still, if we look carefully at the text (Qur'an 3:42),[431] we may conclude that Mary is even chosen twice. Possibly because of polemics against Christianity,

[428] Sahih Muslim book 31, hadith 5966.
[429] Sahih Bukhari volume 4, Book 55, hadith 642.
[430] Musnad Ahmad, hadith 2896.
[431] *"The angels said, "O Mary, Allah has chosen you, and has purified you. He has chosen you over all the women of the world*." (Qur'an 3:42).

Mary's importance may have been downgraded somewhat in favor of Fatima and others. Despite that, the main Qur'anic line is to highlight Mary's significance as being beyond comparison. Her supreme significance does lie in her piety, whereas the fact that she is the mother of Jesus is perhaps not even the primary reason for her lofty position. Indeed, as quoted above, some commentaries argue that the Qur'an means to say: "*the highest of all women of her own generation*", not excluding an equal or even higher status of women later on.[432] This is why, from an Islamic perspective, Mary's status can be compared to that of Khadija, the wife of Muhammad, or to that of Fatima, Muhammad's daughter. This poses an additional question to Christian theology: is Mary's unique status compromised by the fact that she is compared to other women in Islam? Does this perhaps detract from the relevance of the Islamic view of Mary for Christian theology?

The Islamic debate about Mary's prophetic status may give food for thought for Christian theology as well. There is no strongly developed tradition in Christianity of considering Mary as a prophet, but it is not wholly alien to Christianity either, especially in the infancy narrative in Luke 1.26-56.[433] Miriam is explicitly called a prophet and is often compared to Mary. The difference between this and the Islamic approach seems obvious though: in Christianity Mary may be compared to Biblical women who precede her, not to women after her. This may have to do with the Christian theological conviction that revelation has been closed after the New Testament. Still, similarities with the life of Mary can be detected in many lives of female saints.

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[432] See more Barbara Freyer Stowasser, "Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation", 80: "The larger number of traditions recorded in Tafsir and *qisas al-anbiya'* literature establish, on the authority of the Prophet, that Mary and Fatima, Khadija and Asya (the Pharaoh's wife) are the best women of the world and also the ruling females in heaven; traditions on A'isha's inclusion in this group are fewer in number".

[433] N. Clayton Croy and Alice E. Connor, "Mantic Mary? The Virgin Mother as Prophet in Luke 1.26-56 and the Early Church," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (2011): 255.

In the dialogue between Christians and Muslims, we can imagine that the development within Christianity to connect Mary to her Biblical predecessors will influence Muslim perception of Mary as well. Although the Bible is largely unknown among Muslims nowadays (except at an academic level), both *Taurah* and *Injil* are considered to be God's revelation (cp. Qur'an 5:40-49), even if compromised by *taḥrif* (corruption of the text or of the interpretation), as later Muslim commentators suggest. So, in a way, this same development that has happened within Christianity over the last century, to reconnect Mary to the Biblical matriarchs, is imaginable in Islam, if Muslims would likewise wish to trace the Biblical heritage of Mary. No doubt this would cause a major switch in Islamic theological perception, for Mary would then be firmly rooted in a Jewish environment.

Again, although there are many theological differences between Christianity and Islam, there is no doubt in my view that Mary's shared importance in both religions may offer an excellent opportunity for interreligious dialogue and may even contribute to a strengthening of Christian self-definition. Still, the similarities between the Qur'anic and Biblical Annunciation stories do not mean that Christians need to accept a new dogma or correct old ones. The main outcome is to realize that Mary's presence in the Qur'an invites me, as a Catholic theologian, to think more widely about her figure and about salvation story in general and to acknowledge Islamic piety to Mary as an impressive and theologically relevant fact.

4.4.4. *What are the implications of Mary's association with prayer and with the temple?*

Surah *Maryam* overlaps slightly with surah *Al Imran*, jumping in at the Annunciation. The story of Mary's staying in the temple precedes the story of the

Annunciation and constitutes a significant theme which emphasizes the status and peculiarity of Mary.

From her early years, Mary was dedicated to serving God and she lived in the temple, in the eastern part of which she chose a corner for solitude.[434] Mary is twice chosen, according to the Qur'an: as the pious girl dwelling in the prayer chamber, and as the mother of Jesus. A few verses on, in Qur'an 3:45-48, the angelic message takes place. Mary then dwelt in a place the Qur'an names the *mihrab* المِحراب, (cp. Qur'an 19:11: "*So he came out to his people from the prayer chamber and signaled to them to exalt [Allah] in the morning and afternoon*". Mary's presence in the *mihrab* as temple is clear only in light of the subtext of this passage.[435] Still, the Qur'an itself identifies the sanctuary with the *mihrab*. The Dutch scholar Arent-Jan Wensinck concludes that it is a place of prayer, but the Arabic term *mihrab* may be associated not with a simple chamber, but indeed with a temple.[436] Another argument in support of idea that this was meant to be a simple chamber relates to Mary's pregnancy. She becomes pregnant, which may be considered incompatible with her staying in the temple.[437] Here the Qur'an describes how Zechariah, having received the Annunciation of the birth of John, comes out from the *mihrab* and encounters his people. *Mihrab* seems to have a different meaning[438] in surah *Sad* 38:21-22, where the Qur'an refers to "adversaries" who cross into the *mihrab*. Still, we may decide that Mary as a little girl was chosen to serve in the temple, a job probably seen as

[434] Kamal Faghih Imanī, *An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur'an* (Amir-ul-Mu'mineen Ali Library, 1999), 106.
[435] Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 142. While avoiding the suggestion that the Qur'an has copied stories from the Bible, the expression 'subtext' should nevertheless emphasize a connection between the biblical, apocryphal, and Qur'anic narratives.
[436] Ibid., 142.
[437] George Themelis Zervos, *The Protevangelium of James: Greek Text English Translation Critical Introduction* (T&T Clark, 2019), 20.
[438] A different meaning compared to the Gospel of Luke, where Zechariah is in the sanctuary of the Temple when the angel Gabriel announces the birth of John to him (Lk 1.8–20). He comes out of the Temple and encounters his people (Lk 1.21–2).

more suitable for men in Islamic ritual. Again, the Qur'an exalts Mary because God chose her twice: as the pious girl who lived in the Temple and as the mother of Jesus. When Mary is still a baby, her mother prays to God to protect her and her daughter Mary from Satan: "*when the wife of Imran said, "My Lord, indeed I have pledged to You what is in my womb, consecrated [for Your service], so accept this from me. Indeed, You are the Hearing, the Knowing.*" (Qur'an 3:35). In this way, God places Mary under the care of Zechariah, and there she receives miraculous sustenance from heaven, and even fresh fruits not appropriate for the season:[439]

"So, her Lord accepted her with good acceptance and caused her to grow in a good manner and put her in the care of Zechariah. Every time Zechariah entered upon her in the prayer chamber, he found with her provision. He said, "O Mary, from where is this [coming] to you?" She said, "It is from Allah. Indeed, Allah provides for whom He wills without account." (Qur'an 3:37). This section refers to that period in Mary's life when she devotes all her time to remembering God, who has made Mary a member of the family of Zechariah (*Ahl al-Bayt*), who becomes her guardian and the protector of her interests.[440]

There is another important story that completes the Mariological line and follows immediately upon the Annunciation to Mary. After she is told of her pregnancy, she decides to move to another place and stay in loneliness for a while. The Arabic word *nabaza* means "to put aside without hesitation" and the Qur'anic term *'inthibas* – "*the desire to move away from people*." As soon as she feels contractions, she goes into the desert. The Qur'an 19:22 says: *"So she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a remote place*." The Qur'an says that in an attempt to relieve birth pains, Mary leans against a dried palm tree. Obviously, Mary

[439] Mona Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims and Jesus*, 153.
[440] Ahl al-Bayt (Arabic: أهل البيت) literally means "People of the House". Islamic tradition tells us that this term refers to the family of Muhammad.

felt stressed in anticipation of accusations from society, but she was also going to give birth in a desert in complete solitude without any assistance. Mary had to overcome all these burdens. The Gospels emphasize this even more: she would have to face the wagging tongues of her neighbors, and the incredulity of her betrothed (and of the local religious authorities).[441]

The Qur'an shows Mary's great humility with regard to the great challenges that she faced. We can identify some of the burdens that fell on Mary's shoulders:

1 Slander and suspicion from society

2 Pregnancy and childbirth in full solitude.

3 No place for rest and refuge, except a palm tree.

4 Raising a child without a father and slanting glances of tribesmen.

Mary consents, but after conceiving the child, she is again alone and bereft, and cries out in words that refugees worldwide may be tempted to use even today: "*Would that I had died before this and was a thing forgotten, utterly forgotten*!" (Qur'an 19:23). The angel shows her the running water and the date palm tree that God has provided for her, and she survives. "*When confronted by her gossiping neighbors when she returns home with her newborn child (there is no Joseph, no Bethlehem, in this account), Mary chooses to be silent (as Zechariah was by divine force) and lets the child speak for itself*".[442] This miraculous story of Jesus speaking from the cradle includes two passages about Jesus and Mary in surah *Al Imran* 3:46[443] and another reference to this story is in surah *Maryam* 19:28-34.[444] This

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[441] John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Luke: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005), 68.

[442] Francis X. Clooney, "Mary in the Quran," https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/franciscloonеy/blog/mary-quran.

[443] "*He shall preach to men in his cradle and in the prime of manhood, and shall lead a righteous life."* (Qur'an 3:46).

[444] *"O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a wicked man, nor was thy mother a harlot. Then she pointed to him. They said: How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle? He said: "I am indeed a servant of Allah. He has given me the Book and has made me a prophet. And has made me blessed wheresoever I may be, and has enjoined upon me prayer and almsgiving so long as I remain alive, And (has made me) dutiful toward her who bore me, and hath not made me arrogant, unblest. Peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive! Such was Jesus, son of Mary: (this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt*. (Qur'an: 19:28-34).

miracle, to which the Qur'an refers more than once, is among those that have made the greatest impression on the imagination of Muslim believers. It also conveys kerygmatic importance for Islamic theology, since the fact that the child speaks from the cradle is a violation of natural laws and therefore bears witness to the greatness of the Spirit that is in him.[445]

Although the purity of Mary is highly emphasized in the Qur'an, Muslim Mariology does not begin with the conception of Jesus, but rather with the genealogy of Mary and the line of the prophets from which she comes, her Immaculate Conception, her birth, her early years spent in the service of the temple, and finally the virgin birth.[446]

In addition, together with the 'Islamicized' portrait of Mary, we may emphasize her Jewish roots that are important for Christians to take into account. In recent times, we may find images of Mary as a Jewish girl, sometimes named Miriam, or as a power-woman, based on the Magnificat and reflecting the changing perception of Mary within Christianity. One important phenomenon is the way Mary is compared to the matriarchs of Israel: Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Miriam, Hanna and Esther. These comparisons seek to emphasize the strong continuity between these women as bearers of God's promise. Mary is no longer a 'Christian saint', beyond comparison, but a Biblical heroine in the line of the matriarchs, and is sometimes considered the embodiment of the people of God, in the sense of the Jewish people ('daughter of Sion'). A growing sense of the historical Biblical stories and of the problematic nature of a completely spiritual reading of the Hebrew Bible, which runs the risk of a wholesale expropriation of the Bible from Judaism, has fostered this emphasis on Mary's continuity with the 'mothers of Israel'. Hence, we should admit

[445] Giancarlo Finazzo, "The Virgin Mary in the Qur'an," https://www.ewtn.com/library/mary/marykran.htm.
[446] Bahar Davary, "Mary in Islam: 'No Man Could Have Been Like This Woman'," *New Theology Review* (2010): 26.

that placing Mary in the context of other women in the Bible does not as such detract from her status.

The Jewishness of Mary may even shed new light on the Qur'anic rendering of Mary. The statement that God purifies Mary (Qur'an 3:42) is puzzling unless we remember the purity rules of Leviticus 12, which Mary has observed. Although the Qur'an speaks about the time before she gave birth, whereas Leviticus prescribes the purification of the mother after childbirth, both texts emphasize the notion of purification, which does not detract from Mary's elevated status, although it may be bewildering for the Christian theologian at first.[447] The theologian may wonder: why speak of purifying as if Mary had initially been impure? For Christians and Muslims, this sheds new light on the meaning of the Torah in the New Testament and may even prevent a supersessionist theology. Hence, the Jewish background of Mary constitutes a theological challenge both for Christians and Muslims.

This aspect, although it is obscured in modern Christian theology, may reinforce Christian belief in the significance of the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. This connection also emphasizes Mary's Jewish heritage, which holds notable importance within Christianity, although this has not always been realized. Christian tradition has frequently tended to "privatize" Mary, by viewing her primarily within the Christian context. Hence there are moments when Christian tradition forgets that Mary was a Jewish woman and was raised within the Jewish tradition and community. Recognizing this fact profoundly alters our perception of Mary and allows us to consider that Mary's Jewish background and her connection to the matriarchs are a challenge both for Islam and for Christianity. Simultaneously, Mary remains "one of our own," not only for Christians but also for Muslims.

[447] See more Qur'an: 19:16-26.

In general, as a Catholic theologian, I realize that the Islamic veneration of Mary may be more wholehearted compared to that of some Christian denominations, especially Protestantism. Considering this and accepting the possibility that the Qur'an offers some kind of "additional" information about Mary,[448] perhaps not in a historical sense, but in the form of meaningful narratives, we may again ask a theological question: can we regard the Qur'an as a form of revelation? Given the striking resemblances, and if we do not wish to draw an analogy between the Qur'anic account of Mary and the status of apocryphal gospels, how should we view the status of this Qur'anic account of Mary? Mary's prominent presence in the Qur'an and in Islamic tradition inspires me, as a Catholic theologian, to think more widely about the portrayal of Mary and her value for Christianity. Even without having solved the question of the status of the Qur'an for Christian theology, I need to acknowledge Islamic veneration of Mary as a noteworthy and theologically relevant phenomenon.

In general, the strongly temple-oriented traditions about Mary cause us to recognize Mary's roots in Judaism. For Jesus as well, the temple forms an important place,[449] because He regarded that place as being intended only for the worship of God (Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48). Moreover, the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke is "temple oriented". We may suggest that the Qur'an seems to avoid interpreting the place where Mary lived explicitly as a temple precisely because of its Jewish significance and roots. Despite the fact that devotion to Mary is part of Christianity, it is important to realize that she is a member of the Jewish community, with whom Christians are closely related as common adherents of Abrahamic religions. Because of the temple, Mary's Jewish roots are emphasized

[448] For example, the presentation of Mary in the Temple. The story is present in the Qur'an and apocryphal literature, and is integrated into Christian art and liturgy, but is absent in the Bible.
[449] The temple was important for Jesus from his early years. (Luke 2:41-52)

and that is why this is significant for Christianity. In this sense, the main point of disagreement between Christians and Jews concerning Mary is her status as the mother of God. Still, to look at Mary as a Jewish woman who gave a birth to Jesus is also significant for improving interreligious dialogue between Christians and Jews.

4.4.5. *How should Catholic theology evaluate the fact that according to one version the Annunciation to Mary happens through God's Spirit (Qur'an 19:17)? Is it theologically possible to view the Holy Spirit as uniting Christians and Muslims?*

The Qur'an connects the *Rūḥ* to the creation of the Human Being. Adam becomes a living being because God blows from His *Rūḥ* into him (Qur'an 15:28-29; 38: 71-72; 32:9). God's breath is the life-giving spirit. Similarly, at the Annunciation to Mary the *Rūḥ* causes the conception of Jesus (Qur'an 21:19; 66:12). The *Rūḥ* is also sent to the prophets to inspire them with a divine message. In addition, the *Rūḥ* is credited with bringing the revelation to Muhammad (Qur'an 16:102 and cp. surah 97:4, according to traditional Islamic understanding). The Qur'an mentions the *Rūḥ* several times in connection with the life of Jesus (Qur'an 2:87, 253; 5:110: both in the context of Jesus' miracles and of his prophetic inspiration).

Still, we have noted that the Qur'an, in relating the Annunciation to Mary, speaks about *Our Rūḥ* (Qur'an 19:17), but also about 'angels' (Qur'an 3:42 and 45). A historical-critical approach, refined by a "canonical approach" in which inner-Qur'anic texts are compared and confronted with each other, may defend the chronological priority of Qur'an 19:17 over Qur'an 3:42 and 45, by explaining that replacing the Spirit by "angels" was a defense against Arab-Christian polemics.

These polemical Christian voices argued that the Qur'an itself contains the Christian truth, even though Muslims do not acknowledge this.[450]

My approach, a Catholic theological reading of the Qur'an, does not seek to contribute to this complicated historical-critical debate about the chronological priority of texts within the canon of the Qur'an (it may also have been a parallel development without chronological priority for either version).[451] My theological approach is canonical as well, but theologically: I accept both readings in the canon of the Qur'an, "the angels" and "Our spirit" as normative for Muslims. A theological reading explores this issue in more depth and should be combined with theological self-reflection about the Holy Spirit in Christianity.

The theological meaning of "Our spirit" / the Holy, as described in the Annunciation according to the Qur'an (19:17), may have created tensions within Islam, but it should not be ignored. Theologically, it is understandable that Arab Christians have continued to maintain that the Qur'an itself recognizes the Trinity, although this is vehemently denied by Muslims. There is a special connection between the Spirit and Jesus: the conception is the work of the Spirit (Qur'an 21:19

[450] See above on the Annunciation to Mary in the Qur'an. Cp. Nicolai Sinai, *The Qur'an: a Historic-critical Introduction*,111-138; Neal Robinson, "The Dynamics of Sūrat Āl ʿImrān (Q. 3)," in *Unlocking the Medinan Qur'an*, ed. Nicolai Sinai (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 410. Note also how in Qur'an 53:5 many translations add "by an angel". See more Claude Gilliot, "Creation of a Fixed Text," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 42 who points to the reference to Jibril / Gabriel in Qur'an 2:97 as the agent of revelation, which may have influenced the identification of the "spirit" with Gabriel in other passages. Gabriel features for the first time in the Biblical book of Daniel, one of the youngest books of the Hebrew Bible.

[451] The reference to the Holy Spirit may even be explained as an attempt to accommodate a Christian audience. In addition, second century Christianity knows of the Holy Spirit as an angel. Cp. in the context of the Annunciation *Epistula apostolorum* 14 and cp. Neal Robinson, "The Virginal Conception," in *Christ in Islam and Christianity: The Representation of Jesus in the Qur'ān and the Classical Muslim Commentaries* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1991), 156-166. However, these early Christian texts are centuries before the Qur'an. The similarity between the Qur'anic concept of the Holy Spirit / Spirit of Holiness and the *Ruah Ha-Qodesh* in Judaism is far more striking.

and 66:12). The pure Spirit offers special support to Jesus, according to the Qur'an (Qur'an 2:87).

However, the emphasis that Christians place on the Trinity has not led to mutual understanding and may even contribute to harsh polemics.[452] It is not my purpose to rekindle this polemical debate.[453] The frequent denial of Jesus's sonship of God in the Qur'an prevents any equation of Islam and Christianity regarding the Trinity.[454] I think, however, that another question should come to the fore, as result of a Catholic theological self-reflection, a question that has so far been more or less ignored. If we accept that the Qur'an does honor the Virgin Mary with the visitation of God's Spirit, should we not, as Christian theologians, also accept the account of this event that is central to Islam as inspired by the Holy Spirit? Or, to put it more broadly, how should we value the remarkable similarity between the activity of the Holy Spirit as described in the Qur'an and as seen in Christian theology?[455] The Christian concept of the Holy Spirit acknowledges the Holy Spirit as being involved in the creation of the cosmos (Gen 1:2) and of the Human Being (Gen 2:7). He is the Giver of life from the beginning of times. The Holy Spirit has inspired the prophets: *qui locutus est per prophetas*, who has spoken through the prophets, as the Nicene

[452] See the curious booklet: Rev. C.G. Mylrea and Shaik Iskandur 'Abdu'l-Masih, *The Holy Spirit in Qur'an and Bible*, The Christian Literature Society for India, London, Madras and Colombo, 1910. It quotes a wealth of Qur'anic and Biblical texts on the Holy Spirit, but ridicules Muslims who do not want to acknowledge the Christian truth. This proves that the texts as such do not offer a dialogical understanding but should be interpreted with appropriate hermeneutics.

[453] It becomes clear here that both similarities and differences between Islam and Christianity may constitute a source of polemics.

[454] In post-Qur'anic literature, the issue of God's unity becomes a major issue, both in relation to the Qur'an as God's created / eternal Word and in the confrontation with Arab Christians who argued that the Trinity does not compromise God's unity. See more Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 82. However, this debate should not be read into the Qur'an and falls outside the scope of my research.

[455] See E. Verwaal, *Rūh al-ḳudus in de Ḳorān.* [Rūh al-ḳudus in the Ḳur'ān]. *Een historisch-theologisch onderzoek naar de voorstelling aangaande de "heilige Geest" in de Koran en de relevantie daarvan voor het gesprek tussen Moslims, Christenen en Joden*, with a summary in English, Utrecht 1987, 186-219. However, my question here is not about the Qur'an as such (see chapter 6.4.), but broader: about the possible role of the Holy Spirit in Islam (see 6.6).

Creed states. John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb (Luke 1:15).

It is something of a paradox that the Scriptural revelation has been closed after Christ but accompanied with a presence of the Holy Spirit stronger than even before. Although a specific theological reflection upon the Holy Spirit and the triune significance had to wait some centuries, early Christianity and especially the Acts of the Apostles may be called the age of the unfolding of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.[456] The theological reflection upon the Holy Spirit developed after the Christological reflection, in the third to fifth centuries, and struggled with the interrelatedness of the three divine persons. The equal dignity and distinct personhood of Father, Son and Spirit was the outcome of that. However, Bulgakov raises the question whether the "filioque", the forthcoming of the Spirit from both the Father and the Son, as the West has formulated it, has not compromised that equal dignity.[457]

For our purpose, it is not necessary to delve into the intricacies of the Fathers of the Church and their subtle interpretations. Ours is more pragmatic: does it make sense to attribute the work of the Holy Spirit to the realm outside the Church? In that sense, the emphasis upon the intrinsic connection between Christ and the Spirit, not only as to their eternal origin, but also during the whole of salvation history, may have the unwelcome consequence to serve as an impediment to the free development of the Spirit. It may suggest that anyone who has not explicitly acknowledged Christ cannot share in the working of the Holy Spirit. For my purpose it is sufficient to raise the question whether that would unduly curtail the free realm of the Holy Spirit.

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[456] See Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, translated by Boris Jakim, Grand Rapids and Cambridge U.K., 2004. For Bulgakov, apart from the issue at hand, the status of a dogma is doubtful because of its supposed connection with power.

[457] Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, 79-86. The same questioning of the *filioque* in the protestant theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg.

Of course – and this stands somewhat in contrast with what has just been said – in the New Testament the Holy Spirit is closely connected with the working of Christ and with the promise of a Consoler / Paraclete (Joh 14:26). In addition, the intrinsic connection between the Holy Spirit and the Church is underpinned by reference to the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles: the pouring down of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which is generally considered as the beginning of the Church, but betrays an eschatological and universal dimension as well. In contrast, Rabbinic accounts, possibly for polemical reasons, maintain that prophecy came to an end after the Biblical prophets until the end of times, whereas the New Testament emphasizes that the end of times begins with Pentecost, when even "sons and daughters will prophecy" (Joel 3:1–2; Acts 2:17). In addition, the sacrament of baptism confers the Holy Spirit to each individual Christian and Christian prayer is unthinkable without the activity and invocation of the Holy Spirit. All this does not take away the similarity between the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Qur'an and in pre-Christian Biblical accounts. The cultic significance of the story about Mary in the Qur'an which we have also found in Luke's temple-oriented story, finds a theological-poetic continuation in the notion of the Holy Spirit within the Church. Interpreting this notion as excluding the possibility of the Holy Spirit working outside the Church seems to do injustice to the power of the Holy Spirit. It is, however, astonishing to realize that the plethora of theological studies of the Trinity or the Holy Spirit hardly raise the issue of the presence of the Spirit in other religions.[458]

[458] Noteworthy exceptions are the Catholic theologian Yves Cogar, to be dealt with later, and the Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong, who writes about Buddhism and the Spirit. See also the (updated!) version of Veli-Matti Karkkäinen, *Pneumatology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2018.

It is clear that Christian tradition cannot be understood apart from the often-hidden workings of the Holy Spirit. Folk wisdom even holds that "the Spirit blows where he wills", a wisdom derived from the Gospel of John 3:8. Still, authoritative magisterial texts intrinsically connect the Holy Spirit to the Church, thus avoiding any question of the working of the Holy Spirit *outside* the Church. It should be admitted that this insight creates considerable tension within Catholic Comparative Theology. This is why I cannot agree with Klaus von Stosch, who boldly affirms that Comparative Theology fits perfectly into Catholic theology.[459] The Vatican declaration *Dominus Iesus* from the year 2000, states in §12:

There are also those who propose the hypothesis of an economy of the Holy Spirit with a more universal breadth than that of the Incarnate Word, crucified and risen. This position also is contrary to the Catholic faith, which, on the contrary, considers the salvific incarnation of the Word as a trinitarian event. In the New Testament, the mystery of Jesus, the Incarnate Word, constitutes the place of the Holy Spirit's presence as well as the principle of the Spirit's effusion on humanity, not only in messianic times.[460]

On the one hand, the Spirit has been poured out on the whole of humanity, but on the other hand it can only be understood in connection with the revelation of Christ. This warning may have been directed to the theologian Raimon Panikkar, who argued that God's eternal Wisdom can also be found in Hindu texts about divine

[459] Klaus von Stosch, 'Is Comparative Catholic?, *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 24 /1 (2014), 59-67.
[460] There is more nuanced note, however, in *Dominus Iesus* 8, where it is said that the holy Scriptures of other religions may contain "a ray of truth that enlightens all men". This in line with the declaration *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council. Still, the sharing of prophets and patriarchs between Islam and Christianity should be considered as more than just "a ray of truth". The same holds true for Judaism, and *Dominus Iesus* has encountered severe Jewish criticism. However, some (orthodox) Jewish voices expressed satisfaction, but mainly because it allows them in turn to reject the New Testament as well.

wisdom, interpreted as the "unknown Christ".[461] The declaration wished to avoid what it considers to be a relativistic stance, but ended up by unduly narrowing down the working of the Holy Spirit.

Obviously, if *Dominus Iesus* refuses to recognize the working of the Holy Spirit apart from Christ, there can be no room for non-Christian inspiration.[462] Still, the working of the Holy Spirit *before* Christ is duly recognized. It would be strange to think that this strongly universal notion would disappear at the moment Christ has entered history. The profound renewal of theology at the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) has also affected the teaching about the Holy Spirit. The working of the Spirit has been connected to the cosmic presence of the Spirit "who hovers over the waters" (Gen 1:2) and "fills the world" (Wisdom 1:7). The renewal of Vatican II consists in acknowledging that the activity of the Spirit should no longer be confined to the hierarchy, but that it permeates the doings of all Christians, including the laity (*Lumen Gentium* 4). All believers contribute to the building of Church and society, which should be considered the work of the Holy Spirit (*Lumen Gentium* 12).[463] The Dutch theologian Jos Moons S.J. in his book on the Holy Spirit in the teaching of Vatican II, acknowledges this as a crucial renewal. However, for the future he recommends thinking of the Holy Spirit's activity as less bound by the Church and less intrinsically connected with Christ.[464] Obviously, the Spirit was already active before the glorification of Christ, speaking as the Spirit does "through the prophets"

[461] Raimon Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964).
[462] Of course, the Logos as the divine hypostasis present before all times cannot be confined to the period of Christianity only. One should, however, be clear about what is meant in *Dominus Jesus*: the ministry of Jesus incarnate.
[463] The encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* (1986) by Pope John Paul II contains a rich meditation on the Holy Spirit as source and dynamism of the Church's renewal. It refrains, however, from dealing with the Holy Spirit outside the Church.
[464] Jos Moons, *The Holy Spirit, the Church and Pneumatological Renewal: Mystici Corporis, Lumen Gentium and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 319-322, argues that the Holy Spirit should be regarded as more than as an "adjunct" to Christ. A too rigid Christocentrism and a role of the Spirit as completely subordinate to Christ may prevent a bold development of a theology of the Holy Spirit.

(*Ad gentes* 2).[465] Pentecost can be seen as the definitive opening of the work of the Spirit to the whole world. This makes it urgent for the non-Christian peoples to receive special attention in a theology of the Holy Spirit. However, the Vatican declarations do not explicitly include the non-Christian religions in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, although Islam has been recognized as worshiping the one true God (*Nostra Aetate* 3). Muslims acknowledge the Creator and are included in the plan of salvation (*Lumen Gentium* 16).

Some courageous theologians indeed recognize that inspiration by the Holy Spirit should be thought anew in view of the many non-Christian religions. The famous Catholic theologian Yves Congar (1904-1995) distinguishes between the Spirit in the Biblical Israel, in the Church and today. He maintains: "I have no difficulty in holding that the Spirit acts outside the visible and official boundaries of the Church".[466]

As a caveat he adds that we should not hold the Holy Spirit responsible for the errors and mistakes in the Scriptures of other religions, but that does not take away his conviction that there is activity of the Holy Spirit in other religions. Congar refers to a medieval saying: "all truth, by whoever it is spoken, comes from the Holy Spirit".

