In the age of globalisation, people of different nations, cultures and religions are living closer together than ever before. Muslims in the West are a substantial minority claiming equal political rights. In other parts of the world, Islam has got foothold by establishing student organisations, granting scholarships or building large mosques alerting a wider public to our multireligious reality.
Christine Schirrmacher's short introduction presents a well-written outline of the basic teachings of Islam, its sources, its culture and political aims.

Christine Schirrmacher, born 1962 (MA in Islamic Studies 1988, Dr. phil. Islamic Studies 1991) has studied Arabic, Persian and Turkish and is presently Professor of Islamic Studies at the Department "Religious Studies and Missiology" of the "Evangelisch-Theologische Faculteit" (Protestant University) in Leuven/Belgium. She is director of the "Institut für Islamfragen" (Institute of Islamic Studies) of the German Evangelical Alliance as well as an official speaker and advisor on Islam for the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). She lectures on Islam and security issues to authorities, is author of several books on Islam, sharia and family issues in Islam, has visited many countries of the Muslim world and is engaged in current dialogue initiatives, like the conference "Loving God and Neighbour in Word and Deed: Implications for Muslims and Christians" of the Yale Centre for Faith and Culture, Yale University, New Haven/Connecticut, in July 2008.

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Christine Schirrmacher Islam – An Introduction

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Introduction

Islam today has become an enormous challenge for church and society. But, the topic of "Islam" has not been a matter of current interest only since September 11, 2001. Muslims who, in most cases, were enjoined to emigrate to Germany from Anatolia to work and live in Germany since 1961. On the German as well as on the Turkish side, it was assumed that the immigrants' stay would be temporary and would last for only a few years. Most of the "guest workers" planned to return later to their families in Turkey and to establish their own economic existence there.

In 1973, the situation on the labor market in Germany had changed. A stop in the recruitment of new workers was ordered, but the reunification of families still continued to be possible. The children who, in many instances now, were brought to Germany already formed the second generation of Muslims to live in the German sphere. Because the political situation in Turkey remained uncertain and the economic situation there continued to be desolate, many postponed their return, which they in principle desired, to an indefinite time. Today, the children of the children of the immigrants, that is, the third migrant generation, already live in Germany.

As a result of wars such as, for example, the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988 or the conflicts in the Balkans, through the applications for asylum filed by those persecuted because of their religion or politics, through economic refugees, as well as because of a birth-rate that is higher in comparison than that in the German population, the number of Muslims in Germany has grown to ca. 3.2 million today, including ca. 800,000 children and young people. Further, ca. 10,000 to 12,000 Germans are said to have converted to Islam – Muslim organizations give, in part, higher figures – the largest group of which is made up of women from mixed religious marriages. In the meantime, ca. 700,000 people of Turkish origin possess a German passport.

While in France and England, because of each country's colonial history, a North African-Arabic or an Asian Islam dominates the scene, the approximately 2.2 million people of Turkish origin put their typical stamp on the Muslim community in Germany, although over 100,000 Iranians

and several hundred thousand Arabs from various countries also live here. But, the Islamic community coming from Turkey also is not homogeneous, neither ethnically nor religiously. Thus, for example, a large Kurdish minority, on the basis of the passport, is counted among the "Turks". In the same way, the perhaps 400,000 Alevis in Germany do have a Turkish passport, but in their religious practice differ considerably from the Turkish Sunnis.

Turkish Islam is influenced fundamentally by Laicism. Kemal Atatürk, the "Father of the Turks", carried out a secularization of public life in Turkey and formed a state controlled Islam while founding the Turkish Republic in 1923-1924 after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The representative in Germany of this non-political Turkish state Islam is the DITIB, the "Turkish-Islamic Union of the Institute for Religion", which sends most of the imams (prayer leaders in the mosques) to Germany. These, however, are as a rule replaced every few years and, with their in most cases meager knowledge of German, remain limited in their range of activities almost exclusively to the Turkish community.

Nevertheless, there are also politically active groups within Turkish Islam, among them the 30,000-member-strong "Mili Görüsh", which is classed by the *Verfassungsschutz* (German agency for internal security) as an Islamistic extremist group. Islamistic groups in their spheres of influence are advocating segregation of the Muslim community. The linguistic competence among immigrant children of the third generation is still, in part, quite inadequate and the ghettoization of the Muslim community in particular cities has increased sharply. Since there has been a failure in the last fifty years – and this unfortunately continues to be true for the Christian congregations till today – to get to know Muslims as neighbours and friends, the retreat of the Muslim community and the terrorist attacks of the recent past reinforce the fears and negative feelings of many people in the West.

Besides the DITIB, other Muslim organizations are the "Central Council of Muslims in Germany" with perhaps 12,000 to 15,000 members, the "Islam Council" with possibly 150,000 members, and the "Association of Islamic Cultural Centers", which, however, has withdrawn to a great extent from engaging in public relations. But, on the whole, only about five to eight percent of all the Muslims in Germany are likely to be organized. This circumstance makes it exceedingly difficult for the German state and the churches to find a discussion partner within the Muslim community that is representative of the entire community.

Islam has become an irreversible part of European and also German society, although this fact was not taken into consideration for a long time in Germany. The greatest part of the Muslims of the third generation will remain in Germany and will have knowledge of their countries of origin only through visits there. It is for this reason absolutely imperative to face up to this fact and to the questions resulting from it, and to take notice of Islam as a religion and as a social force according to its own self-understanding, in order to be able to encounter Muslims on all levels in a humanly positive as well as objectively competent way. We must not leave the discussion about religious and social values, about the position of women, the areas of influence conceded to Muslim organizations, or the Islamic understanding of the state to only a few "specialists", while the decisions that concern the life together of us all today and in the future are taken out of our hands and are made by others.

What Does „Islam“ Mean?

Do Christians and Muslims believe in the “same God”? Can one simply translate and equate “Allah” with “God”? This question is posed frequently. Here, several levels, namely the levels of concept and content, all too easily become confused.

Even a cursory reading of the Koran shows that the description of Allah given there is quite different from that of God in the Old and New Testaments. Allah is not the father of Jesus Christ and his children; he remains concealed and does not reveal himself. He makes no commitment in regard to the salvation of a human being and he does not save on the basis of faith alone, but rather on the basis of faith and deeds.

At the same time, it is known from the history of the Early Church that Arabic-speaking Christians already before Muhammad’s appearance in the seventh century AD used the Arabic term “Allah” for the triune God and Father of Jesus Christ. “Allah” is related to the Old Testament “El”. Even today, the great majority of Arabic-speaking Christians – with Muslim as well as Christian background – use “Allah” as the term for God. The situation is similar in other cultures which use a general name for a creator and high god, and whose name then is worshipped by native Christians who use biblical elements to provide a new understanding of the term.

“Allah” means “the god”, or “the deity”, and, from the point of view of its pre-Islamic use, naturally has nothing to do with Islam. In pre-Islamic times, the term “Allah” was used, apart from Christians, by at least several Arab tribes to signify a supreme deity (29: 61-65)1, the creator and lord of the world.

Muhammad takes up this concept of God. He assumes at first that he proclaims a message conforming to that found in the Old and New Testament. He fills this concept of God, however, with a message that in the course of time deviates more and more from the biblical texts until, at the

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1 Here and in the following, the information given in parentheses, unless otherwise noted, refers to the corresponding passages in the Koran (Sura, verse[s]). Citations from the Koran follow the translation by ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI, *The Holy Qur’an* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000).

end of his life, he is convinced that a human being can find entry into Paradise only as a Muslim. The thesis, however, that in Islam "Allah" really is the name for a lunar deity and that the symbol for Allah is the half moon, which finds employment on the minarets of many mosques, to the present has not been verified historically.

Muslims believe in Allah, their creator and judge, who has given life to all human beings and who will call these human beings at the end of time to account for their faith and their deeds. "Islam" means "devotion" to or "submission" under Allah and his will as revealed in the Koran. A "Muslim", thus, is someone who submits him- or herself to God, acknowledges His lordship, and desires to live according to His will and commandments. The term "Mohammedan", on the other hand, is regarded as a disparagement and should be seen as a thing of the past: Muslims do not believe in Mohammed (or, more correctly, Muhammad). Muhammad, of course, is considered to be the bearer of God's message, but does not claim for himself to be more than a human being, even if the tradition later reports numerous miracles performed by him.

When Muslims today stress that Islam is the religion of peace and that "Islam" means "peace" (Arabic salam) or "to make peace with God", then one must reply that a direct derivation of "salam" from "islam" can not be shown. What we have here, rather, is above all an ideological assumption that supposes that a unified Islamic society, in which the Sharia (the Islamic law) is established, will be a society of peace.

In general, the degree of secularization in core Islamic countries as well as also within the Muslim community in the West is substantially less than in the Christian sphere. Islam to the present still has not experienced an Enlightenment in the sense of the Western understanding of the concept. Religious criticism exists at most in the private sphere, and indeed at times is dangerous even there, as various attacks carried out against Muslim writers and intellectuals in past years have shown. Muslim voices critical of Islam are heard for the most part from those persons in exile in the West, but never from the pulpits of Arab mosques, from universities, or from the midst of theological committees. Individual intellectuals and theologians, to be sure, even demand a critical re-interpretation of Islam and its sources. But, to the present, no opening up of official theology or of influential doctrinal authorities can be detected that might let one hope for a speedy re-interpretation of the Koran and of Islamic history.

