



## **Islamic Theology, Past and Present. A Comparative Perspective**

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For people with little knowledge about Islam, the title may come as a surprise. Is there anything in Islam that deserves to be called theology?<sup>1</sup> Let us first get some clarity on how to understand “theology”.

### **1. Theology: understanding the concept**

A wide and still meaningful proposal could be the following: theology is a religion’s rational discourse. Each of the three words used here confronts us with several things; and with several problems.

Religion was once explained in an odd but helpful remark by Eric Voegelin († 1985). He wrote that he means by religion “phenomena like Christianity”<sup>2</sup>. That may sound cynical, colonial; but he thus looks at more than only teaching or liturgy and he implicitly admits that there may be a Western projection involved already when we speak of “religion”. Some non-Western languages, however, had similar concepts already before modernity, e.g., Arabic *dīn*. What distinguishes theology from religious studies? Theology is done by “a religion”, that is to say, by its own members and institutions and on its religious claims with the intention to demonstrate that they are true (apologetic), or to elaborate their existential and societal meaning (hermeneutic). There may be a third type of such engagement, which one might characterise by a Jewish expression for “learning”, that is,

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<sup>2</sup> *Die politischen Religionen* (1938) (Munich 2007), 12.

a religion's rational discourse, undertaken with the intention to relate to the tradition for its own sake (talmudic).

**R a t i o n a l i t y** is a regulative idea to which all human effort can only approximate. We cannot say of some proposition with absolute certainty "this is just", or "this is true"; and likewise, we cannot say, "this is rational". A key indicator for a religious discourse's rationality can, however, be seen: to use the argumentative procedures of its contemporaries (even if critically). More concretely, that would be a reflective usage of concepts, logical reasoning, a consistent methodology and a debate culture. One might also use short formulae such as "religious discourse is rational in so far as it is in dialogue with philosophy", and "formally understandable by non-adherents".

**D i s c o u r s e** includes the whole scale of epistemic settings; in our context, intra- and inter-religious debate, the systematic treatise and the multi-volume exegetical commentary, the teaching in an interdisciplinary setting and the various disciplines' contrasting paradigms.

Now, the basic thesis of this presentation is that Islamic theology exists. Yet, in what forms has Islamic theology been employed? How have Muslim theologians actually worked?

## **2. The first flowering of Islamic theology**

Specialists in theology easily forget that Islam's religious thought has also been developed, expressed and transmitted in genres like mystical poetry or miniature painting. Those productions of astonishing depth should be seen as constant company and background to more explicitly theological discourses, that is, more rational endeavours. Three disciplines come to mind. I will present them in ascending order of theological character strictly speaking, that is, the discourse most commonly named "theological" will be the last: first, jurisprudence – second, exegesis – and third, systematics.

*F i q h* is "jurisprudence based on revelation". Four striking characteristics should be mentioned: its high level of self-reflection, its hermeneutical attitude, its cultural adaptability, and its internal plurality.

– The high level of self-reflection: regularly pressing was the question about the argumentative basis that could justify this or that ruling? In Arabic terms, its *uṣūl* ("roots, sources"). Of course, the first two sources would be "an explicit Koranic text" and "a message transmitting a saying or action of Muḥammad" (*ḥadīth*). It is noteworthy that the Koran is not taken here to be words of Muḥammad; the speaker, also according to Muḥammad's own experience, is God. Muḥammad's own words are, rather, transmitted in the "tradition", i.e., the *ḥadīth* transmissions. More intellectually rewarding is

the next couple of sources: analogical conclusions from Koran or Ḥadīṭ rulings; and the consensus of scholars.

– Hermeneutics: more philosophy comes in when the next “sources” are being listed: the question what the real intentions (*maqāsid*) of such explicit rulings are, and what serves best the common welfare (*maṣlaḥa*).

– Local differences: there is also a sense of leaving conquered peoples’ local legal custom (*urf*) untouched as long as they create no conflict with Islam’s own laws.

– Plurality: it is worth noting that different methodologies and priorities brought forth different legal schools (*maḏāhib*). In Sunni Islam, for example, one counts four such schools, which regularly cohabited simultaneously – and peacefully – in the same educational institution.