I would like to point out that the working of the Spirit is not only a matter of divine inspiration of Scriptures. For the Christian, recognizing the Qur'an as inspired from cover to cover constitutes a problem, although the inspiration of Muhammad's preaching of the Annunciation to Mary does not fail to impress the Christian

[465] The extensive treatment of the Holy Spirit [Saint Esprit] in the *Dictionnaire de la spiritualité*, vol. 4 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1961), 1246-1333, duly emphasizes the proximity to natural symbols such as water, breath and fire in the Hebrew Bible, but all this disappears in the description of the Holy Spirit as firmly contained within the Catholic Church. Even the "églises séparées" receive a quite polemical treatment.

[466] Yves Congar, *Spirit of God: Short Writings about the Holy Spirit* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 34-35.

reader.[467] At least as important is the inspiration of the religious life by the Holy Spirit: the earnest prayer of the Muslims, their awe of the Almighty and the care for the poor and the weak. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. The twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit consist of charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity (cp. Gal 5:22–23).[468] No doubt these notions are a rich challenge for each Christian and are rightly presented as such by the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1830–1832). However, we should not deny the presence of these gifts and fruits among non-Christians. The life of prayer in Islam, care for the poor, the discipline of fasting – three pillars similar to those in the Sermon of the Mount – devotion to the Virgin Mary, and the awe of God are admirable traits of the religious life of the Muslims that have been acknowledged as such by the Catholic Church (*Nostra Aetate* 3), and deserve to be reflected upon in a renewal of a Christian theology of the Holy Spirit. It is important to note that this renewal of Christian theology may be tributary to the encounter with Islam, but should avoid to appeal to Western secular values as an argument for pluralism. On the Muslim side such an appeal would be mistrusted as neo-colonialism.[469] In my Ukrainian Catholic Church it would likewise be mistrusted.

I would like to add one more theological reflection, rather tentative in nature. The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) distinguishes in describing the orientation upon the people of God: between those who are believing Catholics, those who

[467] The debate about the possible prophethood of Muhammad has received attention from dialogue theologians, but not from mainstream theologians. See more Emilio Galindo Aguilar, "The Second International Muslim-Christian Congress of Córdoba (March 21-27, 1977)," *Islamochristiana* 3 (1977): 207-228.; Kenneth Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984). It seems to me that the issue of the Holy Spirit offers a fresh perspective in the dialogue.

[468] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1831-2. Galatians according to the Vulgate.

[469] See more Adil Hussain Khan and Michel A. Cowan, "Why Christian-Muslim 'Dialogue' Is Not Always Dialogical," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 28, no. 2 (2018): 23-48; Therese Ignacio Bjoernaas, "Christian–Muslim Dialogue: Karl Rahner and Ismail al-Faruqi on Universal Salvation," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 27, no. 1 (2018): 45-62, esp. 46-48.

believe in Christ, and even "all people without exception who are called to salvation by God's grace". And the encyclical adds: "in a way only known to God" and "as a gift of the Holy Spirit". (*Redemptoris Missio* 9). Further on, we believe that especially there the personal conviction of pope John Paul II comes to the fore, although followed by some qualifications, possibly from another hand, but that does not concern us at the moment:

> Thus the Spirit, who "blows where he wills" (cf. Jn 3:8), who "was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified," and who "has filled the world, holds all things together [and] knows what is said" (Wis 1:7), leads us to broaden our vision in order to ponder his activity in every time and place. I have repeatedly called this fact to mind, and it has guided me in my meetings with a wide variety of peoples. The Church's relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: "Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man." Excluding any mistaken interpretation, the interreligious meeting held in Assisi was meant to confirm my conviction that "every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in every human heart." (*Redemptoris missio* 29).

The famous debate referred above, about the *filioque*, the question whether the Creed should state that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son (Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, accepted by Western churches), or that the Spirit proceeds from the Father only (*inter alia* Eastern Greek churches) may have some relevance here.[470] Although Trinitarian belief posits the co-eternity of Father, Son and Spirit, the formula without the *filioque* (which is the oldest), may grant a specific role to the Spirit, which goes further than being a mere "vicar" of the Son.[471]

[470] See more for the complicated historical and systematic theological debates about the "Filioque: Matthew Levering, "The Holy Spirit and the *Filioque*," in *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Matthew Levering (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 161-236.

[471] Yves Congar, *Spirit of God. Short Writings about the Holy Spirit*, 65. Incidentally, my Ukrainian Catholic church does not profess the "filioque". See also note 455 above Sergei Bulgakov's theology about the "filioque".

Obviously, a distinction should be made between the historical level and the metaphysical level: the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost does not contradict the co-eternity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It may be a theological challenge to realize that the Holy Spirit should be considered a divine hypostasis with a distinct activity (an activity which can be *appropriated* by the Holy Spirit, without excluding Father and Son). This may allow room for the working of the Holy Spirit outside the church as well.[472]

The debate between Muslims and Christians about the Trinity, which has never been free of polemical overtones, may thus be replaced by the Christian recognition that the Holy Spirit is active within Islam, regardless of the question of whether Muslims could overcome their own hesitance about the Holy Spirit. Although the debate has previously revolved mainly around the revelation of the Word, this issue is obviously loaded with polemics and apologetics.[473] It may be that the Holy Spirit constitutes a more viable way to mutual understanding, a way that includes an emphasis on the "fruits of the Spirit", i. e. practical humanitarian care and concern for a just society. I think that this hesitance on the Muslim side has to do with rejection of the Trinity and with the Islamic refusal to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God. However, this should not prevent Christians from recognizing the working of the Holy Spirit in the life and Scripture of Muslims.[474]

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[472] The notorious line: "extra ecclesiam nulla salus", is no refutation of it, for at least in its origin (the time of Cyprian and Tertullian), this line was not directed to non-Christians, but to Christians who wanted to separate themselves from the Church in order to create "the true church". See the important study by Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., *Salvation outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992).

[473] See, however, the impressive undertaking by the comparative theologian Pim Valkenberg, "The Concept of Revelation in Islam from the Perspective of Comparative Theology," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 31, no. 2 (2021): 179-200. Still, the Islamic scriptural conception of revelation (as such very similar to the Jewish concept of Torah), remains a difficult point of comparison with Christ. His paradoxical comparison of *shirk* (giving companions to God) with the (likewise unforgivable) sin against the Holy Spirit may offer another new perspective. See more Pim Valkenberg, *No Power over God's Bounty: Islam and Christian Theology on the Question of Religious Pluralism* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 158-159.

[474] The meaning of the Qur'an for Catholic theology will be treated more fully in paragraph 6.4.

This would establish a midway between relativism and exclusivism. The emphasis on the "fruits of the Spirit" acknowledges the initiatives to peace and justice from whatever sides they come and may contribute to a deeper understanding and appreciation of Muslims by Christians and vice-versa.[475]

Conclusion

One of the most significant aspects of Mary is her interreligious appeal. In a short chapter of his book on Mary in Islamic tradition, Jaroslav Pelikan aptly calls her a *Bridgebuilder*.[476] Throughout history, she has served as a bridge between religions (namely, between Christianity and Islam). Just as Catholicism has interpreted and continues to interpret Mary in varying ways, the Islamic perception of Mary also has a rich history of interpretation. She may occasion harmonious mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims because the concepts of the virgin birth and the purity of Mary can be drawn upon as "a hermeneutical tool for Catholic-Muslim dialogue.[477] It is a paradoxical circumstance that Christian feasts, influenced by non-canonical gospels, have no real foothold in the Bible, but are based on stories that feature in the Qur'an as well. Obviously, such a circumstance opens a new perspective in the context of interreligious dialogue between Islam and Christianity. While Catholics and Orthodox Christians view her as the mother of Christ, the divine Logos, and therefore, the mother of God; Muslims consider her mother of the Messiah, elected by God for this very special role.[478] The Virgin Mary

[475] See more Frans Wijsen, "Strive in Competition for Good Deeds," *Journal for Interreligious Dialogue* 7, no. 2 (1997): 158-176, who takes a similar position between relativism and exclusivism. What really counts, he argues, is a prospect of the "fruits of the Spirit" by contributing to a just society.
[476] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 67.
[477] Bahar Davary, *Mary in Islam: 'No Man Could Have Been Like This Woman',* 26.
[478] Tim Winter, "*Pulchra ut Luna*: Some Reflections on the Marian Theme in Muslim–Catholic Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 36 (1999): 439-469.; David Marshall, "Mary in the Qur'an," in *A Faithful Presence: Essays for Kenneth Cragg*, ed. David Thomas and Clare Amos (London: Melisende, 2003), 155-165.

frequently serves as a shared figure of veneration and a symbol of interfaith harmony between Muslims and Christians. Emphasizing the need for participants to read and understand the scriptures of the others deeply from within their own tradition will favor mutual understanding and even establish a shared piety towards the Virgin Mary.[479] Eventually, not only the similarities, but also the differences between the Qur'an, the Bible, and the apocryphal gospels about the Annunciation story and her Presentation in the Temple open a large field for interreligious dialogue, but no less so for intrareligious reflection within the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox and the Protestant churches. For purposes of popular presentation, it has always been tempting to extract 'what the Qur'an says about Mary and Jesus' without considering the Qur'anic context, or the basic Islamic setting for these passages. However, for the sake of serious dialogue, there should be a willingness from the Christian side to read the passages about Jesus in the Islamic context, realizing that there can be no dialogue or 'Comparative Theology' if the religions are not studied in their own right.[480]

Interreligious dialogue should not seek to minimize the differences between Islamic and Christian understandings of Mary. The Christian theologian may acknowledge historical influences of Christian revelation on the Islamic scriptures, but still has to face the task of theological reflection. The fact that Muslims will deny historical influences on the Qur'an altogether should be understood, but the Catholic theologian does not need to adopt this denial for him- or herself. The Christian theologian should realize that historical influences as such can function both

[479] Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 90.
[480] Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, 2nd ed. (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 19.

positively and negatively in a theological discourse: as minimizing Islam but also as a recognition of fraternal bonds.

Chapter 5

MUHAMMAD AND JESUS CONFRONTED WITH THE DEMAND FOR A MIRACLE: QUR'AN 4:153; MARK 6:4-6; LUKE 11:29-31

Many stories relate how Jesus performed miracles. His miracles have the meaning of inaugurating a Messianic reality, fulfilling prophecies, or alleviating people's sickness or handicap. All the more noteworthy is Jesus' refusal or inability to perform a miracle or sign in the texts chosen. In the Qur'an, Muhammad likewise professes to be unable to perform miracles. The reason for this seems to be that he wants to underline his status as an ordinary Human Being. In post-Qur'anic literature, however, Muhammad is said to have performed numerous miracles. This marked difference with the Qur'anic account is probably caused by a need to compete with Christianity. In this chapter, we will not deal with the numerous miracles performed by Jesus, nor with the miracles attributed to Muhammad in post-Qur'anic literature. I will focus on the inability or refusal to perform miracles and place the main emphasis on the Bible and the Qur'an only. My choice here is to focus on a remarkable similarity between Jesus and Muhammad in their refusal or even inability to perform a miracle in certain circumstances. This similarity between Jesus and Muhammad may induce us to acquire a deeper understanding of Jesus' refusal or inability to perform miracles, especially in His hometown. Simultaneously, it will prevent us from drawing any facile conclusions about Muhammad's inability to perform miracles.

5.1.1. A close reading of the story of Muhammad's attitude to miracles – Qur'an 4:153.

Discourse on miracles is prominent in the Qur'an. The ability to perform miracles is also ascribed to specific individuals to whom God has granted the ability to perform supernatural and extraordinary acts. According to Islam, these individuals are prophets who could perform miracles only with God's permission (3:49; 13:38; 14:11; 40:78). God's miraculous power is strongly emphasized in Qur'anic

discourse.[481] Understanding miracles in Islamic tradition requires an understanding of the underlying motifs. There is the idea of the Qur'an being itself the greatest miracle, probably in defense both against the accusation that Muhammad did not perform miracles at all, and against the accusation that the Qur'an is a human forgery.[482] Muslims are aware that this statement that the Qur'an is the greatest miracle, occurs many times scattered throughout this Scripture.[483] Moreover, the miracle of the Qur'an differs significantly from miracles performed by other prophets and messengers. It is crucial and essential for Islam that all prophets and messengers who were appointed by God were just Human Beings, without any allusion to a divine status. Still, the prophets and messengers of God are granted the ability to perform miracles in order to prove the truth of their claim to carrying God's message. However, not all prophets were granted the same prerogative. Miracles then are presented in the Qur'an as a sign of divine authority, vouchsafed to prove the truthfulness of prophets.[484] There are many examples of miracles and signs recorded in the Qur'an.

Classical Arabic dictionaries[485] provide a lexical definition of the term miracle.[486] The word miracle is not used conceptually in the Qur'an; instead of the explicit use of the word miracle, there is the corresponding concept "ayah" (verse or sign)[487] that refers to events that the prophets performed miraculously by the will of God.[488]

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[481] The clause "God is able to do all things" occurs almost forty times in the Qur'an. In addition, ten verses refer to God as almighty and forty-eight verses refer to God as "mighty".
[482] David L. Weddle, *Miracles: Wonder and Meaning in World Religions.* New York: NYU Press, 2010, 177.
[483] Qur'an 2:23-24; Qur'an 10:28; Qur'an 11:13-14; Qur'an 17:88**,** Qur'an 52: 33-34
[484] David L. Weddle, *Miracles: Wonder and Meaning in World Religions*,191.
[485] Ahmet Özdemir, "Classical and Modernist Approaches to the Miracles in the Qur'an." *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, no. 2 (2019): 468-479.
[486] Ibid., 470.
[487] See Qur'an 7:106-108; Qur'an 11:96; Qur'an 28:36; Qur'an 54:2.
[488] Ahmet Özdemir, *Classical and Modernist Approaches to the Miracles in the Qur'an,* 471.

Post-Qur'anic Muslim theologians classify different types of miracles. The most important and essential are *mu`jiza, maunah, istidraj*. "Islam defines a miracle, معجزة *mu`jizah*, as an extraordinary act or event that is contrary to the laws of nature and can only come about through the direct intervention of God Himself."[489] *Mu`jizah* is a type of miracle performed by various prophets in order to justify the legitimacy of their mission. In addition, there are two types of miracles not performed by prophets. When supernatural acts are performed by pious Muslims, these are called *maunah*, but when miracles are performed by impious people, they are called *istidraj*.[490]

There are certain conditions that have to be met if an event is to be called a miracle: *the event should be beyond human capability; it should be extra-natural; it should be predicted by a righteous man and come to happen as predicted*.[491] Hence an important condition for a miracle is that it should be an event out of the ordinary. A systematic definition of miracles is provided by the Dutch historian A.J. Wensinck. From his point of view, the primary purpose of a miracle in Islam is to prove the sincerity of the apostle(s) and it therefore has to satisfy the following condition: miracles are performances that cannot be done without the supernatural blessing and the explicit will of God.[492]

Then there is the concept of *karamah*. Islamic tradition distinguishes miracles that confirm a prophetic message, *mu`jizah*, from acts of grace, *karamah*.[493] For example, the scholar of Islamic mysticism, Annemarie Schimmel, translates

[489] Aisha Stacey, "What Is a Miracle?," *IslamReligion.com*, 2014, https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/5291/what-is-miracle/.
[490] Arif Zamhari, *Rituals of Islamic Spirituality* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2010), 63.
[491] Yusuf Al-Hajj Ahmad, *The Unchallengeable Miracles of the Qur'an*, 1st ed. (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publications, 2010), 21.
[492] A.J. Wensinck, "Mu'djiza," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs (Brill, September 6, 2011. *Brill Online*).
[493] David L. Weddle, *Miracles: Wonder and Meaning in World Religions*, 184.

mu`jizah* as "deeds that render [others] unable to match them."[494] Gilsenan[495] adds that *mu`jizah indicates a "sign that makes it impossible to contest someone's prophetic or saintly claims."[496] Most of the time, this concept of miracles is not connected to a group of people or believers, but only to the individual to whom the special privilege is given to perform a miracle. Muslim theologians have examined in detail the wonders and miracles of the saints, distinguishing between *karamah*, a "charismatic act," and *mu`jizah*, a "unique act", a miracle by a prophet – as these two types of miracles are always clearly distinguished. If a miracle / *mu`jizah* helps prophets to preach their doctrine in a public way, a miracle / *karamah* is granted to a Muslim saint as a sign of the correctness or truthfulness of his or her chosen path.

As mentioned above, according to Islamic tradition, a miracle can only be performed with the permission of God. A miracle is an act that may be done publicly so that people will recognize the truthfulness of the prophet. The Qur'an describes many miracles performed by various prophets. Every prophet was endowed with a kind of supernatural power by means of which he could perform miracles to prove his prophethood. Hence an extensive debate exists concerning Muhammad and his ability to perform miracles. One the one hand it is obvious that Muhammad's authority in the face of resistance is eagerly confirmed.[497] On the other hand, we will note that reservations exist about the people's asking for miracles or "signs".

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[494] David L. Weddle, *Miracles: Wonder and Meaning in World Religions*, 187.
[495] Michael Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam: Religion and Society in the Modern Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1982), 79.
While the distinction is carefully maintained in the tradition, John Renard insists that there is also "continuity between prophetic miracles and saintly marvels," the latter understood as a succession to the former. See more John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 95.
[496] David L. Weddle, *Miracles: Wonder and Meaning in World Religions*, 184.
[497] Ibid.,187.

The demand for a sign is presented throughout the Qur'an. We will focus on the Qur'anic account in 4:153 and conduct a close reading of the Qur'anic verses.

The story in the Qur'an 4:153.

"*The People of the Scripture ask you to bring down to them a book from the heaven. But they had asked of Moses [even] greater than that and said,* "*Show us Allah outright,*" *so the thunderbolt struck them for their wrongdoing. Then they took the calf [for worship] after clear evidences had come to them, and We pardoned that. And We gave Moses a clear authority.*"

A verse-by-verse close reading:

4:153a "*The People of the Scripture ask you to bring down to them a book from the heaven. But they had asked of Moses [even] greater than that and said, "Show us Allah outright.*"

First of all, it should be noted that the name Muhammad is not mentioned. However, we may understand from the context that this story is about him. The category *People of the Scripture/Book*, according to the Qur'an, may refer to Jews, to Christians, or to Sabians.[498] In Islamic tradition, when dealing with the proposed story, it is common to specify *People of the Book* as indicating certain Jewish leaders in the city of Medinah. Although this is not clear from the text itself, we will take this possibility into account by referring to its broader context later on.

The comparison between the revelation of the Torah and the Qur'an sheds important light on other Qur'anic texts as well. Apparently, Muhammad's audience

[498] Later on, this term was extended to Hindus and Sikhs, as they were under Muslim rule. See more Richard Kimball, "The People of the Book, ahl al-kitāb: A Modern Comparative Theological Exploration." *International Journal of Asian Christianity* 2, no. 2 (n.d.): 189–210.

(or at least the sceptics among them) expected the Qur'an to be revealed all at once, just as they supposed happened with the Torah, rather than in parts and at different moments, according to Qur'an 25:32 "*And those who disbelieve say,* "*Why was the Qur'an not revealed to him all at once?*" *Thus [it is] that We may strengthen thereby your heart. And We have spaced it distinctly*"[499] One may add that they were also looking for miracles like the miracle with the *white hand* (Qur'an 20:22).[500]

The request from the people in the verse 4:153b is a direct reference to the wonders, which the people from the time of Moses had constantly witnessed: the plagues as well as the drowning of Pharaoh and the whole event of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt.[501] They asked Moses for something even greater than the Jews from Muhammad's time asked from Muhammad, namely: "*Show us Allah outright.*" In a way, by referring to Moses, the Qur'an consoles Muhammad about the resistance he meets.

4:153b "*So the thunderbolt struck them for their wrongdoing. Then they took the calf [for worship] after clear evidences had come to them, and We pardoned that. And We gave Moses a clear authority.*"

In the Bible, it is Moses himself who asked to see God's face.[502] The thunders and lightning at Sinai, however, were not a punishment, as the Qur'an has it, but according to the Biblical account accompanied the tremendous theophany. Obviously, here as well as elsewhere the Qur'an does not merely copy from the Biblical account but adopts its own perspectives. In surah *Al-A'raf*, God shows His

[499] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 956.
[500] Qur'an 20:22-23: "*And enclose thy hand in thy side. It will come forth white, without blemish, as another sign, that We may show thee some of Our greatest signs."* This text probably refers to Ex 4:6, Moses' calling, when his hand became leprous and after that healed.
[501] *Tafheem ul Quran Surah 4 An-Nisa Ayat 153-153*, http://islamicstudies.info/reference.php?sura=4&verse=153.
[502] Exodus 33:18-20: "*Moses said, "Please show me your glory", "But," He said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live*."

mercy to the people only because of Moses's prayers.[503] What is interesting here is the people's demand to see God: "*Show us Allah outright.*" Undoubtedly, this kind of request is absolutely unacceptable for Muslims and probably also for Jews. It is not clear whether, according to the Bible, even Moses himself was vouchsafed to see God's face. Still, the Israelites had already seen many miracles: the manna from the sky, the defeat of Pharaoh. The main purpose of this account from the Qur'an does not seem to be to show all details of that event. As is often the case, the Qur'an refers to an episode more than once and in different places. In our case, Qur'an 2:55 also refers to the same event. It is important to note that God does not address Muhammad only, but also the stubborn (Jewish) audience:

"*And [recall] when you said, "O Moses, we will never believe you until we see Allah outright*"; *so the thunderbolt took you while you were looking on.*"

This account presents the supposedly hard-hearted nature of the people of Israel, as the Qur'an sees it. Indeed, even after clear signs and miracles the people of Israel started to worship the calf. This Qur'anic account, on a number of occasions throughout the text, presents the Jews' hostile attitude towards Muhammad's prophetic authority in the present by referring to the Israelites' similar or even worse attitude towards Moses in the past. The Qur'an states explicitly that at that moment the people had already experienced many signs and miracles during their Exodus from Egypt (for example, the parting of the sea; several references of drowning Pharaoh and his army in the Qur'an: 2:50; 7:136; 8:54; 10:90; 17:102–3; 28:40; 44:23–24; 51:40).[504] In spite of that, they succumbed to idolatry by making the

[503] Qur'an 7:155: "*And Moses chose from his people seventy men for Our appointment. And when the earthquake seized them, he said, "My Lord, if You had willed, You could have destroyed them before and me [as well]. Would You destroy us for what the foolish among us have done? This is not but Your trial by which You send astray whom You will and guide whom You will. You are our Protector, so forgive us and have mercy upon us; and You are the best of forgivers*."

[504] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 1201.

golden calf. Demanding to see God and making the calf are intrinsically connected here, probably to emphasize the mistaken desire to possess palpable divine presence.

It is evident from the text that the people were asking for a sign because of their stubbornness and small faith. This does not mean, however, that for the Qur'an miracles are always suspect: as stated before, according to Islamic tradition, the prophets received permission and mercy from God to perform miracles to prove their prophecy. Strikingly, our text does not envisage this possibility for Muhammad vis-à-vis his Jewish audience. This may be due to the motif of the Qur'an being the greatest miracle, although there is no reference to it in the context of this verse from the Qur'an.[505]

5.1.2. The broader context of the story of Muhammad's attitude to miracles – Qur'an 4:153.

Surah *An-Nisa* was revealed in Medina, in the fourth year after the *hijra* (Muhammad's departure from Mecca to Medina), and it contains 177 verses. If the number of words and letters is taken into account, it is the second-longest surah in the whole Qur'an, after *Al-Baqarah*. "This surah is titled *An-Nisa*, (the women) since the first thirty-five verses of it are about women and family affairs."[506] It also includes significant information, including Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and many aspects of Islamic belief, such as the debate about the crucifixion of Jesus and relations with the Jewish community. One of the main subjects of this surah is social relations and how they are conducted and regulated.[507] It also strongly emphasizes

[505] Here, one may see a clear parallel with Qur'an 6:7: "Had We sent down to you (O Prophet) a revelation in writing and they were to touch it with their own hands, the disbelievers would still have said, "This is nothing but pure magic!"
[506] *An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur'an*, vol. 3. https://www.al-islam.org/enlightening-commentary-light-holy-quran-vol-3/surah-nisa-chapter-4-introduction.
[507] Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali, *A Thematic Commentary on the Qur'an* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2000), 55.

the role of the prophets and messengers. One of their characteristics was the ability to perform a miracle. As was mentioned in the close reading above, it is impossible for prophets to perform miracles without God's will. One cannot decide to become a prophet, but it is the sole prerogative of God to call someone to become a prophet or messenger.

There are two terms for the word prophet in Arabic: *rasul*, messenger, and *nabi*, prophet.[508] It is understood that some prophets are given a book (*kitab*), which contains the revelation or the messages to be proclaimed by them. According to Islamic tradition, there are four specific prophets to whom a book has been revealed: Moses (Taurat); David (Zabur): Isa (Injil); Muhammad (Qur'an). Still, it is clearly emphasized that even the prophets are humans, not divine or demigods. This conviction runs as a red line throughout the whole Qur'an. When it comes to supernatural ability, the Qur'an always tries to underline that even if someone has received the grace and responsibility to perform a miracle, his or her human nature remains undisputed. Prophets are fully human, have families, eat and sleep etc.

According to the Qur'an, the main purpose of miracles commonly is confirmation of one's claim to be a prophet or messenger. Miracles are not always intended to bring benefit to the people. Normally, they are instead a clear proof of the prophet's mission or ability to perform supernatural acts.[509] In the proposed story from Qur'an 4:153, the people demand a miracle from Muhammad. Thus, he is not

[508] Mahsheed Ansari, Modern Debates on Prophecy and Prophethood in Islam: Muhammad Iqbal and Said Nursi (London: Routledge, 2023), chap. 1, "Demystifying the Prophetic Vocation in Islam."
[509] See miracles of the prophets, for example: *Jesus breathing life into clay birds* etc.

presented in the Qur'an as a miracle worker.[510] Moreover, "while long-suffering prophets prior to Muhammad were provided with miracles to signal a divine confirmation and approval of the messages which they brought, Muhammad in the Qur'an is sometimes shown as being denied such signals of divine approbation."[511] The Qur'an insists that Muhammad's primary role is to be a "warner", not a producer of signs.[512] Still, there is considerable debate, even among Islamic scholars, as to whether Muhammad was able to perform miracles at all. In the Qur'an itself, we can find references to Muhammad's miraculous so-called *Night Journey* ("Al-Isra' wal-Mi'raj") from Mecca to Jerusalem, as well as to the miracle of the *Splitting of the Moon*. There is much more in post-Qur'anic literature. In contrast, there is also a clear conviction in the Qur'an that miracles are not of essential importance.[513]

We have seen in the close reading stage that the Jewish audience demanded a sign from Muhammad, and the text itself explains that Muhammad refused to perform this. This refusal is important for Islam in order to emphasize Muhammad's status as an ordinary human person. The Qur'an in various ways *defends* Muhammad. For example, in the Qur'an 4:11; 17:93, it is stated that prophets and messengers of God are merely mortal. Moreover, in various verses from the Qur'an, we find that Muhammad asks for forgiveness for his own sins. [514]

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[510] Qur'an 5:109: "*The day will come when God will summon the messengers and ask them, "How was the response to you?*" They will say, "*We have no knowledge. You are the Knower of all secrets*." This in marked contrast with the miracles attributed to Muhammad in post-Qur'anic literature.
Qur'an 7:188: "*Say (O Muhammed), "I have no power to benefit myself, or harm myself. Only what God wills happen to me. If I knew the future, I would have increased my wealth, and no harm would have afflicted me. I am no more than a warner, and a bearer of good news for those who believe*."
Qur'an 18:110: "*Say (O Muhammed), "I am no more than a human like you, being inspired that your God is one God*".
Qur'an 46:9: "*Say (O Muhammed), "I am not different from other messengers. I have no idea what will happen to me or to you. I only follow what is revealed to me. I am no more than a profound warner*."
[511] Ian Richard Netton, *Islam, Christianity and the Realms of the Miraculous: A Comparative Exploration* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 19.
[512] Qur'an 29:50.
[513] Ian Richard Netton, *Islam, Christianity and the Realms of the Miraculous: A Comparative Exploration*, 20.
[514] Qur'an 40:55, Qur'an 47:19, Qur'an 48:2.