Wherever Muslims practice their faith, that faith is not an activity only for Friday or for a few holidays each year, but rather, with its many regulations and commandments, shapes not only daily life, but also the entire

course of life from birth to death. The father speaks the Islamic confession of faith into the newborn child's ears. This is followed by the naming of the child, for which a name from Islamic history frequently is chosen. The yearly feasts and festivities, the dietary regulations (prohibition on alcohol and pork), the communication of social conventions grounded in Islam for women and men, the clothing regulations, the instruction given in daily prayer and annual fasting from the age of about seven all bind the believers with their religion. The life of a human being ends with the Islamic confession of faith and the ritual washing and burial of the body according to Islamic precepts, with which the hope for God's gracious acceptance of the dead is expressed.

Islam, then, is not only a system of theological doctrine, but also makes a comprehensive claim on the theologically unschooled layperson. Islam is an ordering of life for the family and for society; it prescribes clothing as well as dietary regulations just as it imposes laws regulating marriage and inheritance. Exact regulations are to be observed in prayer, fasting, and the pilgrimage to Mecca, regulations that are not placed at the discretion of the individual. These regulations have the status of religious law, the disregard of which makes the respective action (prayer, for example) invalid before God.

The central tenet of Koranic teaching, that there is only one God, who is great and inscrutable, is not at all theoretical knowledge in Muslim families and countries, but rather a component of daily life, even if the religion is practiced at various levels of intensity. Before the ritual prayer recited five times per day, the one calling to prayer (muezzin) cries out "Allahu akbar" ("God is greater", or "God is the greatest") from the minaret of the mosque. The one praying takes up this call in his own prayer, as well as the confession "la illaha illa-llah" ("there is no God other than Allah"). The frequently recited "insha-allah" ("if God so desires") also makes clear that God and His omnipotence must be included in every human consideration. Just as frequent is the formula "bi-smi llah ar-rahman ar-rahim" ("in the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful") that stands before every sura – with the exception of Sura 9 – and, shortened to "bismillah", is spoken before activities of many kinds.

The Emergence of Islam

Muhammad

Little is known about the first forty years of Muhammad's life. He was born about the year 570 as the son of Abdallah and his wife Amina bint Wahb in the tribe of the Quraysh and of the lineage of the Banu Hashim in Mecca. His father probably died already before his birth; his mother died about the year 576, when he was about six years old. Muhammad then went to live with his grandfather Abd al-Muttalib for approximately two years (until 578) and, when the latter also died, went at about the age of eight[2] to his uncle Abu Talib, who died in the year 619.

Muhammad was a merchant by profession and in all probability did not descend from an influential family. The Koran takes up the theme of the lack of affluence and noble descent (11:91; 93:6-8) when it asks the question: *"Why is this Koran not sent down to some leading man…?"* (43:31).

At about the age of twenty-five, Muhammad married Khadija bint Huwaylid, a wealthy merchant's widow fifteen to twenty years older than he and by whom he already had been employed as a trader. Muhammad took no other wives as long as Khadija was still alive – a circumstance that Muslim scholars always judge as proof of a happy marriage. After her death, however, Muhammad married several other women. The sources give various figures from nine to eleven, some even mention thirteen wives. There were, in addition, concubines with whom Muhammad lived as man and wife.[3]

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2 So W[illiam] Montgomery WATT/Alford T. WELCH, *Der Islam*, Bd.1: *Mohammed und die Frühzeit – Islamisches Recht – Religiöses Leben*, Die Religionen der Mensch-heit, ed. Christel Matthias SCHRÖEDER, Bd. 25,1 (Stuttgart/Berlin/Cologne/ Mainz, 1980), p. 51.

3 Cf. Daniel HECKER, "Muhammad und seine Frauen", in: *Islam und Christlicher Glaube*. Zeitschrift des Instituts für Islamfragen, 2/2004, pp. 5-13.

With Khadija, Muhammad probably had at least four daughters and two, or probably, three sons. At the time of Muhammad's death, however, none of these three sons, but also no son from a later marriage, was still alive, a circumstance that made the settlement of his succession very difficult.

Muhammad's Call

The Koran provides hardly any information at all about the events that, in or about the year 610, gave Muhammad the impression that he had been called to be a prophet. If the texts of the extra-Koranic tradition were not somewhat more detailed, then we would have next to no descriptions of this event. The Koran, to be sure, names several prophets that it considers to be Muhammad's precursors, but only the calling of Moses is described in more detail in the Koran (20:9-36).[4]

Muhammad is supposed to have received his first revelations at about the age of forty – that is, in or around the year 610 AD (cf. 10:15-16). According to the accounts by Muslim historians – for the entire pre-Islamic period, we possess accounts solely from the Muslim perspective – Muhammad meditated in a cave at al-Hira, near Mecca. There, he is said to have been overwhelmed by strong sensations that frightened him terribly and caused him to suppose that an evil spirit had taken possession of him. How this first process and all further processes in the transmission of the text of the Koran may have taken place is only hinted at in the Islamic tradition: It tells of acoustic, optical, and physically perceptible influences upon Muhammad such as, for example, the sounding of a bell or the sensations of seeing a vision, experiencing a dream, being thrown to the ground, or even being choked by the neck. Muhammad is said to have been fearful after this first experience and to have been convinced that he was possessed by a demon. It was his first wife, Khadija, who is said to have strengthened in him the certainty that he was a tool chosen by God and charged with proclaiming God's message to his heathen countrymen.

In the view of Muslim theology, God did not communicate directly with Muhammad nor did God participate directly in the process of revelation. The angel Gabriel (Arabaic: Jibril), in the view of the Koran (81:19-26; 95:1-5) and Muslim theology the bearer of the revelation, is said to have proclaimed the Koran to Muhammad. The Holy Spirit also is mentioned in connection with the revelation (16:102). The Koran, however, seems to

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4 Hartmut BOBZIN, *Der Koran. Eine Einführung*, 5. revised ed. (Munich, 2004), p. 49.

indicate in at least one passage that Muhammad could have seen God Himself during the process of revelation (53:1-18). This assumption, though, is negated by verses such as Sura 42:51 (cited in the following) so that the majority Muslim view is that the human being fundamentally is not permitted to see God (cf. also 6:103): *"It is not fitting for a man that Allah should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by the sending of a messenger to reveal, with Allah's permission, what Allah wills."*

Muhammad in Mecca

Muhammad became more and more convinced that he was a prophet sent by God and charged with summoning his fellow countrymen to belief in their Creator and Judge. In the early period of Islam (ca. 610-622), Muhammad's proclamation therefore was concentrated above all in two chief points: the proclamation of the one, omnipotent God (instead of the pre-Islamic polytheism and belief in spirits) and the warning about a Judgment (rejected by the Arabs), in which every person would have to answer for his conduct after his death. Thus, at this point, "Islam" did not comprise a catalogue of individual ceremonial and legal instructions, but rather only a few basic statements that, however, encountered stubborn resistance, above all among the members of the Arab tribes resident in Mecca. To be sure, some Arabs in Muhammad's home town turned toward Islam and joined in the new faith, but on the whole Muhammad found little positive response. Especially among the economically and socially influential forces in Mecca, he suffered vehement rejection. The Koran reports that they accused Muhammad of being possessed by a spirit (81:22), a fortune-teller, magician, or a poet possessed by a spirit-being (37:36; 44:14). They also claimed that he himself has invented his supposed revelations (25:4-6).

Above and beyond this, economic reasons may have played a role – the heathen pilgrimages and the markets in Mecca associated with them stimulated commerce – the more so since the condemnation of fraud and false weights in the sale of goods was among Muhammad's first proclamations. The Kaaba in Mecca, of course, was already in pre-Islamic times an important place for the veneration of the gods, and was the only building and the only site where priests did their service. Several hundred idols are said to have been worshipped in the Kaaba. Islamic tradition speaks of 360 images of gods that Muhammad is said to have destroyed during his "farewell pilgrimage" to Mecca in March of 632, the year of his death.

The resistance to the new faith and its propagation increased among the Arab tribes in Mecca in the years after 613. The situation became increas-

ingly more dangerous for Muhammad, and it became clear that a solution had to be found.

A first way out of this situation was the migration of a small group of Muhammad's early supporters in the year 615 to the neighboring land of Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia), a land governed by a Christian ruler and in which Christianity had been elevated to the level of a state religion as early as the fourth century.[5] Eighty-three men, women, and children are said to have belonged to this group of migrants.[6] Some of them returned later to Mecca; others moved there after Muhammad had moved to Medina in 622 CE.

But, this first numerical reduction in the number of Muhammad's supporters did not essentially defuse the conflicts in Mecca, especially after a boycott of commerce and marriages (616-618) made the situation more difficult for the Muslim community. In addition, Muhammad's first supporter, his wife Khadija, and his uncle, Abu Talib, died probably in 619 so that Muhammad had hardly any familial support and protection on which he could depend.

Muhammad now established contact with persons in the neighboring city of Medina ("the city"), which at this time was called Yathrib. Some residents in Medina must have been instructed in Islam from perhaps the year 620 because Muhammad conducted negotiations beginning in 621 concerning his removal to Medina. Those in Medina who had prepared the ground for this step are called the "helpers" (Arabic: ansar) in the Koran, seventy-three persons[7] from the Arab tribes al-Aws and Hazraj who concluded a defensive alliance with Muhammad in the place of Muhammad's own tribe, the Quraysh.

