



# The Qu'ran as a Gospel for Christians

## *What Christians can Learn from the Qu'ran about Trinity, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit*

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### Abstract

In the joint declaration of Abu Dhabi, Pope Francis and Grand Imam Ahmad Mohammed Al-Tayyeb spoke together in the name of God. In view of the outstanding significance of the name of God and the permanent relevance that Islam has gained in human history, the article demonstrates that the Qu'ran also holds meaning in terms of salvation history for Christianity and can therefore be regarded as good news, i.e. gospel, for Christians. As a consequence, the dogmatic heritage of Christianity must be interpreted not only in light of the Torah and the Jewish tradition, but also in light of the Qur'an. This includes the Trinitarian confession of God as well as Christology and Pneumatology. Thereby it becomes apparent that while Christianity and Islam cannot be unified, they are mutually interdependent and that with the help of the other, one's own heritage can be understood more profoundly.

### Keywords

Qu'ran – Gospel – Christian-Muslim Dialogue – Trinity – Abrahamic Religions – Name of God

## 1 The Joint Declaration of Pope Francis and Grand Imam Al-Tantawi

Can Christians be part of the Islamic Ummah and believe in the Qur'an, specifically as Christians, and even receive double the reward from God because of this belief? (Q 28,52–54) In contrast to the later Islamic tradition, the Qur'an seems to recognise such a possibility; for Christianity this seems absurd. Although the Roman Catholic Church spoke positively of Islam in the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) in the 20th century, after centuries of conflict with the Muslim world, the vision of a real reconciliation with Islam, including the question of God, i.e. a common faith in the one God, was and remains far beyond the horizon of even contemporary Christian (and Islamic) theology.

Nevertheless, under the pontificate of Pope Francis and the term of office of Grand Imam Ahmad Mohammed Al-Tayyeb Al-Tantawi, the Grand Sheikh of the Al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo, a new dimension of friendship has opened up in the form of the joint declaration “A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together”, which was announced on 4 February 2019 in Abu Dhabi as part of an interreligious conference on the topic of “Tolerance and Peace”.<sup>1</sup> The decisive element in this document, which is also worth reading in terms of its content and emphasis on freedom and human dignity, is the fact that the two dignitaries address humanity *jointly* in the *name of God*. In other words, the most important representative of Christian faith and one of the most important officials of Islam profess the same name of God in this document. Insofar as the name expresses the innermost essence of God, it must be noted that the opening words of the document, “In the name of God ...” establish a full community of faith, for what can be the object of the faith of Christians and Muslims if not the name and nature of God? This faith was shared in this historic moment of the joint declaration, the full significance of which still has not been fully grasped by the political and theological public.

With the above statement, Francis and Al-Tantawi have far exceeded everything that Christian and Islamic theology has been able to achieve to date. The task of theology is therefore to interpret this name of God, which can be expressed as “mercy” in both the biblical and Qur'anic traditions,<sup>2</sup> and to show what the two traditions have in common and why they profess the same God. Consequently, this article will attempt to understand what it means to share the name of God with Muslims from a Christian perspective.

It will be shown that Christians must begin to understand the Qur'an as an indispensable part of their own faith. They will have to recognise it as *good*

1 Cf. Pope Francis/Imam Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*.

2 Cf. Khorchide, *Islam ist Barmherzigkeit.*; Kasper, *Mercy*.

*news, a joyful message, a gospel* of God in the deepest sense of the word. This is not a matter of following a fashionable religious pluralism or relativising claims to truth, but of coming to the realization that the truth of the Qur'an makes a decisive contribution to the self-understanding of Christianity. The Qur'an is, as will be shown, 'gospel' because it corrects false forms of Christianity. This does not just apply to a hypothetical Christianity of the Arabian Peninsula of the sixth and seventh centuries, but to Christianity in general. It should be noted in passing that, conversely, Muslims are also invited to rediscover the Scriptures and the Gospel as part of their own tradition and to take them into account in their interpretation of the Qur'an. This was still considered self-evident by the Qur'an and was only obscured by later polemical developments through the idea of *tahrif* (falsification of the Scriptures), according to which Jews and Christians were found guilty.

The necessity of understanding the Qur'an as part of Christianity's own revelation will also give a new impetus to a long overdue and highly necessary orientation towards Judaism and love for Israel, because ultimately, the central theological challenges posed to Christianity by Judaism also correspond to the theological challenges posed by Islam. It is a matter of taking a strictly monotheistic approach to the Trinitarian confession of God, i.e. the irrevocable fact that Christians pray in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This involves an understanding of Jesus and the Holy Spirit that remains true to the monotheistic paradigm ("Hear Israel, YHWH our God, one"; Deut 6:4).

Therefore, a second step, which constitutes the main part of the article, will consist of a reflection on the biblical name of God and, based on this, an approach to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Thereby, the article attempts to take statements from the Qur'an into account. It asks to what extent Christianity must re-read its own dogmatic tradition against this background and inquires what Christians can learn from the Qur'an. In this context, Qur'anic passages are also interpreted from a Christian perspective without violating them.

## 2 The Qu'ran as Gospel

### 2.1 *Two Definitive Words of God*

Just as the Torah is *the good news* for Jews, Christians (and Muslims),<sup>3</sup> the Qur'an can also be viewed as a gospel. To date, however, it has been regarded by Christians as something foreign to Christianity, external to its own Holy

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Braulik, *Gesetz als Evangelium*, pp. 127–160.

Scriptures and even a falsification of key passages. As A. Neuwirth states in her book on the Qur'an,<sup>4</sup> European scholars long measured the content of the Qur'an against the standard of the Christian texts and denied it any independent theological dignity. In fact, Christianity finds it difficult to make a theological assessment: while it was able from the outset to incorporate Greek philosophy, other later philosophical traditions and, since the 18th century, even the secular Enlightenment into its own reflection, and has also been attempting to rediscover the Jewish tradition<sup>5</sup> for several decades, the Qur'an has remained a foreign body for the most part – at least in Western traditions.

The Qur'an was declared to be the work of the devil or was attributed to a private revelation to Mohammed based on his psychological and medical constitution. However, beyond the disrespect and arrogance that underlies such attitudes, which were doctrinally set aside in the Catholic Church with Vatican II, it must be fundamentally recognised that the biblical God is a God of history. God works through the Holy Spirit in history, which can therefore never be regarded as completely devoid of the presence of the Spirit. Of course, this cannot be used to justify all the historical catastrophes and bestialities, as this would release humans from their responsibility and incapacitate them. However, a theological view of the whole of history cannot ignore the work of the Spirit. An attempt must at least be made to read the irrevocable historical power of an event as having been worked by the Spirit. Such a form of historical power is definitively present in the Qur'anic revelation. No one seriously believes that Islam will simply disappear from the stage of history. Its growing importance must instead be acknowledged. Biblically, the idea of the significance of historicity is expressed in the words of the Pharisee Gamaliel before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, with which he pleaded against the persecution of Christians: "[...] for if this plan [the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus] or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" (Acts 5:38 et seq.)<sup>6</sup>

However, if Islam is indeed the work of God, the difficulty for Christianity is that chronologically it appears after Christianity and also explicitly refers to it. It does not claim to override Christ, but it does claim to be a correct – though not necessarily complete! – interpretation of the Christ event, through which the Christian tradition available to Islam is to be corrected. However,

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4 Cf. Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*.