Another function of miracles is to show that the prophets emerge in succession: they were sent "*one after another* (Qur'an 2:87)" or "*one by one*" (Qur'an 23:44).[515] Moreover, the prophets belong to the same genealogical descent.[516] Some scholars, such as Jane Dammen McAuliffe, emphasize the special similarity between Muhammad and Moses.[517] Our verse - Qur'an 4:153 - deals with the demand of a sign, and although Moses is not mentioned explicitly, it is obvious that Muhammad's plight is compared here to that of Moses. Jane McAuliffe states that "virtually every major element in Muhammad's prophetic vocation finds its counterpart in the life of Moses: divine protection in infancy; a theophanic election and prophetic commissioning; the public denial and rejection of each prophet's 'signs' or proofs; God's gift of a 'book' or 'scripture'; the patient endurance of persecution; eventual divine deliverance and destruction of the enemy; the final triumph of the prophet's faithful followers."[518] Although the Qur'anic depiction of Moses is far more elusive and episodic than the Biblical account, taken together it does constitute a complete prophetic portrayal.[519]

[515] Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 249.
[516] Ibid., 235.
[517] Sometimes, this claim goes even further. For example, when searching the Hebrew Bible, Muslim sources frequently note Deuteronomy 18:18, "*I will raise up for them a prophet like you [Moses] from among their brothers, and I will give my word in his mouth, and he shall speak to them whatever I command Him."* This is interpreted as a direct reference to the advent of Muḥammad.
"Similarly, Moses' blessing in Deuteronomy 33:2, "*The Lord has come from Sinai and appeared to us from Seir and hastened forth from Mount Paran*," has provided Muslim Biblical exegetes with an opportunity to adduce Christianity's abrogation of Judaism and then Islam's abrogation of both" – See more Jane D. McAuliffe, "Connecting Moses and Muhammad," in *Books and Written Culture of the Islamic World*, ed. Andrew Rippin and Roberto Tottoli (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 335.
[518] Ibid., 331.
[519] Ibid., 327.

5.2.1.1 A close reading of the first Biblical account of the story without miracle – Mark 6:4-6.

In the past century, scholars have often paid only passing attention to the miracles of the canonical Gospels, not knowing how to treat them.[520] There are still some groups of scholars who express strong doubts about miracles as such. This does not, however, contribute to understanding the remarkable difference between Jesus' performance of miracles as recognized by the crowd and the absence of miracles in His hometown.

Among scholars who have recently studied the canonical Gospels, there has been a significant shift in thought on miracles. This shift is understandable, because miracles are highly significant in the New Testament, and numerous episodes of the Gospel narrative are dedicated to the accounts of Jesus' miracles. In the New Testament, miracle stories serve different purposes. They may be divided into three categories: *healing miracles*, *nature miracles*, and *exorcisms*. They contain a similar structure: description of the problem, Jesus' action in solving the problem, and the reaction of the crowd.[521]

Twelve miracle stories in the synoptic Gospels include the *topos* of faith: lack of faith, great faith, and little faith.[522] In the New Testament, different terms are used to describe such extraordinary events:

– *Semeion*, "sign", indicating the divine intervention or presence (Mark 12:38-39 and 16:1-4; Mark 8:11: Luke 11:16 and 23:8; John 2:11, 2:18 and 2:23; Acts 6:8).

[520] John Morgan Cadenhead, *The Significance of Jesus' Healing Miracles: A Study of Their Role in the Synoptic Gospels and Their Importance to Early Christianity* (master's thesis, Georgia State University, 2008), 2.
[521] David E. Aune, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 148.
[522] Duane F. Watson, *Miracle Discourse in the New Testament* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 6.

– *Terata*, "wonders", extraordinary events (Acts 2:19).

– *Dynameis*, "potency", acts that demonstrate force or supernatural power (Acts 2:22; Romans 15:19).

– *Erga*, "works", the actions of the saints or of Jesus vis-à-vis their followers.[523]

The meaning of "sign" is specifically important in the Gospel of John. Its main meaning is different from that as presented in the synoptic Gospels. Despite the resemblance between the miracles of Jesus as described in the synoptic gospels and in the Gospel of John, these differences are noteworthy.[524] Hence New Testament scholarship often treats the Johannine miracles separately from those in the synoptic Gospels. We will limit ourselves here to the synoptic Gospels. There as well, two divergent perspectives on miracles may be distinguished: miracles that induce faith, and faith that induces miracles.

In general, the understanding of miracles is similar in the synoptics. In the Gospel of Matthew, 153 verses concern miracle stories; in the shorter Gospel of Mark, there are no fewer than 196 verses devoted to miracles; and in the Gospel of Luke 140 verses. The main reason for their inclusion in the Gospels is to teach the readers about Jesus. It is significant to recognize that the miracles or signs performed by Jesus represent a completely distinct category from those presented in the Old Testament and the Acts of the Apostles. This distinction arises from the fact that Jesus' miracles are inseparably intertwined with His person.

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[523] Hendrick van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 217.

[524] The special use of the Greek word σημεῖον in John is well known and the purpose of the Gospel of John is written in chapter 20:30-31: "…Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. But these have been written in order that 1) you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God 2) that through your faith in Him you may have life." Accordingly, John does not speak about miracles in the way the synoptics do, but he calls miracles signs.

In the Gospel of Matthew, the evangelist tends to focus on those aspects of Jesus' story that stress His Messianic qualities because they fulfill Old Testament examples. Hence miracles that do not focus on these qualities are less central to His story.[525] In contrast, Mark emphasizes the supernatural dimension of miracles to a much greater extent than does Matthew.[526]

In this section, I will examine the account from the Gospel of Mark 6:4-6. The first step consists of close reading of the proposed Biblical account. The Gospel of Mark presumably represents the oldest extant narrative about Jesus. Normally, methodological and historical questions arising in the exegesis of the synoptic Gospels are first discussed in connection with scholarship on the Gospel of Mark.[527] In this regard, the question as to how Mark interprets the actions and fate of Jesus is of fundamental significance.[528] Jesus appears as teaching in the synagogue, and His instruction amazes the people on account of His authority.[529] In this light it is surprising that, according to Mark, Jesus could not perform miracles in His home village.

The story from the Bible: Mark 6:4-6

"*Then Jesus said to them,* "*Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown and among their own kin and in their own house.*" *And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.*"

[525] John Morgan Cadenhead, *The Significance of Jesus' Healing Miracles: A Study of their Role in the Synoptic Gospels and their Importance to Early Christianity*, 17.
[526] Ibid., 17.
[527] Jens Schröter, in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 272.
[528] Ibid., 272.
[529] Ibid., 284.

A verse-by-verse close reading:

6:4-5 "*Then Jesus said to them,* "*Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown and among their own kin and in their own house.*" *And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.*"

According to the Gospel of Mark, this was the first time Jesus came to His hometown since the beginning of His ministry. One may assume that "hometown" refers to Nazareth, although the Gospel does not mention the name of the town.[530] The rejection of Jesus in His hometown should not be regarded as a purely individual incident. The story echoes similar experiences by Old Testament prophets. The comparison of Jesus' experience to that of the prophets who were dishonored among their own people is ironic.[531] It anticipates His ultimate rejection by Israel, which should be considered not as a precise historical fact (as many Jews followed Jesus), but as a prophetic model of stubbornness of the people.[532] Here, the people of Nazareth acts as a symbol of spiritual deafness and blindness. It is striking that the reason Jesus could not do any miracles among them was apparently because of the people's unbelief. We may suppose that people were expecting more supernatural acts or performances from Him. Because the people of His own country refused to recognize him as a prophet of God, Jesus was *unable* to perform any miracles there. In the New Testament, Jesus' miracles of healing are generally accompanied by a

[530] Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Introducing the Gospel According to Mark*, vol. 1, *Mark 1–8:21* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 141.
[531] For the legendary account of the rejection and martyrdom of the prophets see the text edited by Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Lives of the Prophets* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1946), and the discussion of H. A. Fischel, "Prophet and Martyr," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 37 (1947): 265-280, 363-386.
[532] Is it Mark's intention to point forward as well to the narrative of the martyrdom of John the Baptist in 6:17-29?

call to both the sick and the audience to believe. Characteristic for Jesus's call to faith is that there is hardly any distinction between faith in God and faith in His anointed, Jesus. According to Mark's account, Jesus was highly provoked by the obstinate unbelief of His hometown, and He could not work great wonders amongst them, except for curing a few sick persons.[533] A similar line is presented in the Gospel of Matthew, although with a slight difference in tone. The parallel account in Matt 13:58 clarifies that Jesus did not perform miracles for the people because they were full of unbelief: "And He did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief."[534] It is not clarified here whether Jesus was unable or did not want to do so. Still, faith in Jesus appears to be an essential element of Jesus' miraculous healing. The purpose of this episode does not seem to be to emphasize a lack of power ("dynamis") on the part of Jesus, but to stress the lack of faith among the people of His hometown. Hence the main problem is not on Jesus' side, according to the Gospel of Mark, but consists of the stubbornness of the people, their refusal to repent.

6:6 "*And He was amazed at their unbelief.*"

At first glance, this verse is quite simple and straightforward. However, when examined carefully, a significant theological question arises: can we imagine that Jesus might be *amazed* and *unaware* of something? Is there anything He might not know?[535] How could Jesus, having been sent by God, somehow be limited in His power by the unbelief of the people? Jesus was aware of the unbelief the people in

[533] Story of a bleeding woman, earlier in Mk. 5-34: "*And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace and be whole of thy plague*." See more Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 159.
[534] Still, an interesting debate might be opened: In the Gospel of Luke it is written that Jesus *could not do* any miracles. However, the Gospel of Matthew says that He *did not do* any miracles.
[535] This debate has been going on since St. Augustine via St. Thomas Aquinas.

Nazareth showed towards Him in private conversations.[536] It should be noted that this is not the first time in the New Testament that Jesus is said to be *amazed*, albeit in different circumstances. Jesus was amazed by the people's unbelief, our story recounts. However, in the Gospel of Luke 7:9, we can see a similar, but opposite reaction where Jesus marveled at the words of a Roman centurion. Jesus turned to the crowds and said: "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" Hence, Jesus' amazement at their unbelief should be accepted without raising such notions of omniscience. This would probably presuppose a docetic Christology. A similar theological debate about the question whether Jesus Himself had faith in God likewise runs the risk of a docetic Christology when it is denied from the outset that He could have had such faith.[537] Hence we should accept the fact that Jesus had indeed not expected this kind of unbelief in His hometown.

5.2.1.2 A close reading of the second Biblical account of the stories without a miracle – Luke 11:29-31.

On several occasions in the New Testament, the demand for a sign is criticized. We will first deal with the story about "the sign of Jonah". The sign of Jonah as referred to here is quite different from the original story of Jonah in the Old Testament. The central issue of the New Testament renderings is "the demand for a sign".[538] The New Testament references to the sign of Jonah can be found in two Gospels: Matthew 12:38-42 and 16:1-4, and Luke 11:29-32. In addition, there are references to the "demand for a sign", but without mention of Jonah, in Mark 8:11-13 and John

[536] If verse 6b is tied to 6:7-13 it indicates that as the result of His tour Jesus determined to extend His ministry yet further through the direct commissioning of the Twelve. See more William L. Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 205-206.
[537] See more Karl Rahner, "Dogmatische Erwägungen über das Wissen und Selbstbewusstsein Jesus." *Schriften zur Theologie* vol. 5 (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1962).
[538] Beate Kowalski, "Meaning and Function of The Sign of Jonah in Matthew 12:38-42 and 16:1-4", *Studia Koszalińsko-Kołobrzeskiev* 22 (2015): 35-54, esp. 39.

6:22-59. Most scholars who have done research on the "sign of Jonah" assume that in all these instances the meaning of the "sign" is identical.[539] This may be questioned, however. For instance, we may note that Matthew refers in the story to the resurrection, whereas this element is lacking in Luke. There are enough contextual differences between the passages to conclude that it is quite plausible that the emphasis is somewhat different in each of these occasions.[540] Still, all Gospel accounts stress that Jesus did not want to give His accusers the sign they wanted, so the sign He says will be given to them, in this case the "sign of Jonah", must be something different than what they were looking for. In Mark, only the Pharisees are Jesus' addressees; in Matthew, some scribes and Pharisees (12:38), or Pharisees and Sadducees (16:1) are addressed. Luke does not mention opponents at all but speaks intermediately about "others" from the crowd.[541] While Mark and Matthew underline the context of a dispute between Jesus and His opponents, Luke composes a scene with Jesus teaching the crowd.[542] In this section, I will focus on the Biblical account about the sign of Jonah from Luke 11:29-32. The first step consists of close reading of the Biblical verses.

The story from the Bible, Luke 11:29-32:

"*When the crowds were increasing, he began to say,* "*This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation. The queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth*

[539] Michael W. Andrews, "The Sign of Jonah: Jesus in the Heart of the Earth." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61, no. 1 (2018): 118.
[540] Michael W. Andrews, *The Sign of Jonah: Jesus in the Heart of the Earth*, 118.
[541] Beate Kowalski, *Meaning and Function of the Sign of Jonah in Matthew 12:38-42 and 16:1-4*, 41.
[542] Ibid., 44.

to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and indeed, something greater than Solomon is here! The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and indeed, something greater than Jonah is here!""

A verse-by-verse close reading:

11:29 "*When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.*"

In this verse, it can be gathered only implicitly from Jesus' words that the crowd had been asking for a sign. According to Luke, the crowds increased at that moment, which may betray a rising level of tension and agitation. Jesus made a sharp address while standing before a huge crowd: *"This generation is an evil generation."* The people may have seen numerous miracles performed by Jesus earlier. However, it seems from the story that all Jesus' previous miracles were apparently not convincing *enough*, as they again asked for a sign and miracle. In this verse, in contrast to the story of the "sign of Jonah" in the Gospel of Matthew,[543] there is no mention of Pharisees asking for a sign. It seems from the verse that the multitude pressed Jesus in the expectation that He was going to show them some new miracles. (See also verse 16 earlier: "*Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven*").

Jesus condemns the demand for a sign, probably a miraculous one, which would prove His having been sent by God. The emphasis here lies not on the need

[543] Matthew 12:38-39: "*Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.*" *He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*"

of people to be healed or forgiven, but on the legitimation of Jesus' mission. At the same time, the question may arise: Why do people want more miracles? Just to see the performance, or perhaps they had a hidden agenda while asking Jesus for a sign? In 11:29, Jesus condemns the purpose of their request: this is an *evil generation*. Jesus makes such a sharp statement in front of the people to emphasize their lack of faith in Him and in God.

11:30 "*For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation.*"

In what way will Jesus be a sign to *this generation*? In a parallel account from the Gospel of Matthew, the evangelist offers an additional explanation, paralleling Jonah's three days in the fish with the Son of Man's sojourn in the netherworld. But that sign will take place in the future, and is not therefore a concrete answer to the demand of the people to perform a sign.[544] However, we will concentrate here on Luke's account. In contrast to Matthew, Luke does not record any allusion to the resurrection of Jesus. For Luke, Jonah was himself the sign for the Ninevites. How should we understand that? Although Jonah did not preach repentance among the Ninevites, but merely warned them of impending destruction, they did repent. In addition, Nineveh was a notoriously pagan city, and the repentance of a pagan city is an impressive and confronting event, especially for a "evil generation" of Jews who refuse to believe in Jesus and His message. Similarly, the Son of Man will be a sign to His generation. If we assume that the Son of Man denotes Jesus Himself, we find a neat parallel between the prophet Jonah and Jesus. The difference is that "this generation" does not repent, in marked contrast with the people of Nineve.

[544] Matthew 12:40: "*As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*."

11:31-32 "*The queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and indeed, something greater than Solomon is here! The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and indeed, something greater than Jonah is here!*"

Because the Jews of this generation have refused to repent, they will be condemned by a pagan people that had been sinful but did repent.[545] Jesus replies with a sort of reproach to the effect that, although the people of Nineveh were pagans, they believed in Jonah's prophecy. It is also emphasized in this passage that during the time of the final judgment, the people of Nineveh will be a living witness of their repentance. The failure of this generation to repent is thus all the more inexcusable.[546] The Queen of the South, the Queen of Sheba, can be compared with the people of Nineveh, for they share a pagan background and were both willing to accept the message of the God of Israel. The Queen of Sheba came to see Solomon's kingship, which was legendary, but "something greater than Solomon is here." Likewise, the people of Nineveh, to whom God sent the prophet Jonah, repented, and the Jews in front of Jesus should too, for something "greater than Jonah" is here. And if they do not repent, the Ninevites themselves can by all rights rise and accuse them on the day of judgment, not by saying anything but by their very existence as repentant pagans.[547] Kingship (Solomon) and prophecy (Jonah) are juxtaposed here.[548]

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[545] Herbert Basser and Marsha B. Cohen, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions: A Relevance-Based Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 315.
[546] Richard B. Gardner, *Matthew: Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 204.
[547] Anna Case-Winters, *Matthew: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 171.
[548] It should be noted that kingship and prophecy are elsewhere supplemented by priesthood: "*more than the temple is here"* (Mt. 12:6).

5.2.1.3 The broader context of the stories from the Bible - Mark 4:4-6, Luke 11:29-32.

Apart from the story the Gospel of Mark 6:4-6, there are two more accounts in the New Testament where Jesus could not perform a miracle: in Mk. 8:11-13, where He is asked to provide a sign from heaven. And in Mk. 15:29-32, Jesus is mocked by being asked to come down from the cross. At first glance, the idea that Jesus could not perform a miracle is a real challenge for Christians. The broader context may shed more light upon this startling episode. The proposed story from the Gospel of Mark features in the broader context of the second section of the first part of the Gospel, 4:35 – 8:26, where Jesus' mighty deeds in gentile and Jewish areas, as well as the relationship between Jews and gentiles, are the focal point.[549]

In the beginning,[550] the evangelist Mark recounts in 6:1 that Jesus was accompanied by His disciples, which means that He was not alone in His own town.[551] Jesus, following Jewish tradition, was offered the opportunity to teach in the synagogue.[552] In the synagogue, Jesus was asked many questions about His identity. Despite the fact that many people were astonished at Jesus' teaching, as we can see from the text, they did consider Jesus' words worth listening to, possibly because they had initially expected Him to speak and act like a carpenter.[553]

"*On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said,* "*Where did this man get all this? What is this*

[549] Jens Schröter, *The Blackwell Companion to The New Testament*, 287.
[550] It is not clear whether this visit of Jesus to Nazareth is the same as that referred to in Luke 4:16-30 or another visit. If it was a second visit, it would have taken place a year later, but the result was the same as on the previous occasion.
[551] For greater details about Jesus' rejection in His hometown, Luke 4:22 reports that the people in the synagogue of Nazareth, who recognized Him as one of their own, called Him "*Joseph's son*."
[552] Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 9.
[553] Tadros Y. Malaty, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark: A Patristic Commentary* (Alexandria: St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, 2003), 103.

wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" *And they took offense at him.*" (Mk 6:2-3).

In addition, Jesus' humble family seems to be a central issue, a fact that confused the people in the synagogue. So, on the one hand, the people at the synagogue in Jesus' hometown were amazed by His words, but on the other hand, they started to distract Him: preceding events determine the response of Jesus' townsfolk, reported in 6:2-3. Moreover, we can see from the context that in addition to the rejection by His hometown,[554] He was also rejected by His friends, neighbors, and family. His family had stated earlier: "He is out of His mind" (Mk. 3:21).

If we enter into the details, we can see an evident connection between the absence of miracle-working by Jesus and the unbelief of the people in His hometown.[555] The purpose of Mark, however, is not to belittle Jesus' powers, but, like in Luke, to stress the unbelief of the people. Jesus' power has not abated; in fact, the people implicitly recognize Jesus' healing power (Mk. 6:2 end). Apparently, what creates the problem is demanding miracles as a proof of divine commission. Jesus' miracles and signs were not magical performances, as the people may have expected. One may suppose that people from Jesus' hometown *refuse to give Him a chance* to help them. Obviously, strong belief is required in order to be saved or healed. He "could not", not from lack of power, but because of the attitude of the people who were not prepared to believe without miraculous guarantees.[556] The exegete Bornkamm rightly observes: "This does not mean that it is faith itself that

[554] See the parallel to Lk. 4:24.
[555] Jesus "could not" work any miracles in Nazareth because He did not find any faith there.
[556] Barton W. Johnson and Don De Welt, *The Gospel of Mark* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1985), 166.

has the power to bring about miracles."[557] Still, in order for a miracle to happen, the people who ask Jesus for help must have faith. Hence, we may conclude that both elements – the faith of those being healed and the charismatic power of the healer – are required for healing. That is why people were not able to see the miracle, because one of the elements was lacking.

In the first example (Mark 6:4-6), the image of Jesus as a miracle worker – some even speak of Jesus as a magician – is essential. In contrast, it is emphasized in this Biblical account that Jesus could not or would not perform a miracle. Moreover, this Biblical story reveals the reason for not doing miracles.

In order for us to further understand the ambiguity of miracles, a second example is needed. I will examine the relevant passage from the Gospel of Luke 11:29-31. For Luke, Jesus uses the figure of Jonah as an attempt to reveal the meaning and purpose of miracles and signs. In the case of 'the sign of Jonah', Jesus refuses to give a miraculous sign to prove His authority.

The broader context of the second Biblical account of the stories without a miracle – Luke 11:29-32.

Despite the fact that among the synoptics, Luke places the strongest emphasis on history, this does not prevent him from dealing with theological issues. In a way, he may even be more of a theologian than the other synoptic evangelists. An essential element of Luke's theology is the idea of universal salvation, including both Jews and non-Jews as members of the one people of God.[558] The Lukan material emphasizes the inclusion of Gentiles more positively in comparison, not only with

[557] Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus von Nazareth* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1956), 121.
[558] Richard P. Thompson, in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 332.

the other Gospels, but also with the subsequent narrative of the earliest Christians, the Acts of the Apostles.[559] When dealing with the Gospel of Luke in comparison with other evangelists, we should note that Luke appears to have a more unambiguous reliance on the possibility that miracles stories can serve as the basis for faith in Jesus by validating Him as the one sent by God.[560] This is in marked contrast, however, with Luke's story of the sign of Jonah.

It may surprise us that, when the people asked Jesus for a miracle as proof of His status or for a supernatural performance, Jesus mentioned Jonah in His reply. The prophet Jonah was not the most obvious example of a servant of God. He was *forced* to obey God's mission, because he initially refused and resented his success afterwards. Despite the fact that his prophetic message is one of the shortest in the whole Bible: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned,"[561] the Ninevites immediately repented.

The people of Nineveh accepted God's warning, and the Queen of Sheba recognized God's glory, traveling as she did from a remote part of the world in order to see Solomon and to learn from his divine wisdom. Despite the fact that they were gentiles, they repented. "The gentiles of old who listened to Jonah and Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 10:11-13) will testify against Israel at the final judgment."[562] In contrast, the people of Israel, who were spoiled by numerous miracles and signs, rejected him. As Jonah was a sign for Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be a sign for this generation. In Luke 10:12, Matt. 10:15 and 11:23; the story of Sodom is regarded as

[559] Richard P. Thompson, in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, 332.
[560] Paul J. Achtemeier, "The Lucan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94, no. 4 (December 1975): 560.
[561] Jonah 3:4
[562] Richard B. Gradner, *Matthew: Believers Church Bible Commentary*, 206.

constituting a comparable sign, although the people of Sodom will not act as judges themselves but will be a warning sign for the audience.

All these signs and parallels aimed to show that Jesus inaugurated the Messianic times. Moreover, the description of Jesus' itinerant preaching served to present an account of the assembling of witnesses, and it presupposed Jesus' Messianic awareness.[563] Hence these miracles served a far broader purpose than just to provide a demonstration of power. Indeed, Jesus' miraculous deeds are often called "signs" in the New Testament (especially in John) because they serve to underline His identity as the Messiah. Still, the "sign of Jonah" remains something of a paradox. One could even speculate that, already in Jesus' time, the sign of Jonah meant that if Israel did not repent and accept the Gospel, God would take the election from them and give it to the gentiles. This was no doubt the way the early Church interpreted this "sign".

Jesus refused the people's requests, possibly because He had already given them all the proof they needed. One may even speculate that if Jesus had performed a miracle at that moment, the crowd would have claimed it was a magic trick with the help of the devil (cf. Luke 11:15-18). Even Satan offered Jesus to perform a miracle for Him (Matthew 4:3-6). We should note that the miracles proposed by Satan are of a different nature than Jesus' miracles. They merely serve as a proof of supernatural abilities, and as a rupture with the physical world. Jesus' miracles, by contrast, "heal" the natural order by healing the sick, the blind, the deaf, and the lame. Jesus' answer to the crowd is very strict. Jesus refused to perform a miracle at

[563] Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of Saint Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 73.

their request. He was not a magician or conjuror, as also Herod learned,[564] who thought he could command Jesus to perform a miracle to satisfy his curiosity.[565]

5.3. The demand for a miracle: questions of a Catholic theologian posed to the Qur'an.

In this stage we will draw up an inventory of the theological questions and challenges posed by the confrontation between the Bible and the Qur'anic account about Muhammad's inability to perform miracles. The two Biblical stories about Jesus' inability or refusal to perform miracles constitute the Christan background to these questions. In stage 4 we will enter more deeply into the questions itself and try to take an honest and responsible position towards them.

Is the inability to do miracles the same with Jesus and Muhammad?

We have seen that Muhammad is generally not associated with performing any miracle at all (although other prophets did). In contrast, the New Testament recounts numerous miracles performed by Jesus, such as healing the sick and raising the dead. However, there are instances, when Jesus was asked for a sign and refused. As we noted, He does not perform a miracle on two specific occasions: in His hometown, and when *asked* for a sign. Muhammad obviously also refused to give a sign, like Moses. Similarly, Muhammad's refusal to provide a miraculous sign parallels Moses' response in certain Biblical narratives, highlighting the importance of the divine message over miraculous demonstrations. Can we compare Jesus and Muhammad in this respect?

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[564] "*When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer*." – Luke 23:8-9.

[565] Herbert Lockyer, *All the Miracles of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961), 152.

Can we compare the notion of the Qur'an as the miracle par excellence to the self-designation of Jesus to be "*more than Jonah*"?

We have previously noted that, according to the Qur'an, prophets are endowed with the ability to perform miracles, including so-called *Jewish* and *Christian* prophets, who are present in the Torah and the Bible as well. It is therefore particularly striking that Muhammad, the central figure of Islamic tradition, did not perform miracles. For the Islamic tradition, Muhammad's lack of miraculous acts is not problematic, at least so it seems. One of the reasons for this is that the Qur'an itself is considered the greatest miracle, obviating the need for further confirmation. This narrative causes me, as a Christian, to see parallels between the Qur'an and the Bible (when Jesus refused to perform a miracle in His hometown). This prompts the question: how appropriate it is to compare Jesus and Muhammad directly? Perhaps it is more accurate to deal with Jesus as the Word of God in Christianity on the one hand, and the Qur'an, as the Word of God in Islam on the other? Consequently, how similar are the assertions in the Islamic and Christian scriptures, that both the Qur'an and Jesus are in themselves the ultimate miracle, requiring no additional validation? Furthermore, this raises an additional theological question: is there a distinction in terms of divine status between these two references?

Is it possible for a Christian theologian to appreciate Muhammad's call to faith in one God?

Apart from the issue of miracles, Muhammad emphasizes monotheism and calls people to faith in one God. Moreover, in Islam, starting from Adam (and including Muhammad), all prophets proclaim the same primordial truth – to worship the one

and unique God.[566] The concept of prophecy is shared between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, though each has accorded varying interpretations to prophecy as to time, significance, and purpose.[567] Following this idea, an additional question arises: is genuine revelation beyond the New Testament still conceivable or even possible? Early Christianity acknowledged prophets who functioned as God's messengers (for example traveling prophets, as mentioned in the Didache). These prophets, although not seen as bringing new revelations that would supplement the Bible, can still be regarded as prophets. Can we as Christians in the same vein affirm Muhammad's status as such a prophet?

How should we in Catholic theology evaluate the typological connection between Moses and Muhammad?

The Qur'an repeatedly portrays Muhammad in close connection with Moses, the paradigmatic prophet of Israel. Moses is not only the most frequently named figure in the Qur'an, but also the one whose story provides a framework for Muhammad's mission. The Qur'an presents both figures as proclaimers of the same religion (Qur'an 42:13–16), and even depicts Moses as instructing Muhammad during the nightly journey. This raises an important question for Catholic theology: how should we evaluate the typological connection between Moses and Muhammad?

In the Christian tradition, Moses has long been read as a type of Christ. From Herod as a new pharaoh, killing new-born babies, to the Sermon on the Mount, echoing Sinai, the story of Moses story foreshadows Jesus' identity and mission. At the same time, the New Testament affirms that Jesus surpasses Moses: while Moses is a faithful servant, Jesus is the Son set over God's house (Heb 3:5–6). The

[566] Mona Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims, and Jesus*, 9.
[567] Ibid., 9.

Christological interpretation of Moses has therefore become central to Christian theology. Yet Moses's typological role has not been exclusively Christocentric. Elijah, for example, functions as a type both for Jesus and for John the Baptist. This suggests that typology can be multiple and layered, without being exhausted in a single fulfillment.

From this perspective, the Qur'an's identification of Muhammad with Moses takes on theological weight. Muhammad, like Moses, calls his people to faith in the one God, appeals to repentance, and show resistance when asked to perform miracles. While Catholic theology may not be able to regard Muhammad as a prophet in the same sense as the biblical prophets, it can nonetheless ask whether Muhammad's appeal to monotheism might be seen analogically as part of Moses's enduring typological significance. Just as Elijah could serve as a type of both Jesus and John, could Moses function as a type both of Christ and, of Muhammad?

5.4 The demand for a miracle: theological reflection on the Qur'anic story

5.4.1. *Is the inability to do miracles with the same for Jesus and Muhammad?*

The concept of miracles is significant both to Islam and Christianity. However, this concept often differs even within one religion. Moreover, a number of various meanings have generated important critical discussion.[568] The Qur'an presents numerous examples of miracles performed by the Biblical prophets,[569] including Abraham, David, Solomon, Noah, Jesus, and many others.[570] Moreover, in the

[568] David Basinger, "What Is a Miracle?," in *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles*, ed. Graham H. Twelftree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 19.
[569] David commands nature (21:79); Solomon has the miraculous ability to talk with animals and jinns (27:16-45). Joseph sees the future (12:42); Jesus heals the sick (5:113-114).
[570] See more Antti Laato and Peter Lindqvist, *Encounters of the Children of Abraham from Ancient to Modern Times* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

Qur'an, there are stories about miracles performed not only by the prophets, but also by ordinary people (Qur'an 2:261, Qur'an 18 – about the 'Seven sleepers').