After Muhammad's move to Medina (or Yathrib) was prepared in this way and seemed to promise success, he secretly left his hometown of Mecca together with his loyal companion Abu Bakr, who later was to become his first successor (Caliph), and arrived in Medina on September 24/25, 622 CE. This event is called the "Hijra", the "emigration", or, as Rudi Paret in his German translation has it, the *Loslösung*, or breaking away from, the tribe of the Quraysh.[8] The year 622 in the Christian calen-

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5 Rudi PARET, *Mohammed und der Koran. Geschichte und Verkündigung des arabischen Propheten*, 9. ed. (Stuttgart, 2005), pp. 14f.

6 WATT/WELCH, *Der Islam*, p. 84.

7 WATT/WELCH, *Der Islam*, p. 94.

8 PARET, *Mohammed*, p. 29.

dar is thus the year 1 on the Muslim calendar; it begins officially on July 15/16, 622.

Muhammad in Medina

After the Muslim community moved to Medina in the year 622, the decisive change in Muhammad's life and, thereby, also in the history and organization of Islam took place. In Medina, Muhammad was no longer merely the religious leader of his followers; he quickly became the arbitrator between groups hostile to each other. Soon, he also became the military leader of his growing group of adherents, as well as a lawgiver and political governor, until he had become the most significant political power factor in the entire region. In Medina, at the time of Muhammad's arrival, there lived two Arab tribes, the al-Aws and the Hazrai, as well as three Jewish tribes, the Banu Nadir, the Banu Qainuqa, and the Banu Quraiza, and also individual members of other tribes and some Christians.

In Medina, too, Muhammad was confronted with resistance, but, because of the expanded size of the group of his supporters and with the aid of the "helpers" sent out before him, and through alliances and confederations, Muhammad soon felt strong enough to engage in military confrontations with his opponents. Muhammad was able to lead his followers into their first successful battle probably in the year 624. Even the Koran reports about the battle at Badr, at which a Meccan caravan was attacked and robbed. To be sure, the Muslim community, the "umma", was forced to accept defeat in the next battle, in 625 at Uhud, but was able then, in 627 in the "expedition of the trench" (or Khandaq) against the Meccans, to score a success by at least withstanding their attacks. In 628, Muhammad undertook a first attempt to move against Mecca in order, as he proclaimed, to carry out the pilgrimage to the pre-Islamic shrine of the Kaaba. He was not able to enter the city, but he concluded a ten-year truce with the Meccans, which he broke already by the end of the year 629. Early in 630, he finally was able to enter Mecca, the city from which he secretly had fled eight years before. Now, in the western part of Arabia, there was no other power factor that could have opposed Muhammad or have threatened his position.

In 632, Muhammad once again carried out a pilgrimage to Mecca, a pilgrimage called his "farewell pilgrimage". In making this pilgrimage, he declared the pre-Islamic Kaaba ceremonies to be a genuine component of Islam. On June 8, 632, Muhammad died in Medina. By associating Adam with the formation and Abraham with the construction of the Kaaba, the Koran and the Islamic tradition justify the assumption of this shrine into

Islam as a return to original Islam (22: 26-29), *de facto* a compromise with paganism.

The Arabs

Muhammad directed his proclamation primarily to the members of the different Arab tribes, but then also to Jews and Christians. In addition, the Koran in several passages (e.g. 22: 17) mentions a group called the "Sabians", the religious identity of whom is not explained clearly. It is possible that this group is identical with the Jewish-Christian Elkesites, who called themselves the "Sobiai" ("those who wash themselves").[9]

The members of the different Arab tribes revered gods and spirits in stones, trees, water-sources, and statues, perhaps also the stars.[10] These idols were carried with the individual tribes or were worshipped at a specific location where sacrifices were made to them.[11] Apart from benign powers and gods, people also believed in the beneficial and harmful activity of spirits and demons (Arabic: jinn), with whom fortune-tellers and "seers" (Arabic: kahin) assumed contact.

Muhammad condemned the pagan faith of the Arab tribes as polytheism. Later, the pre-Islamic period is called a time of "ignorance" (Arabic: jahiliyya), that is, as a time of paganism.

To place another being next to the Almighty, or to put the incomparable Creator on the same level as a created being (Arabic: shirk), becomes in the Koran the greatest sin possible, the offense that separates a human being from entry into Paradise.

Pilgrimages to the Kaaba in Mecca were undertaken as early as pre-Islamic times: At a pre-determined time, in the month of fasting, the pilgrim entered Mecca in a consecrated state, sacrificed animals there, and touched the black stone in the Kaaba – presumably a meteorite – in order to receive the power of blessing. The Kaaba had to be circled by turns at a slow and then a fast walk, and some of the sites in the vicinity of Mecca had to be visited – these and other rites characterize the pilgrimage also in

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9 So, for example, Hartmut BOBZIN, *Mohammed*, 2. revised ed. (Munich, 2002), p. 58.

10 PARET, *Mohammed*, p. 17.

11 Julius WELLHAUSEN, *Reste arabischer Heidentums. Gesammelt und erläutert*, 3. ed. (Berlin, 1961), pp. 15ff.

the Islamic period.[12] At the time of pilgrimage, all hostilities ended, but business could be conducted.

Jews and Christians

Apart from the Arab tribes, Christians and Jews also lived in Medina; the latter were resident on the Arabian Peninsula probably since about 600 BCE.[13] It is possible that they first had settled in Arabia after the dispersal of the Jewish people as a result of the conquest of Jerusalem in 586 BCE by Nebuchadnezzar, and had received additional immigrants after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and the suppression of the Bar-Kochba rebellion in 135 CE.[14]

Muhammad certainly must have made contact with Jews and Christians already in the city of his birth, Mecca. His trading journeys also took him to neighboring Christian states and regions, for example Syria.

Muhammad in all probability became acquainted with some fundamental tenets of the Christian as well as Jewish faiths through oral narratives rather than through his own study of the Old and New Testaments. This conclusion could be drawn in analogy to the standpoint of Muslim theology, according to which, notwithstanding his profession as a merchant, Muhammad was illiterate, so that he himself could not have read Jewish and Christian texts at all. But, even if one would prefer not to accept this view – it cannot be proven clearly on the basis of the sources – the fact remains that only individual portions of the Old and New Testaments were available in Arabic during Muhammad's lifetime. In addition, the language of the church in Arabia was Syro-Aramaic, not Arabic. On the other hand, some apocryphal Jewish and Christian texts – for example, the Childhood Gospel of Jesus – evidently were so wide-spread in Arabia that their traces are recognizable clearly in the Koran and in Islamic tradition. In regard to the numerous statements in the Koran about Christian belief, however, it cannot be established with certainty where Muhammad came across apocryphal texts or even heretical doctrinal opinions that the Koran then describes as the genuine view of "the Christians", and where he possibly interpreted Jewish-Christian tradition himself in a divergent manner.

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12 So PARET, *Mohammed*, pp. 21f.

13 WATT/WELCH, *Der Islam*, p. 46.

14 BOBZIN, *Mohammed*, p. 59.

Muhammad, thus, must have conducted "religious conversations" with Jews and Christians about God and His activity, and must have been made acquainted with essential biblical content and traditions. The Koran, namely, makes reference to numerous points of content in the Old and New Testaments, but offers its own interpretation of them. Among them, the prophetic narratives in the Koran are of special significance. Muhammad derived the justification for his own mission as an emissary of God from the reports about the prophets: Just as God called Adam, Abraham, or Moses to be heralds of the one creator God and Divine Judge, so did God charge Muhammad to be the last in the series of prophets, to be the "*Seal of the Prophets*" (33:40).

Muhammad at first accepted the revelatory scriptures of the Jews and Christians that had preceded the Koran, and characterized the Jews and Christians as "people of the Book" (Arabic: ahl al-kitab) or "possessors of scripture". The earlier texts named by the Koran are, among others, the "Torah" (Arabic: taurah) given to Moses, the "Psalms" (Arabic: zabur) of David, and the "Gospel" (Arabic: injil) of Jesus. The Koran, thus, is really not a different revelation (40:43), but rather merely renews the one, unchanging message of God, the Creator and Judge. The target group now was the Arab people, after prophets already had been sent to other peoples,

When the Koran speaks about Jews and, above all, about Christians, then it presents a picture with conflicting elements: After his move to Medina in 622, Muhammad intensively courted the Jewish tribes in the city, convinced as he was to have been charged by God with proclaiming the same message as that propagated by the Jewish prophets before him. He called on them to accept his mission (2:40-41) and in his cultic practices – the form of fasting, the recitation of prayers facing toward Jerusalem, the evening prayers, and the dietary regulations – at first closely followed Jewish religious practice. His words, however, found little response among the Jewish tribes; indeed, he encountered ridicule and rejection.