5 Cf. Marquardt, *Das christliche Bekenntnis zu Jesus dem Juden*.

6 All biblical quotations are taken from the English Standard Version and at times slightly modified, if a more literal translation was necessary.

this means that the Qu'ran cannot be regarded as a precursor to Christianity or independent of Christianity, in contrast to other historically influential religions and systems of thought. Although it has been recognised in parts of Christian theology today that the Torah is not a precursor to Christianity that has been superseded by the Gospel, the Qu'ran poses an even greater challenge in this respect, because Jesus does not stand directly on the ground of the Qu'ranic tradition and because the Qu'ran also contains a claim to universality and finality that almost inevitably comes into conflict with Christianity, which understands Jesus as the definitive word of God.

It is also questionable today to regard the Qu'ran as a specific revelation for the Arab world, since, like Christianity, it is addressed to the whole world, and its main area of distribution has long since extended outside the Arab world. The matter becomes even more difficult if one takes the New Testament completely seriously in the sense that Christianity marks the entry into the *eschaton*. This means that history no longer develops in a linear fashion as it did before, but that God has irrevocably revealed his plan of salvation in Jesus. This revelation implies a commitment to Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnate and singular Word of God and a commitment to the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. A Christian who denies these two elements of faith can no longer be called a Christian.

Christians thus seem to get caught up in an irresolvable contradiction when attempting a theological dialogue with Muslims: on the one hand, from their point of view, the revelation of history is complete and culminates in *Jesus* (literally: *YHWH has saved*), the Christ (Messiah), the Holy One of God (Mark 8:39), the Son<sup>7</sup> (Matt 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 3:35 et seq. etc.), the Son of the living God (Matt 16:16), the Son of Man (Mark 2:10; Mark 2:28 etc.), the "God Is" (John 1:18; see chapter 4) and the Immanuel (God with us; Matt 1:23; Matt 28:19; John 14:16). On the other hand, there is a historically powerful word of God in the form of the Qu'ran, which is addressed to all people and not least to Christians.

From a Christian point of view, it must be ruled out that the Qu'ran overrides the tradition of the Torah and the Gospel. This view, however, is fully in line with the Qu'ran, which emphasises that Christians and Jews have also already received the Qu'ran: "As for those faithful to whom We had given the

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7 On the difference between "Son" and "Son of God", cf. Ratzinger, *Einführung in das Christentum*, pp. 209–214.

Scripture before this Quran, they do believe in it.” (Q 28:52)<sup>8</sup> The questions that arise, however, concern the reason for the Qur’anic revelation on the one hand, given that the Qur’an in the form of the Torah and the Gospel is older in a sense than the Qur’an itself, and on the other hand which reading of the Gospel is necessitated by the Qur’an. For if the Qur’an is recognised as revealed scripture, then a reading of the Bible must necessarily include the Qur’an in its interpretation. It can be formulated as a hermeneutical principle that the Bible is (also) to be read in light of the Qur’an and the Qur’an (also) in light of the Bible.

## 2.2 *The Qur’an as Alterity and Corrective of Christianity*

If one considers the reason for the Qur’anic revelation in terms of salvation history, one could initially retreat to the viewpoint that history is a divine mystery and that we cannot ultimately know such a reason. However, such an idea does not take sufficient account of the fact that Christians are endowed with the Holy Spirit and, as friends of Jesus, are also initiated into God’s economy (the history of salvation). Divine friendship consists in the fact that God does not leave people in the dark about their fate and about God’s actions. Of course, it is not possible within the scope of this article to sufficiently address all aspects that have brought about a “new” form of revelation also in terms of salvation history, but some key points regarding the occurrence of Qur’anic revelation can be drawn from reading both the Bible and the Qur’an.

The rupture between Christianity and Judaism undoubtedly constitutes a fundamental problem in the history of salvation. While the fact that Israel did not profess Jesus as its Messiah could still be interpreted and justified by Paul insofar that this not only releases energies for the proclamation of the Gospel among the Goyim (Gentiles), but also repeatedly confronts Christianit(ies) with the fact that their task is not least to make God’s love and mercy tangible in such a way that Israel might become jealous (Rom 9–11), there is no justification for Christianity’s negative attitude towards Israel. In any case, the break between Israel and the Church represents a lack of love and a deep wound in the history of salvation. Islam forces Christians, who have used their power against Judaism and attempted to “resolve” the theological conflict with the Jews through violence and condemnation, not only to find a peaceful way of dealing with alterity, but also to subject their own self-understanding – which above all implies the question of God – to critical reflection.

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<sup>8</sup> Quotations from the Qur’an are taken from the translation by Dr. Mustafa Khattab. Cf. *Quran.com*.

If the Qur'an, as received by Muhammad, is to help deepen the Christian understanding of God – and this can be assumed based on the fact that it must be regarded as a divinely ordained revelation – this would mean that it represents *good news*, a gospel for Christianity.

Two points can be taken from the Qur'an that shed light on why the Qur'an is a key to interpretation, a supplement and a corrective to Christian tradition. (1) The first is found in Q 5:48:

We have revealed to you O Prophet this Book with the truth, as a confirmation of previous Scriptures and a supreme authority on them. So judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their desires over the truth that has come to you. To each of you We have ordained a code of law and a way of life. If Allah had willed, He would have made you one community, but His Will is to test you with what He has given each of you. So compete with one another in doing good. To Allah you will all return, then He will inform you of the truth regarding your differences.

In this passage, the Qur'an becomes a testimony to the plurality of divine revelation. This is not about mere tolerance, but about an impulse that criticises claims to power. In the biblical tradition, as in the ancient tradition in general, the question of the representation of power plays a central role. The king, the imperial dignitaries, the empire itself can only exist to the extent that the insignia of power with which they surround themselves are effective. This power is represented in manifold images, but increasingly also in texts (royal chronicles, founding myths, etc.). The biblical prohibition of images aims to draw a fundamental line against any representation of human power. Humanity attempts to gain absolute power by accessing the sphere of God, and this ultimate grasp is to be prevented. This protection also applies to the sacred texts that constitute the community. In the Torah, the reader encounters not only the prohibition of images, i.e. the prohibition of depicting God and thus representing him and bringing him under control, but also the *ineffability of the name of God*, the tetragrammaton YHWH, by which the name of God is signified. In the New Testament, the decisive sign is the cross, which, as it seems, can be depicted and has in fact become a massive symbol of dominance and identity for Christianity, as today's discussions on the presence of the cross in the public realm reveal. However, it tends to be forgotten that the cross symbolises a dimension of human suffering and human existence that transcends any form of representation. Precisely by pointing to the suffering caused by empires in their glory, it calls into question all representation. The Qur'an also contains signs (e.g. right at the beginning of Sura 2) that have no denotative function,

i.e. signs that transcend any immediate meaning and thus representation. It is precisely through these signs, which man ultimately cannot dispose over and control, that the divine dimension of this text and the provisional nature of any interpretation become apparent.

The path taken in the verse Q 5:48 quoted above reveals an alterity that makes it impossible for *any* of the traditional scriptural religions to lay claim to absolute truth and thus to a direct representation of the divine. The sacred text itself is therefore confronted with an alterity, with a distance from human claims to validity, which must not be appropriated, and which proclaims an openness in which ultimately “Allah himself gives knowledge”.

