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### Summary:

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According to the teaching of Vatican II (LG, n. 16) and according to the Qur’an itself (Sura 29,46), Christians and Muslims worship the same God. The same fundamental theological questions then arise for both religions: How is God recognised and what are the criteria for God's revelation? Common answers also emerge: God is recognised from creation as the one "without whom nothing is". The criterion for revelation is that it can be understood as the comprehensive light over everything and is unsurpassable. The dialogue will have to deal above all with the question of how far the rightly understood Christian doctrine of the Trinity can render a necessary service to monotheism. In this, the community of believers in Christ could prove to be the "sacrament" of the unity of all people, pointing beyond itself (LG, n 1).

# Fundamental Theology in the Qur’an?

Vatican II teaches about Islam: God's "will of salvation embraces [...] also those who acknowledge the Creator, among them especially Muslims, who profess the faith of Abraham and worship with us [*nobiscum*] the one God, the merciful, who will judge men on the last day". (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n 16)

One can interpret this "worshipping the one God with us" in a weak sense: they, *like us, worship the* one God. However, the wording also allows for the strong interpretation that it could be a matter of praying *together* already in the deepest sense, of a mutual bond in prayer itself. Should this second interpretation be correct, one would have to be rather surprised at the occasional ecclesiastical prohibitions of praying together. But whichever of the two interpretations one may prefer, it is in any case, according to the Council's view, the worship of one and the same God.

Then it stands to reason that similar questions arise for Islam as are examined in our Catholic fundamental theology. How can God be known? Are there criteria for divine revelation? How do faith and reason relate to each other? Perhaps it will even turn out that there are also common answers to these questions. But how then is such common ground to be dealt with on the Christian side?

I myself am a Catholic fundamental theologian and not an expert on Islam. But I have simply followed the advice of the Muslim reviser and editor of the Qur’an translation by Max Henning, which he gives in his preface: It may be "a wise decision" to "read the Qur'an the first time from back to front, roughly speaking, that is, in the order of its revelation"[[1]](#footnote-1) . This order of reading indeed makes the Qur'an the easiest to understand. In my reading, I also tried to pay attention to allusions to biblical texts or parallels with them, and I found a great deal. I enjoyed reading the Qur’an with attention.

[143] That the relationship between faith and reason is also a subject of the Qur'an is evident, for example, from the important statement of Sura 10:100: On the one hand, "No one can believe without Allah's permission."[[2]](#footnote-2) On the other hand, it says immediately afterwards, "But He is angry with those who do not use their reason." The importance of this latter sentence cannot be overemphasised. The Qur'an itself regards the mind as a gift received from God (Sura 23:78) and already considers it necessary for the knowledge of God (Sura 2:164).

The first of the two sentences in Sura 10:100 bears at least a formal resemblance to Paul's formulation: "No one can say Jesus is Lord except in the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor 12:3) Faith is not a human achievement, but God's gift. Christian faith exists only as being filled with the Holy Spirit, with the presence of God in one's own heart. The Qur’an also says of believers: "They - in their hearts He has engraved faith, and He strengthens them with His Spirit." (Sura 59:22b)

The second sentence awakens the association with Mk 12,28-34 (dialogue about the main commandment), where Jesus so appreciates an "understanding" answer. Elsewhere, Natanaël, who did not shy away from asking what at first sounds like a critical expression of unbelief, what good could possibly come out of Nazareth, is described by Jesus as a "true Israelite", "in whom there is no falsehood" (Jn 1:45-47). What greater praise could there be for the honest use of reason?

In the view of the Qur’an, there is also no doubt that faith is God's gift. Therefore, for the Qur’an there can be no "compulsion in faith" (Sura 2,256): "And if your Lord had willed it, all on earth would have become believers. (Sura 10:99) But for the sake of the freedom of faith so dear to the Qur'an, it is also true that one must use one's intellect even when reading the Qur'an itself. Otherwise, one runs the risk of misunderstanding even the Qur'an, and in that case, according to its own statement, it can only have a disastrous effect: "And we send down from the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to the believers; but to the wrong-doers it brings more destruction." (Sura 17:82) To read the Qur'an in a fundamentalist manner, that is, without understanding and without mercy, is contrary to the Qur'an itself. Similarly, the [144] Christian message can become a "stench of death" to the unintelligent who insist on their own wisdom (cf. 1 Cor 1:18f) (cf. 2 Cor 2:16).

### How can one recognise God?

When someone refers to divine revelation, a number of questions arise from a fundamental theological point of view. Who is this God supposed to be, and how is he known? To say that only God's revelation reveals who God is would be a *petitio principii*. For what criteria are there to determine that it is actually a matter of God's revelation? This question also needs to be clarified.

Of the first two questions, who God is supposed to be and how he is recognised, the first must be answered first. For before one can go into the question of how God is recognised, one must first be clear about who the God referred to in the message in question is supposed to be. Only after it has been clarified what the word "God" is supposed to mean in the Christian message or in Islam, it makes sense to ask whether this God exists or is perhaps only made up.

When I asked theologians who God is supposed to be, instead of an answer I only heard that it is difficult to say. In fact, there is a difficulty: God supposedly does not fall under our concepts. But then how can we talk about him at all? This question is all too often completely suppressed. Perhaps the crisis of Christianity today is closely connected to the suppression of this question. When speaking of "God", it is always wrongly assumed that everyone already knows what this word means; it is widely omitted to give an account of the meaning of the word "God" from the perspective of the Christian message. In my experience, the Christian message only opens up when it is approached with such questions. Perhaps this is also the case with the Qur’an.

Both the Christian message and the Qur’an give a precise and ultimately the same answer to the question of who "God" is supposed to be. This answer is, in essence, that we only ever understand that which is different from God, that which points to him. God can only be known in the recognition of our own creatureliness. We do not first know who God is in order to then say that he created the world, but the only way to know about God at all is in the recognition of our own being created. God is, "without whom is nothing". This is an answer that preserves the incomprehensibility of God; at the same time, it gives an account of how one can nevertheless speak of him.