For this reason, negative developments in Muhammad's relationship to the Jews resident in Medina began to emerge quite quickly. They rejected not only his claim upon the leadership of the congregation in Mecca, but also his divine mission as such. The Koran now threatens the Jews with "*wrath upon wrath*" (2:90). Muhammad condemned the Jewish faith and the Jews' way of life in Medina more and more as false and hypocritical (2:88; 5:13; 2:61, and many others). Muhammad's battles with the Jews began in 624 CE: in that year, he drove the Banu Qainuqa out of Medina; in 625, he besieged the Banu Nadir until they migrated and left all their property behind. Finally, in 627, he killed the 600 to 700 male members of

the Banu Qurayza, although they already had surrendered to him, and sold the women and children into slavery.[15]

While the Jews are referred to in the Koran by turns with two different terms – disparagingly with "al-yahud" ("the Jews") and neutrally with "banu israʿil" ("the children of Israel"), the Christians are called "nasara" ("the Nazarenes"), not for example "masihiyyun" (from the Arabic "masih", "Christ"). Whether one can draw conclusions from this about the theological tendency of the Christian community is still unclear.

The Christians resident in Arabia were most probably members of the Syrian monophysite church of Melkite, Jacobite, and Nestorian character[16] that had split off from the imperial Byzantine church.[17] The Christians in Medina, resident there evidently in quite small numbers and not organized in binding tribal associations or established religious groupings, must have been, above all, merchants, eremites, and monks. Muhammad conducted theological disputes with them, the starting point of which was Muhammad's campaign to win their support and allegiance. The Koran at first expresses Muhammad's good will toward the Christians: "*And you certainly will find that those who are nearest the believers in love are those who say: 'We are Nasara (that is, Christians)', because among these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant".* (5:82)

But, when acceptance and support of Muhammad was not given from the Christian side, his relationship to them became more distanced. Muhammad began to reject individual Christian convictions as false – because they did not agree with his message. The process concluded with his condemnation of the Christians as idolaters and infidels (5:72) who adhere to grave errors such as the sonship of God and the Trinity, and thus commit the unforgivable sin of polytheism. One must qualify this, however, by stating that the Koran always represents the Trinity as a threesome composed of God the father, Mary His wife, and Jesus, their mutual legitimate son (5:116). In the end, it remains unclear whether Muhammad himself undertook this interpretation as a form of apologetic defense against Christian positions, or whether it had been presented to him in this way in his

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15 W[illiam] Montgomery WATT, *Muhammad. Prophet and Statesman* (London/Oxford/New York, 1961, reprint 1977), pp. 172f.

16 Cf. Günter RISSE, *„Gott ist Christus, der Sohn der Maria". Eine Studie zum Christusbild im Koran* (Bonn, 1989).

17 BOBZIN, *Mohammed*, p. 56.

environment, possibly in apocryphal texts or even in – Syrian as well as Abyssinian – ecclesiastical practice.[18]

From the fact that neither Jews nor Christians wanted to accept him as an emissary from God, Muhammad drew the conclusion that the mistake lay on their side and that both groups in each case must have falsified the original revelation given to them (2:75; 4:46; 5:13, 41). In the view of the Koran, Jesus already had proclaimed Muhammad's coming (61:6). The logical consequence of this "falsification theory" and the temporary endpoint in the theological demarcation of Jews and Christians is the statement in the Koran that all the prophets of the Old and New Testaments, and Jesus himself, basically were heralds of Islam. Muhammad, thus, wanted only to call to mind the always identical, eternal revelation. Muhammad's rejection, thus, represented in his opinion a false theological assessment on the part of the Jews and the Christians. The Koran thereby understands itself as a correction of the Old and New Testaments that had been falsified by them.

Muhammad: Human Being and Prophet

Even if Muhammad received the Koran as God's message and was charged with proclaiming it to his Arab countrymen, he is for Muslims still just a mortal human being: he has nothing that is similar to a god or godlike. In the Koran, at least, he is represented as a fallible human being, for – just as some other prophets – he asks God repeatedly for forgiveness (9:43; 48:2). It was only Muslim theology, probably around the tenth century, that sanctioned the sinlessness of all prophets.

Just as undisputed as Muhammad's human nature is the fact of his earthly death: Muhammad died in the middle of the year 632 CE in Medina presumably because of illness, and was buried there. The Wahhabites in today's Saudi Arabia, to be sure, have attempted in the recent past to limit sharply the veneration of graves in Medina. The graves of some early Islamic personalities have been leveled in the past. Muhammad's grave, however, has remained and is visited especially by pilgrims to Mecca.

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[18] On Muhammad's relationship to Jews and Christians, cf. Christine SCHIRRMACHER, „Christen im Urteil von Muslimen. Kritische Positionen aus der Frühzeit des Islam und aus der Sicht heutiger Theologen", in: Ursula SPULER-STEGEMANN (ed.), *Feindbild Christentum im Islam. Eine Bestandsaufnahme*, 3. ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau/Basel/Vienna, 2005), pp. 12-34.

Although the Koran presents Muhammad exclusively as a human being, his countrymen demanded a miracle from him (20:133), through which he was to give final proof of his hitherto disputed mission as a prophet of God. Muhammad pointed out that, as a human creature, he could not perform miracles (29:50), but that the Koran was such a wonderful work that his opponents could not create anything comparable (10:37-38). For this reason, Muslim theology has described the Koran as Muhammad's "qualifying miracle" , as the proof of his divine mission.

Islamic tradition, however, reports about numerous miracles that Muhammad is said to have performed: rain miracles, the splitting of the moon (hinted at in 54:1-2), or the night journey, or journey to Heaven, undertaken by Muhammad (hinted at in 17:1; 83:15-24), during which he was led from Mecca to Jerusalem on the "Buraq", a white horse, and in Jerusalem is said to have ascended a ladder to heaven into the presence of God.

In the view of the Koran and of theology, Muhammad himself has no significance as a person in the process of conveying the revelation. While the Old and New Testaments show individual personalities, such as Moses, Abraham, or Jonah, with all their strengths and weaknesses of character, and indeed report unsparingly and openly about the lapses and sins of these models of the faith, the Koran reveals nothing of Muhammad's human nature – he is merely the medium for the transmission of God's message.

Islam: Religion of Prehistory and of the Endtime

The decisive turn in the development of Islam takes place in the confrontation with pre-Islamic animism, but above all in the conflict with Judaism and Christianity in Medina. Initially, Muhammad classified the faith proclaimed by him as of equal rank with that of the Jews and Christians. He campaigned for their support and took the decisive justification for his own mission from their holy scriptures. After his unfruitful request for acceptance on the basis of equality and after increasing estrangement that led to open hostility – above all against the Jews – Muhammad now ranked Islam before the religions preceding it and placed himself and his message above all others. Out of an initial ordering based on equality grew an ordering that placed Islam before and above the others; an acceptance of Judaism and Christianity became toward the end of his life an increasingly harsher condemnation and derogation of them.

At the same time, Muhammad now declared Islam to be no longer the religion only of the Arabs, but to be the only normative faith for all human

beings (7:158). By extending the existence of Islam backward to prehistory and forward to the endtime, the tradition, above all, declares Islam to be the original religion of humanity. Islam now is considered as the religion that already existed before Judaism and Christianity, as well as the one religion that will continue to exist in eternity: God's message in its pure form, the "mother of scripture" (Arabic: umm al-kitab), is kept in heaven (43:2-4). The prophets commissioned by God have proclaimed it anew again and again, but human beings – even Jews and Christians – have falsified it over the course of time, so that God once again has sent a prophet in order to remind human beings of His revelation. The Koran is the only unfalsified text that has remained preserved, and for this reason it corrects all other revelations. Islam, thus, reverses the historical sequence of the religions by placing Islam first and Christianity last. For this reason, every human being is, in the opinion of Muslim theologians, actually born as a Muslim; only when he or she grows up in a non-Islamic environment is he or she "made" into a Jew or a Christian.

From this perspective, the prophets and faith models in the Old and New Testaments become the heralds of the message of Islam: They, too, brought the pure original revelation until it was falsified by Jews and Christians. For this reason, the Koran presents these prophets only from the Islamic perspective: Thus, Abraham, for example, becomes the builder of the Kaaba (2:127) and is portrayed as Allah's prophet who struggles against the polytheism of his countrymen by destroying their idols – a mirror of Muhammad's situation. Jesus in the Koran emphasizes the duty of (Islamic) alms-giving and pleads that he is only a servant of God; he refuses to be called God's son (5:116-117). Therefore, when Muslim partners in Muslim-Christian dialogue emphasize that they "accept" biblical persons such as Abraham or Jesus Christ, indeed even venerate them, then that means that only the Koranic perspective on Abraham or Jesus has validity, while Abraham and Jesus, in the way they are portrayed in the Old and New Testaments, find no acceptance at all.

But even in regard to the end of all things, Islam is placed before all other religions. According to the Islamic view of the endtime, Jesus, who, in the prevailing view of Muslim theology, was not crucified at the end of his life, but rather was carried away alive to Heaven, will return to earth once again, but this time as a prophet of Islam. After the renewed and final summons to Islam and the subsequent destruction of all Christian symbols, he will take his place for ritual prayer behind the imam in the praying community, and will perform Islamic prayer. This event marks the end of the concurrent existence of multiple religions: In eternity, only Islam will exist, and then all human beings can live together in peace.

Sources of Islam: Koran and Tradition

The Koran

The term "Qur'an" presumably comes from the verb "qara'a" ("read, recite"). Thereby, allusion already is made to the original form of presentation – reciting aloud. We find the exhortation "Read!", or "Recite!" especially at the beginning of Sura 96 (1 and 3): "*Recite in the name of your Lord …*" The tradition describes the course of revelation as a similar process and states that Muhammad was overwhelmed by acoustic and optical impressions and that the angel Gabriel communicated God's message to him, which Muhammad then had to pass on to others.