There is extensive debate about this within the Islamic tradition. Some Muslim scholars abide by the idea that Muhammad did not perform miracles at all and tend to say that Muhammad's followers invented many of the miracle stories in the *hadith*.[571] Some Christian writers have even used this as a polemical argument.[572] It is all the more noteworthy, therefore, that the Qur'an freely acknowledges that Muhammad, who is "the seal of the Prophets," could not perform any miracles.

We may suppose that in the story about the refusal to perform a sign, Muhammad addressed himself mainly to Jews. The reference to Moses and the Jewish people at the time of the revelation of the Torah makes that plausible. The Jews are presented here as non-believers in Muhammad's message. On the other hand, the Qur'an sometimes considers Jews as believers, albeit unlike believers in Islam. This assumption is based on the idea that belief in one God was clear for Jews at that time, as is confirmed by the Qur'an itself.[573] According to the narrative, the Jews asked Muhammad to prove his prophethood if he wished them to accept him. Apparently, Jews requested Muhammad to show a written document from heaven.[574] This event is similar to what happened, according to the Qur'an, with Moses and the people of Israel at Sinai. The Qur'an refers here to the negative attitude of the people of Israel towards Moses when he had received the Torah on Sinai. According to the

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[571] For miracles found in the Hadith, see more Muhammad ibn Ismaʿil al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meaning of Sahih al-Bukhari*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publications, 1997).
[572] Mark Gabriel, *Jesus and Muhammad. Profound Differences and Surprising Similarities,* Florida 2004, 223.
[573] "*Indeed, those who believe and those who are Jews or Christians or Sabeans – those who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteousness – will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve*" – Qur'an 2:62. Note that we reject the solution offered by some Islamic commentators to read this verse (*those who believe*) in the past tense, "those who believed" i.e. limited to the time *before* Muhammad.
[574] Here we can see a clear parallel with Qur'an 28:48: "*But when the truth came to them from Us, they said,* "*Why was he not given the like of what which was given to Moses*?" *Did they not disbelieve in that which was given to Moses aforetime*?""

Qur'an, the people of Israel had demanded proof from Moses, namely by asking him to show God to them.[575] This turns out to be impossible and even dangerous, which is interpreted by the Qur'an as a punishment for their bold questioning.

As we have stated, post-Qur'anic literature presents a number of miracles of Muhammad, including his supernatural predictions in the Qur'an, as described in the *hadith*, the early traditions about the stories and deeds of Muhammad.[576] It seems that Muhammad's inability to perform miracles, the original layer to be found in the Qur'an, was later superseded by the wish to aggrandize Muhammad's charism.[577]

The Muslim writer Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Tabari (nineth century) in his book *The Book of Religion and Empire* offers a whole chapter on miracles allegedly performed by Muhammad. He refers to the stories in the Qur'an on the night journey from "the sacred mosque" to "the remote mosque," which is interpreted as a journey from Mecca to Jerusalem. Muhammad was even able to describe a caravan along the way. Five polytheists offended Muhammad (Qur'an 15:94-95), and were punished, which is interpreted as meaning that they were killed in various ways. At his birth, Muhammad radiated a light beaming across a distance of many miles. Numerous other miracles, even without any basis in the Qur'an, are attributed to Muhammad. Talking animals – even a slaughtered sheep that warned Muhammad of poison – and trees that move are only some of the examples of miracles. It is enough to conclude that the Qur'anic argument that Muhammad, as an ordinary human person, did not perform miracles gave way in post-Qur'anic literature to the portrayal of

[575] See also Qur'an 17:93, where unspecified disbelievers, possibly the Meccan idolaters, assert that they will not believe in the Prophet until he brings down a book they can read. Seyyed Hossein Nasr. *The Study Quran*, 260.
[576] In particular, many Muslims believe that the moon literally split in half and appeared as two pieces in the sky by Muhammad's doing.
[577] Francis Edward Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad: Parallel Tracks, Parallel Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 205.

Muhammad as a miracle worker, possibly in order to compete with Christianity, as we have suggested earlier.

It is not our purpose to go further into the debate about post-Qur'anic developments, but it shows that miracles were also considered an important means of legitimation in Islam.

The demand for a sign is the main issue that connects the stories from the Qur'an and from the Gospel of Luke quoted above. At first glance, a similar issue seems to be at stake in the Qur'anic account and in the passages from the Gospels of Luke and Mark: people demand a sign from Muhammad and Jesus respectively. In both cases, no performance of miracles takes place. And in both cases, a lack of belief on the part of the audience is an important motif.

Asking for miracles as a proof is presented as negative behavior in the Old Testament (when people asked for a sign from Moses), in the New Testament, and in the Qur'an. In that respect, the case with regard to Jesus and Muhammad is similar. Both complain about the people's unbelief. The audience was not willing to believe, neither in Muhammad's message nor in Jesus' message without supernatural signs, which were demanded as divine legitimation. Still, whereas according to the Qur'an Muhammad does not perform miracles because of his status as an ordinary Human Being, Jesus' refusal was limited to one place only, His hometown. Muhammad's inability to perform signs goes hand-in-hand with strong criticism of the unbelief of the people. The purpose of the episode from the Gospel of Mark 6:4-6 is not to emphasize a lack of power ("dynamis") on the part of Jesus, but rather to stress the lack of faith among the people of His hometown.

In this respect, the rejection of the demand for a sign is comparable in both the Gospel and the Qur'an, as both consider the attitude of the audience from a highly critical perspective. As a Christian theologian I need to acknowledge these similarities. However, although the lack of faith on the side of the audience is similar in the Gospel accounts and the Qur'an, the emphasis upon Muhammad as an ordinary Human Being is different from Jesus' role as the Gospel sees it. Although Jesus seems to prefer the people acknowledging His divine status to revealing this Himself (*Messiasgeheimnis*), it is clear that the Gospels portray Jesus as a God-sent prophet, as the Son of God, and as a charismatic miracle worker.

From a theological perspective, we may admit that being an ordinary Human Being does not invariably mean being unable to perform miracles and signs. Muhammad even made no specific claims to the role of a *Mahdi* or eschatological guide for himself, because his most significant contribution was the message of belief in one God. Muhammad claimed to be sent by God, but without any ability to perform supernatural "proofs".[578] The prophethood of Muhammad is stressed throughout the Qur'an. The Islamic scholar Mona Siddiqui rightly notes that the Qur'an distinguishes prophecy (*nubuwwa*) from revelation (*wahy*).[579] Still, the Qur'an itself does not contain an extensive doctrine of prophecy.[580] Hence it may surprise us that, according to the Qur'an, the prophets were without a doubt endowed with the ability to perform miracles and signs, with the exception of Muhammad.

[578] Francis Edward Peters, *Jesus and Muhammad: Parallel Tracks, Parallel Lives*, 2011, 152.
[579] Mona Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims, and Jesus*, 2013, Chapter 1.
[580] Ibid., 13.

Muhammad did not teach his followers to pray for healing or for miracles.[581] As we have seen before, a miracle-*mu`jiza* in the Qur'an is an act performed by a prophet as proof of the mission that God entrusted to him and proof of the connection between the prophet and the source of revelation.[582] Apparently then, this is not applicable to Muhammad. In addition, we hear in the Qur'an how Jesus performed several miracles: making a living bird from clay, healing a blind man and a leper. These miracles are viewed as confirmation of Jesus' special status, because congenital blindness and leprosy are generally considered to be incurable. Hence not only the Gospels, but also the Qur'an knows of a divine legitimation of Jesus through the performance of miracles. Qur'an 3:43 is eloquent enough in this context, containing the quintessence of Jesus' mission according to the Qur'an.

"*And [make him] a messenger to the Children of Israel, [who will say], 'Indeed I have come to you with a sign from your Lord in that I design for you from clay [that which is] like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird by permission of Allah. And I cure the blind [from birth] and the leper, and I give life to the dead – by permission of Allah*." – Qur'an 3:49.[583]

For a Christian theologian it must come as a paradox that the Qur'anic Jesus performs miracles to prove his more-than-human status, although the Qur'an time

[581] It is important to point to yet another approach to miracles in Islam, connected to supernatural knowledge. The main concept is called Al-Ghaib. This term refers to all knowledge that is unseen or concealed and is only known to God (Qur'an 6:59). Other supernatural examples (miracles) were provided by prophets only. In Islam, Muhammad is considered to be the "seal of the prophets", and accordingly, there will be no miracles after him. Still, we need to mention *karamah* – supernatural acts, that are lower than miracles, but can be produced by ordinary people who received this blessing from God.

[582] Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari, *Prophecy* (Baku: n.p., 1994), 27

[583] *"... and when you designed from clay like the form of a bird with My permission, then you breathed into it, and it became a bird with My permission*" – Qur'an 5:110. This story also appears in the apocryphal literature: "*Jesus causes them to walk, also makes clay birds, which he causes to fly, and eat and drink*." – The First Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ: 15:4*;* "*Then he took from the bank of the stream some soft clay, and formed out of it twelve sparrows; and there were other boys playing with him*" – The Second Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ: Chapter 1:4. Still, it is significant to add, that Christianity considers this miracle as not on the same level as those in the canonical Gospels.

and again polemizes against the notion of Jesus as Son of God. Still, the difference between the Qur'an and the Gospels in understanding the miracles – either as legitimation solely of being sent by God (Qur'an) or as a Messianic sign to alleviate human suffering (Gospel) – seems to me fundamental. For Christianity, the meaning of this close attention to the plight of humans by alleviating suffering is based on God's proximity to humankind in the incarnation of the Word of God, through which every person is called to deification.[584]

The faith of the recipient of healing is one of the necessary prerequisites.[585] The other prerequisite is God's consent. A miracle takes effect only when God initiates it, and people have enough belief. Faith is required for miracles; miracles are not required for faith. As was mentioned above, miracles occupy a significant place in the Gospel, whereas asking for a miracle as a "sign" is frowned upon, treated in a paradoxical way or even rejected outright.[586] Still, no other religion makes so many claims to the miraculous (as the heart of the matter) as does Christianity.[587] Obviously, Jesus' curious inability to perform a miracle in His hometown has caused extensive discussions within Christianity itself. Jesus did not force divine blessings on people who openly rejected Him. He often performed miracles for those who were confident of His help with strong belief:[588] "Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" – John 20:29. In addition, doing miracles is not the prerogative of Jesus only. Moreover, Jesus' miracles in the synoptics can be classified into several

[584] Therefore, in some miracle stories, in particular Luke 7:13, the idea that Jesus raised the son of the widow because He had compassion on her.
[585] Barry L. Blackburn, *The Miracles of Jesus,* 114.
[586] Jesus rejected Satan's demand for a sign of throwing Himself from the temple wall while remaining unharmed (Mt 4:5–7; Luke 4:9–12). Christ often rejects the direct demands of the Pharisees to show them a sign (Mt 12:39; 16:4; Mk 8:12; Lk 11:29; John 2:18-19).
[587] Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 286.
[588] Ibid., 115.

prominent types, including healings and exorcisms.[589] Jesus expected His followers to perform the same healings and miracles that He did and even more.[590]

Still, if Jesus performed numerous miracles, how did He understand their significance? The answer is probably complex. Good evidence suggests that Jesus performed miracles because He believed Himself to be gifted to do so through the Spirit of God.[591] Some Muslims consider the fact that miracles in Islam are always accompanied by the clause: "by permission of Allah / God" as a vital difference with Jesus' performance. This does not seem right to me, as Jesus makes it clear that He acts on behalf of God Who sent Him. In addition, the Islamic criticism of the Christian idea of Jesus as having a more-than-human status has a docetic ring to it: as if Jesus Himself did not eat and drink like other Human Beings. Jesus acting on behalf of God does not confuse His status for Christians, however, because by acting thus He did not aggrandize Himself, but He became as it were transparent to God. This seems to me a vital difference with Muhammad.

In addition, there is another essential difference between the miracles in the Gospels and in the Qur'an. For Christianity, the miracles of Jesus are always aimed at the perfection of nature, but they are often not contrary to nature. Confirmation of this statement can be found in the story from the synoptic Gospels Matthew (4:1-11), Mark (1:12-13), and Luke (4:1-13), where Satan approaches Jesus, challenging Him to perform supernatural acts: casting Himself down, turning a stone into bread, and worshipping Satan. The temptation of Jesus was part of His preparation for His

[589] Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 114.
[590] "*I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than theses, because I am going to the Father*" – John 14:12. See more Mark A. Gabriel. *Jesus and Muhammad. Profound Differences And Surprising Similarities,* 120.
[591] Barry L. Blackburn, *The Miracles of Jesus,*121.

earthly ministry.[592] Jesus' miracles include the Messianic message, therefore, His temptations are likewise proof of His Messianic vocation.[593] Jesus refused to perform supernatural miracles as a performance. His miracles are always beneficial to the plight of humans, and we may even suggest that God Himself does not act contrary to nature.[594] Through the miracles, Jesus shows God's compassion for Human Beings and heals those who need this. Numerous miracles are accompanied by faith, repentance, and spiritual renewal.

The demand for a sign in the Qur'an has nothing to do with miracles as salvific for or beneficial to people, or as a sign of Messianic times, as it is presented in Luke 4:16-21. In the Gospels, Jesus regards Himself as an eschatological prophet, and His Messianic consciousness is strongly connected to His miracle-working activity.[595] All these beneficial miracles of the healing of a lame person, a blind person, and persons suffering from a skin disease aim to demonstrate that Jesus inaugurated the Messianic times. According to the Gospels these salutary deeds should be considered as a legitimation of His divine status.[596] It is clear that Jesus expected people to see God's love and the divine plan at work in His activities. In a paradoxical way, Jesus presents Himself as the inaugurator of Messianic times while consistently and simultaneously pointing away from Himself to God.

As a Christian theologian, I should also accept the theological humility of Muhammad when he refrains from assuming charismatic power, which may lead to

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[592] Graham H. Twelftree, "Miracle in an Age of Diversity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles*, ed. Graham H. Twelftree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.
[593] Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), 334.
[594] For example, Augustine rejected the idea that miracles broke the laws of nature. See more *Against Faustus* 26.3. See more Colin Brown, "Issues in the History of the Debates on Miracles," in *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles*, ed. Graham H. Twelftree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 275.
[595] Barry L. Blackburn, "The Miracles of Jesus," in *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles*, ed. Graham H. Twelftree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 123.
[596] Ibid., 123.

dominance over people. Ironically, the emphasis on Muhammad's human status ("he eats and drinks") used as a polemic against Christian views of Jesus, presupposes a docetic Christology in which Jesus' existence is not fully embodied and His eating and drinking and even suffering would merely be illusory and not fully human realities. This should be rejected in Christian theology as well.

At the same time, it is perhaps too easy to neutralize Qur'anic polemics against Christianity by regarding its criticism as directed at a docetic Christology only. It is commonly hypothesized that Muhammad may have been influenced by Miaphysites and East Syrian Christians (referred to as "Nestorians"), or possibly by lesser known "heretical" groups, rather than by Melkite (Chalcedonian) Christians.[597] This approach is sometimes applied to harmonize Islam and Christianity by arguing that the Qur'an only rejects "heretical" forms of Christianity. However, this approach has been rejected by Reynolds who argues that Muhammad was fully aware of "mainstream" Christianity.[598] It may well be that Muhammad's inability (over against so many prophets who have performed miracles) is a polemical rejoinder against the whole Christian conviction of the divinity of Jesus. Muhammad / the Qur'an claims that no human being should be considered divine. As a Christian theologian, I realize that a (or *the*) fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity comes to the fore here. The perspective of some Christian commentators who claim that the Qur'an merely rejects a docetic Christology which would even allow Christians to agree with the specific Qur'anic polemic against Jesus' divine sonship, does not seem feasible to me, not only from a historical perspective, but also from a theological perspective. The Qur'anic passages concerning Christianity

[597] Gabriel Said Reynolds, "On the Presentation of Christianity in the Qur'an and the Many Aspects of Qur'anic Rhetoric," *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 12 (2014): 44.
[598] For this topic, see more Gabriel Said Reynolds, "On the Presentation of Christianity in the Qur'an and the Many Aspects of Qur'anic Rhetoric", *Al-Bayan Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 12 (2014), 44.

reflect a rejection of central tenets of Christology, rather than a direct influence from Christian heretical sects.[599] I consider this an all too harmonizing approach, in which genuine differences between Islam and Christianity are denied. Still, the reflection on miracles highlights Islamic convictions, but also sheds fresh light upon Christian belief in Jesus.

5.4.2. *Can we compare the notion of the Qur'an as the miracle par excellence to Jesus' self-designation as being "more than Jonah"?*

Looking back to our Biblical examples about the ambiguity of miracles, we should realize again that in Luke's episode of the sign of Jonah, the massive addressing of "his generation" echoes a prophetic rebuke, whereas in the story in Mark about Jesus in His hometown more specific relations of family and acquaintances are at stake. In Luke, the crowd was demanding a sign from Jesus, not because they were in need of healing, but only to test Jesus. Apparently, according to the Gospels, miracles are intended to foster, but not to force faith. In Luke, Jesus addresses a "generation." Jesus may have been aware that the numerous miracles and signs He had performed and would do in the future would be "not enough" for *this generation*. Jesus explains that there will be a judgement over *the people of this generation*. The Queen of the South, although though not an Israelite,[600] will condemn the people of the Jews in the same manner as the people of Nineveh will condemn an unbelieving Israel. This judgement will, however, not take the form of an explicit condemnation, but will consist of people of Nineveh's exemplary behavior.[601] Despite her status as a queen,

[599] See more Robert E. Speer, "The Attitude of the Evangelist toward the Muslim and His Religion," (Lucknow, 1991), 233-234.
[600] As it is presented in 1 Kings 10 and 2 Chronicles 9.
[601] Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 117 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 148.

she traveled a very long distance,[602] and humbly acknowledged Solomon's wisdom.[603] Jesus shows the people that even pagans were willing to repent, but the people of Israel, who had witnessed so many signs, wonders, and miracles, remained without faith in His message. When Solomon was king, the Queen of Sheba recognized his wisdom and came from far to benefit from it; when Jonah preached, the pagan people of Nineveh recognized the authentic voice of God and responded to it. With a variation upon the idea of the Qur'an being the greatest miracle, we might state that according to Luke, the crowd did not recognize that the greatest sign that God could ever send was Jesus Himself, He being "greater than Jonah".[604] Here we come upon an important theological insight in the encounter with Islam: comparing Jesus with the Qur'an is often more fruitful than comparing Jesus with Muhammad. The failure of "this generation" to repent is inexcusable, because of Jesus' presence as greater than Jonah. Its demand for a sign is answered by pointing to the divine sign par excellence: Jesus. The people of Nineveh, to whom God had sent Jonah, repented, and so should Jesus' Jewish audience, because something "greater than Jonah" was there.

An important difference with the Markan episode in Jesus' hometown is that the audience there is not condemned in the same way. Although the tensions between Jesus and His own family are reported several times, this does not lead to a prophetic condemnation, as happens with the people of Nineveh. The similarity between the two episodes consists in the importance of faith: both the "stubborn generation" and the people of Jesus' hometown lack faith in Jesus. At the close reading stage, we

[602] We may suppose that it would have taken weeks to travel the distance from the Kingdom of Sheba in southern Arabia to Jerusalem and that it would have been an exhausting and expensive journey.
[603] Anna Case-Winters, *Matthew: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 172.
[604] William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 2001), 150.

have emphasized that Jesus was unable (or unwilling) to perform a miracle in His hometown because of the people's unbelief. We have concluded that the Gospel of Mark does not want to stress Jesus' inability as such, but rather the unbelief of the people.[605] People recognize Jesus as a carpenter, the Son of Mary, and someone whose family they were familiar with. They were unable to reconcile the ordinary person they knew with the miraculous deeds reported elsewhere, which resulted in their rejection of His prophetic and divine identity. In both episodes, no miracle in the strict sense takes place. However, the Lukan story about the sign of Jonah takes one step further: the sign of Jonah brought faith and, in a way, the repentance of the pagan people was the sign of Jonah and the miracle the crowd asked for. The people themselves would perform or at least contribute to the sign demanded by believing in Jesus. This indicates that performing miracles is not solely a manifestation of divine abilities and power, but also strictly connected to the faith of the people.

In the realm of comparative religion and religious studies, scholars frequently compare Jesus and Muhammad as the central figures and 'founders' of their respective religions. However, a more nuanced approach might be to draw a parallel between Jesus as the Word of God and the Qur'an respectively, which is similarly regarded as the Word of God in Islam. This perspective suggests a strong similarity, or rather an analogy, between the narrative in Luke and the Qur'anic account. We examined the story from the Qur'an, where Muhammad declined to perform a miracle. Islamic tradition subsequently emphasized that the Qur'an itself is the greatest miracle, which would explain the refusal of Muhammad to perform other miracles. A comparable emphasis is present in the Bible, where Jesus' declaration

[605] Anselm Ramelow, *Miracles, Metaphysics and Salvation History* (Berkeley, CA: Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, 2016), 3.

to the people of His hometown, "*More than Jonah*," highlights that Jesus Himself is the greatest sign.

We see a clear parallel here between the status of Jesus and of the Qur'an, a status that should not be reduced to identity, but may be called analogical. Obviously, this insight will not be shared by the majority of Muslims (nor of Christians). What is clear that according to the Islamic tradition, the miracle of the Qur'an surpassed all preceding miracles, including those of Jesus.[606] The prophetic messages in the Qur'an all come down to one single message: the belief in one God and the approaching Judgment. This is what the scholar Claude Gilliot has called a "monoprophetism".[607] In two cases (5:72 and 5:117), the Qur'an has Jesus Himself reprimand Christians who consider anyone but Allah to be God.[608] Although Christianity fully endorses the faith in the one unique God, undoubtedly Islam understands this faith as excluding the divinity of Jesus.

5.4.3. *Is it possible for a Christian theologian to appreciate Muhammad's call to faith in one God?*[609]

Muhammad's prophetic message of the one God does not clash with the Christian faith as such, for obviously Christians believe in one God as do Muslims. This might even entail the possibility for Christians to accept the Qur'an in this respect as revelation. Does this imply a revelation that is necessary for Christians as well? This does not follow immediately: the revelation may be interpreted by a

[606] Oddbjørn Lervik, *Images Of Jesus Christ In Islam,* 5.
[607] Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Gavin D'Costa, Vatican II, and Islam," *Nova et Vetera* 15, no. 1 (2017): 292.
[608] Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Gavin D'Costa, Vatican II, and Islam," 293.
[609] Clearly, Christians would find it overwhelmingly difficult to accept Muslim claims about the prophetic status of Muhammad and the revealed status of the Qur'an. Surviving polemical texts show that Christian theologians living under Muslim rule at best accepted him as a prophet *for the Arabs alone* with a scripture that approximated the Bible, but more frequently dismissed him as a self-seeking charlatan or lunatic and the Qur'an as a pastiche of biblical truth. See more David Thomas, "Miracles in Islam," in *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles*, ed. Graham H. Twelftree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 206.

Christian theologian as intended not for Christians but for pagans only.[610] Propagating the idea of Islamic monotheism to Christians (or to Jews) was not necessary, a position possibly even defended by the Qur'an itself.[611] In any case, this is an important theological option for us Christians today, which would allow us both to accept Islam as a genuine revelation (to pagans), while preserving Christian integrity and the conviction that God's fullness has appeared in Christ. All this calls for ample reflection.

One may argue that there is no reason why God could not inspire people outside Christianity to prophecy, as long as they do not proclaim a wrong faith.[612] Still, the question of the criteria of a right or wrong religion remains. Catholic tradition has even considered the Sibylline Oracles, although pagan, as prophetic witnesses. Classical Greek and Roman culture itself, although mingled with idolatrous elements, could be considered a *praeparatio evangelica*. In the case of Islam, as a Christian theologian I might take the stand that there is divine truth in this religion, albeit not on the same level as in Christianity and not intended for Christians.

Still, reflecting upon Islam, it is important for Catholic theologians both to recognize the piety and devotion of Muslims, which can indeed often serve as a

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[610] This idea of Islam as a kind of *praeparatio evangelica* has had little influence in Western theology but is developed by several Eastern theologians such as the Arabic Christians Paul of Antioch and Elias of Nisibis. A similar approach has been forwarded by the Judeo-Arabic writer Netanael al-Fayyumi. See more Marcel Poorthuis, Barbara Roggema, and Pim Valkenberg, *The Three Rings: Textual Studies in the Historical Trialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 18-19 and Herman Teule, "Paul of Antioch's Attitude to the Jews and the Muslims: His Letter to the Nations and the Jews," in *The Three Rings: Textual Studies in the Historical Trialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Marcel Poorthuis, Barbara Roggema, and Pim Valkenberg (Leuven: Peeters, 2005).

[611] "*Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans – those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness – will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve*" – Qur'an 2:62. Note that a reading in the present: "*Those who believe*…", is also possible.

[612] Anselm Ramelow, *Miracles, Metaphysics and Salvation History*, 66.

model for Christians.[613] A variety of the idea of *praeparatio evangelica* is the notion, mentioned already and developed by Christian Arab and Jewish authors in the Middle Ages, that the Qur'an may be considered a genuine revelation by God, but one not intended for Christians or Jews, but for pagan Arabs only.[614] It would solve the vexing question of how *Nostra Aetate* can state that Muslims venerate the one true God, but without saying anything about the Qur'an as revelation. Pursuing this train of thought, Christians may indeed consider Islam as a kind of divine preparation for Christianity. Hence it implies that Islam should not be considered idolatrous or as false religion. As a Catholic theologian, I may admit that God may inspire pious people (including Muslims) from other religions.[615] However, this approach cannot but raise an extensive debate within Christianity. Large segments of Christianity, especially Protestantism (and not only the fundamentalists among them) consider Islam the hallmark of a false religion, because of the rejection of the Trinity, of the crucifixion, and of the divinity of Christ.

We repeat the question: is it possible for a Christian theologian to appreciate Muhammad's call to faith in one God? This question concerns both the interreligious and intrareligious perspectives (i.e. within Christianity), if only because of the significant differences in attitude between Catholicism and Protestantism. The ideas of Miroslav Volf, a Protestant theologian are relevant to my reflection, although he questions what was already decided for Catholicism in *Nostra Aetate* 60 years ago, namely that Muslims believe in the one true God.

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[613] Anselm Ramelow, *Miracles, Metaphysics and Salvation History*, 299.
[614] See note 609 above.
[615] Including the religions which contain "sparks of truth" – Declaration of the Second Vatican Council *Nostra Aetate*. Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions *Nostra Aetate* proclaimed by his holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965 // http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html. We should realize, however, that Islam has much more in common with Christianity than just "sparks of truth".

Miroslav Volf asserts three statements concerning God in Islam and Christianity: *there is one God and one divine reality*; *God has created everything that is not God*; *God is radically different from that what is not God*.[616] For Miroslav Volf, Muslims and Christians believe in the same God, i.e. the same entity, but he makes a qualification. Volf makes six claims showing that the object of Muslim and Christian worship is the same: "*There is only one God, the one and only divine being*" (Mark 12:29; Qur'an 47:19). "*God created everything that is not God*" (Genesis 1:1; Qur'an 42:11). "*God is different from everything that is not God*" (1 Timothy 6:16; Qur'an 6:103). "*God is good*" (1 John 4:16; Qur'an 85:14). "*God commands that we love God with our whole being*" (Deuteronomy 6:5; Qur'an 39:45). "*God commands that we love our neighbors as ourselves*" (Matthew 7:12; Sahih Muslim, Hadith no.45)[617] Still, as Volf himself admits, Muslims and Christians believe in the common God and worship the same true God.[618] Moreover, Volf suggests that a Christian who has been baptized in the name of the Trinity, and confesses Jesus, even if they were simultaneously to pray the *Al Fatiha*,[619] fast during Ramadan, pray five times a day, and believe that Muhammad is a prophet,[620] is one hundred percent Christian.[621] Myroslav Volf's proposed statements remind me of two different theological methods within Christianity: the apophatic and the cataphatic approach.

In this case, the apophatic tradition may be a relevant element in interreligious dialogue. "*The ground stone of apophatic thought is the notion that God cannot be*

[616] Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response*. HarperOne, 2011, 110.
[617] Ibid., 97-110.
[618] Ibid., 123.
[619] The first surah of the Qur'an. In this chapter, the first seven lines dedicated to prayer as the way of relation with God.
[620] Here Volf means *prophet* not according to Islamic understanding as the "seal of the prophets", but rather *prophet* as we could apply this term to Martin Luther King Jr.
[621] Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response*, 199.

endowed with rational categories, definitions, and attributes of human sensory experience."[622] Meanwhile, even if it is built on negation, apophatic theology affirms the existence of God. Apophatic theology tries to convey the mystery of God's existence by emphasizing transcendence as beyond human comprehension. That is why the concept of negative theology and mysticism plays an important role and has been actively developed in Eastern Christianity. Greek Byzantine Church Fathers[623] were convinced that, in order to reach sacred unity with God, everything earthly should be removed from human thought. They argue that the cataphatic way of knowing God does not safeguard God's transcendence sufficiently. In interreligious dialogue the apophatic tradition may be of help because it makes it possible to realize that we should all remain silent and stand in awe before the mystery of God. This teaches theological humility on the one hand – the mystery of God cannot be claimed as a *possession* – and prevents general statements or even judgments about other religions on the other hand. A general relativism, as in: all religions are true, is no less refuted by apophatic tradition than a claim that only my religion contains the truth, thus relegating all other religions to darkness. Still, as a Christian, I believe that Christianity contains the fulness of divine revelation, and I may feel entitled, in all modesty, to testify about this to others. Still, I should not assume that these other religions have nothing to tell me about the divine.