Like the Christian message, the Qur’an understands God to be the Creator of heaven and earth: "Everything is from Allah. (Sura 4:78) He "created the [145] heavens and the earth, and made the darknesses and the light" (Sura 6:2). Even evil can only exist as created: "I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn from the evil of what He has created" (Sura 113:1-2); similarly, Isaiah also says of God: "The Light-forming and Dark-creating, the Peace-working and Evil-creating, I, the Lord, work all these." (Isa 45:7) It is true: "No leaf falls without his knowing it." (Sura 6:59) Jesus said, "But with you even the hairs of your head are all numbered." (Mt 10:30)

God's presentation of Himself is in the Qur’an:

"He is Allah, besides whom there is no God. He knows the hidden and the revealed. He is the Beneficent, the Merciful. He is Allah besides whom there is no god: the Ruler, the Holy, the Healer, the Sustainer of Faith, the Protector, the Exalted, the Irresistible, the Majestic. Praise be to Allah, (exalted is He) above all that they add to Him. He is Allah, the Creator, the Originator, the Shaper. His are the most beautiful names. Praise give to Him what is in the heavens and on earth; He is the Mighty, the Wise." (Sura 59:22-24)

Allah's creation is through the Word: "He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and when He decides a thing, He only says to it, 'Be!' and it is." (Sura 2:117). He is "living and eternal", "all-knowing and all-powerful", "dependent on nothing in all the world" (Sura 3:2, 29, 97). "And it is He Who gave you hearing, sight, understanding and mind." (Sura 23:78) He remains powerful even in man's repugnance to Him: sin comes "from yourselves"; but "Behold, Allah has power over all things" (Sura 3:165). "Knowest thou not that Allah's is the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and that besides Allah ye have neither protector nor helper?" (Sura 2:107)

Our being created is not only about the beginning of the world, but about every moment of its existence. Everything in the world points to God:

"Behold, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of the night and the day, and in the ships which sail the sea with that which is useful to men, and in that which Allah sends down from the sky of water with which He revives the earth after its death, and in that which He spreads in it of all kinds of creatures, and in the alternation of the winds and the clouds which serve the heavens and the earth - verily in all these are signs for people of understanding." (Sura 2:164)

"And it is He Who sends down water from the sky. We bring forth thereby the germs of all things, and from them We bring forth green things, from which We make sprout densely stratified grain, and from the palm trees, from their sheath of blossom, drooping clusters of fruit; and gardens of vines, and olives, and pomegranates, similar and dissimilar. Observe their fruit as it forms and ripens. Behold, verily therein are signs for people who believe." (Sura 6:99)

[146] So one need only look around on earth; everything that exists points to him.

God is "closer to every man than his jugular vein" (Sura 50:16); "*intimior intimo meo*", Augustine had already said (*Confessiones* 3:6, 11). And this God desires the salvation not only of some but of all people: "If your future dwelling with Allah is to you to the exclusion of others, desire death if you are truthful." (Sura 2:94) In the view of the Qur'an, such a different exclusionary conception of the hereafter is completely nonsensical.

Also according to the Christian message, "God desires all men to be saved" (1 Tim 2:4). "God has included all in disobedience in order to have mercy on all." (Rom 11:32) Although no human being can attain fellowship with God by his own power, God will separate all people from their sin.

God "makes even the dead alive again. And he has power over all things." (Sura 30:50). In Rom 4:19, Paul referred to God as the one "who makes the dead alive and brings into existence that which is not". Thus, God's mercy and grace is "better than all" (Sura 3:157; 10:58), much like Psalm 63:4 says: "Your goodness is better than life." Allah is the "firmest hold" (Sura 2:296). Believing in him represents the liberating alternative to any form of world idolatry, but then also of despair of the world. "God alone is enough for me!" (Sura 9:129) Who does not think here of the "*Nada te turbe* ... *solo Dios basta*" of Teresa of Ávila or the "Your grace is enough for me" in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola (GC, n. 234,5)?

All these statements of the Qur’an - it would be possible to go on for pages - could be signed by every Christian. Nor is it just a one-sided assertion by the Council that Muslims worship the same God with us. Rather, the Qur’an itself already says explicitly with regard to "the People of the Book", i.e. with regard to Jews and Christians: "Our God and your God are one and the same." (Sura 29,46; cf. also Sura 2,62.139)

But how does one come to know this God? Several proofs have already been cited that the world refers to him: Everything that exists at all is a "sign for people who reflect" (Sura 13:3). God himself, however, transcends all comprehension; he is the "unimaginably powerful one" (Sura 14:48). One can only ever comprehend his creation, which points to him. God is without whom nothing else can be or be thought.

A particularly impressive explanation of this knowledge of God is found in Sura 6:75-79:

"And so we showed Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, that he might be among the firm in faith. But when the night overshadowed him, he saw a star. He cried out, 'This is my Lord!' But when it set, he said, 'I love not that which sets.' And when he saw the moon rising, he said, 'This [147] is my Lord!' And when it went down, he said, 'Verily, if my Lord does not guide me, I am one of the erring ones.' But when he saw the sun rising, he cried out: 'This is my Lord - this is the greatest!' But when it set, he said, 'O my people, I have nothing to do with your gods! Behold, I set my face in sincere faith on Him who created the heavens and the earth, and I am not of those who give companions to (God).'"

Everything that is in any way subject to change can only ever be that which points to God and must never be confused with Him.

One could compare this passage of the Qur'an with the way Augustine already looked at all the states of being in the world (*Confessiones* 9,10) and could only say each time: They are not God, but point to Him:

"Behold, the heavens and the earth, they exclaim that they are created. For they change and are changed. But that which is not created, and yet is, without which there is nothing, that was not before, for this is called changing and altering. They also exclaim that they have not created themselves: We are therefore because we are created; we were not before we became, so that we could have become from ourselves. And the voice of those calling out is the evidence itself. Thou therefore, O Lord, hast created them, who art beautiful, for they are beautiful; who art good, for they are good; who art, for they are. Yet are they not in the way beautiful, and are not in the way good, and are not in the way they are, as thou, their Creator, compared with whom they are neither beautiful, nor good, nor are. Thanks to you we know this, and our knowledge is ignorance compared to your knowledge." (Augustine, *Confessiones* 11,6,4)

In this passage, Augustine explains what was later called "analogy": In principle, one can only speak of God in an indicative, analogical way, namely in the three ways of the "*via affirmativa*" (the affirmative way of knowledge), the "*via* negativa" (the negative way of knowledge) and the "*via eminentiae*" (the way of transcending). From all the positive perfection of the world, one attributes indicative super-perfection to God. All limitation that belongs to the world is to be denied in relation to God. But even if one ascribes to God limitless fullness of being in this way, this is still like nothing compared to Himself. This is why the IV Lateran Council (1215) will say, "No such great similarity can be said to exist between Creator and creature without a still greater unsimilarity being said to exist between them." (DH 806) In this way, this understanding of God differs from a mere projection, in which the similarity would necessarily be reciprocal. The similarity of the world to God remains one-sided; God, for his part, is not similar to the world, but transcends all comprehension. Presumably, Muslims who are familiar with their Qur’an would only agree with such a recognition of God's absoluteness and incomparability (Sura 112,4: "And there is none like Him").

[148] Why does everything that changes have to be stated as creaturely, namely as "being completely related to ... / in complete difference from ..."? In contrast to an a priori existing difference between two states of affairs, change means that one and the same state of affairs does not remain completely the same; however, it is not possible to separate this into a part that remains completely identical and a part that is no longer identical. Rather, there is a mutual interpenetration of identity and non-identity, which can only be described logically without contradiction by specifying two aspects, which in turn do not exclude each other. Such aspects can only be "being completely related to ... / in complete difference from ...".