The Koran certifies itself as the eternal Word of God, as the only pure revelation, as a copy of the "Mother of Scripture" preserved in Heaven. The Koran is in every respect comprehensive: "*And we have sent the Book down to you to explain all things*…" (16:89). It is a "book" or a "writing from God" (Arabic: kitab Allah), a "*book that makes things clear*" (43:2), a "wise book" (Arabic: al-kitab al-hakim), a "*message for the God-fearing*" (69:48), and a revelation sent from above (40:2) that may not be doubted (2:2).

On the one hand, the Koran insists on its unadulterated nature; on the other hand, it concedes that Satan several times "threw in" false revelations among those received by Muhammad (22:52). Muhammad "forgot" several of the verses revealed to him (2:106), or God later changed the revelation (16:101). The final version, however – so one can say in summary – is, in the Muslim view, the complete Word of God that is beyond any doubt and any historical criticism.

As "proof" of the divine character of the Koran, Muslim apologists have cited its internal logical cohesion, as well as its linguistic perfection. Also, its lack of inner contradiction and the agreement of all its statements of substance with the latest findings in the natural sciences and technology, as well as the fulfillment of all its prophecies, are put forward. For Muslim apologists, further "proofs" for the truth of Islam lie in the perfection of the

Koran, the moral integrity of Muhammad, and in the emergence of an Islamic congregation that was able to expand quickly to encompass large parts of the earth.

Structure and Content

At the very beginning of the 114 suras (chapters) of the Koran stands the "Fatiha", or "The Opening". This is a kind of introductory prayer. The other 113 suras are not arranged according to their content, but rather according to their length: the longest suras are at the beginning and the shortest at the end. Also, within each individual sura, one theme is not dealt with systematically and cohesively. Rather, the sura consists of thematic sequences of one or more verses. Accounts such as those, for example, of the creation of Heaven and earth can follow individual regulations concerning Islamic marital or inheritance law, which in turn are followed by verses about one of the prophets, such as Abraham or Moses, and then several verses about a battle fought by Muhammad's followers. Thus, the individual suras, as a rule, deal with a multitude of subjects that in most cases stand next to each other without any thematic connection or transition. An exception is Sura 12, with the title "Yusuf", which tells the story of the life of Joseph – also a prophet of Islam in the view of the Koran – in chronological order.

In Arabic editions of the Koran, to be sure, one finds information at the beginning of each sura about which verses stem from Muhammad's time in Mecca (610-622) and which come from the Medina period (622-632), but this classification is only a very rough division that was derived later using internal textual criteria, and thus does not represent an objective dating of the material. Every sura carries a title as a heading that does not always stand in any discernible relationship to the following content. Some suras begin with the "mysterious letter", one of a series of letters whose meaning has not been deciphered to the present day.

The Compilation of the Koran

To the present day, quite essential parts of the history of the compilation of the Koran are still a mystery. The fact that the Koran did not exist completely in written form at the time of Muhammad's death – in contrast, though, to several suras, since the Koran itself uses the term "sura" (2:23) – is undisputed even among Muslim Koran scholars. The tradition reports

that the process of the compilation of the Koran began under the first caliph after Muhammad's unexpected death, Abu Bakr (632-634), and in the aftermath of several battles, in which many of his companions who are said to have known parts of the Koran by heart lost their lives. (This last point is very much disputed by Western scholars of Islam.) According to the Muslim view, the editing of the Koran reached a provisional conclusion under the third caliph, 'Uthman (644-656), with a uniform fixing of the text and the destruction of all manuscripts deviating from it.

No manuscript of the Koran from the early period of Islam has been preserved into the present. The oldest Koran manuscripts, from the fourth and fifth Islamic centuries (the tenth and eleventh centuries according to the Christian calendar), contain neither vowels nor diacritical marks that clearly distinguish individual letters from each other. For this reason, these manuscripts appear to have been used less as straightforward texts than above all as mnemonic aids for an otherwise known text; they do not offer an unambiguous commitment to a particular reading of the text.

The Arabic Language

The Koran emphasizes the special significance of the Arabic language (e.g., 20:113). While the revelation earlier was sent already to other peoples in their own languages, when God sent them a "messenger", "warner", or "leader" (13:7), God now has transmitted his message to the Arabs, too, in their own language as a "*book that makes things clear*" (43:2), for "*every people has a messenger*" (10:47).

On the basis of this Koranic finding, the Arabic language plays a quite important role for Muslim theology, too. If God has revealed Himself in a perfect manner in this language, then the Arabic of the Koran must be an expression of the highest perfection and unsurpassed linguistic beauty. Theology has found a concept for this, the concept of linguistic "inimitability", which for centuries made it unthinkable to allow the necessary process of breaking down the text into individual letters for printing. For this reason, the Koran for a long time not only was copied exclusively by hand, but also was not translated into other languages, since a translation no longer was considered to be a real Koran, but rather merely an approximate expression of its content. Thus, on many an endpaper of a German edition of the Koran, the subtitle is not "Translation", but rather "The approximate Meaning of the Koran", and even in conversation with Muslims it is often the case that only an Arabic Koran is valid as a text that can be taken as a basis for discussion.

As a consequence of the many years without a translation and of the judgment of Arabic as God's language of revelation, the understanding of the content of the Koran is quite essentially bound to a mastery of the Arabic language. Thus, the learning of the Koran in the Koran school worldwide takes place in Arabic; a translation or explanation of the text, at least on this level, is not provided, although among the ca. 1.2 billion Muslims worldwide only about 250 million people speak Arabic as their mother tongue. To the present day, a comprehensive critical commentary on the Koran does not exist in any language; the same is true for an historical-critical treatment of Islamic history or the history of the origin of the Koran.

Arabic, however, is not only the language of the Koran, but also of the tradition – the reports about Muhammad and his prophetic companions – as well as of the relevant theological commentaries and legal interpretations. Every believer must have a certain command of Arabic in so far as he or she desires to carry out daily ritual prayer, fasting, or the pilgrimage to Mecca and for these purposes must recite Arabic prayers and Koran verses correctly. A completely valid worship of God, as well as the access to essential sources and interpretations of the Koran, thus is possible only in the Arabic language.

Aspects of the Content of the Koran

The Koran relies to a great extent on biblical accounts and, in the process, outlines a cyclical image of history. In the view of the Koran, history constantly repeats itself, above all in the sending of a series of prophets as heralds of Islam, beginning with Adam and ending with Muhammad. The prophets warn the people about polytheism and summon them to worship of the one God, a call that most do not want to follow. God justifies His prophets by sending a chastisement (a flood, and earthquake, lightning) and many people die. Later, the people once again go astray and worship idols, and God once again commissions a messenger (cf. 89:6-14, 53; 29:40; 7:97-99).

The span of contemporary history discussed in the Koran comprises merely twenty-two years. History before Muhammad is, to be sure, touched upon but not really recounted. The Koran goes into the history of earlier peoples in a quite general way without, however, anchoring the narrative in history by providing dates or by naming places and events. The Koran ends abruptly with Muhammad's death; the era of the caliphs – Muhammad's successors – and the further development of history up to the

end of the world hardly come into view. The time before and after Muhammad's appearance also is of no significance at all for the Koran; important to it is exclusively the discussion of Muhammad's work on the Arabian Peninsula.

The Reverence for the Koran

Not only is the content of the Koran above every criticism and every single doubt in the view of Muslim theology, but also each individual copy of the Koran is treated with great respect and reverence. In some countries, severe penalties are applied in cases where the Koran text is destroyed or soiled. The Koran may be touched only by those who are in a state of purity. In the fasting month of Ramadan, it is read by many Muslims from beginning to end; some verses are used also for magical purposes as a means of warding off injury or as a force providing a blessing.

The Koran is considered the chief source of all knowledge, for which reason a scientific career – at least a theological one – even today frequently begins with a detailed study of the Koran. The Koran may be criticized just as little as God Himself, for it conveys not only God's Word, but it is word for word God's own revelation. Even to pose critical questions about the Koran – in regard to the history of its origins or its content – shifts the questioner into the vicinity of godlessness and heresy. The only possible attitude toward God and His Word is humble submission on the part of the believer, not critical questions or even accusations. Since up to the present no Enlightenment in the European sense has taken place as yet, the one who attempts to interpret the Koran in a modern sense quickly can lose his teaching position or even his life. One of the most recent example is the Egyptian theologian Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, who at present lives and teaches in exile in the Netherlands after a formal divorce from his wife was pronounced against him in Egypt because of his studies on the Koran and after he thereby was declared *de facto* to be a heretic.[19]

The Tradition

The tradition (Arabic: hadith) contains reports about Muhammad, his family, and the companions of the Prophet. These narratives are considered

[19] Cf. his own account in Nasr Hamid ABU ZAID, *Ein Leben mit dem Islam*, as told by Navid KERMANI, 2. ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau/Basel/Vienna, 2002).

to be fundamentally inspired by God and to be just as binding in all legal questions – for example, in the marital law discussed there – as the Koran. In all non-legal questions, the believers are instructed to imitate the exemplary "custom" practiced by Muhammad (Arabic: sunna) in all things whenever possible.