Can we as Christians affirm Muhammad's status as a prophet? The question whether Christians may recognize Muhammad as a prophet has puzzled many theologians and needs some preliminary clarification. Often in Muslim-Christian dialogue the question is posed to Christians at an early stage. The Catholic

[622] Nur Kirabaev and Olga Chistyakova, "Knowing God in Eastern Christianity and Islamic Tradition: A Comparative Study," *Religions* 11, no. 12 (2020): 6.
[623] Apophatic theology was fundamental for John of Damascus, Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, Athanasius of Alexandria, and the Cappadocian Fathers.

theologian Hans Küng has found no fewer than seven similarities between the Biblical prophets and Muhammad, such as their testifying of an absolute monotheism, and the call for social justice.[624] A major difference, however, is that the Biblical prophets, with the exception of Jonah, did not preach to pagans, as did Muhammad. In addition, Biblical prophets derive a major significance for Christians from the fact that they are signposts and precursors of Jesus Christ, another essential difference. It seems, however, that the decisive difference consists in the Islamic claim that Muhammad is the seal of the prophets (Qur'an). It is striking that Tertullian in his *Adversus Iudaeos* 8:12 uses exactly the same expression to characterize Jesus Christ: *All prophets have announced Christ, and His coming and suffering, and the fulfillment of the prophecies by His advent, and this is why it is said that the vision and prophecy have been sealed because Christ is himself the seal of the prophets* (Adversus Iudaeos 8:12). This is the reason for some Christian theologians to deny the prophethood of Muhammad altogether. I would rather argue that comparing Muhammad to Christ makes little sense, but this does not exclude a meaningful comparison between Muhammad and the Biblical prophets. My own approach makes a distinction between the prophethood of Muhammad as such and its meaning for Christians.

The similarity between Muhammad and the Biblical prophets becomes clear from a comparative religion approach. A hallmark of the prophetic calling seems to be the reluctance to obey. Jeremiah curses the day of his birth, Moses claims an inability to speak, Jonah flees his calling and takes a boat, apparently hoping to be out of God's sight. The overwhelming experience of being called is clear in Moses' vocation: he sees a burning bush and a voice speaks to him, revealing the name of

[624] Hans Küng, *Islam: Past, Present and Future* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 207, 505.

God which challenges comprehension. Isaiah's numinous experience brings him to cry out that he is impure of lips. An angel purifies him with a fiery coal. Muhammad's vocation is traditionally connected with Qur'an 96:1, where it is said: "*Speak in the name of the Lord who has created you*." It is a point of debate among scholars whether this surah indeed refers to Muhammad's calling – it is possibly a fragment of a liturgical formula – but here we focus upon the traditional Islamic understanding. This surah is supposed to refer to Muhammad's vocation as described in his biography the *Sirah*. There the angel Gabriel orders Muhammad to read / recite while pressing him; three times Muhammad cries: "*What shall I read (recite)*?"[625] Then the angel recites Qur'an 96.

The Biblical echoes of Muhammad's calling are clear: in addition to those mentioned above, one may refer to the young Samuel called three times by God and to the Annunciation to Mary by the angel with the same name Gabriel. Later on, Muhammad doubts his own senses and feels desperate. He receives new messages and gradually becomes convinced that God has called him as his prophet. In this comparative perspective one could agree on the prophetic character of Muhammad's calling.

From a Christian theological perspective, however, we should wonder whether a genuine revelation is still possible or necessary after the New Testament. Admittedly, early Christianity knows of itinerant prophets (see the *Didache*, beginning of the second century). Still, although these prophets are trusted spokesmen of God, they do not deliver a newly revealed document to be added to the Bible. In that perspective, it is hard for Christians to accept the Qur'an as an

[625] Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Isḥāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 106.

additional and supplementary revelation. Of course, it is the Islamic perspective that the Qur'an even corrects the Biblical message which is supposed to have become corrupted (*taḥrif*). This corruption may concern the text itself or its interpretation. I think that neither possibility can be accepted by the Christian theologian. However, if we leave aside the problem of *taḥrif*, we might accept the idea that the Qur'an does not claim to bring a new revelation, but rather a message which is identical to that delivered to Jews and Christians: faith in the one, unique God, which also underlies Jesus' attitude to miracles, both those He performed and those He refused to perform.

To whom is the message of Muhammad directed? Muhammad constantly appealed to his hearers to believe in one God, but that does not necessarily create problems or challenges for Christianity, because Christians also believe in one God, a fact of which Muhammad was well aware. Accordingly, we can assume that this emphasis was directed at those who do not believe in one God and are, therefore, pagans. Hence, it is possible for me to argue that Muhammad's call is relevant for pagans but not for Christians.[626] In this sense, we can say that Islam is post-Christian, because in a way it continues the Christian mission to bring pagans to monotheism by using and referring to well-known Biblical stories. Simultaneously, we can say that Islam is, in a certain sense, pre-Christian because it sees its origin in the figure of Abraham, who lived long before the birth of Jesus. The Qur'an speaks of "taking a covenant" with five particular prophets, Muhammad, Noah, Moses, Abraham, and Jesus, as if the relationship of prophet to God is a long-term integrated project.[627]

[626] As stated before, this concept was developed by Medieval Arab-Christian as well as Jewish thinkers. See more *The Three rings*, p.106 n.42 (Paul of Antioch) and 262 n.13 (Netana'el al-Fayyumi). These ideas have hardly reached Western European theology though.
[627] Mona Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims, and Jesus,* 15.

So, we may say that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, but still, we could maintain that theologically and subjectively, the concept of God in Islam and Christianity differs. Christian theology is rooted in God's will, which culminates in the figure of Jesus, seen as the embodiment of the Word of God addressed to all of humankind. However, we should realize that Jesus, in answer to the question concerning the great commandment (Mk 12:29), quotes the *Shema Jisrael* (Deut. 6:4-6), in which God's unity and lordship is emphasized. So, we should accept that Jesus worships the same God as Judaism does. From the close reading perspective, this reference to the One unique God is a hallmark of the Jewish faith, but also of Jesus' own relationship with His Father in heaven. Hence, we must accept that referring to the one unique God is a valid creedal statement for Christians who believe in the Trinity. Obviously, the concept of the Trinity cannot contradict the belief in the One unique God. Just like the *Shema* creates a "common ground" between Judaism and Christianity, Muhammad's constant reference to the One unique God may be seen as a "common ground" between Christianity and Islam.[628]

Moreover, Deut. 6:10[629] refers to Abraham, who was stalwart in his belief and who was the first to realize the truth of monotheism through his own reflection and became the archetype for Muslims and Islam in general.[630] In this case, as a Christian theologian, I think it is warranted to say that Jews, Christians, and Muslims worship the same God, whatever further differences there are. This statement provides ample possibilities for interreligious and intrareligious dialogue.

[628] Cp. the Islamic declaration *A Common Word* (2007) which emphasizes this common ground.
[629] "*And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham…*".
[630] Adam Silverstein, Guy G. Stroumsa, and Moshe Blidstein, *The Oxford Handbook of the Abrahamic Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 12.

Is there any possibility to argue that there can be substantive scriptural intertextuality between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam? We should note that Christianity and Judaism share the Hebrew Bible (although some thinkers claim that precisely this 'sharing' hides fundamental differences in the interpretation). Islam in a way appreciates both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, but with some important qualifications: the interpretation of the Bible or even the Biblical text itself is supposed to have been corrupted (*taḥrif*). This of course explains for Muslims the necessity of the Qur'an, (which incorporates many oral traditions and Biblical explanations from Judaism and Christianity), but I do not think Christianity can find any 'common ground' in the concept of "corruption". Still, these differences between Islam and Christianity do not prevent a basic agreement about addressing the same God. For Christians, the revelation of Christ as the Word of God is not a detour but the eminent way to God. Likewise, profession of the Triune God should not be considered as essentially different from profession of the One true God, even when Jews and Muslims will never agree to this.

In a way, we have seen a structural similarity between Jonah and Muhammad as prophets to the pagans, and between He who is "more than Jonah", namely Jesus, and the Qur'an as the Word of God. This similarity can be appreciated, but cannot be appropriated by either Muslims and Christians as integral to their belief.

The issue whether Judaism, Christianity, and Islam worship and believe in the same God is among the most hotly debated issues of theological reflection in each of the three traditions and has often led to polemical utterances in the past. The polemic approach will never lead to a sharing of faith and inspiration and will eventually cause a refusal to participate as a guest in mutual interreligious exchanges. This approach fails to do justice to the challenge of Islam, and is

therefore not an interreligious enrichment. Although polemics can by no means be relegated to the past, nowadays we find that dialogue is a better tool for mutual understanding.

The status of Jesus, of the Hebrew Bible, and of the Qur'an belongs to the central topics of conversation between the three monotheistic religions, often grouped together as the Abrahamic religions.[631] We can find echoes of these debates in the declaration of the Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, one of the groundbreaking documents. It is evident that *Nostra Aetate* was written for Christians; however it signaled to Jews, Muslims (and even to Hindus and Buddhists), that the Catholic Church was reflecting on its attitudes towards non-Christians by opening up new vistas.[632]

To demonstrate that the issues discussed above are not yet settled among Christians, not even in the light of *Nostra Aetate* and the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,[633] (see the first chapter of this study), I wish to point to the following debate.

Nostra Aetate is often referred to as indicating that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. However, on closer inspection, according to some Christian commentators, matters are more complicated than that. The British theologian Gavin D'Costa does not follow Volf's perspective that Muslims and Christians believe in

[631] The term Abrahamic religions is still criticized. See more Aaron Hughes' *Abrahamic Religions* and Jon Levenson's *Inheriting Abraham*.
[632] Anthony J. Cernera, *Examining Nostra Aetate after 40 Years: Catholic–Jewish Relations in Our Time* (Fairfield, CT: Sacred Heart University Press, 2007), 74.
[633] See more Pim Valkenberg and Anthony Cirelli, *Nostra Aetate* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016).

the same God.[634] When dealing with *Nostra Aetate*, D'Costa underlines the role of the "sparks of truth" and argues that Muslims, like other non-Christians, could be saved only because they are "invincibly ignorant"[635] of the Gospel.[636] A conscious denial of the Gospel would make salvation a complicated matter, but ignorance may serve as an excuse for not believing. This would hold good for Islam as well. In addition, from D'Costa's point of view, "divine sparks" can be found in different religions, including both Islam and Far Eastern religions. However, D'Costa more or less ignores the central role of Abraham in *Nostra Aetate*, who binds Christianity, Judaism, and Islam together. In "Divine Sparks and Abraham: A Major Difference", a reply to Gavin D'Costa, the Dutch theologian Marcel Poorthuis argues that Islam cannot be generically subsumed under the term "a ray of truth" and that *Nostra Aetate* does not refer to Islam as "invincibly ignorant".[637] He argues that the declaration distinguishes between the Abrahamic religions: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, on the one hand, and the Far Eastern religions Hinduism and Buddhism on the other. Poorthuis continues that sections 3 and 4 about Islam and Judaism should not be regarded as a further clarification of the section dedicated to Buddhism and Hinduism and hence that Judaism and Islam cannot be subsumed under mere "sparks of truth". Obviously, *Nostra Aetate* approaches Judaism and Islam differently from Hinduism and Buddhism.[638] Having said this, I realize that *Nostra Aetate* does not elaborate upon the content of Islam and what Muslims practice except for the Islamic "pillars of faith" and that Muslims adore the only God, the living, the merciful, and

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[634] "*The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God*" – Nostra Aetate 3.

[635] We should point out that this idea would be completely unacceptable for Muslims.

[636] D'Costa explains the idea of Islam's dependency on Christian revelation.

[637] Marcel Poorthuis, "Divine Sparks and Abraham: A Major Difference," *Louvain Studies* 40 (2017): 251.

[638] Miroslav Volf, *Do We Worship the Same God? Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 4.

omnipotent creator of heaven and earth who has spoken to the Human Beings.[639] While *Nostra Aetate* expresses appreciation for the faith of Muslims and even uses its terminology, it does not make any definitive statement regarding the place (if any) of Islam in the divine dispensation and says nothing at all about the Qur'an or Muhammad.[640] D'Costa underlines that the use of Qur'anic language does not imply any acceptance of the Qur'an but merely serves to present Islamic teaching in an appropriate manner. Still, Muslims may be justified in asking: If Christians admit that Muslims believe in the One true God, should the Qur'an then not be considered revelation … by Christians?

It is significant to note here that if we suppose that Muslims and Christians worship the same God, we should realize that, from a Christian perspective, confessing the one true God is equal to acknowledging God the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.[641] As an answer to the heresy of Modalism (which claimed that God reveals Himself in different "modalities," without this implying relations within the Trinity), Christians may present the concept of *perichoresis*. Perichoresis (*περιχώρησις*) is a term used in trinitarian theology, referring to interdwelling between the persons of the Triune God (Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit). When this concept is used in the context of Christology, it refers to the doctrine that there are human and divine natures in Jesus Christ without being separated. All this remains valid for me as a Christian theologian. Still, I feel that it would be theologically incorrect to consider Jesus' profession of the *Hear Israel*, a central profession of the Jewish faith, as inferior to the trinitarian creed, which in fact, mysteriously expresses the same divine reality.

[639] Miroslav Volf, *Do We Worship the Same God? Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Dialogue*, 4.
[640] Gabriel S. Reynolds, *Gavin D'Costa, Vatican II, and Islam*, 205.
[641] It is right to add that this theological statement is interpreted differently within Christianity. This debate appeared in the fourth century and was formulated as the controversy between Western and Eastern Christianity on the *Filioque.*

Obviously, Jews and Muslims consider the encounter with Jesus as a detour. Without in any way concurring with that reservation, Christian theology should avoid docetic or Marcionite heresies by assuming that Jesus has no affinity with the Jewish faith. Evidently, one may argue that Jesus's divine Sonship, as well as the Holy Spirit, play a role in the New Testament, even if specific theological reflection about the Holy Spirit appears quite late in the writings of the Church Fathers.[642] This, however, does not detract from the paramount significance of the trinitarian faith for Christianity. Moreover, one may say that even Islamic understanding does not refute Christian belief in the Trinity. Both religions addressed themselves to the one unique God. Christians worked extensively in the first five centuries to formulate and defend the trinitarian doctrine. In the New Testament, the picture is not straightforward because it speaks about the oneness of God Himself,[643] whereas simultaneously Jesus is presented as God.[644] Hence Jesus' humanity is not an obstacle to His being God, according to the New Testament.[645] We can admit that exactly because of the figure of Jesus, the oneness of God in the New Testament continues and expands the Old Testament *Shema Jisrael*.[646]

Moreover, the Qur'an emphasizes the oneness of God[647] even more strongly than the New Testament itself. However, the Qur'an[648] does so apologetically, often directed against the Christian concept of the Trinity.[649] Islam denies the concept of

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[642] The major debates over the Trinity took place between the third and fifth centuries and found its culmination in the Council of Nicea (325) and the Council of Chalcedon (451).
[643] See in Mark 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:4; Gal. 3:20; 1 Tim. 2:5; James 2:19.
[644] See in John 1:1, 10:30; Rom. 15:6; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:8; Jude 1:25.
[645] In John 17:21-23, Jesus prays for apostles to be one with the God Father as Christ is.
[646] Agshin Jafarov, *Monotheism in the Qur'an and in the New Testament: Comparative Theological Explorations of the Role of Prophets and the Covenants* (Holland, MI: n.p., 2016), 106.
[647] See in the Qur'an: 2:163; 2:255; 6:102; 6:151; 7:59; 17:23; 17:42; 21:22; 23:91; 31:11; 35:3; 39:38; 51:56; 16:36; 42:11; 46:4; 112:1-4.
[648] "*They have certainly disbelieved who say,* "*Allah is the third of three.*" *And there is no god except one God. And if they do not desist from what they are saying, there will surely afflict the disbelievers among them a painful punishment.*" – Qur'an 5:73.
[649] Agshin Jafarov, *Monotheism in the Qur'an and in the New Testament*, 24.

the Trinity as well as the divinity of Jesus, two fundamental concepts of the Christian faith, considering this *shirk*, i.e., heresy.[650] Although the Qur'an consistently misinterprets both Jesus' divine Sonship (namely as Docetism) and the Trinity (namely as tritheism), which has led some Christian scholars to make the bold statement that they can agree with all the Qur'anic polemics against Christianity, we should acknowledge this strong polemical stand against Christianity, which may be a question for Muslims rather than for Christians.

Within Christianity, there are numerous approaches concerning Islam which frequently involve apologetics and polemics. As it has been seen in the first chapter of this study, the history of relations between Christians and Muslims has taken a thorny path. It should be realized therefore that the approaches presented above by Volf, Poorthuis, and even D'Costa are pioneering approaches, which by are no means universally shared by Christians. As mentioned earlier, certain Protestant churches in particular are adamantly opposed to considering Islam an authentic faith. We must also recall the polemical themes within the history of Christianity dedicated to Islam and Muslims and proposed by Christian fundamentalists, including denying the authenticity of the hadith;[651] doubts about the divine mission of Muhammad; his mental state and his inability to perform miracles[652] and signs.

We have, however pointed out many intertextual exchanges and enrichments to which reading of the Bible and the Qur'an has given rise. Protestant

[650] Mona Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims, and Jesus,* 9.
[651] Bukhari, considered to be the most reliable collector, admitted that of the 300,000 *hadith* he collected, he considered only 100,000 as authentic (later he narrowed this number down to 7,275, many of which are repetitions so that the total number is in fact near 3,000. That means that even he admitted there were errors in over 295,000 of them.) – See more Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 170.
[652] "The miracle stories based on Muslim tradition are suspect. They lack eyewitness accounts, contain many contradictions, and, therefore, lack credibility." – See more Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 171.

fundamentalism is convinced that Muhammad's prophethood should be denied and refuted even on reasonable grounds. This seems to me not very fruitful: it implies an accusation by Christians that Muslims are irrational.

5.4.4. *How should we in Catholic theology evaluate the typological connection between Moses and Muhammad?*

Allegory and typology, for all their differences, are both productions of meaning that transcend the so-called original context of a text. This is why both allegory and typology have been largely ignored in historical-critical Biblical research, which is mainly interested in a historical reconstruction of origins as the locus of "truth". Even Christian theology itself has lost interest in typology, due to a more factual historical understanding of the Old Testament.[653] Allegory was supposed to obscure the historical meaning by arbitrarily comparing elements of a story in the Old Testament with spiritual elements often from the New Testament. Typology is the idea that a person or event in the Hebrew Bible finds its "fulfillment" in persons or events in the New Testament. A good example of this is Moses in the Exodus, liberating the people from slavery, which is regarded as foreshadowing the resurrection of Christ and the liberation from death. Crossing the Red Sea thus becomes a prefiguration of baptism. The person in which Old Testament figures find their fulfillment is often Christ. This is why typology comes close to a Christocentric reading of the Old Testament. Understandably, Jewish authors object to such a reading, which in their view robs the Biblical persons of their own meaning through Christian appropriation of their identities. However, if we look at this from a somewhat broader viewpoint, it can be seen that Jewish and Islamic traditions also

[653] See for the central role of typology in the context of *nouvelle théologie* Jean Daniélou's influential—though not entirely original—study, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in Biblical Typology of the Fathers* (London: Burns & Oates, 1960); cf. idem, *Bible et liturgie* (Paris: Cerf, 1962).

have their own typological reading. A Jewish view is that "the suffering servant" of Isaiah 53 is not a prediction of Christ, but of the Jewish people at large, whereas Esau stands for Rome, the evil Roman empire and later the Church. There are also examples of Jewish typology that approximate a Christological reading even more closely, like the Jewish messianic interpretations of Old Testament texts, such as the famous one in Gen 49 about Shilo (Gen 49:10).[654] A wealth of both Jewish messianic and Christological interpretations has been attached to such texts.[655]

Christianity regards many Biblical figures as foreshadowing Christ: Abel, Melchisedek, Abraham, Moses, David, Jonah, just to mention a few. Especially those mentioned as such in the New Testament, like the ones just listed, continue to enjoy strong authority in Christian theology.[656] Obviously, in the eyes of his disciples, as a magnet Jesus attracted comparisons with many Biblical types which highlight different aspects of His identity. Sometimes the arbitrariness may baffle the reader, for example when the Church Father Ambrose (339–397) considers David as a type of Christ during that episode, in spite of his grave sin with Bathsheba. How Uriah should embody Satan, as Ambrose also holds, is similarly difficult to fathom.[657] Nevertheless, a kind of rehabilitation of typology can be detected, for instance under the influence of the literary scholar Northrop Frye.[658] As stated earlier, Angelika Neuwirth, a prominent figure in Qur'anic studies, has introduced this perspective into research of the Qur'an, as a proof that texts can convey

[654] See also the collection of Messianic texts from the Targum (the Aramaic paraphrase of the Hebrew Bible), in Samson H. Levey, *The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation* (New York: Hebrew Union College Press, 1974).
[655] "The sceptre will not depart from Judah until Shilo comes". See more Adolf Posnanski, *Schilo: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Messiaslehre* (Leipzig: n.p., 1904).
[656] Related to this is the difference between the Alexandrian patristic school, which allows many Christological readings of the psalms, whereas the Antiochene school only permits this for the (four) psalms quoted in the New Testament.
[657] *De apologia prophetae David* § 14.
[658] See more Robert Alter, "Northrop Frye between Archetype and Typology," in *Frye and the Word: Religious Contexts in the Writings of Northrop Frye*, ed. Michael Dolzani (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 121-172. As a Bible scholar, Alter is quite negative about typology.

meanings other than in their original historical context.[659] The rehabilitation of the Old Testament in the first centuries of Christianity was a welcome side-effect of typological reading.

The text chosen by me about the absence of miracles in the Qur'anic description of Muhammad is a perfect example of the identification of Muhammad with Moses.[660] It is Moses who instructs Muhammad during his nightly ascension.[661] Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad proclaim the same religion (Qur'an 42:13–16).[662]

Hence, for our purpose, we should ask ourselves what theological meaning can be attached to Muhammad's identification with Moses. In view of the paramount significance of Moses in the life of Jesus and in the eyes of his disciples, the question arises how this relates to the Qur'anic typology of Moses in the preaching and deeds of Muhammad.

Herod, persecuting the child Jesus, is reminiscent of pharaoh threatening the child Moses, a fact which turns pharaoh into a negative type of Herod.[663] Many miracles of Jesus, like the feeding of the thousands or the promise of living water, seem to echo miracles of Moses in the desert. During the transfiguration of Jesus on

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[659] Just like post-Biblical typology, there is a post-Qur'anic typology: compare how both the Virgin Mary and A'isha are accused of sexual immorality. See more Neal Robinson, "The Virginal Conception," in *Christ in Islam and Christianity: The Representation of Jesus in the Qur'ān and the Classical Muslim Commentaries* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1991), 159. The "peg" for this affair with A'isha is Q. 24:11 ff. The Biblical Miriam and the Virgin Mary may form another typological relationship, often mistaken for a Qur'anic error (Q. 19:28). In the previous chapter we have seen how the Temple forms the type for the prayer niche, for the Church and for Mary's body. The burning bush that remains intact is another type of the Virgin Mary.

[660] See more for the numerous similarities between Moses and Muhammad Annabel Keeler, "Moses from a Muslim Perspective," in *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conversation*, ed. Norman Solomon, Richard Harries, and Tim Winter (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 55-66. Cf. Daniel A. Madigan, "Themes and Topics," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 87, who notes that "no other figure in the Qur'ān is treated in such detail and length as Moses—recognizably similar to the figure known from the Bible and Jewish haggadah."

[661] In several post-Qur'anic elaborations of Qur'an 17:1.

[662] See more Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, 28 and 37-40. This is an excellent book on Islam, but his descriptions of Nestorianism and "Monophysitism" (read: Miaphysitism) (p. 20) need some revision.

[663] Jewish and Islamic stories about Abraham and the tyrant Nimrod are related to this persecution-motif as well.

the mount He is in the company of both Elijah (prophecy) and Moses (the Law). The Sermon on the Mount reminds the reader of Moses promulgating the commandments from Sinai. Still, there is also a certain tension in Christian evaluations of Moses: Jesus as the new Moses sometimes becomes Jesus the true Moses. Moses embodying the law is often seen as having been superseded by Jesus (cp. John 1:17).[664] However, other strands within Christianity view Moses as the mystic par excellence because of his ascension of Sinai, "towards thick darkness". Moses who leads his people from slavery to freedom prefigures Jesus who liberates humankind from sin and death. The Letter to the Hebrews opens with a reference to God speaking in the past through the prophets and in the last days through his Son (Hebr. 1:1). Moses is praised "as a servant in His house, but Christ is as a son over His own house" (Heb 3:5-6). Jesus clearly fulfills and transcends the man Moses, at least according to the author of this *Letter to the Hebrews*, written by an early follower of Christ.

I consider it a major difference between Moses in the Qur'an and Moses in the New Testament, that Muhammad is not portrayed as greater than Moses.[665] Moses is the most frequently mentioned person in the Qur'an. Still, the connection between Muhammad and Moses is evident.[666]

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[664] See more John Barton, "Moses in Christianity," in *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conversation*, ed. Norman Solomon, Richard Harries, and Tim Winter (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 49-50.

[665] In post-Qur'anic Sufi literature this is different: Moses *heard* God twice, but Muhammad *saw* God twice. Cp. Annabel Keeler, 'Moses from a Muslim Perspective', 59. See also about this issue: Pieter Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur'an Commentaries: Crossings between This World and the Other World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 201-207 and 237-239. Although infallible, Moses asked to see God, but he did so to demonstrate to the people that this was impossible; or in principle seeing God is not impossible, but Moses was not granted that privilege in this life. Some Sufi commentaries thought otherwise, and the afterlife is another matter altogether. These post-Qur'anic developments will not detain us further.

[666] See more Angelika Neuwirth, "Qur'anic Studies and Philology: Qur'anic Textual Politics of Staging, Penetrating, and Finally Eclipsing Biblical Tradition," in *Qur'anic Studies Today*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells (London: Routledge, 2016), 249.

How should this be evaluated from a Catholic theological perspective? Should we assume that the Christological understanding of Moses, which is an undeniably rich typology, once and for all exhausts other possible identifications with Moses?

Already in view of Jewish hermeneutics, Christian theology is inclined to regard typology as paradigmatic, but not as exclusive. The rejection within Christianity of the traditional image of a 'blinded' Judaism has led to a strongly increased appreciation of Jewish readings. In addition, historical-critical explanations of texts from the Old Testament have their own value, although they may exclude typology.

It is important to look at another towering figure from the New Testament: John the Baptist. The first chapter of the Gospel of Luke shows a strong intertwining between the births of Jesus and of John the Baptist. Later, it seems that John the Baptist and his disciples differ somewhat in mentality and behavior from Jesus and his followers. There may even have been some friction between the two groups. However, the people consider John the Baptist a saint, wondering whether he might be the prophet Elijah (Mt 16:14; cp. 17:11 and Lk 1:76). According to the last sentences of the last prophet in the Hebrew Bible, Malachi, Elijah will return to reconcile parents with their children (Mal 3:24). In Judaism, this expectation has evolved towards the concept of Elijah as forerunner of the Messiah. The New Testament testifies to this expectation, both regarding Jesus and regarding John the Baptist. This is why Elijah too is an important type of Jesus (cp. Mt 16:14), but also of John the Baptist. John's sober prophetic call to repentance (Mark 1:4) – which, in its soberness, is not unlike that of many prophets in the Qur'an – is echoed in Jesus' preaching (Mt 4:17) and rebuke (Mt 12:34).

Elijah serves here as a type of John the Baptist, although some regard the prophet as a type of Jesus. Apparently, not all types need to be Christocentric.[667] Could this throw some light on the position of Muhammad for whom Moses has served as a type?

I think it is possible to appreciate the idea that Moses could be seen as a type of Muhammad. Muhammad's inability to perform a miracle is connected to his appeal to belief in God. Although Moses did perform miracles, the episode in the Qur'an presupposes Muhammad's explicit inability to do so, although he is confronted with the unbelief of the people. I have shown that all this is somewhat similar to Jesus' inability or refusal to perform miracles in Nazareth because of the unbelief of the people (chapter 5). It makes sense to view Moses as a type, both of Jesus and of Muhammad (although the latter is not considered greater than Moses in the Qur'an).