In both Christianity and Islam, the recognition of God consists in the recognition of one's own creatureliness, which one can never leave behind. Strictly speaking, however, this recognition of God does not take place in a conclusion from the world to God (for then he would have to fall under concepts), but in a conclusion from the changeability and finiteness of the world to its creatureliness. For our inferential thinking, the recognition of our creatureliness is the logical end of the line. It allows no further inference, but only an indicative speaking in relation to God. It remains the case that we only recognise him by grasping that which is different from him, that which points to him. God himself does not fall under concepts. Nor are there any principles of thought that transcend God.

According to the teaching of the Catholic Church, God can be known by *reason* from what is created, i.e. on the basis of our creatureliness (that the world in everything in which it differs from nothingness is a "being completely related to ... / in complete difference from ...") (cf. Vatican I, DH 3004). For our being created is not an additional quality to our being, but is completely identical with our being. We are created exactly in the measure in which we are. Our own being, however, is the object of reason, and thus it is also our being created, if it is indeed identical with our being. *Faith* only begins where *communion* with God is concerned.

The basic concern of the Qur’an in all its statements is, on the one hand, to preserve the absoluteness of God and that nothing in the world be idolised at any price. On the other hand, it is about praising God as the merciful. There is no sura in the Qur’an that does not speak of God's mercy. The actual revelation is that of God's mercy. This is very clear from Sura 93:

"In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful! By the light of day! And by the dark night when it becomes still! The Lord hath not forsaken thee, nor abhorred thee! And verily the Hereafter is better for thee than this world. And the Lord will surely give thee soon, and thou wilt be satisfied. [149] Did He not find thee an orphan and takes thee in? And did he not find thee lost, and guides thee? And did he not find thee poor and makes thee rich? Therefore, as for the orphan, do not discriminate against him! And as for the suppliant, turn him not away. And as for the good deeds of thy Lord, speak of them!"

This sura could be called the centre of the Qur’an. It applies in light and in darkness, in every situation: Because God is merciful to us, we can be merciful to one another. And what Christian could not agree with such a statement? One cannot even say that such a statement could be surpassed by the Christian message. What could be greater than this mercy of God that allows us to be merciful? As long as something greater could be thought of, it would not be the mercy of God at all.

### Criteria for a divine revelation

The talk of Muhammad as one and even the "prophet" (e.g. Sura 7,158), even the "seal of the prophets" (Sura 33,40), i.e. the ultimately confirming prophet, designates him as the bearer of divine revelation. But the mere assertion of being a bearer of revelation, or a subjective certainty, however strong, of having a revelation, is not yet a guarantee for the factuality of revelation, i.e. for the truth of the assertion of having a revelation. Fundamental theology distinguishes - as every reasonable person does - between the mere statement of the existence of an assertion and the recognition of its truth. With the first in itself, the second is not yet given. It is not enough for an alleged bearer of revelation to be completely convinced of the truth of his message for others to be justified in accepting that message as well. Mere subjective certainty or even possible trance experiences are no guarantee of truth. Moreover, anyone who cares about the responsibility of his faith and who wants to be certain of his faith will only be able to gain this self-assurance of faith if he "consistently thinks through the possibility of its impossibility or unnecessity"[[3]](#footnote-3) , i.e. really deals with objections.

Muhammad, too, repeatedly grapples with the question of the criteria of revelation. He feels compelled to deal with this question simply because his message is rejected by many. This is true not only of Muhammad, but also of the other prophets before him: "But never did a prophet come to them without their mocking him." (Sura 43:7) In the New Testament, Jesus says to his [150] disciples, "Blessed are you when you are insulted and persecuted and slandered in every way for my sake. For this is how the prophets before you were persecuted." (Mt 5:11f)

The Qur'an gives the reasons of those who reject its message: "And those who have no knowledge say: 'If only Allah would speak to us or you would bring us a sign!' With similar words the people before them (already) spoke thus. Their hearts are like one another." (Sura 2:118abcd) This is an objection apparently already boring to Muhammad himself. God says to him: "For people of faith We showed the signs clearly enough. Behold, We sent thee with the truth, as a messenger of joy and a warner; and for the dwellers of Hell thou art not responsible." (Sura 2:118e,119; cf. 7:188d: "I am but a warner and a herald of glad tidings to a believing people.") Those who reject the message seem to demand that God either speak to them directly or authenticate any messenger by irrefutable signs. Instead, Muhammad invokes as the actual sign the content of his message, which he understands, as we Christians might say, as both "law" (warning) and "gospel" (message of joy). And it is not he who is responsible for the rejection of his message.

In the face of the idea of revelation overwhelming man's freedom, the Qur'an replies almost mockingly: "Do they expect Allah to appear to them in the shadow of the clouds, and the angels too? But then the matter would already be decided." (Sura 2:210ab) The Qur'an also rejects the idea of revelation by any heavenly beings as incompatible with the freedom of faith: "And they say, 'Why then has no angel been sent down to him?' But if We had sent down an angel, the matter would have been decided." (Sura 6:8abc) Nor is the following a sensible objection: "And they said, 'Why was not this Qur'an sent down on a leading figure from the two cities[[4]](#footnote-4) ?'" The answer is: "Are they distributing the mercy of your Lord?'" (Sura 43:31, 32a)

Already in reference to Noah it says: "And the leaders of his people who did not believe said: 'We see in you only a man like us. And we see that only the lowest among us follow you, in hasty resolution. Nor do we see in you any advantage above us, but consider you a liar.'" (Sura 11:27) Paul also pointed out that among the followers of the Christian faith there are "not many wise in the earthly sense, not many powerful, not many distinguished" (1 Cor 1:26); he rightly saw no objection in this to the truth of his message.

[151] Muhammad knows that he is called upon by God not to refer to divine treasures or superhuman insights or other displays of splendour in a kind of "*theologia gloriae"*: "Say: I do not say to you: 'With me are the treasures of Allah' and not: 'I know the hidden things'. Nor do I say to you, 'I am an angel'. I follow only that which has been revealed to me." (Sura 6:50). Muhammad described himself as unlearned (Sura 7:158). The Qur'an, on the other hand, attributes a *theologia gloriae to* Pharaoh vis-à-vis Moses:

"And Pharaoh proclaimed among his people: 'O my people! Is not the kingdom of Egypt and these rivers that run through it mine? Do you not look around you? Am I no better than this contemptible man who can hardly make himself understood? Why then have no bracelets of gold been put on him, or have no angels come in his wake?'" (Sura 43:51-53)

The Qur'an rejects the demand for such signs in a similar way as it was repeatedly rejected by Jesus (cf. Mt 12:38f; 16:1-4; Mk 8:12):

"And they say: 'We shall never believe thee until thou send forth for us a spring from the earth; or until thou cause the heavens to fall upon us in pieces, as thou sayest, or until thou bring Allah and the angels face to face with us; or until thou possess a house of gold, or until thou ascend into the heavens; and we will not believe in thy ascension until thou send down for us a Book which we can read.' Say: 'Praise be to my Lord! Am I more than a man, a messenger?' And nothing hinders men from believing when guidance has come to them except their objection: 'Has Allah sent but a man?'" (Sura 17:90-94)