*Tafsīr* is “Koran exegesis”. Since the Koran is – at least in theory – the point of departure for Islamic lawyers and judges, there were many questions asked to the text itself. So, the exegetical disciplines grew out of practical challenges:

– What was the correct “reading” of the Koranic text, in other words, which of the different transmitted versions is the original one? Here, actually, the answer was often surprisingly Solomonic: all traditional variants were declared to be revealed in parallel; still, we thus have a high culture of studying variants (*qirā’āt*); in modern terminology, a form of “textual criticism”.

– What do the words the Koran uses actually mean? The Koran’s Arabic is notoriously difficult and the claims of Beduins that this means that needed testing; especially when Islam was accepted by upper class Iranians, they were, at the same time, non-Arab and shaped by a high administrative and literary culture; it was they who produced impressive grammatical and semantic research on the Koran.

– In which context was a given Koranic verse originally proclaimed? An example, “As for the thief, whether male or female, cut their hands as a penalty for what they have reaped – a deterrent from God. God is Mighty and Wise” (5:38). Now there were many traditions from early on that claimed to know the situations into which such verses were first proclaimed (*asbāb an-nuzūl*); was it a particularly brutal robbery, had a poor beggar’s only coat been stolen? The context of the text was, therefore, considered as relevant for the understanding and application of a revealed text.

However, there was also, from early on, *Kalām*. Probably the word is harkening back to the Greek verb *dialegesthai* “to discuss”, because the people engaged in it are the *mutakallimūn*. Often, *Kalām* is translated by “rational theology”. Here again, some striking facts need to be noted:

– In the early centuries, there was no class of professional theologians who held a paid position within the religious community and/or the state hierarchy. The prayer leaders, preachers, callers to prayer often had a salary in the cities. However, they did not produce any scholarly theology; and while government official might author a theological treatise, he would not have been employed for that. Sunni Islam does not know of a clergy. What counted was the argument, not the religious community's magisterial position. Practically, for sure, there was a teaching authority; but it was claimed by the political leader. He interfered when he saw his own power in danger. So, we are in a world of "lay theology".

– This theology in the fullest sense of the word was not what one might expect from a religious discourse in a Semitic language. It was not narrative. Rather, it was, from early on, highly conceptual. Typical themes were the divine properties: what does it mean for God to be one? This is, of course, the most fundamental Koranic affirmation, God's "One-ness" (*tawhīd*). Now, if God is the only, the only one who has existed from eternity, what about his Word? The Koran is created, most early theologians concluded; because if the Koran is uncreated it must have existed next to God for ever, and then God were not the original unique one. A related question was about time and created objects: if this sheet of paper exists by itself in the next second, God is not totally free in front of it but has to submit to the stable existence of it. The solution was to say that God creates in every moment all creatures again according to his will – and he might not want to create again this sheet of paper in the next moment. So, these are two classical *Kalām* themes: uncreatedness of the Koran and time atomism, which show us the highly conceptual, and indeed deductive character of early Islamic theology, that is, "setting a concept of God first and concluding from it".

– The Arab peninsula with the Meccan shrine has been the centre of Muslim piety from the beginning; first as the place *at which* they prayed, then, as the place *towards which* they prayed. Arabia has always been centre of piety but has never been a cultural, intellectual centre. Those centres were in today's Syria and Iraq for the first Muslims. There, they lived in close contact with institutions of Jewish and Christian learning. Where Islam had the political power beyond the Arab peninsula – and that was very soon a very large area – Christians and Jews were allowed to stay. So, there was also theological contact, and, of course debate. Muslims were challenged by the other believers' rejection of Muḥammad's legitimacy and thus of the Koranic claim at revelation. Christians were challenged by their contemporaries about the convincingness of the Christian presentation of Jesus. The Muslim argumentative strategy in what we now call "theology of

religions” was to say that “all prophets are acknowledged”, because all said in principle the same: that God is One, that his judgement is unavoidable, that we have to live accordingly. If there is discord between the Jewish, the Christian and Muslim views, that is only because, according to Islamic understanding, the former had distorted their prophets’ original teaching. It is, thus, in terms of theology of religion, a position of “inclusivism”. Put differently: “what the others really intend with their belief is what we believe explicitly; only, they do not know that”.