A major difference between John the Baptist and Muhammad is of course the time of their performance: John the Baptist announces Jesus in his appeal to repentance, whereas Muhammad's call to repentance and to belief in one God takes place centuries after Jesus' preaching and – at least in our excerpt – is not organically connected to it. Although Christians may not need Muhammad's call to repentance and belief, they may still appreciate Muhammad's performance by way of analogy. Seeing Moses as a type of Muhammad may awaken recognition in Christians and the realization that for millions of people he has pointed a way to belief in the one true God. Christian theology may consider Muhammad a prophet by analogy, not a prophet as such for Christians, but, under the inspiration of Moses and in a way that

[667] In a way, the notion of *Elijah redivivus* is even stronger than a type or foreshadowing, as the identity between Elijah and John the Baptist is more or less complete.

is somewhat comparable to John the Baptist, for those who still wander "in the darkness of ignorance or idolatry".

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, let us return once again to the topic of miracles. Although for the Christian, Jesus' miracles are a proof of His divine sonship, a herald of the Messianic times, an appeal to conversion, and inspired by God's love for humankind, the ambiguity of miracles when asked for as proof of Jesus' divine mission and as a condition for faith is obvious. In a way, the Qur'anic rejection of this demand for a miracle may remind the Christian theologian of his or her own "tradition of ambiguity" as it can be found in the Gospels. The absence in Muhammad's performance of the rich beneficent dimensions of miracles in the Gospels does not invalidate his prophethood, however. His modesty as a Human Being when freed from polemics against Christianity, may be an impressive element for Christians too. The Qur'an has turned out to be a complicated document when it comes to miracles: although Jesus' divinity is denied, miracles continue to be attributed to Him. The complexity increases in post-Qur'anic literature, where an increasing number of miracles is attributed to Muhammad. This, however, should not distract the Christian theologian in search of theological challenges mainly in the Qur'an.

Again, the fundamental differences between Islam and Christianity should not be ignored. Surely, Muslims and Christians contain many similarities, but we do not need to harmonize these or avoid the differences in order to come together. In fact, our methodology accepts these differences. As a Catholic theologian, I am enriched, but not by harmonizing Islam and Christianity. Claiming that Muslims and

Christians worship the same God but in different ways provides a theological mystery, calling for further deep reflection.

Chapter 6

THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

In this chapter I intend to conduct an elaborate theological evaluation of my complete research. Repetitions with earlier chapters will be unavoidable, but the advantage is a full and integrated theological reflection. I will adopt the same sequence of previous chapters but put somewhat more emphasis upon shared theological issues. This will enable me to raise the central question at the end of this chapter: how to view the Qur'an from a Catholic theological perspective?

6.1 Responsibility for the loss of Paradise. A Christian theological evaluation.

The narrative of the world's creation of the world holds significant importance in both the Bible and the Qur'an. Central to this narrative is the account of the Paradise story, depicting the eventual expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, possibly as a descendance to the earth, although already here, a significant difference between the Bible and the Qur'an may exist. In the context of evaluating the significance of a Qur'anic reading for Christian theology, I first will review the Paradise story.

The distinctive aspect of methodology I employ is its initial emphasis on examining the Qur'anic text. Having examined the Paradise story in the Qur'an, I noted a significant parallel with the book of Genesis regarding the expulsion from Paradise, akin to what I encountered in the book of Genesis. In both stories, a dramatic interaction between God and humans takes place, featuring prohibitions, consequential actions, a tree, and a tempter, and culminating in the expulsion of the Human Beings from Paradise. Engaging with the Qur'anic account of the story prompted me to re-examine the Biblical narrative with utmost care. The first element that drew my attention was the determination of who bears the responsibility for the "Paradise Lost". It is intriguing to note that the Qur'an does not differentiate between genders by addressing both man and woman simultaneously. Adam and Eve

(although not mentioned by name) are addressed simultaneously without being addressed separately.

In contrast, in the Biblical context, the tempter conducts a whole conversation with Eve, in the presence of Adam. There are evident and distinct responsibilities and penalties assigned to Adam, to Eve, and to the serpent respectively. As we noted in the section on theological reflection, Adam and Eve did not ask God for forgiveness, but Adam shifted the responsibility for the transgression to Eve, and Eve to the serpent. This episode holds substantial significance in Christian tradition, as it has been a longstanding factor contributing to the "censure" of women's roles, attributing the blame for the Fall to Eve and by implication to women in general. According to a somewhat polemical Muslim interpretation, the Qur'anic account of the transgression with equal roles for Adam and Eve serves as evidence of the superiority of the Qur'an in its treatment of women as equal to men, this in positive contrast with the Bible. Undoubtedly, a negative perspective on women has been attached to the role of Eve in Christian tradition. This is not the whole story, however, and the possible interpretations of the Genesis account are by no means exhausted by that. It is clear that Adam himself shifted his responsibility to Eve, hereby betraying his guilty conscience and degrading God's gift to him to an alibi for his responsibility. Hence, accusing Eve is not factual and does not reveal a specific "female nature" but is in itself a symptom of Adam's guilt. Again, there is no interval between the seduction of Eve and that of Adam in the Qur'an. Hence, the Qur'an offers a basic interpretation of equality between Adam and Eve, which could be agreed upon by Christian theology and may even be considered a warning against depreciating women. Still, the more elaborate Genesis story contains surprising elements about shifting the guilt to someone else, not offered in the Qur'an. This shifting of responsibility is an important element of a guilty conscience.

For Catholic theology, the story of Paradise emphasizes the human condition as alienated from God and in need of divine redemption. Hence the connection of the Paradise story in the New Testament or more specific: with the salvific work of Christ, is an indispensable aspect of theological hermeneutics. As we pointed out in the theological reflection section, this story is not only about Adam and Eve as such, but it is filled with intriguing parallels between Eve and Mary on one hand and Adam and Jesus on the other. It is only through the redemptive power of Jesus that Adam's sin is cleansed. In a way, Mary seems to take away this burden of sin from women. However, from a theological perspective, it is not completely correct to say that Mary will take away the burden of sin (or rather its consequences) from women. This would attribute to the virgin Mary a redemptive role on equal footing with Christ and would divinize Mary. Church history demonstrates how the Church has countered such a divinization of Mary, in order to avoid an association of Mary with a goddess cult. Salvation is not given to Mary separately from Christ, but because of Christ and through Christ. Hence, one may underline that this contrasting of Eve and Mary is only a figure of speech and should not be connected to a universal redemption comparable to that of Christ. We can find hints of this understanding already in the New Testament and even more so in the writings of the early Church Fathers. This introduces a certain hermeneutical and methodological complexity when giving account of the meaning of the Qur'anic account. A theological perspective on the Paradise story cannot wholly dispense with the Christian tradition after the Bible, as described above. I did not set out to solve these problems, but I realized that the theme of redemption should be taken into account in order to understand the Christian hermeneutics of the Paradise story.

The Qur'an strongly differs with this Biblical theological account in respect to connecting the Paradise story with redemption. Before we enter into that, let us

conclude about gender that the Qur'an may remind us of an equal part of the male and female in the transgression. Christian theology should realize that 'Adam' often denotes humankind in general, not just the male protagonist. Christ as the *second Adam* brings universal redemption to both men and women. As a consequence, a certain reticence as to Mary's role in the redemption is valid for Christian theology as well.

There is an often-heard statement that the Qur'an does not know of a redemptive dimension, an aspect brought forward by Muslims as a positive aspect enhancing one's own responsibility, and as a negative aspect by Christian theologians, who sometimes even consider the Islam a "natural religion". From Muslim side one may argue that redemption is not necessary, because Adam and Eve had repented on the spot. This argument from Muslim side has been challenged by us based upon other voices from Muslim side and upon a careful reading of the Qur'an. The Qur'anic allusion to "guidance" to be sent by God apparently suggests a way to remedy the plight of the expulsion. One may even consider the Qur'an itself as that "guidance" and as a revelation to Muslims and a means of redemption from the consequences of the banishment.

The emphasis laid out in the Qur'an prompts me to undertake a meticulous examination of this narrative in the Bible. Hence, I quickly discovered that a full Christian reading of Qur'an and Bible can hardly dispense from post-Biblical interpretations. Still, it allowed me to have a clearer understanding of what is directly stated in the Biblical text of the Paradise story and what has been shaped through the inclusion of the New Testament and of centuries of theological reflection. This, in turn, raises a series of inner-Christian questions:

How far has theological thought strayed from the original text of the Bible? Is it accurate to solely focus on the original Biblical text, or conversely, is it more appropriate to consider the broader context and the "Wirkungsgeschichte"? Obviously, both ways of approaching the Bible can be highly challenging. For example, it may lead to the discovery that Genesis as such does not know of Satan tempting the Human Being, whereas both Christian post-Genesis interpretations and the Qur'an strongly emphasize that aspect.

In a sense, the Qur'anic account of Iblis gives a more 'Christian' impression than the Christian reading of the Bible only.

Let us now first turn to the figure of Iblis in comparison with the serpent. As a Catholic theologian, I am faced with questions regarding different approaches to interpreting the Bible: exegetical or hermeneutical.

The advantage of the first approach, namely, to stick to the Biblical text, is clear. It adheres closely to the Scripture, hereby avoiding theological layers that have been developed in various historical and diverse cultural and political contexts. These layers could potentially distance the reader from the genuine essence of the text. On the other hand, and by using the following example, if we refrain from identifying the devil as the serpent in Paradise, then the Christian understanding of the Paradise narrative undergoes significant transformations. Not only that, but we would fail to acknowledge the intricate relationship between the Qur'anic account and the Christian interpretation of the Paradise story. Ultimately, this hermeneutical conundrum raises questions about the contribution of the Church Fathers and pseudepigraphic texts to the development of Christian theology. At this juncture, we are not only considering apocryphal or non-canonical books but also the intricate

relationship between the Bible and its authoritative interpreters, such as the Church Fathers and the pronouncements of ecumenical councils.

Hence the *interreligious* confrontation with the Qur'an induces us as well to reflect upon these *intrareligious* questions. Within the Christian community, there is a lack of definitive consensus on how to read the Bible and on which authority should be assigned to post-Biblical interpretations. Protestants turn to the Scriptures, even invoking the concept of *Sola Scriptura*, a topic we will delve into shortly. Meanwhile, on occasion, Orthodox believers seem to draw on secondary sources even more than on the sacred text itself. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, tries to keep a certain *balance* between the appreciation for the Bible as the Word of God and the role of tradition as a privileged access to the Bible. It is precisely because of this theological hermeneutics that the affinity between the Christian theological perspective and the Qur'an comes to the fore. It means that we should remain open for a fuller understanding of Scripture by resorting to venerated Christian tradition. The emphasis upon Scripture itself is apparently different from a historical-critical approach to Scripture, but may have practical reasons, which appears to possess merely a limited value.

Then there is the issue of the trees in Paradise. the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life.

Unlike the Biblical narrative, the Qur'an refers to one tree only in Paradise – explicitly prohibited by God to Adam – which is The Tree of Eternity, at least in the word of Iblis.[668] It is around this tree that the central story unfolds. In this regard, the Qur'anic narrative may sound quite familiar to a Christian audience. However, a

[668] "*Then Satan whispered to him; he said, "O Adam, shall I direct you to the tree of eternity and possession that will not deteriorate?*" – Qur'an 20:120.

careful reading helps us to see that in the story from Genesis, alongside the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, another tree appears – the Tree of Life. At the *theological reflection* stage, we noted that the role of the Tree of Life has a deep and multilayered theological meaning in Christianity, in particular as an allusion to the Cross of Jesus. While this identification is not stated in the Biblical text as such, it is a well-established theological concept and expresses an intimate Christian belief.

The Qur'an does not mention two trees. While we cannot assert it with certainty, we may speculate that the absence of a second tree might have been be deliberate, in order to avoid drawing parallels with Christianity, in which the Tree of Life and the Cross are explicitly linked. Here, we observe a significant distinction between the Qur'an and the Paradise story, as interpreted in Christian theology. The Tree of Life is the way to redemption and salvation. That is why Adam and Eve after their expulsion needed to *wait* for Christ to descend into the Netherworld in order to redeem the first couple and its progeny. There is a strong emphasis here upon the unique role of Christ in the drama of redemption, which does not take away one's own responsibility, but still emphasizes a profound attachment to the salvific work of Christ.

In addition, here we come across a similar hermeneutical issue as in the above about the serpent and Iblis. How "far" from the original Biblical text may a Christian theologian go by using interpolations and theological interpretations? The existence of the second tree that remained out of reach for the Human couple, is crucial and logical within Christianity, as it is integral to the narrative of salvation history. It is connected to significant theological issues, such as the doctrine of original sin and the descent of Christ into the Netherworld. Still, we can also discern in the Paradise story of both the Qur'an and the Bible similar plotlines, which may provide a fertile

foundation for interreligious dialogue. According to the Qur'an, the consequences of the transgression in Paradise have exercised a profound influence upon humankind, of which death and a permanent temptation by Satan are the most obvious. In a way, the Qur'an as an antidote fulfils the same function in Islam as Christ in Christianity, that of redeeming humankind from the consequences of the transgression in Paradise. To be more specific, we have noted that the Qur'an could be regarded as the "guidance" to be sent be God to humankind. Although Muslims may feel uneasy about such a close similarity, in which the banishment from Paradise plays a crucial role, and because of that may even play down the consequences of the transgression for human life after the transgression, this can be explained as an apologetic attitude towards the Christian concept of original sin.

A careful look at the Qur'anic text shows that for me, as a Christian, reading these stories raises important questions that revolve around the differences in the stories. If the Qur'an encourages me to think deeper and reflect on my own traditions, then the question arises: how should I regard the Qur'an in a theological perspective? It is evident for me that, as a Christian, I cannot regard the Qur'an as an equivalent text to the Bible with identical revelatory status. However, as demonstrated in this study, the Qur'an holds significance in enhancing my comprehension of Christian scriptures. Moreover, the Qur'an spreads it message to millions of people, a fact that demands a Christian theological reflection as well.

So how should the Qur'an then be interpreted by a Christian theologian – as a secondary source of the Bible; as a repetition and summary of Biblical revelation; as a document with similar status as the Church Fathers in commenting the Bible; or as edifying stories similar to the Bible but not part of the canon, such as the apocrypha? This is why, in addition to my present reflection, we will deal with the

question of the status of the Qur'an in a more comprehensive way later in this chapter.

It may well be that we will not find definitive answers. Still, we may decide now already that the considerable differences between Bible and Qur'an should not lead me as a Catholic theologian to a wholesale theological disqualification of the Qur'an.[669]

6.2 The Annunciation story in the Qur'an. A Christian theological evaluation.

Without any doubt, the figure of Mary plays a significant role in both Islam and Christianity. As the chaste mother of Jesus in both Christianity and Islam, Mary's role as a mother of Jesus, as a woman, and her devout dedication has prompted profound theological contemplation within both religious traditions. It is the figure of Mary who often serves as a bridge-builder between Islam and Christianity, in marked contrast with the role of Jesus, who has continued to be a bone of contention in the discussions between Christians and Muslims. In the context of evaluating the significance of a Qur'anic reading for Christian theology, I have decided to focus my attention on the Annunciation story.

As presented in the chapter of the Annunciation story, the Qur'an contains two substantial narratives dedicated to Mary. Mary's connection with Jesus, her immaculate conception, her profound purity, and her Annunciation – are stories that undeniably constitute cherished traditions in both Islam and Christianity, even when the specific wording may differ. They provide a valuable platform for mutual

[669] We should not forget about the differences between the Bible and the Church Fathers as well, which also provokes important theological questions.

understanding and learning about each other's religions. It is also a great opportunity for both religions to enrich their understanding of their own tradition. Simultaneously, as the story of the Annunciation is presented in the Qur'an, it unveils an alternative perspective on its significance, which should not be rejected out of hand by Christian theology. Indeed, we have observed specific elements and even distinct narratives concerning Mary in the Qur'an that do not have counterparts in the Bible (as thoroughly discussed in chapter 3, dedicated to Mary). This may provide a solid foundation for reasoning how, as a Catholic theologian, I should approach the Qur'anic narratives concerning Mary. Can we consider the Qur'an as on the same level as the Bible if it proposes a more detailed or even a different perspective on Mary? At least, the stories about Mary which are well-known to Christians, are also present in the Qur'an and even more; these Christian post-Biblical stories contain "additional information and significant details". As a Christian theologian, I cannot remain indifferent about Mary's role in the Qur'an, even if I would not be willing to put the Qur'an on the same level of revelation as the Bible. By recognizing the Qur'an as revelation on equal footing with the Bible, the Christian theologian would run the risk, justifiably or not, of being accused of syncretism, relativism, or eclecticism. Hence Christian theology faces a formidable question: how should Christians evaluate the Qur'anic accounts of Mary? Even the exclusively Qur'anic elements about Mary may strike the Christian theologian as relevant and theologically significant, as they may induce fruitful reflection for Christians.

One possible approach is treating the Qur'an as a post-Biblical source similar to apocryphal literature. In this light it is especially important to emphasize that apocryphal texts about Mary have influenced Qur'anic narratives, a fact that will be obvious to the Christian theologian, although Muslims may deny that. This influence

may lead to a polemical stand against the Qur'an, as containing "nothing new", but may also indicate a profound affinity between Christianity and Islam. This interconnection between the Bible, Qur'an and apocryphal literature is crucial for my research. It demonstrates once again the limitations and the importance of taking into account broader contexts, while simultaneously distinguishing between the original Biblical text and all further textual and cultural layers. This is crucial as it enhances my comprehension of my own Christian traditions. Still, the similarity between the apocryphal gospels and the Qur'an cannot be limited to the historical level but has to be accounted for on a theological level as well. This leads us to the next, somewhat more specific question, to be answered in Catholic theological perspective.

The Qur'an relates numerous narratives centered about Mary, some of which are not found in the Bible. As a Christian theologian, I find these unique Qur'anic accounts particularly significant. As stated above, numerous Islamic texts exhibit discernible traces of influence stemming from apocryphal literature and the wider Christian tradition. As a Christian theologian, I may accept that the portrayal of Mary extends well beyond the Bible and Christian theological tradition. Still, this question is not easy to solve. On the one hand, Christianity shows strong reservations when it comes to the status and theological value of apocryphal texts. Often a tinge of "heretical teachings" may be traced in some of these texts, such as a denial of the humanity of Christ and even of Mary. On the other hand, it is clear – and the Catholic Church itself holds it – that these texts contain "edifying elements" for Christianity. This formula even seems to be too reticent: medieval art, religious feasts and hymns and even Catholic dogmas about Mary testify of the profound meaning of these apocryphal texts for Christian theology. This raises a complex debate within Christian tradition regarding the question of the role and authority of apocryphal

texts for Christian theology. More concrete, we know of Mary's parents, of Mary's upbringing in the Temple and of her assumption into heaven only from apocryphal gospels and not in the Bible as such (which of course explains the protestant reticence to acknowledge these motifs). Curiously, in spite of the many historical studies of apocryphal literature, to my knowledge this debate has not really been conducted as a *theological* problem in Catholic theology. We cannot deal seriously with the possible theological significance of Qur'an narratives without comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the Marian traditions within Catholic theology. Hence, when we perceive the Qur'an as a significant apocryphal text with intertextual inter-connections, historical influences, and parallels, it potentially becomes a valuable option, at least because of the stories about Mary the Qur'an it contains that are similar to Christian stories about Mary.

Although the similarity of some parts of the Qur'an with apocryphal literature is obvious, as we have seen, especially in the chapter on Paradise, but no less in the stories about the Annunciation, still the theological option to regard the status of the Qur'an for Christians as identical to that of the apocryphal gospels does not seem felicitous. Apocryphal literature in history has often been branded as tinged with "heretical" ideas, but the notion of heresy is only valid for inner-Christian deviant groups and even then, is preferably avoided after Vatican II. The positioning of Islam as a Christian heresy (like John of Damascus already did) offers an opening for dialogue, according to some Christian theologians. However, I think that conceiving Islam as another religion, comparable to Judaism, guarantees a more respectful attitude. Hence the status of the Qur'an as comparable to that of apocryphal literature does not seem theologically feasible.

Another option is to regard the Qur'an as an entirely different document in comparison to the Bible, similar to, for example the Bhagavad Gita. This option, does not, however, do justice to the considerable shared heritage of the patriarchs, the devotion to Mary, and the centrality of the pillars of fasting, charity and prayer, a triad which forms also the basis of the Sermon on the Mount. These elements are duly emphasized in the Vatican declaration *Nostra Aetate*. Here we propose another theological approach. The declaration *Dei Verbum* from the Second Vatican Council emphasizes the importance of the ongoing tradition of the Church in understanding the Bible. The declaration even speaks about the legitimacy of oral tradition as a companion to the written Bible, which may or may not have been written down later on. Hence, the notion of the Qur'an as part of this ongoing post-Biblical tradition cherished by Catholic theology seems more promising. The many stories about Mary in apocryphal literature do not derive their status in Catholic tradition from apocryphal literature as such, but because they form part of the ongoing oral tradition of the Church. How about reckoning the Qur'anic account of Mary to that same oral tradition?

How do we, as Christian theologians, evaluate the Islamic idea that Mary can be compared to some other women?

A plethora of verses within the Qur'an and additional sources, such as *sunnah* or *hadith,* highlight the significant role of Mary within the framework of Islam. We indicate at the *theological reflection* stage that Mary is presented in the Qur'an as the greatest of all women. Subsequent Islamic tradition nuances: in her time, yes, but some Islamic women after Mary may be considered superior. Is this due to Islamic polemic against the Christian veneration of Mary? Or is it in order to emphasize the proximity to Muhammad as a criterion for a high status of women?

Anyhow, Christianity grants Mary more or less the same status as the Qur'an does, although with much more emphasis upon her unique role in salvation history and always referring to her being the mother of the Son of God. It is interesting that Mary has maintained her primary position in modern Christian theology, especially in feminist theology, which likes to address Mary's significance in the line of the Biblical matriarchs Sarah, Rebeccah, Rachel and Lea. Here Mary is indeed also connected to other women. Still, a fundamental distinction between Islam and Christianity comes to the fore as well. Muslims venerate Mary as the first woman of the highest importance, in connection with Islamic women *after her*, whereas in Christianity, Mary is contextualized in relation to the women who *precede her*, the matriarchs. This aspect, although quite new in Christian theology, reinforces Christian belief in the significance of the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. This connection also emphasizes Mary's Jewish heritage, which holds notable importance within Christianity, although this has not always been realized. Christian tradition has frequently tended to "privatize" Mary, by viewing her primarily within the Christian context. Hence there are moments when Christian tradition forgets the fact that Mary was a Jewish woman and was raised within the Jewish tradition and community. Recognizing this fact profoundly alters our perception of Mary and allows us to consider that Mary's Jewish background and her connection to the matriarchs are a challenge both for Islam and for Christianity. Simultaneously, Mary remains "one of our own," not only for Christians but also for Muslims. A fine example of this can be found in the following: the Qur'anic statement about Mary's purification may bewilder the Christian theologian at first.[670] Why speaking about purifying as if Mary would have been impure initially? Still,

[670] Qur'an 3:42-43: "*And [mention] when the angels said, "O Mary, indeed Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds. O Mary, be devoutly obedient to your Lord and prostrate and bow with those who bow [in prayer].*"

here as well Jewish traditions may shed new light upon this Qur'anic notion, a new light probably even for Muslims. This notion of purification may reconnect the reader to the purity rules of the book Leviticus (12:2-8), which indeed were observed by the virgin Mary (Luke 2:22) and is celebrated in the feast of Candlemas.[671] For Christians and Muslims, this sheds new light on the meaning of the Torah in the New Testament and may even prevent a supersessionist theology. Hence the Jewish background of Mary constitutes a theological challenge both for Christians and Muslims. The same holds good for Mary's involvement with the Temple as a young girl, as told in apocryphal literature and alluded to in the Qur'an.

In general, as a Catholic theologian, it strikes me to realize to that the Islamic veneration of Mary may be more wholehearted when compared to some Christian denominations, especially Protestantism. Considering this point of view and accepting the possibility that the Qur'an offers some kind of "additional" information about Mary,[672] perhaps not in a historical sense, but in the form of meaningful narratives, we may again ask a theological question – can we regard the Qur'an as a form of revelation? Given their striking resemblance, and if we do not want to draw an analogy between the Qur'anic account of Mary and the status of apocryphal gospels, how should we view the status of this Qur'anic account of Mary? Mary's prominent presence in the Qur'an and in Islamic tradition prompts me to think broader about the portrayal of Mary and her value for Christianity. Even without having solved the question of the status of the Qur'an for Christian theology,

[671] The ritual of 'churching' after birth which has been observed by Catholic mothers, although badly understood and reason for unnecessary shamefulness, is rooted in this observance of Mary.
[672] For example, the presentation Mary at the Temple. The story is alluded to in the Qur'an ("prayer chamber") and expressly told in apocryphal literature ("Temple"), and is integrated in Christian art and liturgy, but is absent in the Bible.

I need to acknowledge the Islamic veneration of Mary as a noteworthy and theologically relevant phenomenon.

6.3 The demand for a miracle to Muhammad and to Jesus: A Christian theological evaluation

There are many stories in Bible and Qur'an dedicated to miracles performed by prophets. In addition, the demand for a miracle in both Scriptures plays a significant role. Still, as it was presenting at the beginning of chapter 5 on miracles, my main focus has been concentrated on the similarities between Jesus' and Muhammad's refusal to perform a miracle in specific circumstances. This resemblance between Jesus and Muhammad prompts me to deepen my own understanding of Jesus inability, or rather refusal, to perform miracles and of his critical attitude to the demand for a sign in general.

We have indicated at the *theological reflection* stage, that in the presented stories both from the Bible and from the Qur'an, both Jesus and Muhammad were unwilling or unable to perform miracles. The central topic connecting these stories mentioned above in the chapter on miracles is the rejection of the demand for a sign and a miracle as a lack of faith. Still, the Qur'an mentions various examples of signs and miracles, that were performed by the prophets. Most of these prophets are known to Christians, because they feature also in the Old or New Testaments. In general, requesting miracles as a proof is frowned upon as an unfavorable behavior. Both in the story of Jesus in his hometown and in the story about the sign of Jonah, Jesus refuses to perform a miracle, apparently because the people demonstrate their lack of faith by demanding proof. Likewise, when the people asked Muhammad to perform a miracle, he refused. This lack of miracles happened not only in specific situations, like with Jesus, but holds good for the whole of Muhammad's

performance (if we rule out post-Qur'anic stories about Muhammad). Muhammad did not perform a miracle at all, in contrast with Jesus. The similarity between Gospel and Qur'an is no less striking: the unbelief of the people is branded as a highly negative attitude. What holds a special significance for me as a theologian in the story of Muhammad (see chapter 5) is the clear reference to Moses. Muhammad draws parallels between the disbelief exhibited by the people in Moses' time and the opposition against his own preaching. There Muhammad follows in Moses' footsteps by his refusal to perform a miracle. Simultaneously, we can infer that this episode may serve implicitly as an Islamic polemic against Christianity, by highlighting the crucial aspect that Jesus, according to Islam, was a significant prophet, but without divine nature (although paradoxically the Qur'an does know about Jesus' miracles). Ultimately, the aspiration to affirm Muhammad's prophetic heritage has resulted in the emergence of accounts of Muhammad's miracles in post-Qur'anic texts.

Muhammad's incapacity to demonstrate a miracle is tied to his strong criticism of the people's lack of belief. Ironically, his inability to perform a miracle might be affirmed by those Christians who may not view Muhammad on the same level as other prophets of the Old Testament or as key figures of the New Testament. However, things are more complicated than that. The notion that the central figure of the Qur'an, Muhammad, was unable to perform miracles sparks my interest in delving deeper into my own tradition. It recalled a parallel account explored in chapter 5 when Jesus faced a moment of miraculous limitation too. Obviously, we see parallels between the two stories, but as we presented at *theological reflection* stage, the differences are no less relevant. The intention behind the Biblical passage is not to underscore a deficiency in Jesus's power, but rather to emphasize the lack of faith of his hometown community. According to Christianity, Jesus' revelation

emphasizing the significance of faith in the efficacy of miracles is not a failure, but holds profound importance. This underscores why Jesus consistently calls upon people to have a strong faith in nearly every instance, also when Jesus does perform a miracle. As a Catholic theologian, and in spite of the differences, I find it noteworthy to highlight this significant similarity between the Qur'an and the Gospel, when it comes to the call to believe.

Still, according to Islam, a miracle is not necessary to prove Muhammad's status as a prophet (although for other prophets, this may well be the case). For Christians, the miracles are a sign of Jesus' inauguration of the messianic times. The Gospels portray Jesus as a God-sent prophet, as the Son of God and as a charismatic miracle worker. Indeed, a significant aspect of miracles in Christian understanding is that a miracle is directed specifically to a beneficent treatment of a person. It involves a mutual exchange, meaning that if a person is with without faith in God's power, Jesus' willingness to perform a miracle is seriously hampered. A miracle as a proof for unbelieving people loses its beneficent aspect and this may be the reason why Jesus refuses to perform such a miracle.

Can we compare the notion of the Qur'an as the miracle par excellence to the self-designation of Jesus to be "more than Jonah"?

Building upon the prior discussion, we observe that people have asked for a sign from Muhammad, to which he responded by pointing out that people demanded what is even greater than this from Moses. Moses refused to perform a miracle and even more, the *thunderbolt struck the people for their wrongdoing.* In the Qur'an, a noteworthy literary and theological technique is employed to elucidate Muhammad's lack of performing miracles. It does so by drawing parallels to a comparable scenario involving Moses, a revered prophet from the past, effectively

overlaying his narrative onto Muhammad's. Indeed, the technique of appealing to Moses in the context of Muhammad's narrative closely resonates with elements found in Christianity. At numerous occasions the towering figure of Moses looms in the background there as well, such as in the Transfiguration or in Jesus' feeding of the multitude.