God did not make the prophets beings who would not have to eat food or be immortal (Sura 21:8). They are quite ordinary human beings. According to Sura 17:93, the Qur'an, too, is obviously not a book fallen from heaven, although its contents exist in heaven from eternity (cf. Sura 43:4) and are inexhaustible: "Say: 'If the sea were ink for the words of my Lord, verily the sea would be exhausted before the words of my Lord were exhausted, even if we were to add so much (sea) once more.'" (Sura 18:109)

Thus, according to the Qur’an, Muhammad is supposed to refer solely to the content of his revelation. The criterion is the *unsurpassability*[[5]](#footnote-5) of what is said:

[151] "And this Qur'an could not have been devised by anyone except Allah. It is a confirmation of what preceded it, and - no doubt about it - a (complete) exposition of the (written) revelations of the Lord of the worlds. Yet they say, 'He made it up!' Say: 'So produce at least one Sura equal to it, and invoke for it whom ye may - except Allah - provided ye are truthful.'" (Sura 10:38).

This criterion of unsurpassability means much more than the literary perfection of the Qur'an, which consists in its exquisite Arabic. The Qur’an is only written in Arabic "so that you may understand" (Sura 43:3b). Rather, Its unsurpassability may consists in that only such a word can be understood as God's word, which encompasses and transcends everything else and in relation to which nothing even greater can be said. This is indeed a fundamental criterion for divine revelation. How could something be the word of God if it could be surpassed by another word? Thus Paul says: "No, we proclaim, as it is written, what no eye has seen and no ear has heard, what has not entered the mind of man: what God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Cor 2:9) Also according to the Qur’an, in the promised fellowship with God one receives "far more" than one is able to desire (cf. Sura 50:35).

At the same time, there is an inner criterion in the heart of the believers: "It is He Who sent down inner tranquillity into the hearts of the believers, that their faith may increase in faith - for Allah's are the hosts of the heavens and the earth, and Allah is Knowing and Wise". (Sura 48:4) One is reminded here of Augustine's saying, "Restless is our heart until it rests in Thee." (*Confessiones* 1,1,1) God's word - if it is understood - has a power of conviction that nothing else can match; it leads to a certainty that can no longer be increased and in the face of which nothing else comes into question. "Lord, where shall we go? You have words of eternal life." (Jn 6:68b) The Qur'an says accordingly, "In what revelation then will they believe if not in Allah and His message?" (Sura 45:6) Thus "Allah has made faith dear to you and established it in your hearts" (Sura 49:7b).

[153] For the unsurpassability of the content of revelation and its certainty-giving power, the criterion is also the effect in life. In his poem "Der Zweifler" ("The Doubter")[[6]](#footnote-6) , Bert Brecht formulated the following as a criterion for every word that is to be believed: "But above all / Again and again above all else: How does one act / When one believes what you say? Above all: How / does one act?"

Would the message actually help to a loving life, a life of mercy? This criterion for revelation presupposes that the difference between human and inhuman can be made intelligible in advance to faith. At least in the Christian understanding, revelation does not bring with it any additional moral norms, but frees man from the power of that fear for himself which otherwise always prevents him from behaving humanly rather than inhumanly.

It is expressly not said: "How do *you* who proclaim these things act? The credibility of a proclamation cannot be determined by how the proclaimer himself lives, but it can be determined by how it would affect anyone who actually accepts it. It may well happen that the preacher himself does not adhere to his own message at all. This does not make the message untrustworthy, but it exposes its messenger. In this way, Muhammad can also sometimes turn against the supposed believers themselves: "O you who believe! Why do you say what you do not do?" (Sura 61:2) The Qur'an warns against any form of hypocrisy (only "wanting to be seen" in prayer, Sura 107:6).

According to the Christian message, faith as love for God, namely the recognition of his love for us, works itself out in good works, love for our neighbour (cf. Mk 12:28-34). For in communion with God one no longer lives under the power of fear for oneself, but has, as it were, one's back free to use all one's own powers for the good of the world and one's neighbour. The Qur'an is not inferior to this in its fundamental statements: "And seek the future home with what Allah has given you, without forgetting your share in this world. And do good as Allah has done good to thee, and do not cause mischief on earth; behold, Allah loves not those who cause mischief." (Sura 28:77). It is precisely in the desire for eternal communion with God that one should remain turned towards the world and do good in it. Even when one is in need, one should make an effort to care for the poor, the orphans and the prisoners (Sura 76:8). One should also not donate "in order to receive more in return" (Sura 74:6).

Again and again it is said to repel evil with good (Surah 13:22; 23:96; 28:54). "Tell the believers to forgive those who do not reckon with the [154] days of Allah." (Sura 45:14a). "But whoever is patient and forgives - verily that is the right kind of resolve." (Sura 42:43) Trusting in Allah, one can patiently bear what harm is done to one (cf. Sura 14:12). There is even talk of loving one's enemies: "Perhaps Allah will make friendship between you and those of them who are enemies to you. Allah is Mighty, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful." (Sura 60:7).

"Servants of the Beneficent" (Sura 25:63) are those "who do not kill anyone, when Allah has forbidden killing except according to law and justice" (ibid., 68). For in the Qur'an's view, evil consists in oppressing people and "committing acts of violence without any justification" (Sura 42:42). As God's Word, Muhammad receives the following reference to the Torah in the Qur'an: "For this reason We have decreed to the Children of Israel that whoever kills a man without his having committed murder or caused mischief in the land, he shall be as one who has murdered all mankind. And whoever preserves a life shall be as if he had preserved all mankind alive." (Sura 5:32ab). In such sentences, the reference to "all mankind" indicates that this ethic claims universal validity "regardless of the person" (cf. Rom 2:11; Jam 2:9).

Even about Christians who truly live by their faith, the Qur'an says: "in the hearts of those who followed him [Jesus] we put kindness and mercy" (Sura 57:27). Muhammad's own mission can be summed up in such words: "And verily we sent thee as a mercy to all the earth." (Sura 21:107).