We can now describe early Muslim theology by seven characteristics. It is:

1. conceptual: characterising, rather than narrating God’s actions;
2. deductive: concluding from first principles;
3. methodological: reflecting about its own procedures;
4. ethical: calling people, in view of the Last Judgment, to responsible behaviour;
5. juridical: regulating this world’s affairs with clear rulings;
6. dialectical: trying to disprove the position of others; and
7. inclusivist: declaring that in true religion, their difference is only of form, not of contents.

### **3. Islamic Theology: why it came into being**

The question of what Islam is can be answered in thousands of ways. I propose the formula: Islam is the hermeneutical engagement with what Muḥammad witnessed as revelation.

- **H e r m e n e u t i c a l e n g a g e m e n t** refers to the never ending process of responding to life’s fundamental questions.
- **W h a t M u ḥ a m m a d w i t n e s s e d a s r e v e l a t i o n** is more than the words of the Koran; the text itself points to other revelations, in nature, and by other prophets.

In 622 C.E. Muḥammad emigrated – with a small group of followers – from his home town Mecca, to Medina. There, the population was religiously and ethnically mixed, as opposed to the more homogenous Meccan society. The Meccans wanted to get rid of a troublemaker who criticised their polytheistic cults. The Medinans, by contrast, were looking for a charismatic outsider to be their “trans-tribal” leader. So, 622 marks Islam’s founding year.

About 150 years later, in what had become the “Islamic world”, we find a remarkable quality of religious thought with a variety of authors and views. How come? Several factors came together.

- **I s l a m w a s i n a p o s i t i o n o f a d m i n i s t r a t i v e l e a d e r s h i p f r o m e a r l y o n**; so, a functioning

jurisprudence was needed, which was both faithful to the new doctrine, and practical. Such challenges make for sharp thinking;

- Islam grew in areas where academic, scholarly, textual, philosophical work had been going on for centuries already.

A third factor, however, was also at play. It must not be undervalued, also in order to resist a modern misunderstanding. The – false – claim says that due to administrative responsibility and surrounding cultures, Islam was soon *changed* into something quite different from its original intention. No; rather:

- Islam is already by the Koran predisposed towards the seven characteristics just listed (“conceptual, deductive, etc.”). The Koran itself is conceptual, deductive, etc.

Here, a Koranic quote is in place. The Koran comes in 114 sections, called “suras”. They are ordered according to their length, roughly. Here is part of the second sura. It is one of the youngest. The younger a sura, the longer it is, and the longer are its individual verses. Here are five of them: “O you who believe! Spend from what We have given you, before a Day comes in which there is neither trading, nor friendship, nor intercession. The disbelievers are the wrongdoers” (2:254).

The Koran addresses its listeners, not by the word “Muslims” but “believers.” *Muslim* then still meant, more generally, a person who “surrenders” to God – as did already Abraham. While “believer” first included all who accept the One and Only God, and in the later suras (like Sura 2) came to mean “those who accept Muḥammad as prophet”.

From the beginning of its proclamation, the Koran warns of the Last Judgement. Be responsible, it says, so to speak, because you will have to respond to the examination then; so, behave socially responsibly now. You will be judged individually, no one will help you. “God! There is no god except He, the Living, the Everlasting. Neither slumber overtakes Him, nor sleep. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and everything on earth. Who is he that can intercede with Him except with His permission? He knows what is before them, and what is behind them; and they cannot grasp any of His knowledge, except as He wills. His Throne extends over the heavens and the earth, and their preservation does not burden Him. He is the Exalted, the Magnificent” (2:255). Very often, the Koran underlines God’s sovereignty. The Koran does this regularly in a solemn form: as article-plus-adjective, like “the Exalted” (*al-‘alī*). These phrases echo biblical vocabulary. So, Koranic “the Living, the Everlasting” (*al-ḥayy al-qayyūm*) resounds Daniel’s Aramaic original (‘*ālāhā ḥayyā wə-qayyām*, 6:27).

These Koranic self-characterisations of God are called “God’s most beautiful names.” They are traditionally put together in a list of 99 names. In Muslim piety, they are recited like mantras, or *Ave Marias*, but also Islam’s systematic theology thus had an easy guideline for its treatises on the nature of God: “theological theology” is being developed in the light of concepts, rather than based on experience of history.