The tradition is considerably more extensive than the text of the Koran and in many questions can be understood as an explanation of, and a supplement to, the instructions in the Koran, which are sometimes very short. Some reports discuss events from early Islamic history; others Muhammad's habits and opinions (for example, his likes and dislikes in personal matters such as questions concerning food and clothing). Other texts, again, deal with the details of religious practice (such as the required ablutions before ritual prayer); others regulate legal questions, for instance concerning property law and economic law (for example, the prohibition on usurious interest). Some texts contain regulations concerning marital and family law (for example, the prohibition on marrying two sisters at the same time).

Thus, if the tradition disapproves of men wearing gold and silk – because the one who loves such adornment in this world will not wear it in Paradise – and reports that Muhammad, for this reason, wore only a silver ring, then it is appropriate for men in their imitation of the exemplary "custom" practiced by Muhammad to wear silver jewelry exclusively. If, however, the tradition lays down that the one who has fallen away from Islam deserves the death penalty, and reports that Muhammad himself carried out the death penalty against apostates, then this becomes a legally binding regulation of the Sharia – even if it is applied in practice in only a few Islamic countries.

If the tradition can claim the same authority in legal questions as the Koran, then the question of the authenticity of the individual traditional texts is naturally of great significance. When, after Muhammad's death, numerous stories about Muhammad's supposed or actual statements and instructions came into circulation in the Muslim congregation, the danger of an overgrowth of the historically tangible by the legendary was quickly recognized. For this reason, Muslim scholars established criteria that decide about the authenticity of a traditional narrative. The supreme prerequisite for the recognition of a traditional text was not the "probability" of its content, but rather the impeccable, that is, unbroken chain of the tradition (Arabic: isnad) reaching back to Muhammad or to one of his companions, as well as the reported transmission of the relevant content via various strands of tradition and the good reputation of the informant.

The development reached a provisional conclusion between the eighth and ninth century. Muslim scholars, after strict examination of authenticity, recognized six collections of traditional texts as canonical, which contain several thousand – in part, however, thematically overlapping – individual texts and which remain valid for Muslims to the present day as an impeccable traditional legacy in faith and law. The two oldest and most significant collections originated in the ninth century and come from ’Abd Allah ibn Isma’il al-Bukhari (ca. 810-870 AD) and from Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (died 875 AD). They are complemented by the collections by Ibn Maja (died 886), Abu Da’ud (died 889), at-Tirmidhi (died 892), and an-Nasa’i (died 915).

The Teachings of Islam

Who is God?

God is one, and no one is like Him: this is the focus of the Koran's doctrine of God. God is eternal and omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. He is the creator and judge of every human being and in no aspect can be compared with His creatures. He remains hidden in His transcendence and is inconceivable for human beings and beyond their experience. He is not the father of His children, since fatherhood requires a "family" relationship between God and human beings that is unthinkable in Islamic theology.

Yet, the Koran describes God as kind and compassionate, as the provider and preserver of human beings, and even says of the human being that God is *nearer him than his own jugular vein* (50:16). Because of His goodness, the human being owes God gratitude, reverence, and submission. The human being is called to acknowledge his position as a servant of God, and to live according to God's commandments.

God sends signs to human beings (for example, through His creation) and admonishes and warns them, above all through the Prophets. After death, God sits in judgment of every human being, who God will judge fairly according to the human being's faith and acts. Then the books will be opened and the works of each human being will be weighed on the scales (23:102-103). Whether God will be gracious toward a particular human being and will let him enter Paradise in the end cannot be predicted because of God's omnipotence and sovereignty. The human being during his life retains no more than the hope in God's compassion (26:82). There can be no final certainty, for it would not befit the human being to anticipate God's decision.

In some passages, the Koran even speaks about God's love. However, it attaches preconditions to this love, which the human being can fulfill only when he first has subjected himself to God: *"On those who believe and work deeds of righteousness will (Allah) Most gracious bestow love"* (19:96), and *"For Allah loves those who do good"* (3:148).

In regard to God's compassion and love, serious differences in regard to the biblical message arise here: In numerous biblical books, it is emphasized that God not only bestows love or acts in a loving way, but that He Himself *is* love (1 John 4:8, 16), a *"God of love"* (2 Corinthians 13:11). God's love for His creatures did not remain a merely theoretical quality, but rather became the motive and motor of God's action in history, which reached its highpoint in His sending of His son, Jesus Christ: *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son…"* (John 3:16). Jesus, the Son of God become flesh, was *"the love of God manifested in us"* (1 John 4:9). Only because God, the source of all love, bestows His love upon human beings is the human being able to love God and his neighbor. Jesus terms this the greatest commandment: *"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind… You shall love your neighbor as yourself"* (Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18; quoted in Matthew 22:37-39). Because, in the biblical understanding, there is no alternative to love and love is to extend to all people, indeed even to the enemy, this love is not permitted to remain only pious wishful thinking, but rather must be put into practice in the same way as God's love became manifest in Jesus Christ.

What is the Human Being?

The human being is to be considered basically as a "servant" or "slave" (Arabic: 'abd): *"Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to (Allah) Most Gracious as a bondman"* (19:93). The human being is the creation of God whose faith and gratitude toward God are examined throughout his earthly life (2:52).

Although the human being was created by God, God did not make His creation in His own image, as, in contrast, Genesis 1:27 formulates it. Creator and creation are fundamentally different from each other and cannot be placed in a relationship with each other.

The human being is caught in his creatureliness and is subject to restrictions (he needs food, water, and sleep). He cannot establish any real relationship to God, for an encounter between God and the human being would be possible only on a common level, which, however, is unthinkable in the Koranic conception. God does not reveal Himself, He merely sends His message – a book –, but He never emerges from the hiddenness of the other side, from His transcendence. An incarnation of God and a voluntary surrender of the Son of God to human beings is, according to the view of the Koran, unthinkable because of the sublimity of God.

The human being, thus, is instructed by God to believe and to do what is right, that is, to observe ethical guidelines. The Koran thus assumes a fundamentally more optimistic view of the human being than does the Bible, which considers the human being as a sinner incapable of doing what is good.

Sin and Forgiveness

In comparison with the Bible, the analysis of the problem "From where comes the evil in the world?" is much less dramatic in the Koran, but the solution is also less fundamental. While the Bible assumes that the human being in his rebellion against God is himself the real problem (Mark 7:21) because he is separated from God since the Fall and because evil lives in him, the Koran explains the problem by stating that evil approaches human beings from the outside, through the whisperings of Satan. If the human being listens to the devil and then sins, then he harms only himself (2:27), but never God.

Just as in the Old Testament, the Koran contains a Paradise narrative (7:19ff.) that roughly follows the account in Genesis: Satan seduces the human being, but Adam asks for forgiveness for his lapse, and God promises him His forgiveness and the human being henceforth is barred from Paradise – so the similarities between the biblical and Koranic accounts. In the Koran, though, Adam draws the surprising conclusion that he and his wife have sinned only against themselves (7.23), but not against God. In the view of the Koran, the relationship between God and the human being was destroyed just as little as was the relationship between human and human (or man and woman). The human being brings neither sin nor death into the world. He, thus, is able, even after the Fall, to keep God's commandments, if he does not believe the whisperings of Satan and does what is good. Because he neither has been separated from God nor fallen into sin, it is now his responsibility to orient his life and actions on the instructions given by God. He, of course, can become weak and can give into temptation, but he is not fundamentally lost for this reason.

In the biblical understanding, on the other hand, the human being is guilty and completely dependent upon God's grace, the undeserved gift of His forgiveness. In the understanding of the Koran, the human being can do what is good when he just decides to do so. What happens, though, when the human being does what is evil? Then he must perform good works as compensation and hope in God's compassion – entry into Paradise is not guaranteed.

Will God be merciful to me, the sinner? This question always can be answered in Islam therefore only with "insha Allah": "If God so wills". On the other hand, the Koran speaks of the forgiveness for the one who regrets his sins, would not like to commit them again, and performs atonement. Nevertheless, the omnipotence of God and His absolute freedom of action remain, and these allow no predictability in regard to His forgiveness. Only the martyr will enter Paradise directly and also without being subjected to questioning by the tomb angel after his death (4:74).

Ethical Instructions

The Koran formulates ethical instructions that are to be observed in dealing with others, as well as religious duties toward God that everyone has to fulfill. Among the ethical commandments is, for example, the prohibition against the pre-Islamic practice of burying newborn girls alive out of the fear of impoverishment (17:31), for every child is a creature and gift of God. Further, the Koran obliges the faithful to honor their parents and forbids their children to disdain them in their old age (17:23-24). It provides instruction to be kind to the poor and needy (17:26), not to rob orphans (17:34), to avoid lascivious and adulterous behavior (17:32; 24:2), not to depend upon riches and possessions (17:30), not to defraud or to break contracts (2:177), not to be arrogant (17:37), to slander no one (17:36), and not to rob anyone (5:38). Sura 2:177 summarizes in a classic text: *"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces in prayer towards East or West, but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts that you have made; and to be firm and patient, in suffering and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing."*

The Foundations of the Faith: the Unity of God, the Angels, the Books, the Prophetic Nature of Muhammad, the Life to Come, and the Judgment

The fundamental consensus in the question of what doctrinal content within Islam is considered as comprising the indispensable tenets of the faith always has been relatively limited. Except for the short confession

"There is no God except Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet", there is but little doctrinal content that is considered as binding by all Muslim theologians. The belief in God, the existence of the angels, the earlier revelatory texts, the prophets as the messengers of God, and the Judgment belong to this content. Frequently, the belief in predestination is added to this list, but this belief already is included in a certain sense in the belief in the omnipotent God.