But are there not also passages in the Qur’an that seem to call for violence? Is it perhaps dishonest to quote here only those passages that call for peace and reconciliation? Indeed, the Qur'an knows a right to use violence, but only to prevent even greater violence. Only attackers may be fought (cf. Sura 4:90). "Permission (to defend) is given to those who are fought - because they have been wronged - and Allah certainly has the power to assist them, those who have been driven from their homes blamelessly, just because they said: 'Our Lord is Allah!'" (Sura 22:39). "And fight in the path of Allah those who fight you, but transgress not." (Sura 2:190a). The "yet transgress not" means that instead of preventing more violence, one does not rather contribute to the escalation of violence. This is the same teaching on the permissibility of self-defence with the prohibition of any excess, which is also found in Thomas Aquinas: "And thus, if anyone uses greater force than is necessary in defence of his own life, it will be impermissible. But if he moderately rejects the violence, it will be a permissible defence." (*Summa theologica, II-II q64 a7 ad c*).[[7]](#footnote-7) But despite the legitimacy of defence, as long as the injustice relates only to oneself and there are not others to be defended, the Qur'an also states: "But if you endure it patiently, this is better for you who are patient." (Sura 16:126) Cf. Mt 5:39: "But I say unto you, resist not him that doeth you evil: but if any man smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." However, the Good Samaritan of Lk 10:30-35, had he arrived earlier at the scene of the event and perhaps even had enough companions, would certainly not have stood idly by at first until the robbers had finished beating up the one who had fallen among them. For what was at stake here was the defence of another.

Perhaps an understanding of Jesus' death on the cross could also be gained in Islam from the Qur'anic passages about suffering injustice, which in fact does not contradict the fact that death could not overcome him (Sura 4:157).

The outbreaks of violence in Islamic countries due to the caricatures of Muhammad in the Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten on 30 September 2005 certainly cannot be based on the Qur’an. The Qur’an says: Those turn to Allah "who go on with dignity when they hear frivolous speeches on the way." (Sura 25:72). In Christianity, too, the Crusades, the Inquisition or the persecution of witches could not justifiably refer to the Bible. On the contrary, outbreaks of violence in all cases and on all sides are always just the opposite of religion and piety.

A revelation claim that satisfies the criteria mentioned above of being unsurpassable in terms of content, of having the power of conviction that fulfils the yearning of the human heart, and of enabling and promoting loving action, thus differs in an appreciable way from an arbitrary assertion; nevertheless, it remains the case that the truth of a revelation claim can only be recognised in faith itself and thus in free consent. Can it be denied that the Qur’an certainly meets these criteria?

What then is one to make of the rejection of the message of faith? To this the Qur'an answers:

"And if they accuse you of lying, then say: 'My deeds concern me, and your deeds concern you. You are free and clear of my conduct, and I am free and clear of your conduct'. Some of them do listen to you. But can you make the deaf hear when they will not use their reason? And others of them watch thee. But canst thou guide the blind when they will not see? Behold, Allah does not wrong men, but men wrong themselves." (Sura 10:41-42).

[156] In other words, this sura says: The message is of such a nature that one cannot invoke valid reasons for its rejection. Rather, people's deafness is based on the fact that they "do not want to use their reason", and their blindness is also based precisely on the fact that they do not "want" to see. It is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts (cf. Sura 22:46). The opposite of faith is to follow only one's own desires (Sura 22:16) and to confuse theirs with God (Sura 25:43). Such unbelief is itself pseudo-faith: alluding to the Old Testament story of the Golden Calf (cf. Ex 32), the Qur'an says: "And in their unbelief their love for the calf filled their whole heart. Say: 'Bad things did your faith command you, if you are believers at all.'" (Sura 2:93)

In the New Testament, too, unbelief is described as arbitrary. Of the opponents of Jesus' message it says: "They hated me without a cause." (Jn 15:25) There is seeing without seeing and hearing without hearing (cf. Mk 4:12 following Is 6:9). The Qur'an in turn says: Allah's signs are disputed "without any proof" (Sura 40:35a). "And so Allah seals the heart of every proud, violent one." (Sura 40:35b). The New Testament also states: He who does evil does not come to the light (cf. John 3:20). "When you read the Qur'an, We place between you and those who believe not in the Hereafter an invisible curtain. And on their hearts We put blankets so that they do not understand it, and make their ears deaf." (Sura 17:45-46) The mention of covers bears a strong resemblance to 2 Cor 3:14-17; and, similarly to the Qur'an, it is also said in the Bible that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex 4:21; cf. Rom 9:17-18).

Muhammad is rightly convinced that there can be no objection to real revelation that cannot be answered in principle: "And they will not come to you with any objection without Our giving you the truth and the best interpretation." (Sura 25:33) Such a passage is reminiscent of Mt 10:19f: "When you are brought before the court, do not worry about how or what you shall speak, for it will be given you in that Hour what you shall say. It is not you who will speak then, but the Spirit of your Father will speak through you."

In fact, even in the Catholic view, the reasonableness of faith is not based on the fact that it could be traced back to any more or less plausible reasons of reason (and then basically one would no longer really have to believe), but on the fact that all objections of reason against faith can be *invalidated in* their own field by reasons of reason. This is something completely different from wanting to *base* faith on mere reasons of reason; this is already logically impossible because the certainty of faith is incomparably greater than any certainty of reason.

[157] On the one hand, nothing can be believed that can be traced back to mere reason; thus one escapes any form of rationalism. On the other hand, however, nothing can be believed that contradicts a reason that preserves its autonomy; thus one escapes any fideism according to which the decision to believe has no criteria.

If an alleged revelation should really come from God, one need not fear any objections against it; they will all be refuted in their own field, the field of reason itself. So one does not have to dismiss objections and queries, but can respond to them calmly and serenely.

Real unbelief cannot be based on sound reasons, but has the structure of pure arbitrariness. In the view of Catholic fundamental theology as well as in the view of the Qur’an, unbelief is a violation of one's own reason and basically only "does wrong to oneself" (Sura 10:42).

However, a distinction must also be made between real unbelief and only apparent, only "provisional" unbelief, as the already mentioned passage with Natanaël shows in the New Testament (Jn 1:45-47): Objections to reason must indeed first be refuted before one can rightly believe. Otherwise, one would have to believe with a bad conscience; and such a dishonest faith would rather be an antithesis to faith, actually a form of lacking faith.

Sura 10:41-42 also clearly states that it cannot be the task of the prophet to punish others for their unbelief. Similarly, Sura 3:20 says: "But if they turn away, then it is your task only to preach." Or also: "But if they turn away: We have not sent thee as their overseer; for thee only is the preaching." (Sura 42:48a)

It is my hope that the above rendering and explanation of basic statements of the Qur'an can be accepted by Muslims as accurate and that Christians of all denominations can also agree with the rendering of the Christian parallels and especially with the fundamental theological criteria presented.

### For a dialogue with Islam

The 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (1995) writes about interreligious dialogue:

"In view of the divisions, abuses and conflicts to which religions, including Christianity, have led throughout history, dialogue seeks to help the unifying and liberating power inherent in each religion to break through, thus highlighting the importance of religions for the good [158] of humanity, for justice and for peace in the world." [[8]](#footnote-8)

What is remarkable about this sentence is that other religions are no longer devalued, as was the custom in the Catholic Church for a long time. Certainly, one need not close one's eyes to the fact that there is abuse of religion; but it has also existed on our own side.

Also noteworthy is the statement that "every religion" has a unifying and liberating power. The "unifying force" is directed against all separation and enmity. This force is "liberating" in relation to oppressive conditions and above all in relation to the power of man's fear for himself.