(2) If the first aspect addressed here contains an uncomfortable element for both Christianity and Islam – both of which have a universal claim to validity – insofar as it becomes clear that this universality also includes alterity and criticism of one’s own claims to truth, then a second aspect poses a very central challenge for Christianity:

Indeed, those who say, “Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary,” have fallen into disbelief. Say, O Prophet, “Who has the power to prevent Allah if He chose to destroy the Messiah, son of Mary, his mother, and everyone in the world all together?” To Allah alone belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and everything in between. He creates whatever He wills. And Allah is Most Capable of everything. (Q 5:17)

The question raised in this verse: “Who can avail anything against God?” could perhaps be astutely answered: No one, of course, except God himself. For although it is indicated here that no human being can set limits on God, this does not imply that God does not set this limit within Godself – out of mercy. In this way, God’s transcendence contains a fundamental boundary against human fantasies of omnipotence, which also claim to have God at their disposal. God eludes the projection of absolute totalitarian power. The first sentence, which contains the decisive provocation of the Qur’an towards Christianity with the marvellous – because it includes Mary – designation “Jesus, the son of Mary”, can perhaps also be read against the background of this criticism of power and authority, insofar as it is understood as a corrective to the idea of the “Son of God”. For those who firmly stand in the Christian tradition, the central dogmas of the first ecumenical councils cannot be denied, but this does not prevent us from understanding them in a more profound way with the help of the Qur’an (and of course also with the help of the Torah). The divinity of Christ and the depiction of Jesus as Pantokrator was a crucial element of the iconographic programme of the Byzantine rulers, who considered

themselves representatives of Christ on earth. Although the crucified Christ represents a subversion of all imperial power, the divinity of Christ was also associated with an apotheosis of man, which in turn was aimed at an apotheosis of the emperor.<sup>9</sup> It must therefore never be forgotten that the criticism of Jesus as the Son of God, viewed in a positive light, includes the creatureliness of humanity, which finds its own limitations therein, and this contrasts negatively with the oriental cult of kings, in which the king is the Son of God.

Furthermore, the criticism in this verse, which initially seems scandalous to Christian ears, also opens up the possibility to understand one's own Trinitarian faith and the person of Jesus more deeply, so that it will prove possible to hold on to the Christian tradition without abandoning monotheism and without losing the possibility of dialogue with Judaism and Islam. Christianity is thus referred to the biblical tradition and its central directive, which corresponds in its entirety with the Qur'an: "Hear Israel: YHWH our God, YHWH ONE! Love YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." (Deut 6:4 et seq.)

It is no coincidence that the *name of God* – referred to in the Bible as the tetragrammaton YHWH – plays a central role in this commandment.<sup>10</sup> The nature of the Trinity and the nature of Jesus can only be revealed by reflecting on the name of God, whose invocation ("In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"), alongside the "Our Father", is the cornerstone of distinctively Christian prayer.

### 3 The Name of God

Alongside Lev 16, Exod 32–34 constitutes the central text of the Torah<sup>11</sup> and, insofar as the Torah can be regarded as the centre of the Tanakh,<sup>12</sup> also of the

9 G. Agamben has analysed these mechanisms in great depth. Cf. Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*.

10 On the meaning of the name of God, cf. Ebach, "Name ist Schall und Rauch", pp. 17–82.; Dohmen, *Exodus 1–18*.

11 On the significance of Lev 16, in which the highest festival of the Jews, Yom Kippur (the great Day of Atonement between YHWH and his people Israel) is thematised, cf. Borgonovo, *Torah e storiografie dell'Antico Testamento*; Zenger, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, p. 75.

12 The Tanakh is the Hebrew Bible of the Jews. It largely corresponds to the Old Testament of the Christians, although some of its books are arranged differently. The abbreviation TaNaKh denotes its three parts, namely the Torah, the Nevi'im (prophets) and the Ketuvim (writings, also including the Psalter). The Torah is at the centre, with the other two parts serving as a kind of commentary. The New Testament is in turn in many respects

entire Jewish and Christian Scripture. The Gospel also remains rooted in the Torah, which was the Holy Scripture of Jesus. Particularly the Fourth Gospel, i.e. the Gospel of John, in which the other Gospels as well as the Torah and Tanakh are once again subjected to a reinterpretation, is, as will be shown, a single great meditation on the name of God YHWH.

In Exod 32–34, the possibility of a reconciliation between YHWH and Israel after Israel's breach of covenant, which was expressed in the worship of the golden calf, is discussed. In this context, Moses makes an intercession for Israel to be spared and ultimately receives the deepest introduction to the name of God, YHWH, in response:

YHWH descended in the clouds and stood with him there (Moses) and proclaimed the name of YHWH. YHWH passed by before him and proclaimed: YHWH YHWH: Deity, merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, preserving favour to the thousandth generation, bearing iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation. (Exod 34:5–7)

The exceptional significance of Exod 34:5–7 as the climax of the narrative in Exod 32–34 about the breach of the covenant and forgiveness is already evident from the fact that the tetragrammaton, i.e. the name of God, is doubled. This is significant in a context where repetition is used to express particular emphasis. Among other things, this is also evident in the sayings of Jesus, when a particularly solemn declaration is introduced with a double Amen. In addition, however, this doubling also has a special significance in terms of content: Exod 34, which presents the *content* of the name of God, is, alongside Exod 3, the central moment of the self-revelation of this name. In Exod 3, YHWH revealed the *meaning* of his name as “I will be there for you as ...”. If this name is now doubled in the sense of YHWH (is) YHWH, one could read the introduction: “I will be there for you as ...”<sup>13</sup> (is) the ‘I will be there for you as ...’. This peculiar phrase already expresses an extremely open form in its first part: YHWH will prove himself in his being-with, whereby this proving himself is concretised in the history of salvation. The verbal dimension of the phrase is decisive: The

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a commentary on the Tanakh and in particular on the Torah, the prophetic books and the Psalms in light of the figure of Jesus.

13 On the meaning of the name of God YHWH and its interpretation as “I will be there for you as ...” cf. Dohmen, *Exodus 1–18*.

name of God does not express a static object that could be assigned definable characteristics, rather it shows itself in its being-with-the-people-of-God. The doubling of the name further radicalizes the uniqueness of its open form: YHWH (is) YHWH, i.e. there is no human determination or representation of any kind that could grasp or capture the uniqueness of HIS name. The turn of phrase is reminiscent of a love relationship, where the beloved other is beyond all attributions and can only be expressed to third parties through a shared history, i.e. only poetically-affectively, no longer denotatively and descriptively.

YHWH (is) YHWH expresses the dynamic of God and thus his uniqueness, which transcends any static definition in the deepest way. From a biblical perspective, God is therefore not a noun that could be objectified, but rather a *verb*. It should already be mentioned at this point that the Qur'an is also not simply a book, but a recitation and thus a performative response to the performative event of God, not least in recitation.

In a second step, Exod 34:5–7 attempts to meaningfully unravel the dynamism and verblability of the event of God. The content-related definitions used here represent, as it were, event modalities (adverbs) of the unique name, but not static attributes. *The followers of the biblical Scriptures therefore do not believe in God, but in the name YHWH that happens and manifests itself.* The first concretising form of this event of the unique holy name is expressed with the term *deity* (El). This essentially implies two moments of the name's occurrence: Firstly, the creative activity, which in the context of Ex 32–34 also manifests itself as the new creation of Israel, which was doomed to destruction in its sin, i.e. in its old existence. The second moment of the "God-ing" (to phrase the event in active, verbalising forms) is, as the beginning of Genesis shows, *separation*, whereby the original separation is between light and darkness. From a New Testament and Qur'anic perspective, one could say that "Deity" evokes the processes of protological creation out of nothingness (i.e. the separation between life-affirming existence and life-destroying nothingness) and eschatological separation (the judgement between mercy and mercilessness).