“There is no compulsion in religion; the right way has become distinct from the wrong way. Whoever renounces evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handle, which does not break. God is Hearing and Knowing” (2:256). The verse is often understood as a ruling; as if it were saying “there must not be any compulsion in religion”, which would mean, “let there be religious freedom”. The original context, however, makes it much more likely to read it as a consolation to Muḥammad, who was confronted with the fact that although he used all rhetorical vigour and theological authority many listeners remained untouched. Therefore, rather than “you must not force people” the verse really says, “you cannot force people to come to follow the true teaching”.

“God is the Lord of those who believe; He brings them out of darkness and into light. As for those who disbelieve, their lords are the evil ones; they bring them out of light and into darkness – these are the inmates of the Fire, in which they will abide forever” (2:257). So, those who reject the proclamation that is now being heard, have to expect severe punishment in the hereafter.

“Have you not considered him who argued with Abraham about his Lord, because God had given him sovereignty? Abraham said, »My Lord is He who gives life and causes death«. He said, »I give life and cause death«. Abraham said, »God brings the sun from the East, so bring it from the West«. Thus, the disbeliever was confounded. God does not guide the oppressors” (2:258). The basic gift of Islam is *hudā* – “right guidance”. The word appears in the verse’s last phrase: God does not guide the oppressors. Abraham had engaged in religious debate with a tyrant who rejects God’s sovereignty. What happened then, happens now again: the monotheistic testimony challenges human self-referentiality in Abraham’s times, in Muḥammad’s times, and in any subsequent age. Again and again, men in power do not recognise that their power has been given to them by God. The proof Abraham uses is to say that human power cannot bring about the order of the cosmos: God alone can. So, the one truly in power, truly to be obeyed, is God.

In these verses, one can rediscover all seven characteristics of Islamic theology. The basic argument of the verses just quoted runs as follows:

- God is presenting Himself here as absolute in his power (conceptual);

- Therefore, He is also the only authority in the final judgment (deductive);
- Consequently, either you now obey the order and donate, or you will have your punishment in hell (juridical, ethical);
- Already Abraham used the same line of argument when he disproved the unbelieving sovereign (inclusivist, dialectical, methodological).

#### 4. The 9th Century crisis

In the 9th century, conceptual-deductive theology had run into a severe crisis. The difficulty must be explained from two sides simultaneously; first, as a philosophical problem, and secondly, as a political one.

Philosophically speaking one can see Islamic rational theology's fundamental problem, if one considers its way of conceptually deducing theological affirmations. It can argue in the following manner: "God has the characteristic *C*, therefore He will do action *A*". By this, one claims to have understood the word that is used to express the characteristic; as if saying, "we all know what it means for God to be the Exalted". But do we really know it in a way that allows us to draw our own conclusions from that? Many of the first rational theologians in Islam used such arguments. Those called Mu'tazilites argued: God has the characteristic "justice" (*'adl*, a word the Koran incidentally does not yet use in order to speak of God's justice). So, he will give human beings the knowledge to understand what is right and wrong, the freedom to choose between right and wrong, the capacity to bring about what they understood to be good, and God will judge them accordingly.

Here, the rational theologians came into conflict with a more text-based Islamic theology. It looked more to the Koran and *ḥadīṭ*. There, one could find stronger affirmations of God's sovereignty in guiding people, indeed, in predestining them to hell or paradise. In the 9th Century, all rational theology had run the danger to be completely prohibited; but the reason for that was not only one of theological arguments and philosophical reflection. There was a political problem involved. Three caliphs of the 'Abbāsīde dynasty, from al-Ma'mūn (son of the famous Harūn ar-Rašīd) onwards, were so convinced by the rational clarity of Mu'tazilite positions that they made them state doctrine; and they started a persecution of Muslims who held other views, especially the Koran's "uncreatedness". This persecution, of course, had the opposite effect from what was desired: theological rationality was now discredited as used by men of conflict and violence, by men in power, rather than men of faith and insight. Should one not, in order



to return to a true Islam, become “traditionists” on the basis of *ḥadīṭs*, and get rid of all theological argument?