The expression "any religion" is not a licence to pass off any ideology or "cult" as religious. In contrast to pseudo-religion, which consists of idolising anything in the world, every real religion is about the worship of the unsurpassable. What is unsurpassable is not just anything, but only the one God, without whom nothing else can even be. Real religion therefore always stands in opposition to every form of world idolatry.

It is now a matter of helping the unifying and liberating power inherent in every religion to "break through" more and more. It should be a matter of doing the religions a service in that their importance for the well-being of all humanity, for justice and peace in the world is emphasised, i.e. made conscious, clarified and promoted.

The means to this end should be dialogue. Dialogue consists of the interlocutors communicating their own understanding to each other and making an effort to understand the other's understanding in such a way *that* the other *can confirm that he or she has been correctly understood*. The latter is crucial for any real dialogue. For a dialogue can neither consist of concealing one's own view from the other nor, conversely, of talking past each other in two mutual monologues or merely trying to persuade each other. Real dialogue can only take place if people are prepared to give each other time.

[159] It is characteristic of the Christian faith that it can *only be* communicated in the manner of dialogue, that is, in a friendly and benevolent response to all queries; it can never be permissible to forbid questions or to turn them away. "Where the Spirit of Christ is, there is freedom." (2 Cor 3:17) Thus, one will only have to deal with real Christian proclamation of faith if it gives freedom to ask all questions and raise all objections. Interlocutors must also be accepted to confront the Christian message with their own, perhaps different, views. Where this freedom is not granted, it is not a matter of proper testimony of the Christian faith. Moreover, to withdraw any doctrine of faith from questioning would be to degrade it to a mere private opinion of one's own.

Presumably, it is also true for every other real religion in its own interest - and certainly for Islam - that it can only be properly witnessed in the manner of free dialogue without domination of any side. From the Qur'an's point of view, Islam is plurality-friendly: "We [...] made you peoples and tribes that you might know one another." (Sura 49:13)

If Muslims, as Vatican II says and they themselves declare, worship the same God with us, then one can no longer want to prove Islam wrong. Worshipping the same God cannot be something "insufficient" in itself. Rather, it will be a matter of underlining precisely the deepest truth of Islam from the message of Christ. In fact, the claim to absoluteness of the Christian faith[[9]](#footnote-9) would be completely misunderstood as a claim to superiority; for Christ "came not to rule but to serve" (Mt 20:28).

In saying this, I do not represent the view of the so-called pluralistic philosophy of religion, according to which the most diverse revelations could exist side by side and none of them can rightly claim to be absolute. Rather, as a Christian, I assume that the whole world is created in Christ and therefore, from his message, one can find his hidden presence everywhere. This is a theology of religion that can perhaps most aptly be called "interiorism".[[10]](#footnote-10) There is a hidden presence of Christ "in" religions. Interiorism is the alternative to exclusivism, inclusivism and plura-[160]lism. Instead of wanting to "surpass" other religions, it would be a matter of doing a service to their actually already existing unsurpassability.

Rightly understood, therefore, the Christian message cannot want to take the place of other religions. If Muslims actually worship the same God "with us", they cannot be asked to "turn away" from their religion. Rather, it can "only" be a matter of them grasping the truth of their own religion more deeply. However, this "only" may well encompass more than it seems at first glance. Instead of adding something to the truth of the religions, it will rather be a matter of a new illumination of something inherent in them, for which, however, an encounter with the Christian message is certainly necessary (cf. Jn 3:21: "He who does the truth comes to the light, so that it may be revealed that his works are done in God."). So something is to be revealed that has long before been the case in a hidden way.

In early Christianity, Jews who believed in Jesus Christ did not therefore have to stop being Jews. Peter and John continued to "go up to the temple to pray at the ninth hour" (cf. Acts 3:1). According to its self-understanding, the Christian faith in relation to other religions cannot well be concerned first with promoting them ("helping the unifying and liberating power inherent in every religion to break through") and in the end with replacing them.

Christianity's true relationship to other religions (contrary to its history of sometimes breathtaking inattention to its own content) is better described as a service to their Unsurpassability. Conversion to faith in Jesus Christ would not, from this faith, have to mean leaving one's previous religion. How else could Pope John Paul II have said: "We may indeed believe that every true prayer is inspired by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every man."[[11]](#footnote-11) One will only have to turn away from such possible misunderstandings concerning one's religion that contradict its "unifying and liberating power". Such misunderstandings, as already mentioned, have historically existed in Christianity as well.

Of particular importance for the dialogue is the question of how the Christian doctrine of the Trinity can go together with monotheism, indeed is possibly necessary for its very sake, if God's mercy is really to be proclaimed together with it.

Muhammad encountered Christianity, it seems, almost only in the degenerated form of a kind of doctrine of three gods or a disguised Arianism or a Christological monophysitism that actually mixed God and the world. He had to get the impression that these Christians understood by the doctrine of the Trinity that there was not only one God, but three gods, or that Jesus' alleged sonship with God consisted in a creature or some kind of intermediate being "associated" with God. Sura 112 on the sincerity of faith, "which, despite its brevity, according to Muhammad, corresponds to a third of the entire Qur'an"[[12]](#footnote-12) , on the other hand, reads: "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful! Say: 'He is the One God, Allah, the Absolute. He begets not and is not begotten. And there is none like Him.'" This sounds as if it is directly against the Nicene and Constantinople Creeds, according to which the Son is "begotten, not made".

Unfortunately, even today Muslims repeatedly experience that Christians, when asked about their understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, only stammer. Isn't it - as some Christians like to talk themselves out of it - a "mystery of faith" that no one understands anyway? And for how many Christians is the doctrine of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit important at all?

But if the Christian message refers to God's Word and wants to convince hearts, then it cannot be an incomprehensible word. A mystery of faith has nothing to do with incomprehensibility, but means a fact that cannot be read from the world, that can therefore only be revealed to you through the Word and whose truth can only be recognised in faith itself. But it is anything but an incomprehensible riddle. And if one only becomes a Christian through baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", it must even be the decisive and understanding access to the whole faith.

One can only completely agree with the Qur’an in its rejection of any doctrine of three gods and any association of a creature with God. It is another question whether the real Christian doctrine falls under its condemnation. Educated Muslims have already confirmed to me several times that [162] no objection can be raised against the explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity from the Qur’an which follows below.