In the story about the "sign" it is the prophet Jonah who serves as a model in the Gospel. First of all, we emphasize that the story of the sign of Jonah, as presented above in Mark's version, is addressed to the crowds of Jesus' hometown. The people were asking for a miracle from Jesus, not out of a genuine need for healing, but solely as a means of putting Jesus to the test, as a proof of being God-sent. Apparently, signs are intended to develop faith, but not meant to impose it forcibly. Hence Jesus not only refuses to do miracles, but he also explains, that it will not be "enough" for *this generation.*

These stories from the Bible are strongly similar to the Qur'anic account and provide a crucial question for the Christian theologian: *should we regard Muhammad as a sign comparable to the sign of Jonah?* From the very first glance we may response positively in an attempt to compare Jonah and Muhammad. The main purpose of Jonah's mission was to convey God's message to the people of Nineveh, urging them to abandon their pagan beliefs and embrace monotheism by placing their faith in the one true God. In this regard, we may hold that the story of Muhammad aims at the same goals. Muhammad reveals for people of Meccah and its suburbs the monotheist faith. Additionally, he implores them to forsake their pagan beliefs, emphasizing that conversion is essential to avoid God's punishment and eternal damnation. As a Catholic theologian, I find it reasonable to draw parallels between Jonah's mission and the call of Muhammad. This observation is particularly

compelling, as in the cases of both Jonah and Muhammad, their missions were addressed to non-believers and ultimately met with success. In this perspective, we can even go further, by proposing that the rise of Islam might be considered as a sign similar to the sign of Jonah. In both cases, Muhammad and Jonah are presented as divine messengers who wish to convert people, distinguishing them as God-sent prophets who confirm the role of those who fulfil God's request.

It is precisely at this point that we have to enter another trajectory. I encounter the following idea, that Jesus strongly replies to his audience, that *more than Jonah is here*. Accordingly, if Jesus is greater than Jonah in this context, then his revelation should be considered greater than Muhammad. Despite the role of messengers connected to both Muhammad and Jonah, Jesus, in contrast, inaugurates the Messianic times and is himself the embodiment of God's Word. It is only reasonable to see here a fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity. Muhammad refers to God's Word, condensed in the Qur'an, which is held to be the miracle *par excellence* and a divine sign for the believers. Curiously, whereas the central notions are similar, Jesus points to himself as the divine sign *par excellence*: "more than Jonah is here" and in the Gospel of John Jesus is considered to be the living embodiment of God's Word. Obviously, this will be not accepted by Muslims but sounds as a genuine credal statement for Christians, familiar from the prologue of the Gospel of John. This does not mean, however, the Islamic view of Jesus as a prophet has lost all significance, as is argued by the Jesuit Christian Troll.[673] The variety of Christological titles may be considered as shedding each a different light on Jesus, without isolating one at the expense of other titles. The prophetic status of

[673] Christian Troll, *Dialogue and Difference: Clarity in Christian-Muslim Relations* (Maryknoll: New York, 2009), 118-119.

Jesus may have been somewhat ignored in Christianity, but we are reminded of it e.g., in the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:19). The Islamic view may remind Christians of such a "forgotten" title of Christ, without, however, inducing Christians to accept the Islamic polemics against the title of Son of God.

It is clear that we encounter here a crucial difference between Christianity and Islam. Precisely that is often ignored in interreligious dialogue, out of fear to spoil the serenity of mutual understanding. Still, this fear of differences is in itself a flaw in interreligious dialogue. Assessing genuine differences will provide new vistas for interreligious dialogue and will a enhance the intrareligious dialogue as well.

Is it possible for a Christian theologian to appreciate Muhammad's call to faith in one God?

As we have indicated at *the theological reflection* section, the belief in one God is crucial for Islam. The belief in one God undeniably holds primary significance both in the Qur'an and in Muhammad's teachings. It stands as a central aspect of his mission. This matter carries profound sensitivity for Muslims, particularly in the context of interreligious dialogue with other world religions. In this context, the belief in one God establishes a strong and promising foundation for interreligious dialogue between Muslims and Christians. Islamic beliefs, centered on the oneness of God, aligns harmoniously with the concept of God in other Abrahamic religions, allowing for a common ground for discussion and understanding. Although Christianity holds that the way to God is Jesus Christ himself. Access to God without the fulness of grace as has appeared to us in Christ is difficult to imagine for Christians. Still, it does not seem reasonable to brand other Abrahamic religions as unbelief. The declaration *Nostra Aetate* states that "the church regards Muslims with appreciation who believe in the one true God." It should be admitted that precisely

this declaration from the Second Vatican Council, together with the declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* on the freedom of religion, are under attack these days, not only by the schismatic Brotherhood Pius X, but also within the church.[674] It is argued that the Second Vatican Council intended to be a pastoral council, not a theological council. Hence, supposed "ambiguities and even "errors" should be remedied. I consider this an unfruitful approach. Obviously, *Nostra Aetate* and other texts invite further theological reflection, but that does not mean that the Church should withdraw from its central teaching, least of all by listening to a small but vociferous conservative voice, which comes close to the Brotherhood Pius X.

Both Judaism and Christianity agree to the theological assertion of the oneness and unicity of God. As a theologian, I found it intriguing to witness the devotion with which Muhammad professes this belief. Certainly, it's well-known that Muhammad was acquainted with both Christianity and Judaism, although in which forms remains a matter of research. Muhammad's emphasis on the belief in one God likely aimed to foster a sense of unity between religions by underscoring shared origins and concepts. However, considering that both Jews and Christians are monotheists, such a confirmation from Islam may not be the whole message of Islam. Hence, it is reasonable to suppose that Muhammad's main audience consisted of those individuals and groups, who did not adhere to the belief in one God and were practitioners of polytheism, rather than monotheists. That is why, for me, as a Catholic theologian, appreciating Muhammad's call to pagans to believe in one God is a viable way. This issue nonetheless opens a huge discussion within Christianity itself about the role of Islam in relation to Christianity. Substantial groups within Christianity, especially in the Protestant branch (but also in reactionary Catholic

[674] See more Athanasius Schneider, *Catechism Credo: Compendium of the Catholic Faith* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2023).

circles), regard Islam as a clear example of a false religion. The concept of a *praeparatio evangelica* by which Church Fathers have validated both Greek culture (e.g the Sybilline books and pagan philosophy) and the Hebrew Bible as pedagogy towards the fullness of Christ, may be applied to Islam as well, although the rise of Islam occurred well after Christianity. Still, why should the pagan Sybilline books be considered revelatory, as is testified by the ceiling of the Sixtine chapel, and should that be denied to the Qur'an, one may wonder?

We should realize, however, that there is a major difference between revelation before the life of Christ and after the life of Christ. Can there be a genuine revelation after Christ according to Christian perception? Interestingly, as we have seen the well-known expression "seal of the prophets" as *epitheton* of Muhammed occurs already in Tertullian, but there applied to Jesus![675] Continuing this debate and as partial answer to the issue of revelation after Christ, one may argue that the Qur'an does not claim to bring a completely new revelation, but instead reminds (and sometimes pretends to restore, according to some Muslim commentaries) the venerated Biblical revelation.

The phenomenon of prophecy is multi-layered: although there is the conviction that prophecy has stopped after the New Testament, prophetic manifestations continue to occur in the early centuries of Christianity. Apparently, prophecy before Christ differs in nature from prophecy after Christ, although both phenomena are recognized by Christian tradition. The Qur'an does not claim a completely new prophecy, but rather presents a common message with that given to Jews and Christians: the faith in the one, unique God. We have noted that the call to belief in the one unique God also underpins Jesus' stance regarding miracles. Both

[675] Hans Küng, *Islam: Past, Present and Future* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 43.

the miracles Jesus performed and his refusal to perform a miracle may be seen as testimonies to the one unique God. A side-glance to Judaism may be of help here. As Catholic theologians, we accept that Jesus worships the same God as Judaism does. At the *theological reflection* stage, we already presented different approaches and perspectives to this question. Extrapolating this insight, it is clear to me that Muslims and Christians share belief in the one God. Again, Muhammad's prophetic message about one God and his strong identification both with Moses and with Abraham and their obedience to God, is not inherently in conflict with Christianity, as we also venerate the same Biblical figures and believe in one God. (In contrast, the Qur'anic statements about Jesus are polemical and largely unacceptable for Christians).

However, a fundamentally different and more complicated view – is whether we both believe in *one* God or whether we believe in the *same* God? From the beginning of my research, I was convinced that the God of Muslims and Christians is *One* in terms of monotheism, but not the *same* in terms of his qualities. Accordingly, if we as Christians accept that the God of Islam is the same God as God in Christianity – it is immediately gives rise to another question in what way address Muslims the same God as Christians? If Muslims deny Jesus' divine sonship of his Father in heaven? On the other hand, *Nostra Aetate* acknowledges more than just 'sparks of truth' within Islam, by recognizing Islam as containing many elements akin to Christianity, especially the veneration for the virgin Mary. In fact, some statements in *Nostra Aetate* about the shared heritage of Christianity and Judaism, such as the role of patriarchs, could be stated about Islam as well.

I did not initially intend to address this complicated question about the difference between *the one God* and *the same God* in my dissertation. Furthermore,

it is doubtful that I can now definitively articulate my stance on the matter of believing in the *same* God as Muslims and Christians. Hence, while it is possible to state, that Muslims and Christians worship the same God, still one can argue, that from the theological perspective, *the concept* of God in Christianity and Islam diverges.[676]

6.4 Five attitudes of Catholic theology towards the Qur'an and my position

We will now deal with a central question underlying this whole research, which determines my perspective as a Catholic theologian on the status of the Qur'an, based upon my research: *Which status can be assigned to the Qur'an, seen from Catholic theological perspective?*

Obviously, the history of Islamic-Christian relations offers ample examples of Christian perspectives on the Qur'an, which may serve us further, but still, my task implies my own perspective based upon my own research. David Bertaina, in his article *Christians and the Qur'an*, presents five different approaches used by Christians towards the Qur'an in different historical periods – "*from outright rejection and nonengagement, to appropriation for argumentation, to acceptance of inspirational characteristics within it.*"[677] We will comment on each of the five approaches, and explain which ones should be rejected, seen from my Catholic theological perspective. Eventually this procedure will clarify our own perspective as a Catholic theologian.[678]

[676] Still, one should realize that the same dilemma has occurred about the contrast between a God of revenge in the Hebrew Bible and a God of love in the New Testament, which led to the Marcionite heresy and to a disparagement of Judaism during centuries thereafter.
[677] David Thomas, *Routledge Handbook on Christian-Muslim Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 279.
[678] Ibid., 279.

1. *The Qur'an is foreign to Christian theology*.

This view considers acquaintance with the Qur'an as a threat to Christian theology and life. Acquaintance with the Qur'an would lead to syncretism and confusion. This viewpoint considers the Qur'an as a false document. This viewpoint could even be buttressed by pointing to the complete silence about the Qur'an in the declaration *Nostra Aetate*.

My comment: This position has emerged at the inception of the interaction between Islam and Christianity. Many Christians held a hostile stance towards Muslims, regarding them as either embodiments of the devil (as stated by Luther and his Medieval predecessors) or as adherents of a Christian heresy (as expressed by John of Damascus).

Arguments pro.

This approach carries its merits as it closely aligns with Christian theology. As we know, the Qur'an does not recognize Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and this, in turn, is one of the most fundamental truths in Christianity. Therefore, if it stands in contradiction to Christianity, it may not be reconciled within that faith. It is evident that the Qur'an aligns with the theological truths intrinsic to Islam. Nevertheless, when Islam encounters Biblical narratives that do not align with Islamic teachings, it may assert that these texts have been corrupted (*tahrif*), or at least their interpretations, and require correction.

Indeed, the reproach of corruption of the Biblical text seems to be more determined by theological conflicts than by historical analysis. We possess the accounts of the evangelists who were witnesses to accounts about Jesus, living during the same century, and who used sources which personally testify of Jesus'

ministry and miracles. Given this, the question arises: why would we rely on a text written some six centuries later, which asserts its superiority in accuracy over the information provided in the Bible?

Arguments against.

The primary counterargument to this perspective finds its most compelling expression in the declaration of the Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*. This document advocates interreligious dialogue with representatives of the Abrahamic religions. In all fairness, it is worth noting that *Nostra Aetate* does not directly address or recognize the Qur'an, probably in order to steer clear of potential contentious issues. Instead, the declaration focuses on fostering interreligious cooperation. Yet, if we align with the ethos of modern Catholic theology, it becomes imperative to approach Muslims with respect, including their sources of revelation. This perspective does not equate the Qur'an to the Bible as a source of revelation, but it does entail acknowledging that the Qur'an shares a considerable heritage with Christianity. This is also what my research has confirmed.

Without claiming psychological expertise, it is easy to see fear as the underlying principle of this rejection of the Qur'an. It seems as if the spokesmen are afraid to become overly impressed by the text, hereby losing their Christian faith. Hence the attitude is ambiguous: a conscious rejection coupled with an unconscious high valuation of its possible impact, while perhaps even doubting the validity of the Christian message. The attitude of a Catholic theologian should not be based upon fear, but upon fraternal dialogue and understanding of the Qur'an.

2. *The Qur'anic text is valid insofar as it proves the authenticity of Christianity*.

My comment: the presence of Biblical figures from the Old and New Testaments in the Qur'an, along with the narratives linked to them, underscores this very notion. Our treatment of the virgin Mary in the Qur'an contains noted differences with the Biblical and the apocryphal accounts about Mary, but without outright rejecting them. Indeed, the surprising similarities appeared to be much more substantial than the differences. In a way, the Qur'an indeed underscores the importance and validity of the Bible, in spite of the notion of *taḥrif* (corruption), which in some post-Qur'anic perspective has come to mean a corruption not only of the interpretation, but of the Biblical text itself. The Qur'an itself affirms the Torah and Gospel as inspired, as "guidance and light" (see Qur'an 5:46), although for Muslims this does not seem to be a living reality. It may be that precisely because of the importance of the Bible as the basis of the Qur'anic message, the concept of *taḥrif* has been deemed necessary! Furthermore, this perspective aligns with the Christianization of the Qur'anic texts. In essence, this involves interpreting the Qur'anic text through the prism of Christian perspectives. This approach underscores the possibility of considering individual verses from the Qur'an without necessarily being committed to accepting the entirety of the Qur'an.

Arguments pro.

In contrast to the initial approach, this approach acknowledges a certain relevance of the Qur'an for Christians. Even if this validity is manifested exclusively in Christian perspective, this does not imply the acceptance of the Qur'an as containing elements of revelation; it may be considered as merely a condensed repetition of the Bible. Indeed, this approach can prove beneficial for a Christian theologian, serving as a catalyst for deeper reflection on the texts and for an enriched understanding of

their own tradition. It is important to emphasize that this approach does not position the Qur'an on an equal standing with the Bible. This viewpoint is possible even simultaneously with avoiding any allusions to equality, to common Abrahamic heritage, or even to interreligious dialogue.

Arguments against.

I find this approach less beneficial as a Christian, because it simply turns to the Qur'an in an eclectic way without comprehending it as a whole text within its historical, cultural, and religious contexts. This would result in isolated verses devoid of their overarching meaning. This approach inherently leads the reader to the conclusion that the Bible holds a superior position compared to the Qur'an or other sacred texts. The primary objective in seeking such texts in the Qur'an comes down to proving and buttressing Christian theology. In a way, my research may be accused of a similar one-sidedness in that it has not chosen religious laws or apocalyptic sections, but only episodes central to Christianity. Still, my perspective is broader that just buttressing Christian theology.

3. *The Qur'an is deficient*.

This approach seeks to show the Qur'an as a deficient text and to criticize it in a outright polemical perspective. In this approach, primary emphasis is given to the assertion that the Qur'an was authored by humans / a Human Being, and potentially involved deception. This argument extends to the examination of language, stylistics, and poetry within the Qur'an, underscoring the incorporation of borrowed foreign words (e.g., from Syriac). This approach places particular emphasis on the multitude of inserts, additions, and edits, allegedly present within the holy book of Islam. According to proponents of this approach, it challenges the notion of the

Qur'an's purely divine origin, refuting the point that God directly conveyed its content to Muhammad, who then serves as the sole authentic source of revelation, but without human contribution.

Arguments pro.

Undoubtedly, this approach is not conducive to fostering interreligious dialogue. However, it is essential to acknowledge, from a non-theological perspective, that the Qur'an was indeed authored by humans and may be subjected to exegetical and historical scrutiny, still a highly delicate issue within Islam. Furthermore, the Qur'an does not recount any miracles performed by Muhammad, miracles which might serve as validation of his claims regarding prophethood and revelation. While miracles and signs are attributed to all other prophets, they are notably absent in the case of Muhammad within the Qur'an (see chapter 5). Narratives of miracles do surface in post-qur'anic literature, but they are not present within the text of the Qur'an itself.

My research has shown, however, that asking for a miracle as a proof of divine authority was frowned upon both in the Qur'an and in the Gospel. The call to belief and the lack of it among the audience determined Jesus' attitude in his hometown, highly similar to Muhammad and in the line of Moses. As a Catholic theologian, I should confirm the validity of Muhammad's attitude in this respect. The many miracles of Jesus testify to his messianic role and in this respect the Qur'an and the Gospel strongly differ. This does not detract, however, from the validity of the call to the audience to believe in the Qur'an. The polemical Christian argument that Muhammad's inability to perform miracles proves the purely human origin of the Qur'an fails to acknowledge the similarity between Jesus and Muhammad in their rejection of miracles as proof of being God-sent.

In a profound way, an important difference between Christianity and Islam comes to the fore: whereas Islam points to the Qur'an as God's word and as the miracle par excellence, Christianity considers Jesus Christ as God's word and as the answer to the request for a miracle: "more than Jonah is here." In a way then, comparing theological debates about the human and divine conjunction of the Qur'an and its status as eternal versus created word of God, may fruitfully be compared with the Christological debates about the human and divine nature of Christ and about his pre-existence. The comparison between Christ and Muhammad is theologically less fruitful.

Arguments against.

The polemical Christian approach in the Middle Ages against the Qur'an as a human product implicitly assumes that the Bible, at least the Pentateuch, has been written by Moses himself under direct inspiration of God. The theological insights of today do no longer assume the literal authorship of Moses as proof of the divine origin of the Bible (see the Vatican constitution *Dei Verbum* §3).[679] Hence such an argument against the Qur'an is obsolete for Catholic theology.

Both the Bible and the Qur'an were written by humans. I agree that for Christians, the human origins of the Qur'an may not require special emphasis, as it is considered self-evident. In Christianity, it is acknowledged (with the exception of some fundamentalist evangelicals) that both the Old and New Testaments were authored by human hands as well. Within Christian teachings, there is an integration of the concept of "organic divine inspiration", which poses no conflict. Islam adheres

[679] "*Through the patriarchs, and after them through Moses and the prophets, He taught this people to acknowledge Himself the one living and true God, provident father and just judge, and to wait for the Savior promised by Him, and in this manner prepared the way for the Gospel down through the centuries*." – Dei Verbum, paragraph 3.

to a "mechanical divine inspiration", in which the human factor does not play a role at all. Islam emphasizes that Muhammad received direct Divine revelation through an angel, directly from God, as told in his biography, the *Sirah*.

In addition, the Qur'an juxtaposes Moses and the Torah with Jesus and the Gospels, as if Jesus had received the sacred text in a way similar to Moses (and to Muhammad's reception of the Qur'an). Obviously, this ignores the fact that the Gospels testify about Jesus but were not written or received by Jesus himself. They were written by Human Beings under divine inspiration. Catholic theology accepts the notion of "organic inspiration" of the sacred text, in which the author is fully involved. This concept is, however, hardly accepted in Islam, because it is interpreted as a denial of revelation as such. As a Catholic theologian, this inner-Islamic debate is not a living reality. Still, Catholic theology might apply the concept of organic revelation to Muhammad as well, which means that by emphasizing Muhammad's involvement in the Qur'an, this does not invalidate the Islamic claim of the Qur'an to be God's revelation. In any case, polemical criticism of the Qur'an, as has happened in the past and in the present, especially among evangelical Christians, does not seem feasible for Catholic theology, which may point out the flaws in such polemical criticism, by applying such criticism to the Qur'an, while passing over the same criticism of the Bible.[680]

4. The Qur'an might contain elements of divine revelation and truth.

In contrast to the three preceding approaches, this perspective earnestly entertains the possibility that the Qur'an might contain elements of divine revelation and truth,

[680] One may think of the archaeological arguments by evangelical Christians about Allah supposedly originating as a moongod, while ignoring comparable archaeological findings in the Biblical realm. Historical research is considered irrelevant when it comes to the Bible, but not when it is applied to the Qur'an.

even if only in part. This dual stance, simultaneously affirming and rejecting, stems from the inherent tension between the Qur'an's contradictions of Christian beliefs and the Christian inclination to approach Muslim beliefs regarding their scripture with respect and consideration.[681] William Montgomery Watt, for example, regarded the Qur'an as the result of a divine initiative and thus viewed it as revelation. He saw parallels between the Qur'an and earlier prophetic texts found in the Old Testament. (Watt 1969:8).[682] This, of course, does not imply that Christians should adopt the Qur'an as *their* guiding scripture. Rather, as Watt mentioned, it suggests acknowledging the Qur'an as one of the various paths to salvation that God has revealed to humanity throughout history. This inclusive perspective finds resonance in the writings of the Islamic scholar and Catholic mystic Louis Massignon, who believed that Christians could hold the Qur'an in reverence as a sacred text, even if it does not hold ultimate authority for Christians.[683] We come close to the position of some Medieval Arab Christian and Jewish authors, who claimed that the Qur'an as divine revelation addresses itself to pagans, but not to Jews and Christians who are already believers, according to the Qur'an, so they claim.

This approach also allows for the possibility that Muhammad and his followers may have misunderstood the essence of the tradition. By approaching the Qur'anic text from a Christian standpoint, we can draw the conclusion that it contains numerous affirmations of Christian narratives and truths.

[681] David Thomas, *Routledge Handbook on Christian-Muslim Relations*, 281.
[682] Ibid., 281.
[683] Ibid.

Argument pro.

This perspective offers an engagement between Christianity and the Qur'an. The assertion that the Qur'an may encompass aspects of veracity and theological agreement, need not be seen as completely opposite to Christianity. William Montgomery Watt brilliantly suggest that the Qur'an may function as one of the divine revelations accessible to diverse communities in a manner that resonates with their own respective contexts. Consequently, the Qur'an could potentially serve as a source for divine guidance, facilitating the transition of adherents from paganism to monotheism for 7-th century Arabs in Mecca. Furthermore, as previously elucidated, the Qur'an holds affirmations of several Christian doctrinal truths. Thus, the Qur'an, in relation to the Biblical canon, may be considered as a secondary and supplementary source of theological insight, comparable to other non-canonical texts or apocryphal literature. This argument was proposed and confirmed by the theologian Peter Ford, who proposed to treat the Qur'an as a text that might be significant as spiritual benefit for Christians, even if it will not receive equal status of revealed scripture.[684] This comes also close to the description of apocryphal literature as "edifying for Christians", but not as revelation.

Arguments against.

When dealing with the *pro* argument, we assumed that Muhammad might have misunderstood some fundamental dogmas of Christianity and has been influenced by those Christians who had been excommunicated from the Church, accused of heresy, and had been forced to migrate to the Arabian Peninsula "away from the capital" where they had been condemned. Therefore, this statement may contain

[684] David Thomas, *Routledge Handbook on Christian-Muslim Relations*, 282.

truth, but still sounds somewhat naive. Muhammad was quite familiar with Judaism and Christianity and its various forms, including Miaphysites, Nestorians, and those accepted by the Ecumenical Councils. Accordingly, Muhammad may have been guided by political or cultural factors in determining his attitude toward Christians rather than religious ones. Still, we should not harmonize Muhammad's rejection of Christianity in order to accommodate the dialogue with Islam. The strategy to claim Muhammad's Christianity as merely consisting of deviant groups such as docetists, tri-theists and Collyridians, supposedly venerating Mary as a goddess, so that Christians may agree with all condemnations of Christianity in the Qur'an, seems to do no justice to the Islamic rejection of central tenets of Christianity.[685] Even more, the Qur'an 4:16[686] (confirming mainstream Christianity) is directed against Jewish statements about Mary, considering these as *great slander*.[687]

Talking about the theological component, the fact that the Qur'an may contain some truth is certainly in line with the spirit of the Nostra Aetate. Still, this approach does not determine whether we as Christians can use the Qur'an as a source of truth, either on par with the Bible (which is probably not acceptable) or on par with the Apocrypha (which is probably allowed), or as a book that may contain some aspects of truth.

5. From the past polemics to interreligious dialogue

The last approach represents a combination of different opinions and perspectives, but united by the spirit of interreligious dialogue. This approach proposes to avoid past polemics and resentments by concentrating on careful research of the Islamic

[685] Gabriel S. Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 246.
[686] "*And [We cursed them] for their disbelief and their saying against Mary a great slander*." (Qur'an 4:16).
[687] Gabriel S. Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 247.

heritage. It also recommends taking into account forms of Muslim devotional life and to be conscious of the centrality of the Qur'an, but at the same time this approach is unwilling to regard the Qur'an as a revealed scripture alongside the Bible.[688] Still, the Qur'an might be considered as sacred text. On the one hand, followers of this method are trying to avoid major differences between Islam and Christianity, concentrating mostly on the common elements. But on the other hand, differences are acknowledged as well. As the Jesuit Christian Troll has aptly noted, "*the interreligious dialogue is even more fruitful when it recognizes and accepts differences between the Qur'anic and Biblical understandings of scripture and not just the commonalities they share from the Biblical tradition.*"[689]

Still, Christian Troll does not seem to be ready to acknowledge the Qur'an as revelation, which makes the acknowledgement of differences logical but theologically less challenging. How then should Christianity treat the Qur'an in the atmosphere of interreligious dialogue, if Christians cannot put the Qur'an on the same level as the Bible? The Qur'an might be interpreted as the Word of God that has been revealed to people for people of Arabia. It is possible to read and to find common grounds for fruitful discussions and possible cooperation in future, seeking for dialogue and mutual respect. It is a bit complicated to determine the *pro* and *against* arguments to this approach because the opinions of theologians differ within this approach. Still, some main lines can be singled out.

Argument pro.

This approach mostly corresponds to the spirit of a well-known direction – interreligious dialogue, peacebuilding etc. Already the Second Vatican Council

[688] David Thomas, *Routledge Handbook on Christian-Muslim Relations*, 282.
[689] Ibid., 282.

confirmed that Islam contains genuine religious belief. Surely, *Nostra Aetate* does not mention the Qur'an in its paragraph dedicated to Islam and Muslims. However, at the same time, we realize that the main source for Islam is the Qur'an, which in turn requires a respectful attitude towards it as source of the Islamic belief in the one true God. From my point of view as a Catholic theologian, this approach comes closest to my own perspective – the desire and the possibility to recognize authentic religious belief outside the Church. We should realize that the well-known statement: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (No salvation outside the church), was originally directed not to non-Christians, but to Christians who consider themselves as 'holy remnant' and wished to separate from the mainstream.[690] Already from the first centuries onward Christianity has recognized "sparks of truth" in other cultures; here the "shared heritage" of Christianity and Islam even goes considerably deeper. The notion of "shared heritage", which I derive from the statement of Nostra *Aetate* §4 about Judaism and applied by me to Islam, (be it with considerable differences in interpretation), refrains from notions like "heresy" and "error", helps to recognize the truth in Islam and fosters interreligious dialogue by proclaiming mutual understanding. We can hardly take Islam or the Qur'an seriously into account and we would rob the dialogue of its basis, if we do not recognize authentic belief and truth in them.[691] Therefore, this approach is fruitful, as it reinforces the goal to seek mutual understanding.

Another benefit of this approach is that we can perceive the Qur'an and Islam as kind of a *challenge* to Christianity. By taking into account the Qur'anic narratives, which are connected with Biblical stories and Biblical figures, we can deepen our

[690] Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 14-28.
[691] Hans Küng, *Islam: Past Present and Future*, 76.

own Christian belief. Interreligious dialogue stimulates intrareligious dialogue.[692] Primarily, as we have indicated in my research, a Christian scholar is offered the opportunity to conduct a more profound examination of specific passages from the Bible, under the illumination of novel inquiries posed by the Qur'an.

Argument against.

While this approach does not explicitly seek to amalgamate religious traditions or diminish the distinctions between Islam and Christianity with the aim of forging a singular religion, the potential for such an outcome exists. This raises concerns about the delicate balance between the interreligious dialogue towards Islam and Christianity on the one hand, and syncretism, eclecticism, relativism, or pluralism on the other. When we acknowledge the Qur'an as a potential source of truth, it is akin to placing it in the same position with the Bible. So, following this example does it mean, that the Qur'an is a divine revelation on equal footing with the Bible? This approach provokes and provides so called *interreligious romanticism*. Searching for dialogue with Muslims, we as Christians do not need to move out of our religious principles and beliefs in order to *please* our dialogue partner. Again, the interreligious dialogue has its own boundaries and limitations which, from my perspective need to be respected and even more – appreciated, not by limiting the results of interreligious dialogue, but by guaranteeing it benefits.