The saving compromise on the Sunni side was to declare as theological standard a fairly anti-rational theology: the school of al-Aṣʿarī (d. 936). He held that we simply do not know the precise contents of God’s characteristics, we only know that he has revealed them as words we are to use about him; and God’s orders are not to be obeyed because we understand them to be good but because He ordered them; that is what makes them good. In the Anglo-Saxon analytical tradition, this position is called the “divine command theory”. It became the leading theological style, at least for Arab speaking Islam. The Ottoman Empire sided much more with a contemporary of al-Aṣʿarī: al-Māturīdī (d. 944) from Samarkand, and thus of Turkic (if not Turkish) origin. Over against Asharism, Maturidism holds that God has, with His rules, set up an intelligible system; therefore, human beings can follow God’s guidance rationally. Where Asharism prevailed, Islamic theology lost much of its tensions; but also much of its life.

## 5. The 19th Century crisis

Still, there were other centuries of great productivity. A series of three great Persian theologians ought to be pointed out here. Ibn Sīna (d. 1037), famous in the West under the name “Avicenna,” used Aristotle’s philosophy in an innovative way. Against this, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (d. 1111), though himself an original thinker, forwarded grave objections: if Islamic thinking followed Ibn Sīna, it was losing its core convictions, e.g., that the world had a beginning, being creation. Islamic theology seemed to have fallen into another crisis of rationality. Were the doors of fresh thinking definitively closed now? No. Another century or so later, Faḥraddīn ar-Rāzī (d. 1209) was able to pave the way to new theological creativity.

At this time, the so-called Islamic world had become the leading culture, at whose feet Europeans had to sit, learning. Arab sources ridiculed the crusaders who arrived in the East. *Franġ* – “The Franks” – as what they were called in Arabic, were perceived as uncivilised fanatics, brutal, void of hygiene and thus incapable of looking after their ill and wounded companions for lack of professional medical standards.

Only in 1798, the Muslim self-perception changed. Napoleon arrived in Egypt; and the once ridiculous “Franks” now proved to be superior in all senses of the word: strategically, politically, technically, scholarly. This perception has carved a deep trauma into the Islamic self-image. It is still to be felt. When dealing with Muslims world-wide, one must also consider that much of how they present themselves today is a fruit of a collective in-

feriority complex in front of a – thus created – Modern, Western, Christian civilisation.

Muslim religious thinkers reacted to that in a surprising way. In the late 19th Century, some of them – who became leading voices – claimed that the Islamic world had so terribly fallen behind because it had been unfaithful to Islam. “Islam is the solution”, became a motto. And what is Islam? Now a deplorably reduced form of Islam became the religious and cultural model. Rather than the wide culture of poetry and mystics, of popular religious practices and international mutual enrichment, a “Koranic Islam” was claimed to be the original and correct form of true Islam. This movement, started in Egypt with preachers like Ğamāladdīn al-Afġānī (d. 1897), Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905) and Muḥammad Rašīd Riḍā (d. 1935). It presented itself as a modernisation; but it was not taking modernity’s challenges seriously for a profound rethinking of religion in the light of contemporary philosophies and sciences; and it got an altogether counterproductive support from Saudi Arabia. There, a royal family had been created, they had become extremely rich, and they made their state’s doctrine a “Puritan” form of domestic Islam, grown in an area without any solid educational institutions: an anti-traditional attempt to re-establish a first-generation Islam: “Wahhabism”. Both the Egyptian and the Saudi types of alleged purifications rejected the popular tradition, sufism (i.e., mysticism), art, cultural difference. They had and still have the energy, and the money, to enthuse identity seekers in the whole world through simple answers: radicalisation by reduction.

## **6. 21st Century: flowering again**

Let us look at the German-speaking world for a moment. There, the situation of academic theology is particular. Public universities have so-called “confessional theological faculties”. That is to say, there are believing professors with their own staff, there are libraries and there are courses recognised also by the relevant religious communities – but financed mostly by civil society, that is, by the tax payers. The students can acquire all academic degrees – from bachelor’s to master’s to the doctorate to the “Habilitation” – in order to be teachers of religious education in the various public school levels, to be future professors; but also to be the official religious leaders, priests in the Catholic Church, pastors in the Protestant and Rabbis in the Jewish cases. There are more than 40 such “faculties” (schools of theology) in Germany alone. This institutional construction is not without tension: the academic community normally welcomes the theologians as colleagues, but there are also interdisciplinary suspicions about whether

theology is really a scientific endeavour with a place in a modern university. On the other hand, some Catholic Church leaders and many Protestant Free Churches question the sufficiently “ecclesial” character of university theology. In general, however, the presence of theology in the university is considered to be beneficial; and even the discussions about it are fruitful. Confessional theology can provide a platform for quality interlocutors and can form a new generation of religious leaders and mediators. So the existence of theology at the university is an advantage for the religious communities, for the civil society, for politics, and even for the interdisciplinary academic world. Thus, a type of rationality, a tradition of knowledge and an epistemic competence is alive in its original context. After all, theology belongs to the founding factors of Western culture, including the European idea of university.