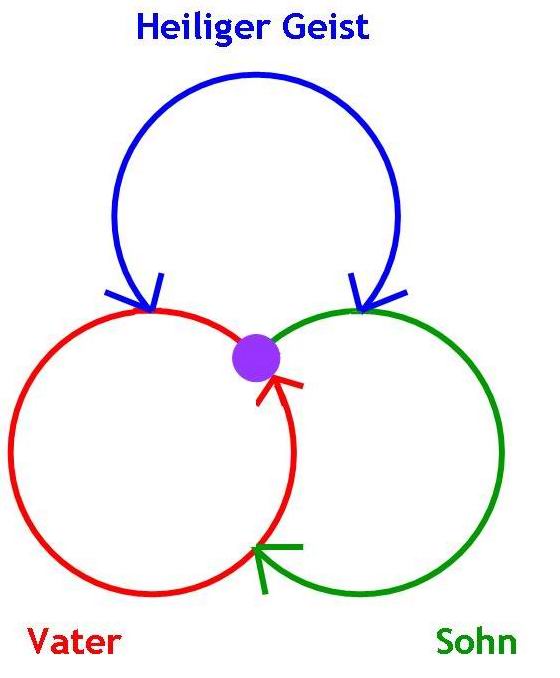
The doctrine of the Trinity is about the question of how the recognition of God's absoluteness can be brought together with the statement of his mercy and the assertion that people are addressed by God, indeed that he is lovingly turned towards them. After all, Allah is "not dependent on anything in the world" (Sura 3:97). Christianity may be the only religion that can answer this question and thus do a service to the truth of any real religion.

This is indeed a problem that also exists within Islam. As early as around 745, the Islamic theologian Dja'd Ibn Dirham posed the question of how the Qur’an could be used to say that the eternal, absolute and transcendent God had a "dialogue" with Moses (Sura 2,51) or that he had taken "Abraham as his friend" (Sura 4,25). How is the recognition of God's absoluteness compatible with saying that he relates to a human being?[[13]](#footnote-13) This question is of fundamental importance. Even the idea of a mediation, for example through angels, who would also only be creatures[[14]](#footnote-14) , could not lead us any further here; for even in the case of angels, it would have to be asked how one can say that God is turned towards them. At that time, no one knew how to answer this question; instead, the questioner was sent to the stake without being able to refer to the Qur’an. The question remains. And there is an answer:

Being created out of nothing means that the world is completely absorbed in a one-sided dependence on God in everything in which it differs from nothing, that is, in its entire reality. It would contradict our "being created out of nothing" and thus also the recognition of God's absoluteness to assert a turning of God to the world that would have its measure in the world itself, for which the world would thus be the term constituting it as a relationship. The dependence of the world on God can only be thought of as completely one-sided, namely as completely identical with the being of the world itself.

A love of God for the world can therefore, according to the view of the Christian faith, only be stated in such a way that this love already exists in advance for the world from eternity as a love from God to God, indeed that this love itself is God. Otherwise, God's love would be determined by something created.

[163] When we say that we are persons, we mean our capacity for self-presence (that we know about ourselves and can dispose of ourselves). If God is also said to be a person, this means that God's reality is present to itself. From the message of Jesus, we Christians speak of three persons in God in the sense that the one and only reality of God is present to itself in three different ways. The Father is a first self-presence of the one reality of God, which is not preceded by any other person; he is, as it were, the I of God. The Son is a second self-presence of the same reality of God that presupposes the first one (not in the temporal sense, but from eternity). The Son is the You of God. The Holy Spirit is a third self-presence, again of one and the same reality of God, which presupposes the first and the second. He is the We of God. He is the love between the Father and the Son, this love being itsel God. All three self-presdences of the one and only reality of God are co-eternal. Then it is true: the Father is God; the Son is the same God and the Holy Spirit is also one and the same God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each self-presence of one and the same reality of God-being common to them. Although Father and Son and Holy Spirit are *different* self-presences of the one reality of God, as self-presences of *one and the same reality* they are not three Gods.

The Council of Florence (1439-1445) put it this way: "The Father has whatever he is or has, not from another, but from himself; and he is origin without origin. The Son has whatever he is or has from the Father, and he is origin from an origin. The Holy Spirit, whatever He is or has, He has at the same time from the Father and from the Son." (DH 1301a) In the illustration opposite, each of the three circles signifies a self-presence of one and the same reality; it is clear how the second circle presupposes the first and the third the other two, each to return to its starting point. Is there anything "too complicated" about this? Only with this explanation can God's love for the world, his mercy towards us, be stated in a ultimately understandable way.

[164] When the Christian creed says of the Son that he is "begotten, not created", it does not mean an act of procreation in the sense, rejected by the Qur’an, of a subsequent emergence of the Son, and certainly not an anthropomorphically conceived act of procreation, but precisely the opposite is meant to exclude that it is a question of the joining of a creature. It is only to say that the second self-presence of God presupposes the first one and thus comes from eternity has the first one as its its origin, while the first self-presence is origineless.

The world is created in the love that exists from eternity between the Father and the Son. This love is God, the Holy Spirit and is the same God. But because this love of God for the world is not measured by the world, it cannot be measured by the world. It can only be revealed in such a way that it is revealed to the world in a human word. “word” means a human word, spoken from one human being to another.

But how can one attribute a human word to God? To answer this question, the Christian message refers to the incarnation of the Son; in Jesus he took on human nature: A human being in his human self-presence is included in the self-presence of the Son, which as his ultimately sustaining self-presence constitutes the personhood of this human being. Believing in Jesus as the Son of God then means nothing other than trusting in God's love on the basis of Christ’s word, which is not measured by anything created, but reveals the eternal love of the Father for the Son. It is promised to us as also valid for us. God has no other love than this, which is eternal and unconditional.

According to the Christological dogma of the Council of Chalcedon (451) (DH 301-303), being God and being human in Jesus remain respectively what they are "without mixture and without separation": they are not separate from one another, but they are distinct from one another (the one is not the other and is not part of the other); nor are they mixed together (as if there had a common intersection), but they are bound together by the relationship of divine self-presence which is the Son.

The answer to the question of why God became man is: so that there can be the Word of God in the strict sense[[15]](#footnote-15) , so that from Jesus exactly that can be said in the human word which God wants us humans to understand: that we are secure in God's love for God which exists from eternity. Because this love of God is not measured by anything created, but only by God himself, it is reliable for all eternity. This faith means that one no longer has to live out of fear for oneself, which results from one's own vulnerability and transience and which is otherwise the cause of all inhumanity. Those who believe in this way already live in this world out of eternal communion with God (cf. Eph 2:6), against which even death has no power.

How should it be possible to answer the question posed by the above-mentioned Dja'd Ibn Dirham differently? How can God's relation to a creature be stated differently in such a way that the recognition of God's absoluteness is not called into question?

Muhammad rightly refused to accept a nonsensical understanding of sonship with God in the sense of a creature joining God. If, however, it is possible to understand sonship with God differently, then according to the Qur'an it applies to Muhammad, and what applies in this way is even given to him to proclaim: "Say: 'If the Beneficent God had a son, I would be the first to worship him'". (Sura 43:81) Such a sentence would not make sense if the talk of a "sonship of God" could only be contradictory in itself and thus only nonsensical.