The *second* form, in which the name of God and its first form are further concretised, is found in the word *merciful*: YHWH manifests Himself as mercy, i.e. in merciful devotion to his people, which entails the two dimensions of *forgiveness* of guilt and *healing* of sickness. It thus leads out of the sphere of death, which is characterised by sin and suffering, into the sphere of newly bestowed life.

The *third* form of the revealing of the name is expressed in the chain of words *slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, preserving favour to the thousandth generation*, all of which represent a further specification of God's mercy from the perspective of the covenant relationship. YHWH

has made a covenant with His people (and as the Bible and the Qur'an know: with humanity in general),<sup>14</sup> the content of which is HE himself, i.e. the calling to HIS *knowledge*, i.e. the knowledge of the unique mercy of the Creator and Judge. Recognising the name YHWH as mercy consequently entails a unique and profound devotion to others and to the world around us. In other words, the Torah and the social form of the Church and the Umma are a direct expression of the insight into the name of God, which is obscured by anti-social, merciless behaviour.

The next, *fourth* determination, bearing iniquity, transgression and sin, plays a special role in the Judeo-Christian context: YHWH does not discard humanity, although this would be justified in view of humanity's misdeeds, but rather YHWH endures and accompanies the sinner. In addition, the central idea is also echoed that YHWH not only endures Israel's guilt, but also carries Israel in its guilt, i.e. accompanies the Hebrews through a history of guilt. Finally, in Christianity we encounter the view that this bearing-with is expressed in the fact that Jesus goes as far as hell for humanity, which is reflected in his path to the cross. In this radical solidarity, which also includes the darkness of guilt and brokenness, he becomes the divinely recognised paradigm of the new man and the new creation, thus allowing this aspect of the name of God, which refers to the "bearing of guilt", to be encountered in a unique way.<sup>15</sup>

The final, *fifth* way of revealing the name of God "but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation" emphasises the consequences that culpable actions entail. YHWH shows his devotion to thousands of generations, but three to four generations, i.e. people living in the same household, must bear the consequences of wrongdoing. The point here is not that children are held accountable for the behaviour of their parents or grandparents, but that human misconduct has repercussions that reach far beyond one's own life or generation.

To summarise, the decisive approach to the biblical understanding of God is that the name of God represents His innermost moment, and that the latter manifests itself as creative, judging, forgiving, healing, and compassionate mercy. When the Trinitarian confession of God is separated from the verbal

14 Cf. On the covenant in Qur'anic understanding: Rizzardi, *Il linguaggio religioso dell'Islam*, especially pp. 64–66. In the Bible, the Noachic covenant is of paramount importance because in it YHWH commits himself to protecting the world from destruction (Gen 9:11).

15 In following Christ, Paul therefore also assumes the willingness to renounce not only his happiness or his life for Israel, but even his salvation. Paul would go as far as hell for his brothers. Cf. Rom 9:3.

dimension of the name, a tritheism necessarily follows, which is rightly criticised by the Qur'an. When Christians begin to interpret their God in a tritheistic manner and when Jesus' divinity is understood as an attribution, as quoted in Q 5:17, then this constitutes the sin of *Tahrif*, or distortion, in relation to the Scriptures and also in relation to the Gospel. This involves a lack of knowledge of God and consequently constitutes a breach of covenant. In the following two sections on Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the Christian confession of God, i.e. the confession of the name of YHWH the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit will be considered and brought into dialogue with the Qur'an. Christians today are hardly explicitly aware that the formula with which Christian prayer is introduced and which has its primary place in the sacrament of baptism ("baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", cf. Matt 28:19) refers to the name YHWH and does not speak of three names "Father", "Son", and "Spirit". Perhaps an encounter in friendship with the Qur'an can change this. In this respect as well, the Qur'an would be gospel for Christians.

#### 4 Jesus and the Name YHWH

##### 4.1 *Jesus, the "Only Begotten" (John 1:1–18 part 1)*

Certainly, the main difficulty in a Christian reception of the Qur'an lies in the differing views on Jesus. From both a religious studies and a Muslim perspective, Jesus and Muhammad are often placed on the same level as the decisive sources of the revelations associated with them. In fact, however, it is questionable whether such a view of Jesus does justice to the Qur'an, which paints a clearly different picture of Jesus than of Muhammad, a point to which we will return later. From a Christian point of view, such a position is out of the question, as it in no way corresponds to the Gospel, in which Jesus is neither introduced as a prophet nor as the founder of a religion.

Another way of relating Jesus to the Islamic tradition from a Christian perspective is to establish a structural analogy between the Qur'an and Jesus. In this case, the *incarnation* (becoming flesh) of the Word of God in Jesus is contrasted with the *inlibration* (becoming a book) of the Word of God in the Qur'an. It is indeed indisputable that theological considerations that assume a pre-existence of the Qur'an are linked to the dogma of the pre-existence of Jesus and thus put the Qur'an in the place of Jesus.<sup>16</sup> However, this view

16 Cf. Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*; Stosch, *Herausforderung Islam*.

initially has the disadvantage that it places Jesus and the Qur'an in a competitive relationship. Moreover, it is not entirely accurate, insofar as the Qur'an is not a book but a recitation of a text, i.e. it has a performative character. It is possible that the role of Jesus in the Gospel and in the Qur'an, especially with regard to the question of God, could be understood even more deeply than is expressed in this figure.

In order to approach the crucial question, namely the question of the divinity of Jesus, which seems to represent an insurmountable barrier between Christianity on the one hand and Judaism and Islam on the other, a few sentences from the prologue of the Gospel of John will be reflected upon below (John 1:1–18). The advantage of this choice of text lies not only in the fact that this prologue contains incomparably dense reflections on Jesus, which have had a great impact on the Christian dogmatic tradition, but also in the fact that in the reception of this prologue, the reader is confronted with a Christology that poses a particularly great difficulty in dialogue with Jewish and Islamic traditions. Anyone who can reasonably overcome some of the hurdles posed by this prologue is therefore well on the way to a conversation that exceeds mere dialogue. The passages that are decisive for the considerations in this article are reproduced below:

In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was with God, and God was the Logos. In the beginning he was with God. Everything became through him and without him nothing became that which has become. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. [...] And the Logos became flesh and dwelt [literally: tented] among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. [...] From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth were given through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only begotten, the "God is" in the bosom of the Father, he has interpreted. (John 1:1–18)

A crucial background for interpreting this passage lies in an understanding of the world as a system of signs. This view, which is also familiar to the Qur'anic tradition, can read the whole of existence, whether physical-material or spiritual, as a "book". The signs in this book of being are not arbitrarily placed but denote a divine script that is to be deciphered in creation. In the biblical tradition, it is the four signs of YHWH, the so-called tetragrammaton, the name of God, which underlies our creation and stands at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of this world. All the other signs are aligned and arranged in accordance with the logos of this tetragrammaton. In this respect,

these divine signs denote God himself or are added to God as a name (John 1:1: “the word/sign<sup>17</sup> was with God”) and – as shown in the previous section – as a unique name, as a sign of all signs, even surpass the word *God* itself. Without these signs, the world would be completely meaningless (Hebrew: *Tohuwabohu*), one could not even speak of world. Therefore, the sign of God’s name precedes all time and all meaning and forms their initial logos (meaning), i.e. the word that opens up all time.