Meanwhile, some 6 million Muslims have come to live in Germany. Responding to requests of Muslim communities to have religious education in public schools given by teachers trained in Germany, the regional (*Länder*) governments opened five institutes for Islamic theology at German universities in 2011. The major problem was to find an official Muslim representation to approve of the doctrinal orthodoxy of the teaching, in analogy to “Church” authorities. Muslim boards were created. Tensions between them and theologians are frequent; but academic Islamic theology is now operative in Münster, Osnabrück, Frankfurt/Gießen, Erlangen/Nürnberg, and Tübingen; with a sixth institute about to be opened in Berlin. Student numbers are significant in all places mentioned.

A public criticism against this development is that Islam has no such tradition, first, no theology, and second, no modern university theology. Both objections are wrong. The preceding sections have already demonstrated that one has to designate a part of Islam’s religious self-reflection as “theology”; and its place in a “modern university”? We can look back to decades with such “faculties” in several majority Muslim countries: Indonesia has them, under the name *uṣūl ad-dīn* (“roots of religion”), and both Iran and Turkey know them as Faculties of *ilāhīyāt*, a word precisely translatable into English as “divinity”, and classically used to mean “metaphysics”. Turkey has seen, between 1947 and 2010 the foundation of Islamic Theological Faculties at 24 state universities; afterwards, also private universities were allowed to have their theological schools, which has made now for more than 100 such institutions. While the older faculties have done remarkable work in subjects from Koranic Hermeneutics to Religious Pedagogy, from analytical systematics to psychology of religion, the present situation is difficult. A university is meant to be a space of freedom – for research and teaching, opinion and debate. With thousands of academics fired in the last

year, that space of freedom is now in acute danger. Iran's Shiite tradition of fine distinctions and openness towards philosophical speculations has, by contrast, still been palpable when the totalitarian side of the revolutionary system seemed to prevent diversity. – Altogether, the recent history of Islamic university theology is to be considered as a factor of world wide importance and of political relevance. Only in the freedom of the academic space, an Islamic mentality can be developed which gives Muslims at the same time the confidence that they are keeping faithfully to their original impulse, their religious beginnings, their great intellectual history and to today's new cultural and scientific opportunities.

## 7. Comparing Islamic and Christian Theologies

For the Christian faith, book and text are less important than for Islam; and the word has a markedly different role. God's action in history, the person of Jesus and personal communion with him and the human community thus created are foundational. The first Christians were a persecuted minority. Christian identity was shaped in growing contrast to Judaism (which thus found its present identity in turn); and in contrast to state power. Institutions of learning or jurisdiction were not in the first Christians' scope.

The typically Christian manner of speaking, which led to ecclesial institutions and scriptures can also be characterised by seven properties. It is:

- Witnessing: the most basic forms are “the Lord has truly risen and has appeared to Simon” (Luke 24:34);
- Remembering: accounts are put together on what Jesus said, did, suffered, often following “Old Testament” narrative patterns;
- Transformative: Jesus' own way of affirming to people that God's hoped-for salvation is present now to be entered comes to be re-used as opening personal engagement: “the Kingdom of God is near”, “blessed you poor” (Mark 1:15; Luke 6:20);
- Paradoxical: what Christians want to express goes beyond the expectable and rationally calculable; this surprise is communicated in deliberately provocative formulae which challenge all pre-defined usage, like Paul's “crucified Messiah” (1 Corinthians 1:23): which begs the question how the victorious saviour can be a victim of state execution;
- Confessional: three acts are named by this, viz.,
  1. grateful acknowledgement of God's deeds,
  2. regretting admittance of one's own captivity in sin,
  3. commitment by entering into Christ's life in baptism, prayer, public testimony and service.