### Summary:

According to the teaching of Vatican II (LG, n. 16) and according to the Qur’an itself (Sura 29,46), Christians and Muslims worship the same God. The same fundamental theological questions then arise for both religions: How is God recognised and what are the criteria for God's revelation? Common answers also emerge: God is recognised from creation as the one "without whom nothing is". The criterion for revelation is that it can be understood as the comprehensive light over everything and is unsurpassable. The dialogue will have to deal above all with the question of how far the rightly understood Christian doctrine of the Trinity can render a necessary service to monotheism. In this, the community of believers in Christ could prove to be the "sacrament" of the unity of all people, pointing beyond itself (LG, n 1).

***Abstract:***

*According to the teaching of Vatican II (LG, n. 16) and of the Qur’an itself (sura 29,46) Christians and Muslims adore the same God. Thus, for both religions the same questions of fundamental theology may arise: How can God be known, and which are the criteria for a revelation of God? There will also be common answers: God is known from the creation as "without whom nothing exists". The criterion for revelation consists in the fact that the latter can be understood as the all embracing light over everything and cannot be surpassed. In dialogue, one main theme should be to what extent the correctly interpreted doctrine of divine Trinity may be necessary for monotheism. The community of the believers in Christ may prove itself as the "sacrament", pointing beyond itself, of the unity of all human beings (LG, n 1).*

1. *DerKoran - Das heilige Buch des Islam - Aus dem* Arabischen von Max Henning - Überarbeitet und herausgegeben von Murad Wilfried Hofmann, München: Heinrich Hugendubel Verlag 1999, 11. I the German text of this article I quote this edition in today's orthography. The bracketed words are in the original; they are clarifications by the editor. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [143] The names of God in the Qur’an, "*Allah*", "*Ila"* and "*Alahumma"* have Old Testament equivalents in "*El*", "*Eloah"* and "*Elohim*". In the Arabic languages, the Catholic Church also calls God by the name "*Allah*"; for example, in the missal texts in Malta. The word *Allah* has the advantage of not allowing a plural. Already Max Henning as well as the reviser of his translation leave the word "*Allah*", which means "God", untranslated; whoever as a European says "God" is "hardly entirely free from the trinitarian Christian image of God" (ibid. 11). This reasoning perhaps overlooks the fact that, according to the Qur'an itself (Sura 29:46), Muslims worship the same God as Jews and Christians. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Thus rightly Bultmann, Rudolf, *Neues Testament und Mythologie.* In: Ders, Kerygma und Mythos I, Hamburg Volksdorf: Reich 1951, 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The two cities are Meccaand Ta'if. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In Catholic theology, the criterion of unsurpassability was developed above all by Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), who was in dialogue with Jews and Muslims. Still in advance of all revelation, it is already true with regard to God that he is not only of such a kind that nothing greater can be thought [*quo maius cogitari non possit*], but that he is greater than everything that can be thought [*maius quam cogitari possit*] (*Proslogion* 15). The first states that even God plus the world are not greater than God. This is *in recto* a statement [151] about the world, namely that in everything in which it differs from nothingness, it is completely absorbed in not being able to be at all without God. The second underlines that God Himself cannot be subsumed under any concepts and therefore cannot be the starting point, object or result of conclusions. This refutes all the inaccurate interpretations of Anselm which attribute to him that he wants to derive God's existence from a concept of God (the possibility of which he denies). The two formulations correspond to the Muslim "*Allah akbar*" = God is greater (than everything). - In principle, statements regarding God must be of such a nature that they cannot be increased. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Brecht, Bert, *Gesammelte Werke in acht Bänden,* VIII, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1967, 510f. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. on the underlying principle of proportionality: Knauer, Peter, *Handlungsnetze - Über das Grundprinzip der Ethik*. Frankfurt: (Book on Demand) 2002, ISBN 3-8311-0513-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Statutes of the Society of Jesus and Supplementary Norms,* Published by the Provincial Conference of the Central European Assistance. Munich: 1997, 388 (Supplementary Norms, n. 265). Already in the "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Ad gentes*)" of Vatican II, the Catholic Church had exhorted its members "that with prudence and love, through conversation and cooperation with the professors of other religions, and by their witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognise, safeguard and promote those spiritual and moral goods and also the social-cultural values found among them" (n. 2,3). In the encyclical "*Redemptoris Missio*" of 7 November 1990, n. 55, John Paul II had even written that God himself "makes himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to peoples in the richness of their spirituality, which finds its exquisite and essential expression in religions". [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. Knauer, Peter, *Ein anderer Absolutheitsanspruch ohne exklusive oder inklusive Intoleranz*. In: D'Sa, Francis X. / Mesquita, Roque (eds.), *Hermeneutics of Encounter - Essays in Honour of Gerhard Oberhammer on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (= Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, Vol. XX). Vienna: Sammlung de Nobili 1994, 153-173 (also: peter-knauer.de/05.html]). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Cf. Knauer, Peter, Christus „in“ den Relionen: Interiorismus[*Christ "in" the Religions: Interiorism*]. In: FZPhTh 51 (2004) 237-252 (also: peter-knauer.de/34.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Christmas Address to the Cardinals and the Roman Curia, 22 December 1986, in: AAS 79 (1987) 1082-1090, n. 11. Cf. also the following statements in the encyclical "*Redemptoris Missio*": that the Holy Spirit, with his presence and in his action, touches not only individuals, "but also society and history, peoples, cultures, religions. The Spirit is likewise at the origin of noble ideals and good initiatives of humanity in their path" (*RM*, n. 28). "For it is always the Spirit who works, whether by enlivening the Church and urging her to proclaim Christ, or by spreading his gifts to all men and peoples and unfolding them, guiding the Church through dialogue to discover, foster and embrace these gifts. Every presence of the Spirit must be received with respect and gratitude." (*RM*, n. 29) "He [God] makes himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to peoples in the richness of their spirituality, which finds its exquisite and essential expression in religions." (*RM*, n. 55) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Introduction by Murad Wilfried Hofmann to his edition of the Qur’an (cf. footnote 1), 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Cf. Nagel, Tilman, *Geschichte der islamischen Theologie,* Munich: Beck 1994, 102; Vajda, Georges, *Ibn Dirham,* in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* New Edition, Vol. III, Leiden-London: Brill 1986, 474. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. If, according to Gal 3,17, the "law" is ordered by angels, this means that it is recognised from creation itself, which as such does not yet signify fellowship with God. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Even on the reading of Israel's Scriptures and their claim to be the "Word of God" lies, according to 2 Cor 3:14, "a covering" which is only taken away in Christ. Strictly speaking, the faith in Christ is not about an addition to the faith of Israel, for the Scriptures already speak of Him (cf. Jn 5:29), but about the removal of an obstacle to understanding. Thus the Christian expression "Old Testament" means a *new*, "fulfilled", namely definitely meaningful understanding of these Scriptures. The necessity of this new view is disregarded when many Christians today want to speak only of the "First" Testament instead of the "Old". [↑](#footnote-ref-15)