The first radical shift that the Gospel of John introduces is that it speaks of the *becoming of flesh (incarnation)* of this word/sign: on the one hand, this implies an affectivity that permeates the entire universe, i.e. the whole world of signs, insofar as the term *flesh* implies unrestricted tangibility, but on the other hand it also implies the entry of the sign, i.e. the name of YHWH, into history, into which the sign is incarnated.

The name of Jesus is not mentioned at first; rather, the following passage speaks of the *glory* of YHWH: In the traditional Jewish view, the glory of God has its seat in the Temple of Jerusalem, more precisely on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, and the sight of the glory of YHWH in the temple was the meaning of life of the people of God. For the Gospel of John, the new place of the glory of YHWH – after the destruction of the temple, which is already presupposed in this Gospel (John 2:19) – is the cross and the resurrection of Jesus, which is initially only hinted at in the prologue and will be discussed later in this article. The decisive point is that, in John’s view, Jesus’ devotion is connected with the vision of the glory of the name of God, which affectively (“became flesh”) permeates all signs and thus all areas of life.

The next key term represents a particular provocation on the part of John: He not only moves the incarnation of the name (YHWH) closer to the (not yet definitively identified) person of Jesus, but also uses the term *begetting*, which is particularly problematic to Qur’anic ears. Of course, Christians can help themselves by pointing out that this phrase in no way refers to the biological begetting of Jesus by the Father, but this does not relieve them of the task of explaining this term in more detail, since even and especially Christians have often failed to grasp its full significance. Philosophically, one could contrast “begetting” with “creation”, whereby the former releases the begotten into independence, while the created is not granted independence from its maker. However, attention must also be paid to the specifically biblical connotations of the term: Ps 110 speaks of the king being begotten from the womb of YHWH before the morning star (Ps 110:3); Ps 2 contains a divine proclamation

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17 Both of these meanings are to be considered when one speaks of Logos.

that speaks of the begetting of the messianic king (Ps 2:7). The background of such statements is the ancient Oriental (especially Egyptian) ideology of kingship, which uses the language of divine begetting to emphasise the transcendent origin of the king. With relation to the messianic king, the Psalter and especially the Gospel of John add a particular qualifier to the kingly messiah tradition in terms of the *only* begotten Christ (Messiah): in naming the “only begotten”, all earthly claims to power of all worldly kings, who claimed divine lineage to legitimise themselves, are invalidated. In contrast to the immanent provenance of all earthly rulers, the transcendent origin of the Messiah Jesus, which resonates in the term begetting, is also not unfamiliar to the Qur’an: Q 3:45 states that “O Mary! Allah gives you good news of a Word from Him”, whose “name will be the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary”.

Significantly, John uses the passive voice, the *Passivum Divinum*, in which no direct statement is made about God; rather, the term “only begotten” implies the transcendent origin of Jesus, who, unlike all other rulers, does not descend from biological genealogies. The qualifier “only” also points in this direction, once again distinguishing Jesus from political sons of God. The transcendent origin of kingship is messianic, not political, which implies a challenge to the Roman (and ancient Oriental) ideology of kingship, insofar as the latter legitimised the validity of its domain through divine appointment.

However, the “only begotten” in relation to Jesus not only holds the connotation of the singularity of the messianic king, who de-potentializes all others, but the word “only” also aims at a temporal statement. To understand this, it can be helpful to take the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew into consideration, which is taken up and continued in the prologue of John in a way that is specific to this Gospel.<sup>18</sup> Matt 1 begins with the heading “Book of the Origin of Jesus Christ”, which presents a genealogy of Jesus in 3x14 generations at the beginning. This reflects the decisive stages of the biblical history of salvation (and catastrophe), which are characterised by Abraham, David, and the Babylonian exile. The number 3x14 indicates the highest perfection, i.e. salvation. It is interesting, however, that the last part of the triptych comprises only 13 generations. It ends with the following passage:

Jacob [11th generation, legal grandfather of Jesus] begat Joseph [12th generation, legal father of Jesus], the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus [14th generation], who is called the Christ [Messiah]. (Matt 1:16)

<sup>18</sup> This specific way consists in the fact that the Gospel takes up statements made elsewhere in the Bible, alienates them and thus exposes them in their original and often buried contexts while simultaneously deepening them.

Of course, there is no counting error here; rather, there is an open passage in the genealogical sequence that points to the transcendent openness of history and the transcendent origin of the Messiah, who is not to be derived from history but from the will of God. Genealogy is so important to Judaism because the genealogical connection to the ancestors also links one to the prospects of salvation made to them. The descendants of Abraham were included in the divine promise of the Promised Land that had been made to Abraham. This promise was passed on from generation to generation until the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah. The term “only begotten”, used in the prologue of John, marks the uniqueness of the outstanding messianic generation that will dawn with Jesus, who comes from God. Like the open genealogical passage in the Gospel of Matthew, in John the course of time is also interrupted and the Messianic end time has entered history.

#### 4.2 *Excursus: The Cross as a Messianic Place and the Messianic Difference between Christianity and Islam*

These observations bring us to what is perhaps the decisive difference between Christianity and Islam (or Christianity and Judaism), a difference that can nevertheless be productively addressed and could perhaps balance out the one-sidedness of both traditions. This difference could be described as a *messianic difference*: The Qur'an speaks of the coming world judgement, and the time until then is a time of probation, in which people's deeds come to light in their true content and are judged (Q 99 and many others). The idea of the coming judgement also exists in Christianity, albeit with the restriction that the coming of Jesus means that the transition to the eschaton has already taken place, which is particularly emphasised in John. The *Night of Destiny* (Q 97:1), in which the Qur'an is revealed<sup>19</sup> and which not only signifies the entry of the divine Logos into the world, but is also associated with the arrival of a time of God that sublates the time of man,<sup>20</sup> corresponds to the night in John in which Judas hands Jesus over to the cross, thus initiating the event of the crucifixion.

In John, the *cross* is the eschatological place *par excellence* where the glory of God's name is revealed and following Jesus to the cross signifies the transition from earthly-chronological time into the eschaton. The background underlying the significance of the cross is that in its sign, Jesus' devotion is fulfilled as the concretisation of the name of God. In this path to the cross, which stands under the sign of being-for-the-other, i.e. in this vicarious (pro-)existence, Jesus reveals the paradigmatic human being, i.e. he becomes the sign for

19 Cf. Neuwirth, *Frühmekkanische Suren*, pp. 98–100.; also, Ventura, *Il corano*, p. 877.

20 Cf. Neuwirth, *Frühmekkanische Suren*, p. 99.

humanity in general. If, from a biblical perspective, humanity (in the form of Adam, who represents the history of man in the Bible) was under accusation due to its violence and sinfulness – which was particularly evident in the persecution of Jesus and the prophets and which would therefore have resulted in a guilty verdict – man is nevertheless acquitted in Jesus. One could say that God no longer sees the empirical sinful human being, he no longer sees the sinful Adam in us, but he sees Jesus, the new Adam, in every human being and in creation as a whole. Jesus is the image of God and the firstborn of creation, in whom all things are created (Col 1:15), because he lives paradigmatically for the other, because he expresses universal compassion that embraces and encompasses all signs, and is therefore the place of the glory of the name of God, which extends over all creation in the form of mercy. The ethical imperative of Christianity is therefore “to see Christ in the other”; and God’s love and mercy for his creation consists in recognising Christ in all creatures, *all* of whom bear his signature.