[692] We have noted a specific example of that in the appreciation of the virgin Mary in Islam, while more or less ignored by large segments of Protestantism.

6.5 My own opinion as a Catholic theologian: Qur'an – as a part of "venerated tradition"

Indeed, the approaches presented and summarized by David Bertaina serve as an excellent illustration of the dynamics of practices in Christianity concerning the Qur'an. We have weighed the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, which sparked my own reflections and inquiries, eventually shaping them into a distinct approach of my own. Of course, the starting point of our attitude to the Qur'an and Islam, in my opinion the central vision, is that we are well-positioned to fully recognize the devotion of Muslims and their zealous attitude toward their religion. Religious truth is not merely about thoughts and texts, but also about practice, devotion and deeds. Accordingly, moving in the spirit of Vatican II, emphasizing the common Abraham heritage, we can look at Muslims as brothers and sisters with open eyes rather than perceiving them as a Christian heresy or, as the fourth approach suggests, as merely a misinterpretation of Christianity. Consequently, we can study with interest their view of similar stories from the Scriptures or their interpretation of certain characters in the Qur'an and compare them to the Bible.

At the same time, one may consider Cristian Troll's idea, that the Islamic understanding of the Biblical narratives, is not as such essential or even helpful for our Christian faith. According to Troll, the Qur'anic understanding of Jesus as a prophet conveys perspectives that differ strongly from the understanding of Jesus in Bible and Christianity. He argues that the Qur'an and the Bible convey distinct messages, and the Qur'an cannot be seamlessly integrated into a unified sequence with the Old and New Testaments due to their inherent differences in content and theological perspectives.[693] According to Troll, hence, there is no basis for viewing

[693] Christian Troll, *Dialogue and Difference: Clarity in Christian-Muslim Relations*, 144.

Islam as a "precursor" to Christ or Christianity, nor is it appropriate to classify it as a form of Jewish or Christian heresy.[694] As Christians, we cannot fully acknowledge Muhammad as a prophet *for us* without simultaneously renouncing our own faith. Nonetheless, with a stance of discerning openness, we can and should sincerely contemplate the testimony of Muhammad's life and teachings, along with the challenges they present.[695]

Anyhow, along with the different challenges (including the Qur'anic view of Jesus as a prophet), the fact that I respect Islam as part of the Abrahamic heritage and therefore respect the Qur'an, the most important thing is that researching and studying Qur'anic narratives deepens my Christian religion and may remind me of sometimes forgotten layers in it (like that we found in the title of Jesus as prophet of God. The disciples on the way to Emmaus called Jesus "a mighty prophet in word and deed in the eyes of God and of the people" (Lk. 24:19)). The Qur'an reminds Christians of such a somewhat "forgotten" Christological title, which also reconnects Jesus with preceding Biblical prophets, including Abraham and Moses who are considered prophets in Islam.[696] The Qur'an reminds Christians of such a somewhat "forgotten" Christological title, which also reconnects Jesus with preceding Biblical prophets.

The Muslim Scripture also reminds me of the debate surrounding the role of the serpent and the devil in the Paradise story, which is in its details lacking in the Bible itself but plays an important role in Christian "venerated tradition". Likewise, the Qur'an reminds me of important elements of the story about Mary[697], which we

[694] Christian Troll, *Dialogue and Difference: Clarity in Christian-Muslim Relations*, 144.
[695] Ibid., 135.
[696] Compare as well: *The Letter to the Hebrews* 1:1, in which Jesus as Son of God is placed in the line of the prophets.
[697] See more Andrea-Bianka Znorovsky, *The Apocryphal Geography of the Virgin Mary in Hagiographic Collections: Dissemination and Liturgy* (Trivent Publishing, 2018).

do not find in the Bible, or merely in smaller details. In essence, this approach comes down to the question: how do I treat the Qur'an, as a Catholic theologian? Is it possible for Christian to acknowledge the Qur'an, – following by Robert Casper (a co-founder of *Groupe de Recherche Islamo-Chretien*) with his suggestion, – as "a bearer of a Word of God?" Surely, the difference with the Qur'an is that the Gospels are not as such the literal the word of God but should be considered the testimonials of the Word of God, which is Christ. That is why as Christians we should not be bothered by the fact (often exploited by Muslims polemics), that there are four Gospels with occasionally significant differences, for these four all testify in their own ways to the paramount significance of Christ and should be considered human responses to His life and works. In contrast, Muslims do not perceive the Qur'an as a human response to God; instead, they consider it as nothing less than in itself the divine Word of God. They believe it has existed eternally (although others profess its created status), inscribed "on a preserved tablet" in heaven (Qur'an 85.22).[698] Still, Christians may consider the Qur'an as a part of the Divine design, hereby acknowledging the potential inclusion of elements of revelation from God upon individuals within the context of the 7th century, within suitable religious, cultural, and political environments. The similarity of Christological debates with these Islamic concepts of the Qur'an is clear.

Considering the shared Abrahamic roots, a new approach may be proposed: the Qur'an is an integral part of the wider *oral tradition* which the Church has considered calid and even authoritative. Clearly, both Jesus and the Bible have significantly shaped the emergence of the Qur'an and Islam. Within Islam, we acknowledge numerous significant, commendable, and positive aspects, including

[698] Christian Troll, *Dialogue and Difference: Clarity in Christian-Muslim Relations*, 138.

the approach to prayer, fasting, charity, and reverence for the Biblical prophets. Hence, we can regard the Qur'an as a component of a grand heritage that aids Christians in gaining deeper insights into their own texts, fostering reflection, seeking fresh interpretations, and enriching their religious, iconographic, and liturgical traditions. We may buttress this view especially by referring to an intrareligious phenomenon: the Catholic appreciation of stories about Mary that are not in the Bible. Despite the fact that the canonical Gospels offer small details about life of Mary, the Church wants to avoid referring to the apocryphal texts as the primary source of the Marian dogmas.[699] Instead the Church refers to "venerated tradition" alongside the Bible itself, orally communicated before having been written down in post-Biblical texts.

Here our personal opinion gains firm ground: we may regard the Qur'an as part of that venerated tradition which does not aim at correcting the Bible but can be seen as an element of that broader tradition. Following the examples presented above we can with some irony suppose that the Qur'anic tradition is sometimes closer to that "venerated tradition" than the Biblical text itself. My entire study ultimately culminates in this conclusion, maintained by numerous examples outlined earlier. Hence, if the Qur'an stimulates such valuable reasonings, it should not be regarded as equivalent to the apocrypha (in spite of many similarities). Instead, the Qur'an constitutes an essential component of an oral tradition with significant importance. The Qur'an stimulates valuable reflection whereas the Church, wishing to avoid referring to the apocryphal literature, may refer instead to the veneration tradition. In this sense, we can treat the Qur'an as part of our venerated tradition of the Church

[699] Stephen J. Shoemaker, "The Virgin Mary's Hidden Past: From Ancient Marian Apocrypha to the Medieval Vitae Virginis," *Marian Studies* 60 (2009): 1.

and refrain from categorizing it as apocryphal which still may contain a tinge of heresy.

The background to this "venerated tradition" can be found in the constitution Dei Verbum from the Second Vatican Council. This document announces that the apostolic tradition does develop in the church, to add:[700] *Tradition contains both written and spoken words, as well as deeds* – "This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them" (Dei Verbum § 2).[701] The bishops of the Council declare that the apostolic tradition is not a static entity confined to the past. Instead, it evolves, gaining deeper insights into the realities and teachings that are transmitted. This position, that tradition serves as a living subject, found its relevance within various theological schools around the Europe.[702] In particular, one may remember the Catholic School of Tübingen and Johann Möhler (1796–1838), one of the leading members of the school. Another significant contribution was made by Yves Congar (1904–1995), the French Dominican priest and theologian; Maurice Blondel (1861–1949), a Catholic philosopher; the scholars of the Roman school of G. Perrone (1794–1876) and J. B.

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[700] Tan Tran, *The Development of Tradition: Dei Verbum and a Scientific Practical Theory of Tradition* (Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, 2012), 8.

[701] Dei Verbum, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

[702] For more extensive research see:
– James D. G. Dunn, *The Oral Gospel Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013).
– Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).
– Henry Wansbrough, *Jesus and the Oral Gospel Tradition* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004).
– William J. Bausch, *In the Beginning There Were Stories: Thoughts about the Oral Tradition of the Bible* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2004).
– Birger Gerhardsson, *Tradition and Transmission in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998).

Franzelin (1816–1886)[703]; the English theologian and cardinal John Henry Newman[704] (1801–1890).[705] They all contributed to a more dynamic understanding of tradition. Hence, we are on firm ground with our appeal to "venerated tradition", but now as a clarification of the status of the Qur'an! We arrive at this daring position about the Qur'an which is simultaneously firmly rooted in Catholic tradition. This position should be distinguished from that of certain liberal theologians who freely grant other religions an equal status with Christianity. One should even avoid adaptation of Christianity to Islamic categories, in so far these categories are alien to Christianity. "Venerated tradition" offers an ample opportunity to an openminded affirmation of the profound similarities between Bible, post-Biblical; developments and the Qur'an.

In a way, the monumental work by Hans Küng on the dialogue with Islam, gives the impression that a specific liberal approach to Scripture and Catholic faith is mandatory for a genuine understanding of Islam. To give an example: Jesus as Son of God is, according to Küng, a post-Easter confession. Jesus never considered himself the Son of God, Küng seems to implicate. Even if this were true this does not detract from the importance of this title as the earliest Christian confession. However, this is among exegetes a hotly debated issue – already the Gospel of Mark emphasizes this title at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (Mk 1:11; 3:11). This exegetical crux should not be decided beforehand in order to accommodate Muslims![706]

[703] James P. Mackey, *The Modern Theology of Tradition* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), reviewed in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17, no. 3 (September 1964): 376-377, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600009613.
[704] John Newman distinguishes between the prophetic tradition and the apostolic tradition.
[705] James P. Mackey, *The Modern Theology of Tradition*, 376-377.
[706] Hans Küng, *Islam: Past Present and Future*, 76.

Küng also argues: "*Can we exclude the possibility that, on the basis of God's revelation in Christ, countless men and women from prehistory to the present have experienced, and still experience, the mystery of God? Can we exclude the possibility that Muhammad, the Prophet from pagan Arabia is also given special knowledge, entrusted with a particular task or given a special charisma?*"[707] Later, strongly rejecting the idea, that there is no grace granted outside the Church (*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus conceditur gratia*), Hans Küng accepts Muhammad as a post-Christian prophet.[708] That means, in a sense that Muhammad brings the word of God, confirming this statement with the point, that Muhammad received revelation from God. It may seem that this standpoint has been corroborated by the Canadian scholar Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a pioneering figure, who has suggested that Muhammad could be regarded as a post-Biblical prophet. However, this approach is based upon comparative religion rather than upon a Christian theological perspective. When it comes to a theological approach, I think one should be more careful than Küng, who does not specify whether Muhammad can be called a prophet *for Christians*, but still imposes his idea of Muhammad as a prophet as mandatory from the outset. In addition, and in contrast to Hans Küng, I do not presuppose the historical-critical method to the Scripture, be it Bible or Qur'an, as a mandatory approach. It is obvious, that historical-critical approach is valid for the Bible[709], according to the Catholic Church (although not exhausting the theological meaning), but at the same time I do not want to obligate a Muslim dialogue partner to that same approach. We do not need to depart from a specific liberal approach to Scripture, and neither should we try to avoid stumbling blocks or sensitive topics during the engagement with the Scripture of the other partner in dialogue. Involvement in the dialogue requires no

[707] Hans Küng, *Islam: Past Present and Future*, 76.
[708] Ibid, 76.
[709] See *Dei Verbum* §2,8,10.

particular theological stance towards other religions or obligatory changes in the participants' beliefs.

6.6 The question of the Holy Spirit

Although we have dealt with the status of the Qur'an by debating some five options, a theological reflection on the Qur'an cannot avoid the question of inspiration. To put it in even more theological terms: can we say that, from a Christian perspective, the Holy Spirit is in one or other way involved in Islam and Qur'an? We should realize that this question raises formidable theological problems. To my knowledge and surprise, the working of the Holy Spirit outside the Church and outside Christianity has hardly been dealt with. We have seen that the Second Vatican Council has opened up the issue of inspiration to include the lay believers, but the next step should be the working of the Holy Spirit outside the Church. The well-known line: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* should be understood as an exhortation to Christians not to leave the church and not as a categorical condemnation of all non-Christians. The teaching of the Jesuit Leonard Feeney (1897-1978) has been condemned for claiming the exclusion of all non-Catholics from salvation. Still, the surprising lack of reflection about the workings of the Holy Spirit outside the Church - except for a single voice such as that of Yves Congar – should be remedied.

How should we proceed in the case of the Qur'an? Obviously, there are many teachings about Jesus that cannot be accepted by Catholic theology. In addition, many ceremonial laws may remind of similar laws in the Hebrew Bible, but they are not binding for Christians, due to saint Paul's preaching to include the gentiles. Stating a full inspiration of the whole document of the Qur'an cannot be in order. It is, however, a hallmark of the working of the Holy Spirit to be not massive, but subtle and rather now and then, than always.

When it comes to a reflection on the Holy Spirit, three aspects should be distinguished. First the Qur'an speaks about the Holy Spirit working in prophets. This is similar to the Creed where it states: "*qui locutus est per prophetas*". It means that even before Christ's earthly life, the Holy Spirit inspired people with divine messages. Applied to Islam, it may explain how Muslims came to believe in the "one true God", according to the declaration of the Second Vatican Council, Nostra Aetate. Such a belief can hardly be imagined without the working of the Holy Spirit. Of course, the Church has acknowledged how "rays of truth" have enlightened all peoples (Nostra Aetate 2), hereby acknowledging how all people are included in the salvific working of God. Still, and as stated before, one should realize that sharing the Patriarchs, the Prophets and the Virgin Mary, as Islam and Christianity do, constitute much more than just rays of truth, which hold good for all peoples. In fact, the statement of Nostra Aetate § 4 about Judaism: "the great common spiritual testimony of Jews and Christians", holds good - mutatis mutandis - for Islam as well.

A second aspect concerns the actual religious practice of Muslims. The importance attached to prayer, to fasting and to charity forms an impressive testimony of the sincere faith of Muslims and may be compared to the three foundations of the Sermon on the Mount. The fruits of the Holy Spirit, mentioned earlier, should be kept in mind while reflecting upon these pillars of the Islamic faith. These fruits form another way of acknowledging the workings of the Holy Spirit, no less important than the inspiration of Scriptures.

A third aspect is the way the Virgin Mary is held in reverence. Still, the Christocentric dimension of the Virgin Mary who, as *Hodegetria*, always points to her Son, has escaped the Qur'an. The virginity of Mary should be understood as testimony to Jesus's divine sonship, not as an individual virtue of Mary. However,

this does not take away the solemnity of Islamic devotion for Mary. Not everything about Mary in the Qur'an can be traced back to similar stories in Christianity, but we should not identify the working of the Holy Spirit only with elements that are exactly identical with those in Christianity. In that respect, the Holy Spirit may continue to surprise us.

The many conflicts and violence that can be attributed to Islamic fundamentalism do not take away our search for the Holy Spirit in Islam. Christianity itself has not steered clear of violence and abuse. The guidance of the Holy Spirit is all the more necessary for the Church itself to remain loyal to her vocation.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

This conclusion summarizes the major results of our research in four headings:
The historical-critical method and the rehabilitation of typology (7.1); the relationship between Scripture and Tradition (7.2); the interplay between interreligious dialogue and intrareligious dialogue (7.3); and the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Qur'an (7.4).

7.1. The historical-critical method and the rehabilitation of typology

The Historical-critical method, particularly in its classical formulation, has sought to interpret biblical texts strictly within the historical, cultural, and literary horizons of their emergence, deliberately distancing itself from later theological readings that connect texts across temporal boundaries. More concrete, the historical-critical method aims to protect the integrity of the Old Testament by resisting its reduction to a mere anticipation or prediction of the New Testament. While the historical-critical method has succeeded in reconstructing the past, it remains structurally limited when confronted with questions of meaning that transcend historical origin. Typology, by contrast, operates precisely within this broader temporal horizon. It establishes meaningful relationships between past, present, and future, thereby introducing an eschatological dimension that historical criticism alone cannot sustain. across time. Our research has shown how the temple prefigures the Virgin Mary, not only in Christianity, but clearly in the Qur'an as well. In addition, the figure of Moses plays an important role in the New Testament as anticipation of Jesus as "the new Moses". In the Qur'an, Muhammad strongly identifies with Moses, as we have seen in the issue of the demand for a miracle.

Actually, one of the central methodological insights of this dissertation concerns the rehabilitated theological significance of typology in the context of interreligious engagement with Islam. Within modern Christian theology, typology has often been regarded as an outdated method of interpretation. In this sense, typology does not deny historical-critical insights but situates them within a wider theological vision. The problem arises not from the historical-critical method as such, but from its absolutization. When historical-critical method becomes the only one preferred approach, theology risks dissolving into religious history. If Christian theology were to identify itself entirely with the historical-critical method, it would lose its normative, confessional, and eschatological dimensions. The present study therefore insists on the legitimacy of employing historical-critical tools without allowing them to exhaust theological interpretation. Undoubtedly, the paramount importance of Moses for Muhammad contributes to a theological understanding of the latter as the prophet of Islam.

In Byzantine theology, typology exists through liturgy, hymnography, and iconography, shaping a vision of history as symbolically ordered toward divine meaning. The importance of the liturgical feasts of the Virgin Mary in Byzantine tradition closely relates to the central place of the Virgin Mary in the Qur'an, as we have demonstrated. The marginalization of typology in Western modernity therefore represents not a theological advance as such, but a narrowing of interpretive imagination. Again, the dissertation argues that the rehabilitation of typology does not imply a rejection of historical-critical scholarship.

Although Angelika Neuwirth works strictly within a wider historical-critical paradigm, in so far that her research does not entail a Christian-theological reflection, her reading of the Qur'an repeatedly reveals typological structures. She interprets Qur'anic narratives not merely as historical reports or textual borrowings,

but as meaningful reconfigurations of earlier Biblical figures and motifs. In doing so, she implicitly rehabilitates typology from within the heart of historical criticism itself. Her approach does not engage Christian doctrine, nor does it reflect upon Christian theological identity. Nevertheless, the typological sensitivity present in her work reveals an interpretive logic that resonates strongly with pre-modern Christian theology, particularly Byzantine approaches to Scripture that continue to determinate present-day Eastern Christianity. This convergence is not accidental. The Qur'an itself operates through typological logic, re-presenting figures such as Moses, Adam, and Jesus not as static historical characters but as paradigmatic bearers of meaning.

Neuwirth's work demonstrates that typology can be articulated without abandoning a strict historical-critical approach. At the same time, it also highlights the limits of a purely non-theological approach. In our theological perspective, typology becomes a bridge between interreligious and intrareligious dialogue. The recognition of typological correspondences in the Qur'an raises internal Christian questions concerning revelation, continuity, and the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. These questions inevitably touch upon the distinctions and convergences between Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant approaches to biblical interpretation.

The irony, therefore, is striking: while modern Christian theology often distances itself from typology in the name of historical criticism, Qur'anic studies—when pursued with sufficient literary and historical sensitivity—naturally rediscover typological patterns. In this sense, the Qur'an becomes an unexpected inspiration in the rehabilitation of a theological mode of reading that Christianity itself has partially suppressed.

7.2. The relationship between Scripture and Tradition

A second major conclusion concerns the relationship between sacred scripture and tradition—an issue that proves central in both Catholic theology and Islam, although articulated differently in each tradition. The story of Iblis is part of Islamic revelation in the Qur'an, but belongs to tradition in Christianity. Still, the Catholic understanding of revelation is transmitted through both scripture and tradition. In both cases, the sacred text does not exist in isolation but is received, interpreted, and lived within a community over time. For Catholic theology, this tension has been articulated through debates concerning inspiration, canon, and hermeneutics. Yet it reveals a shared tension: how to affirm the divine origin and authority of a sacred text while acknowledging the historical, linguistic, and interpretive mediation through which that text becomes accessible? As an Eastern Catholic theologian formed within the Byzantine tradition, the theological inquiry undertaken in this dissertation is necessarily shaped by a specific ecclesial, liturgical, and hermeneutical horizon. As it was presented in the dissertation, *tradition* does not function merely as a confessional background, but as a living theological element through which revelation, history, and divine action are interpreted. Consequently, the engagement with the Qur'an as developed in this study cannot be understood as confessionally neutral or methodologically detached. Rather, it is consciously situated within a Catholic theological framework that is itself marked by the synthesis of Scripture, Tradition, and liturgical experience.

The Byzantine theological heritage places particular emphasis on the continuity between doctrine, worship, and spiritual practice. Patristic theology, liturgical texts, hymnography, iconography, and sacramental life together form a coherent interpretive universe in which theological meaning is not exhausted by propositional statements alone. Even when this dissertation deliberately limits its

primary engagement to biblical texts, this broader theological framework remains. Such influence is neither accidental nor methodologically problematic. However, it reflects the fundamental insight that theology is always conducted from within a lived tradition and cannot be abstracted from its ecclesial context.

Within this framework, Comparative Theology that was chosen as the main method, is employed not as a relativizing strategy, but as a disciplined and confessional mode of inquiry. The comparative task is not conducted from a neutral or "bird's eye" view, but presupposes a clearly articulated theological identity and does not seek to suspend or neutralize doctrinal commitments. Instead, it allows the theologian to engage seriously with religious claims that arise from another tradition while remaining accountable to one's own ecclesial and theological inheritance. In this sense, Comparative Theology enables a form of intellectual and spiritual hospitality: it creates space to "host" religious insights, questions, and challenges that originate outside one's own tradition without conflating genuine differences or dissolving theological responsibility.

This methodological commitment has important consequences for the treatment of post-biblical Christian tradition. Within Eastern Catholic theology, the Church Fathers and the liturgical tradition are not secondary authorities appended to Scripture, but integral witnesses to the Church's reception and interpretation of revelation. At the same time, in order to preserve the integrity of the interreligious encounter, this study adopts a principle of restraint. Patristic and liturgical sources are introduced only when the Qur'anic text itself necessitates such engagement. This methodological choice reflects a conscious effort to avoid projecting Christian theological developments onto the Qur'an in a way that would obscure its own internal coherence and religious logic.

It is precisely this dialogical sensitivity that explains the prominence of certain themes—such as the Paradise story, Annunciation story, and Jesus' miracles—in the analysis. The Qur'an's engagement of these theological topics invites a response that eventually cannot be fully reflected on the basis of Scripture alone. Here, the broader resources of Eastern Christian theology—particularly its liturgical and patristic heritage—become indispensable, not as imposed frameworks, but as dialogically evoked interpretive partners. Moreover, the inclusion of these themes highlights a deeper theological insight: that the boundaries between Scripture and Tradition are not merely chronological but also hermeneutical.

Finally, in order to situate this theological engagement within the authoritative teaching of the Catholic Church, the dissertation draws upon magisterial texts of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent ecclesial documents. These sources provide a normative framework for interreligious dialogue and theological openness, affirming both the uniqueness of Christian revelation and the reality of God's action beyond visible ecclesial boundaries. Vatican II, in particular, represents a decisive moment of theological renewal in which the Church articulated a posture of dialogical engagement grounded in fidelity rather than defensiveness. By integrating these magisterial insights, the present study seeks to ensure that its theological exploration remains both ecclesially grounded and responsive to the challenges and opportunities of Christian–Muslim encounter in the contemporary world. Our research follows in the footsteps of *Nostra Aetate*, realizing that the question of the theological meaning of the Qur'an should no longer be avoided.

7.3. The interplay between interreligious dialogue and intrareligious dialogue

This dissertation proceeds from the assumption that interreligious and intrareligious dialogue are not merely related phenomena but are structurally and theologically interconnected. Interreligious dialogue, understood in this dissertation as a serious theological engagement with another religious tradition, cannot be meaningfully sustained without a simultaneous process of intrareligious reflection.

Any encounter with religious otherness inevitably generates questions that must be addressed within one's own theological tradition through critical self-examination, reinterpretation, and renewal. So, it simultaneously involves both the *other* and the *self*. The engagement with Islam does not merely serve to clarify what Muslims believe or how they interpret their sacred texts, but rather, it challenges me to re-examine how my own theological tradition interprets, expresses, and embodies its faith.

Theological dialogue does not merely aim at understanding the beliefs or interpretive frameworks of another tradition. It also exposes the presuppositions, categories, and hermeneutical habits operative within one's own religion. In this sense, engagement with Islam does not simply clarify Islamic self-understanding but also challenges Christian theology to reconsider how it articulates, transmits, and lives its own convictions.

From the perspective of an Eastern Catholic theological framework, this dual movement acquires particular significance. Eastern Christian theology, shaped by patristic exegesis, liturgical consciousness, and apophatic sensibility, has historically developed through dialogue—both with internal diversity and with external traditions. Its emphasis on mystery, relationality, and experiential knowledge of God

renders it especially receptive to forms of theological encounter that resist reduction to purely conceptual comparison.

Within this framework, engagement with the Qur'an emerges simultaneously as an interreligious encounter and an intrareligious moment of Christian self-examination and operates analogously to a hermeneutical mirror: it reflects not only the distinct self-understanding of Islam, but also aspects of Christian theological identity that may otherwise remain implicit or underdeveloped.

7.4. The relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Qur'an

One of the most demanding and unavoidable theological questions emerging from this dissertation concerns the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Qur'an. Once the Qur'an is taken seriously as a religious text that has shaped the faith, practice, and moral orientation of a believing community, Christian theology cannot simply suspend the question of divine agency.

The position developed in this dissertation deliberately avoids two different approaches. On the one hand, the Qur'an cannot be regarded as a pagan text or as a purely human construction lacking religious depth. On the other hand, it cannot be affirmed as divinely inspired in the same sense as the canonical Scriptures of the Church. Between these positions lies the real theological challenge: whether, and in what sense, Christian theology may discern the activity of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Qur'an and to Islam more broadly. The question, therefore, is not whether the Holy Spirit can work beyond the Church, - although this issue has been neglected in Christian theology as well - but whether Christian theology is willing to reflect seriously on how the work of the Holy Spirit might be recognized and articulated in the Qur'an.

Indeed, one of the striking observations underlying this dissertation is the relative absence of sustained theological reflection on the working of the Holy Spirit outside Christianity. While Christology and ecclesiology have been extensively developed, pneumatology has often remained confined to intra-ecclesial categories. Even the significant theological renewal initiated by the Second Vatican Council, while opening important perspectives on salvation, revelation, and religious freedom, did not fully elaborate a theology of the Spirit's action in other religious traditions. Our research has proposed a new perspective of the Holy Spirit no longer subservient to the Son, but, as the wording of original Nicene Creed has it, "proceeding from the Father" (but not from the Son, lacking the "filioque"). This may allow for a freer realm of the Holy Spirit outside Christian ecclesiastical boundaries.

Pneumatological reflection becomes unavoidable concerning the Qur'an's understanding of prophecy. The Qur'an consistently presents prophets as recipients of divine guidance through the Spirit. This resonates with the Christian confession that the Holy Spirit "has spoken through the prophets," a statement that explicitly affirms the Spirit's activity prior to and beyond the New Testament. In addition, especially the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary in the Qur'an instills wonder and respect in me as Eastern Catholic theologian. The acknowledgment that Muslims sincerely worship the one God implies, at minimum, some form of participation in God's self-communication. Such participation, from a Christian perspective, cannot be conceived without reference to the Holy Spirit. Even more, Islamic devotion is characterized by a disciplined commitment to prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and moral responsibility. These practices are not peripheral but constitute the core of Muslim religious life. When viewed through a pneumatological lens, they raise serious theological questions. Christian tradition has long recognized the *fruits of the Holy*

Spirit not only in doctrinal correctness but in transformed life, ethical orientation, and spiritual discipline. Practices that cultivate humility, self-restraint, generosity, and attentiveness to God cannot be excluded a priori from pneumatological considerations.

So, this dissertation concludes that the question of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Qur'an should be further developed within Catholic theology. Silence on this issue would amount to an implicit theological judgment that contradicts the Church's own affirmations concerning God's universal action. While a full acknowledgement of Qur'anic inspiration does not seem theologically feasible, still a nuanced pneumatological approach remains both legitimate and necessary. Our research may be seen as a first step into that direction, while welcoming similar reflection from Muslim side.[710]

To acknowledge that the Holy Spirit may be at work beyond the visible boundaries of the Church does not weaken Christian identity. On the contrary, it safeguards the confession of a God whose Spirit "blows where it wills." In this sense, the Qur'an does not force Christian theology to abandon its convictions, but it does compel it to think more deeply, more humbly, and more faithfully about the freedom of the Holy Spirit.

[710] See the announcement of what may be seen as a first attempt from Muslim side: Idris Naserey and Zishan Ghaffar (eds), *Defining Islamic Comparative Theology*, De Gruyter 2026 (forthcoming).

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APPENDIX № 1

Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions *Nostra Aetate* proclaimed by his holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965.[711]

Paragraph № 3

3. The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.

[711] Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions *Nostra Aetate* proclaimed by his holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965 // http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html