This agreement on only a few binding tenets of doctrine also is rooted in the fact that no supreme doctrinal authority binding for all groups exists in Islam, not even for segments such as Sunni or Shiite Islam. To be sure, individual theologians have exerted a far-reaching influence through their commentaries on the Koran, legal opinions (fatwas), or through their teaching and preaching activity at a higher theological school or a mosque, but they, however, possess no special authority by virtue of their office.

The Five Pillars of Islam

The idea that God is the creator and cause of all things is taken up again and again in the Koran. God creates belief and unbelief; He guides whoever He wants, and He lets stray whoever He wants (6:125; 16:36-37, 93). The observance of the "Five Pillars of Islam" is one of the fundamentals of the faith in Islam. In the opinion of Muslim theologians, whoever denies their legitimacy or willfully and constantly refuses their observance has left Islam and, strictly speaking, is to be considered as an apostate – even if such neglect of the religion is prosecuted only in exceptional cases.

Every religious exercise – prayer, fasting, pilgrimage – begins with the "declaration of intent" (Arabic: niyya) by which the one praying or fasting declares which action he subsequently will perform. Then follows a ritual purification, a "partial" purification comprising the washing of the feet, arms, hands, and head when only a "minor" impurity is present (such as is automatically caused, for example, by sleeping or even touching a person of the opposite sex). After a "major" ritual uncleanness – for example, through sexual intercourse – a complete washing of the body is necessary. Without a declaration of intent and without ritual purification, the subsequent religious act is invalid and is as though it had not taken place at all.

The Confession

"There is no God except Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet". So is the confession of faith that is inseparably bound with Islam and with the life of every Muslim. It is a component of the call to prayer and of prayer itself as well as the confession used upon conversion to Islam. It is whispered into the ear of the newborn baby, and also the dying person speaks it shortly before his death. If this is no longer possible, then the confession is recited to him, so that after his death he can remember it when he is questioned by the death angel. According to folk Islamic notions, a power of blessing is inherent in the confession of faith.

Prayer (Arabic: salat)

In Islam, there are different kinds of prayer. The most important and the only prescribed prayer is the compulsory ritual prayer that is to be prayed by every Muslim adult five times a day in Arabic while facing in the direction of Mecca. Of much less significance is free prayer, in which every Muslim can turn to God at any time, as well as various pre-formulated prayers that have been handed down above all by mystics.

Ritual prayer requires the observance of numerous regulations so that it is valid before God. These regulations concern the preparation for and the performance of the prayer. First, the ritual washings must be observed and the regulation clothing worn. Men must be covered at least from the navel to the knees; women must be covered completely with the exception of the face and hands. The one praying requires a rug or other foundation that separates him or her from the dirt of the ground below. He or she must direct his or her prayer toward Mecca and must perform it at the exactly prescribed time, which changes daily according to the position of the sun. At other times of day – exactly at sunrise or sunset – ritual prayer is forbidden. Women may neither pray nor fast at times of their impurity (menstruation or during the lying-in period).

The first ritual prayer of the day is required before sunrise, the second prayer after sunrise, then toward midday, before sunset, and finally after sunset. At certain times of the year, when the sun rises early, the first morning prayer can begin as early as 3:20 a.m. and the second can follow at around 5:00 a.m. or 5:30 a.m.

The order of prayer – kneeling down, prostration so that the forehead touches the floor, the praise of God spoken in Arabic, and the blessing

upon Muhammad – also is prescribed precisely and must be observed in exact detail. Any interruption or any deviation of any kind from the prescribed order makes the prayer invalid; it then must be begun anew. Children are to pray from approximately the age of seven and to have command of prayer by the age of ten. From this time, prayer is an obligation for them and, at least in strictly orthodox families, is not placed at their discretion.

The most important day of the Islamic week is Friday, even if this day is not a holiday in the real sense of the term. Friday presumably was market day in Medina so that it readily lent itself as a day for the assembly of the original Islamic congregation.[20] Friday prayer in the Friday mosque, the largest mosque in a city, is of special significance. Attendance at midday prayer and the following two-part sermon is obligatory for all adult men, but not for women, however. The Friday sermon frequently takes up current or political questions along with devotional subjects, and the sermons by well-known preachers are recorded on cassette tapes and distributed.

Fasting (Arabic: saum)

Several different forms also are to be distinguished in regard to fasting. The thirty-day fast in the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, has the greatest significance. Ramadan is observed in memory of the sending down of the Koran (2:185) and is understood as an annual recurring test by God.

As soon as the sliver of the new moon has been sighted by the religious authorities of a country, the beginning of the fasting month is proclaimed. All Muslim adults are called on to abstain from eating and drinking, perfume and cigarettes, intimate relations, and, if possible, medication from sunrise to sunset or when *"the white streak of dawn appears to you distinct from the blackness of night"* (2:187). Indecent speech and immoral acts also are to be refrained from in this period. Ramadan should be characterized by humility, patience, restraint, and self-discipline. Many Muslims in this period study the entire Koran and visit the mosque repeatedly in this period.

The "Night of Power" (Arabic: laylat al-qadr) has special significance. According to prevailing opinion, this night is supposed to be the night from

[20] WATT/WELCH, *Der Islam*, p. 296.

the twenty-sixth to the twenty-seventh of Ramadan, a night that is said to be filled especially with salvation and blessing (44:3; 97:1-5).

After sunset, the fast may be broken – traditionally, with an odd number of dates and some water. Afterwards, the family gathers for an often especially good and plentiful meal. After a last meal shortly before sunrise – for which a crier or a drummer awakens the people – a new fasting day begins. Thus, during Ramadan, public life shifts into the evening hours or the night, while during the day the pace of life is considerably slower.

Ramadan ends after about thirty days with the "Feast of Fast-Breaking", the second most important feast in the year after the Feast of Sacrifice. Special foods, visits from relatives, gifts to the children, new clothes, and also a donation to the poor are an integral part of these festivities for many families.

Always exempt from fasting are children below the age of seven, pregnant women, nursing mothers, women at the time of their impurity, travelers, the sick, and those performing heavy labor. All of these, however, with the exception of the children, must make up the days of fasting later. Old people and the fatally ill can either ask a relative to fast on their behalf or give alms as compensation.

Along with the fasting at Ramadan, there is the additional, voluntary fasting that, in principle, is possible at any time except on those days on which fasting expressly is forbidden, such as, for example, the Feast of Fast-Breaking.

A third form of fasting is penitential fasting, a religious act of penance for a sin that has been committed. Thus, the Sharia prescribes that for the killing of a human being that is not expiated through retribution, blood money should be paid and two months of additional fasting should be performed.

Alms (Arabic: zakat)

Care for the poor through the contribution of a portion of one's own possessions is one of the earliest commandments in Islam (92:5-11). Alms should not be given in full sight of others (2:264), but rather in secret, for God. Most theologians are of the opinion that 2.5% annually is demanded from Muslims as a contribution to the poor, but this amount is seldom collected by the state. Most alms, thus, are given at one's personal discretion. Alms are to be given to the poor and needy or to be used for the extension of Islam, but can also benefit travelers, jihad fighters, or the slave, whose

freedom can be bought with them. The poor are considered especially at the times of the major feasts such as the Feast of Fast-Breaking and the Feast of Sacrifice. Also during Ramadan, the feeding of the poor at the evening breaking of the fast takes place in many towns in the public squares or in mosques. But, apart from the major feasts and the fixed percentage of contributions, the Muslim faithful also always should be generous toward the needy, and should not defraud or rob the orphans and the defenseless (83:1-3; 4:2, 10).

The Pilgrimage (Arabic: umra or hajj)

In regard to the pilgrimage, two different kinds are distinguished: the minor pilgrimage (Arabic: umra) and the great pilgrimage (Arabic: hajj). The goal of both is Mecca. The minor pilgrimage, in contrast to the great pilgrimage, can be carried out at any time of the year. The number of required rituals is much smaller and it also requires no animal sacrifices at the conclusion of the ritual activities.

The goal of the pilgrimage is the Ka'ba, in its foundations originally from the pre-Islamic period and today a cube-shaped empty building in the inner court of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. It is draped in a black cloth embroidered with Koran verses, which is replaced every year. In the eastern corner of the Ka'ba, a black stone – presumably a meteorite – in a silver setting is let into the wall. Every pilgrim to Mecca will attempt to touch this stone, in order to receive the power of blessing that is said to be inherent in it.

To complete the great pilgrimage to Mecca once in a lifetime, if at all possible, is one of the religious duties for men and women. In the last month of the lunar year, Dhu-l hijja', nearly two million pilgrims from all parts of the earth set off for Mecca, enter into a state of consecration upon their entry into the holy district around Mecca, and carry out a number of rituals that, in part, have their origin in the pre-Islamic period and are fixed in detail. The multitude of uniformly-clothed pilgrims from all parts of the earth illustrates to the pilgrim the worldwide dissemination of Islam. At the same time, the pilgrimage takes place in memory of Abraham who, in the Muslim view, is said to have established the Ka'ba, a reminder of the primeval nature of the religion of Islam.