In this sense, judgement is transformed into the difference between empirical and divine perception, into the difference between the chronological time of judgement and the messianic time of mercy. However, this extreme view of a present eschatology is always linked to a willingness to give one’s life, to a *jihad* that requires absolute renunciation of oneself, i.e. absolute *submission* (Islam) to the name of God, therefore living Islam as a gospel.

Based on these considerations, a new light could perhaps be shed on one of the most difficult passages for Christian-Muslim dialogue, which also expresses one of the most enigmatic passages of the Qur’an:

They were condemned for breaking their covenant, rejecting Allah’s signs, killing the prophets unjustly, and for saying, “Our hearts are unreceptive!” – it is Allah Who has sealed their hearts for their disbelief, so they do not believe except for a few – and for their denial and outrageous accusation against Mary, and for boasting, “We killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of Allah.” But they neither killed nor crucified him – it was only made to appear so [literally: rather, it appeared similar to them, often also rendered as a similar one appeared to them.] Even those who argue for this crucifixion are in doubt. They have no knowledge whatsoever – only making assumptions. They certainly did not kill him. Rather, Allah raised him up to Himself. And Allah is Almighty, All-Wise Every one of the People of the Book will definitely believe in him [Jesus] before his death. And on the Day of Judgment he [Jesus] will be a witness against them. (Q 4:155–159)

This passage is often interpreted in a Docetic tradition to mean that Jesus did not die on the cross, but that either a decoy body was crucified or someone else (e.g. Judas Iscariot) was crucified in Jesus' place. However, the Qur'an alludes to Jesus' death in Suras 3:55 and 19:33 and it seems that in the first centuries, Muslims did not accuse Christians of falsifying the scriptures when talking about the crucifixion of Jesus.

Klaus von Stosch, an expert in Islamic-Christian dialogue, interprets the passage to mean that some Jews, by claiming to have crucified Jesus, also implied a corresponding threat against Muhammad, which is rejected in this passage.<sup>21</sup> "They did not crucify him" thus rejects human claims to power. In any case, it should be noted that these enigmatic verses express a certain proximity to the Gospel of John. As already indicated, the cross of Christ is the central sign *par excellence* in this Gospel as the place of the glory of YHWH, but it emphasises that Jesus ascends to the cross, i.e. it emphasises the sovereignty of Jesus, who transcends all worldly power. In this respect, Jesus' ascension to heaven continues a movement that begins at the cross. The cross itself is transformed from a mere instrument of torture to the new cover of the Ark of the Covenant, which was the place in the temple where the reconciliation of YHWH and Israel took place by means of the blood of the covenant (as a symbol of the giving of life). Therefore, the cross no longer denotes a purely earthly geographic location and the crucified body of Jesus forms the intersection between the earthly world (Golgotha) and the heavenly world (the heavenly temple), between the material and symbolic order. In this way, Jesus can no longer be viewed in purely physical categories, and the cross becomes the eschatological sign (and symbol of the willingness to give one's life for the others) *par excellence*, transcending all concrete representations. This is a fact that is not adequately taken into account by Christians who use the cross merely as a symbol of identity without being rooted in the practice of discipleship. In dialogue with Muslims, Christians cannot ignore the cross of Jesus, but they must be aware that this eschatological sign transcends "earthly" standards and cannot simply be a mundane object of veneration. It finds its actual representation when "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear and the poor have the Gospel preached to them" (cf. Luke 7:18–23; Q 3:49). For it is precisely this form of healing that biblically manifests the sphere of God's reign, which in Christianity is symbolised by the cross.

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21 Cf. Stosch, *Herausforderung Islam*, p. 163.

### 4.3 *Jesus, the “God-IS” (John 1:1–18 part II)*

The conclusion of John’s prologue is unacceptable to Muslim and Jewish ears, insofar as it seems to speak of Jesus being God: “No one has ever seen God. The only begotten, the ‘God is’ (literally: ‘God-the-Being’) in the bosom of the Father, he has interpreted” (John 1:18). On closer inspection, however, a number of questions arise. First of all, it is striking that the passage states that no one has seen God, i.e. the phrase that associates Jesus with being God is introduced with a declaration of God’s absolute transcendence. Jesus himself, however, as John leaves no doubt, was of course seen. As argued above, the phrase “only begotten” has messianic and anti-imperialistic connotations, and it discloses the divine sphere out of which Jesus descended.

The following phrase is crucial for understanding Jesus and Trinity, but also for the possibility of a dialogue with Judaism and Islam: it is often understood to mean that Jesus is God, i.e. divinity is regarded as an attribute of Jesus. Jesus would then be a Jew, a human being, a man, a carpenter, a rabbi, and also God. In this way, however, there would indeed be a danger of abandoning biblical monotheism, which is confirmed and defended by the Qur’an. God the Father would be joined by God the Son and subsequently by the Holy Spirit as the mediator between the two.

However, in contrast to this interpretation, which assumes that Jesus is God in a predicative sense, another reading, which corresponds to the spirit of John and also preserves the monotheistic tradition, must be emphasised. Jesus is not God, but the God-Is; his divinity is not an attribute, but an adverb, i.e. a verbalisation of the name of God that is connected to this person. In the Gospel of John, Jesus’ “I AM” statements are of paramount importance in the context of his self-declarations. His symbolic actions, e.g. the sign of the bread, the raising of Lazarus etc. are interpreted through these “I AM” statements. “I AM” the bread of life (John 6:35), “I AM” the light of the world (John 8:12), “I AM” the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6) and others.<sup>22</sup> In addition to the “I AM” statements which are concretised through signs and symbolic acts, there are Jesus’ absolute “I AM” statements (John 8:24,58; John 13:19; John 18:6) without further specification, as well as statements or rather confessional formulas in the third person stating “... that Jesus IS” (John 20:14; John 21:7). What these phrases all have in common is that they allude to the two biblical pericopes

22 According to the conventional count, a total of seven I AM words are listed in John: In addition to the three mentioned above, John 10:9 (I AM the gate), John 10:11 (I AM the shepherd), John 11:25f (I AM the resurrection and the life) and John 15:1 (I AM the true vine); John 18:37 (I AM a king) could be added as the eighth.

Ex 3:14 (“I AM” he who will prove himself to be ...) and Ex 34:6, in which the meaning of the name of God YHWH is revealed.

For the prologue of John, it is crucial that the phrase “Jesus, the ‘God-Is’” does not constitute a predicative definition of Jesus, but refers to the name of God, which, as has been shown, manifests itself verbally. Paradoxically, one would have to say that for Christians, Jesus is not God, but more than a mere God (the emperor also understood himself to be God), meaning that Jesus is the presence of HIS name, the way in which the NAME is verbalised and occurs. Jesus is therefore not God, but the “God-Is”, the verbalisation of the name. The biblical statements are therefore not ontological determinations of Jesus, but soteriological ones, because in the person of Jesus the glory of the name of God was revealed and because through Jesus the name of God became interpretable, i.e. the signs of the world became legible under the sign of YHWH. The Philippians hymn (Phil 2:5–11) also points in this direction, where Jesus’ devotion is linked to the gift of the “name that is above every name (YHWH)”, so that it is precisely the moment of devotion, humbling and pro-existence that makes the tetragrammaton visible.