- Sacramental: in repeating words like “the is my body”, again, three dimensions are operative:
  1. mystery: the language does not state the empirically obvious but points towards a deeper level of understanding,
  2. history: it is not the regularity of the cosmos but the newness of a particular course of events that is being conveyed,
  3. community: in such a speech act, the human action is not carried out by someone’s individual wisdom or resolution but by the ecclesial Spirit.
- Fulfilling: the dynamic of fulness and fulfilment is present in Jesus’ and the early Christians’ communication on three levels, namely, in re-reading and thus understanding anew the meaning of
  1. the Jewish Scriptures as God’s law, promise and covenant,
  2. Israel’s election as open to all humanity,
  3. the world and its wisdom, including its rationality.

Systematic theological reflections were produced by Christians when they were facing the challenges of dualistic teachings like gnosticism (Irenaeus, Origen) and Manichaeism (Augustine). Fully fledged theological systems that start with the concept of God and use conceptual deduction as a principle method are, however, a phenomenon of the Medieval University in Latin Europe. Now, theology was done in interdisciplinary dialogue with jurisprudence, philosophy and science. Aristotle’s thinking had become a major new tool. He was used by mediation of Muslim thinkers and therefore similarly to them. That helped Christian thought to develop new forms of expression and to be taken seriously in the institutions of a new Europe growing out of the university. The price to be paid was the typically Christian style of communication. That other rationality, which we might call historical, rather than deductive, was already rediscovered by the Reformation. It has, however, only started to re-acquire its due role in the whole of Western theology, Church life and public culture after World War II<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> For further reading, five quite heterogenous books – but all available in English – can be recommended: Shahab Ahmad, *What is Islam?* (Princeton 2015); Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers. At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge MA 2012); Josef van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, trans. from the French (sic!) by Jane Marie Todd (Harvard 2006); Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*, trans. from the French by Jon Rothschild (London 1984); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. from the German by Francis McDonagh (Louisville KY 1976).

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## Islamic Theology, Past and Present. A Comparative Perspective

### SUMMARY

The article describes the early Muslim theology by seven characteristics. It is: (1) conceptual; (2) deductive; (3) methodological; (4) ethical; (5) juridical; (6) dialectical; and (7) inclusivist. The existence of these seven characteristics is confirmed in the verses of the Koran 2,254-258: God is presenting Himself here as absolute in his power (conceptual); Therefore, He is also the only authority in the final judgment (deductive); Consequently, either you now obey the order and donate, or you will have your punishment in hell (juridical, ethical); Already Abraham used the same line of argument when he disproved the unbelieving sovereign (inclusivist, dialectical, methodological). In contrast the typically Christian manner of speaking is characterised by seven other properties. It is: (1) witnessing; (2) remembering; (3) transformative; (4) paradoxical; (5) confessional; (6) sacramental; (7) fulfilling.

**Keywords:** Theology, Muslim theology, Christian theology, characteristics

## **Teologia islamska: przeszłość i teraźniejszość. Perspektywa porównawcza**

### STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł opisuje wczesną teologię muzułmańską w siedmiu charakterystykach: 1) konceptualna; 2) dedukcyjna; 3) metodologiczna; 4) etyczna; 5) prawna; 6) dialektyczna i 7) inkluzyjna. Istnienie tych siedmiu charakterystyk potwierdzone jest w Koranie w wersach 2,254-258. Bóg prezentuje się tutaj jako absolut w swojej mocy (konceptualna); tak więc, jest On jedynym autorytetem w sądzie ostatecznym (dedukcyjna); konsekwentnie, albo będziesz przestrzegał prawa i zdobędziesz nagrodę, albo otrzymasz karę w piekle (prawna, etyczna); już Abraham używał tej samej linii argumentacyjnej, kiedy nie aprobował suwerennych niewiernych (inkluzyjna, dialektyczna, metodologiczna). Kontrastuje z tym typowy chrześcijański sposób mówienia charakteryzujący inne siedem wartości: 1) świadcząca; 2) pamiętająca; 3) przemieniająca; 4) paradoksalna; 5) konfesyjna; 6) sakramentalna; 7) spełniająca.

**Słowa kluczowe:** teologia, teologia muzułmańska, teologia chrześcijańska, charakterystyki