What the name of God consists of is also hinted at in the rest of John’s prologue, when it is said that the “God-Is” has his genuine “place” in the bosom of the Father. This expresses an intimate affective connection that evokes the affectivity of the name of God as it is revealed in the merciful devotion to His people. Jesus is therefore the event, the manifestation of the mercy of the name of God, which has taken up *residence* in him (*schechina*: indwelling, to use Jewish terminology, which is perhaps more fitting here than Greek). The term “dwelling place” also echoes the phrase that the sign has “dwelt/tented” among us. This refers to the tent of the covenant, in which YHWH IS present in the event of the exodus of his people from slavery (and Jesus, insofar as he leads out of the slavery of sin).

Fascinatingly, there is a parallel in the Qur’an with regard to Jesus as the event of the Name: Q 19:21 speaks of Jesus being made a sign to bestow *mercy* on mankind. In general, Jesus is closely connected to Mary, from whose womb he emerges. In Semitic culture, the womb in particular is the sign of mercy, and in this way as well, Jesus becomes the bearer of the gospel of mercy, which in Islamic tradition expresses the name of God (as the first of all names, so to speak) in an outstanding way. The special significance of Jesus in the Qur’an is also evident in the fact that he is the “Word of God”, i.e. of transcendent origin (Q 3:45), which is parallel to the son metaphor, without it being misunderstood in biological terms. In addition, he already possesses the Logos as a newborn (Q 3:46; 19:24–33). Above all, however, according to the testimony of the Qur’an, the first specific feature of the name of God (from Ex 34:6),

namely the power of creation, which belongs to the sphere of God, occurs exclusively in Jesus:

I have come to you with a sign from your Lord: I will make for you a bird from clay, breathe into it, and it will become a real bird – by Allah's Will. I will heal the blind and the leper and raise the dead to life – by Allah's Will. And I will prophesize what you eat and store in your houses. Surely in this is a sign for you if you truly believe. (Q 3:49)

Jesus reveals himself here in the power of the name (YHWH) as the giver of life, who raises the dead to life and lets life emerge even from inanimate matter (clay).

In summary, from a Christian New Testament perspective, Jesus is the event, i.e. the verbalisation of the name of God YHWH, the indwelling of divine mercy in the signs of this world and a life-affirming occurrence. The idea of Jesus as indwelling mercy extends deeper than a parallelisation of Jesus and Mohammed – the prophet whom Allah/YHWH raised up in the midst of the brothers in order to put HIS words into his mouth and who says everything that Allah/YHWH commands him (cf. Deut 18:18) – which would not be appropriate for Christians, or a parallelisation of Jesus and the Qur'an. When Christians listen to Muslims reciting the Qur'an, when they pray with them, they can hear the name YHWH as it is interpreted in Jesus in the introduction "In the name of the merciful and gracious God".

## 5 Spirit, Freedom and the Legibility of the World

### 5.1 *Spirit and Freedom*

Especially in the Western Christian tradition, a theology of the Holy Spirit often causes great embarrassment, as the experience of the Spirit has been systematically repressed in favour of institutionalised forms of Christian faith, whether in liturgy, prayer, or practice. In Trinitarian conceptions that interpret God from a phenomenology of love, the Spirit is often understood as a kind of link between the love of the Father and the Son. However, this conception remains external to the prayer experience of Christians, who have traditionally prayed to the Father through the Son in the Spirit. For many Christians, the Holy Spirit is therefore just as abstract as Trinitarian faith in general.

By contrast, however, it is certainly worthwhile to reflect on what constituted the specific experience of the Spirit of early Christians. It manifested itself in a unique experience of prayer that helped them to look beyond the "bondage"

and “corruption” of creation and hope for the manifestation of the “glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:18–24). The Spirit of God also enabled Christians to address their God as Father (Rom 8:15–17) and to know God (1 Cor 2:10 et seq.), i.e. to love God with all their hearts, insofar as, biblically speaking, knowledge is never reduced to object-like knowledge, but manifests itself as love. Furthermore, the Spirit made it possible to regard Jesus as *Lord* (1 Cor 12:3), i.e. as the bearer of the name of God (which in the Septuagint, i.e. the Greek Bible, was realised with the term “Lord”). This confession of faith in Jesus was associated with a view that could locate the indwelling of the name of God beyond the temple in the whole of creation and thus regarded the whole of creation as holy. This perspective was tied to a particular interpretation of the person of Jesus: Jesus’ life was not a life of itself, but life for others. The whole of creation is embedded in this form of merciful devotion, in which Jesus expresses the name of God, and therefore becomes the affective space of  $\Upsilon\text{H}\text{W}\text{H}$ . In this way, as made sacramentally visible in baptism, Jesus was seen as the subject of all creatures who no longer remain in their own existence, but participate in the existence of Jesus.

Such a view, which experiences the world in a shared affective space under the sign of  $\Upsilon\text{H}\text{W}\text{H}$ , is *inspired*, i.e. an expression of the work of the Holy Spirit. This position is closely linked to an experience of freedom: “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor 3:17).” It is based on the fact that human beings no longer have to see themselves as puppets of guilt, impulses and external determination, but move with Jesus and in Jesus in the centre of God’s name and experience themselves liberated both from themselves (their “sin”) and from all other earthly powers. Paradoxically, the Holy Spirit is thus the experience of a de-subjectification, which simultaneously releases people into their true theocentrically anchored selves. In short: *the Holy Spirit is true freedom* that transcends all possibilities of the “earthly” human being.

### 5.2 *Spirit and Scripture: The Re-Enactment of the Name of God*

The decisive factor here is that the confession “Where the Spirit is, there is freedom (and vice versa)” is linked to a corresponding interpretation and experience of Holy Scripture, which is no longer to be read and lived according to the letter, i.e. at an external distance, but read and lived according to the Spirit (2 Cor 3:7), which is situated in the affective centre of the human being (heart) (2 Cor 3:3; cf. Jer 31:33; Ez 36:26).

The relationship between the Spirit, Scripture and creation is addressed in a particularly profound way in John:

Amen, Amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me [Jesus] will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you *another Helper, to be with you* [Immanuel: God with us] in the Aion [cf. Matt 28:20], even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. [...] But the *Helper, the Holy Spirit*, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:12–17.26)

The pericope, which begins with a particularly solemn double Amen, is irritating for Christians because Jesus promises his disciples that they will accomplish even greater works than he has done. But what can these works consist of, given that Jesus raised the dead, healed the sick and gave his life? A key to understanding this statement is provided by the rest of Jesus' speech, where he promises his circle of disciples "another helper". If Jesus is the first comforter, helper and advocate of his disciples – the Spirit of Allah (Q 4:171), who leads them into the name of God and who is able, as the prologue to John has already established, to interpret the name of God, which is the centre of Scripture (John 1:18) – then by going to the Father, he clears the way for the other helper: This one, presumably in reference to Matt 28:20, is given one of Jesus' names, namely *Immanuel* (God with us), thus expressing  $\Upsilon\text{HWH}$ 's unconditional devotion and faithfulness to the covenant. Furthermore, he is referred to as the Holy Spirit, who reminds us of Jesus' words and teaches "all things". This is precisely where the "greater work" is revealed: The Holy Spirit manifests Himself in the living reading of the Gospel of John, which manifests itself as discipleship/following-in-love. This Gospel (in the realised love that is true church) is thus the greater work to which Jesus refers.

It is particularly interesting in this context that both the apocalyptic insertions of the synoptic Gospels and the Qur'an speak of the fact that in the eschaton, along with heaven and earth, our geographical world order will perish, but the word or Scripture of God will remain. (cf. Matt 24:35; Mark 14:31; Luke 21:33; Q 81:10–11 and others). The Gospel of John radicalizes this idea by systematically replacing the categorical world with a symbolic order that can no longer be anchored purely on earth, but takes place, so to speak, between heaven (the place from which Jesus and the Spirit were sent down) and earth. It is difficult for contemporary Western thought to understand that the Holy Scriptures

systematically replace the categorical (spatio-temporal) geographical landscapes with affective landscapes of the book, which give man symbolic-soteriological orientation instead of cosmic orientation. Even the entry into the Promised Land as professed in the Torah increasingly becomes an entry into the Torah itself, which thus becomes the actual 'promised land.' It could be said that in recitation, the reader of Scripture puts on the Torah like a second skin in order to be able to feel the world in it and through it – in compassion with those who suffer.

The beginning of the Gospel of John ("In the beginning was the *Logos*/Word") refers to the Greek *Logos* and the word of creation in Genesis on the one hand, but on the other hand the *Logos* also points to the Torah (cf. Ps 119) or the Tanakh in general. Thus, John's prologue maintains that Scripture stands at the beginning of the world. Once again, it should be pointed out that the entire cosmos, i.e. its *Logos*, is understood as a system of signs that is deciphered by the sacred text. This is why the text is at the beginning, because it provides the deciphering key. However, John even goes one step further: the Gospel in its beginning refers to the beginning of the Torah or the Tanakh and in its final passages (before the epilogue) refers to the last part of the Tanakh, concluded by Chronicles,<sup>23</sup> and to the conclusion of the Torah, Deut 34.<sup>24</sup> Of particular interest is the reference to the end of the Tanakh: in John 20:17, the resurrected Jesus announces "the ascension to the Father" to Mary Magdalene. As is often the case in this Gospel, this phrase is multi-layered and has several aspects of meaning: The "ascension to the Father" is an allusion to the end of the book of Chronicles, where the Israelites are enabled to ascend to the temple again, thereby placing the entire history in a horizon of the promise of encountering God. Furthermore, it alludes both to the cross and to the exaltation to heaven: both events (crucifixion, exaltation) create a common sphere that cannot be separated from each other, and the cross becomes a symbol of

23 The third part of the Hebrew canon, the writings (*ketubim*), were relatively flexible in their order. The book of Chronicles is found partly at the beginning of the third part, partly at its end, whereby the final position reflects the ancient tradition and also corresponds to the idea of Chronicles, which understood itself as a summarising conclusion to the canon. For it in fact offers a prophetic overall view of the history of Israel with an open end, which includes the possibility of an ascent to the rebuilt temple as the seat of YHWH. In a certain sense, this re-enacts the entry into the promised land, but this time with the explicit consent of the foreign king (the Persian Cyrus as anti-pharaoh). Cf. E. Zenger, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, p. 172; Steins, *Die Chronik und die Entstehung des dritten Kanonteils*, pp. 500–517.

24 It is no coincidence that John 20:30 et seq., where a summary of Jesus is given, is evocative of the end of Deut (Deut 34:10–12), where the same is the case for Moses. Cf. Vignolo, *Raccontare Gesù secondo i quattro vangeli*, p. 183.

YHWH's dwelling place. Another deliberate ambiguity concerns the subject of this ascension: Mary Magdalene is to proclaim on Jesus' behalf: "I am ascending to my Father ..." (John 20:17). The "I" remains open and can refer to both Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Thus, they both form a common sphere, which means that the ascent to the Father, i.e. to the name of YHWH, is bound to discipleship and following Jesus to the cross. Mary is the paradigmatic disciple of Jesus who is prepared to lay down her life.

What is significant for our context is that the Gospel of John, by alluding to both the beginning and the end of the Tanakh (and the Torah), subjects the whole of Scripture to a re-reading. It is the Spirit-worked Gospel in which Scripture becomes newly readable. This legibility, in turn, is inextricably linked to the discipleship of Jesus. This means that the Gospel is no longer merely identical with the text at hand, but encompasses the whole of Scripture, which must be re-enacted in discipleship. The word of the beginning is thus the Scripture that comes alive in following Jesus to the cross, i.e. in the affective entry into the name of God YHWH, in lived compassion, mercy and the giving of one's life (*jihad*). The greater work is thus the gift of the Gospel of John, in which the world is created and can begin anew on the prerequisite of discipleship. The guide on this path is the Holy Spirit himself. In this context, it cannot be emphasised enough that the canonical text must not be understood simply as an object, i.e. as a material book: rather, the sacred text is a subject, a living and never-ending event that must constantly be re-enacted, in which the name of God comes to life in the mercy of the faithful.

This brings us to another fascinating parallel with the Qur'an: the latter speaks of the Holy Spirit sending down the Qur'an (cf. Q 16:102: "The holy spirit has brought it down from your Lord ..."; cf. also Q 17:82: where the Qur'an is itself mercy that is sent down to us). Jesus is also strengthened by this Spirit (Q 2:87), as evidenced by the fact that Jesus testifies to the Gospel as the interpretative key to the path to God.

In summary, from a Christian perspective, the Holy Spirit manifests itself in the living canon. Scripture is re-enacted liturgically (i.e. in prayer) and practically (i.e. in mercy) in the discipleship of Christ, which is worked by the Holy Spirit and becomes the actual subject of the Christian who, in the Holy Spirit and through Jesus (i.e. through his example and interpretation), follows Jesus to the name of God. The experience of freedom associated with this path is decisive for Christians, as they are no longer determined by cosmic powers ("heaven and earth") but are guided by the Spirit. If Jesus can be associated with the dimension of mercy, the Spirit can be associated with the dimension of freedom that arises in the *performance* of the text. In this way, the spirit would be the equivalent to the Qur'an, which in its constant recitation opens

the way to the merciful God, whereby submission (Islam) to the will of Allah is true freedom as well as true humanity.

## 6 The Trinitarian Confession of God and the Qur'an

At the conclusion of this article, it can be pointed out that through Jesus/mercy and the Spirit/recitation of the Scriptures, the path to submission to the occurring name of God is shown. This submission, however, manifests itself as the freedom of believers. Christians are referred to the name of the merciful and gracious God through the gospel of the Qur'an and can repeat the ancient biblical confession "Hear Israel: YHWH our God, YHWH ONE! Love YHWH your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might." (Deut 6:4 et seq.) without having to renounce the Trinitarian belief in God and the "God-*is*", i.e. the name of Jesus. They are reminded by the Qur'an to internalise the confession of the NAME as a confession of the uniqueness, ineffability, and alterity of YHWH. The name, of course, never remains an abstract object, but proves itself verbally as *mercy* in *freedom*.

### Biography

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