The pilgrim walks around the Ka'ba several times at a slow and then a fast pace. The symbolic stoning of the devil in a town near by Mecca,

Mina, occurs in memory of the fact that Satan intended to dissuade Abraham from sacrificing his son. Then follow rapid marches and slow wanderings to different locations near Mecca where certain events in Islamic history or in the life of Muhammad are commemorated, which in each case are accompanied by prescribed prayers and actions. At the end is the sacrifice of an animal in memory of the sacrifice of the son of Abraham (37:102ff.). With this Feast of Sacrifice – which those remaining at home also celebrate with the slaughtering of an animal – the pilgrimage ends. Many Muslims afterwards visit the city of Medina and Muhammad's grave there.

The performance of the pilgrimage means not only the fulfillment of a religious duty. Since it is assumed in folk Islam that a pilgrimage, and especially prayer in the Grand Mosque in Mecca, expiates all a human being's sins and, in contrast to prayer at home, is an incomparably more meritorious act, many older people perform the pilgrimage, for which they in many cases have put aside their savings during their entire lifetime. The pilgrimage is at the same time a reminder of the transience of human life. Usually, the pilgrim takes the unhemmed robe that he wore during the rituals with him on his return journey home, where it is used later at his burial. The one returning now bears the honorary title "hajji" (as a woman, "hajja") and is especially respected. Water from the well or dust from the forecourt of the Grand Mosque in Mecca are considered to be filled with the powers of healing and blessing and are used especially in the healing of the sick.

The Five Pillars of Islam, on the one hand, structure the believer's private exercise of religion, but also are always a communal confession. Juxtaposed to prayer at home is the communal prayer on Friday, which brings the congregation together. Fasting takes place at home during Ramadan, to be sure, but the commonality of fasting becomes plain in the slower pace of public life and in the common celebration of breaking the fast. Alms, likewise, have a private as well as public character; the same is true of the confession of faith that is an element of daily prayer. And, the pilgrimage is to an extremely high degree a communal experience that also, by virtue of the Feast of Sacrifice, which is celebrated not only by the pilgrims but also by all Muslims at home, at the same time possesses a familial component.

Jihad and Da'wa

Sometimes, jihad is added as a sixth pillar to the five mentioned above. The term does not stand for "Holy War", but rather for "making an effort" or "struggling on the path of Allah". Jihad can mean any kind of effort made on behalf of the cause of Islam, whether by peaceful means – here, above all, the promotion of Islam – or with the help of armed conflict and war, which Muhammad also conducted in Medina to help Islam to assert itself (9:41; 49:15).

The promotion of Islam, the "da'wa", means the "call" or "invitation" to Islam – in a certain sense the equivalent to Christian mission. For example, propaganda for Islam is made at an open house in individual mosques, through promotional appearances in the media, or through the dissemination of the Koran and literature in non-Muslim countries. In countries of the two-thirds world, especially in Africa, aid dependent upon conversion to Islam is provided as a form of "da'wa" (for example, medical treatment, enabling school attendance, or access to drinking water), as is also the awarding of scholarships for study at a higher theological school in an Arabic country.

The militant version of jihad, in accordance with the model of Muhammad, serves really as a form of defense against aggression against, the suppression of, and the threat to the Muslim "umma", the community, by its enemies. Problematic, of course, is the unequivocal interpretation of the facts in each case. Does the USA threaten the Muslim "umma" through its global policies, and are the airplane attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 for this reason a legal act of defense? Does the Israeli nation, by the mere fact of its existence upon the soil of Palestine, represent a suppression of the Muslim community, and are, therefore, suicide attacks even against women and children in the name of Islam justified, even commanded?

The answers to these questions differ widely. The majority of Muslims condemns suicide attacks and attacks on innocent people. But, at the same time, the example of Muhammad, the warrior for the cause of Islam, who after all is to be emulated in all things, carries great weight. In addition, the Koran contains several exhortations to fight against and to kill the "infidels" (2:216), and thus presents no general renunciation of violence against those who believe differently as, for example, the New Testament. In addition, in the Koran the martyr is promised direct entry into Paradise (3:195), while all the other faithful must first endure a meticulous questioning by the tomb angel and perhaps even a time of punishment. The martyr, thus, is the only one who on this side of death already obtains certainty about the

Hereafter: *"Think not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. Nay, they live, finding their sustenance in the Presence of their Lord"* (3:169).

Is then Islam a peaceful or a belligerent religion? It can be both – the answer depends on the interpretation of the Koran's instructions concerning the dissemination and defense of Islam.

Judgment, Paradise, Hell

Paradise and Hell are described quite graphically in the Koran. Human beings enter into Paradise or Hell for eternity. After death, there is no longer any possibility to accept Islam. Whoever in his lifetime has submitted himself to God must fulfill two conditions: *"… believe and do what is righteous"* (26:227). Meant by "believing", of course, is first of all belonging to Islam; "doing" refers primarily to the observance of the Five Pillars. Only the believer can hope in God's compassion in the Last Judgment, for every person will be judged by God after his death in regard to his belief and his actions.

No one except God Himself knows (7:187) when the Judgment, which the Koran calls *"the Hour"* (30:12), will take place. Several eschatological signs will precede the Judgment (27:82; 18:83-98). The tradition speaks of the fact that Jesus will return to earth once again after the "Antichrist" will have led many people astray. Jesus will kill the Antichrist and will take his place at communal prayer behind the imam (the prayer leader). He, thus, returns as a prophet of Islam.[21] Then, the dead will rise from their graves and the Judgment begins. Only when the one examined was of the Muslim faith and when his good works outweigh the evil ones on the scales is he permitted to hope for entry into Paradise. No one will be able to provide an excuse for his unbelief before God, for God has sent signs and prophets to every people as a warning, and will judge with absolute fairness.

The believer hopes for intercession in the Judgment, which the Koran appears to suggest in several passages (19:85-86; 2:255). In folk Islam, the notion also exists that Muhammad, the saints, or angels can intercede just as well as the martyrs for those persons who they would like to take along with them into Paradise.

In Paradise, the *"Gardens of Bliss"* (56:10-26), reclining thrones, especially magnificent clothing, golden jewelry and pearls, water and wine,

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[21] Hermann STIEGLECKER, *Die Glaubenslehren des Islam*, 2. ed. (Paderborn, 1983), pp. 740-745.

milk and honey, fruits and meats, youths and virgins of Paradise (44:54), as well as the *"good pleasure of God"* (13:15) await the faithful. There, the pardoned live free from lies and sin, no longer experience sadness, and do not get tired.

The Koran also describes the agonies of Hell very graphically. Heat, fire (74:27), the scorching of the skin (4:56), and bodily anguish (25:34; 22:21) are portrayed effectively in the Koran. Hell and Paradise lie so near to each other that the condemned can speak with the saved (7:43), but the pardoned are not able to help the condemned in any way.

The Supernatural World: Satan, Angels, and Demons

The Koran assumes the existence of angels and spirits (Arabic: jinn) and the work of Satan, or the devil, whereby the last two terms obviously are used interchangeably.

The spirits already were an important component of old Arabic folk belief in the pre-Islamic period. The Koran takes up these notions of the work of the spirits, which occurs to the harm or to the benefit of human beings. The spirits were created by God (6:100) from smokeless fire (15:27); they can become Muslims or choose unbelief and condemnation to Hell by either believing their messenger or rejecting his mission (6:130).

The notion of the "jinn" and the defense against them, or the invocation of them, is of great significance in folk belief. Their effects on human beings are feared, and places where it is believed that spirits live (cemeteries, ruins) are avoided, especially at night. If a person is considered to be possessed by a jinn, then in folk islam it is believed that he must be freed of it with the help of a specialist who employs magical rituals. So that a jinn cannot seize possession of a human being in the first place, various protective practices are employed for children and adults, for example, amulets, blue pearls, or symbols in the form of an eye.

The angels mentioned by name in the Koran are Michael (or Mika'il) (2:98) and Gabriel (Jibril) (2:97). At the beginning of human history, all the angels prostrated themselves before God; only one refused out of arrogance to do so: Iblis, the Satan (15:26-34). The angels have the task of bearing the throne of God (69:17); they praise God (2:30; 39:75) and ask for forgiveness for human beings (42:5). They will be inhabitants of Paradise along with human beings and will serve God there (13:23). Some angels are the guardians of Hell (66:6); others are God's heralds who are sent to human beings. And, the death angel also is mentioned in the Koran, who

"brings back" the human being to God (32:11). The tradition adds the fact that two angels constantly accompany every human being. One angel sits on his right shoulder, the other on his left shoulder. They record what works the person concerned performs during his life. Two special angels are the tomb angels, Munkar and Nakir, who examine every person after his or her death by putting him or her through a meticulous questioning about his or her faith, direction of prayer, prophets, and confession.

Satan, who along with the name "Iblis" is also called "Shaytan" in the Koran, likewise plays an important role. He was driven out of Paradise because of his arrogant refusal to fall down before God and came to earth, where he is permitted to continue doing harm to human beings by suggesting evil to them. "I seek refuge from the Satan who has been stoned" is thus a frequent figure of speech used by those believers who reckon with Satan's activity, but who would not like to give into his attempts at seduction.

The Prophets

The Koran reports in greater detail about circa twenty-five prophets – dependent upon how they are counted – and mentions a further fifteen only briefly. The most important prophets in the view of the Koran are Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. The prophets (or "messengers") have special significance in the Koran. They are the bearers of God's message who warn human beings about the consequences of their polytheism and admonish them to live their earthly lives with an eye to the Hereafter. God enables every prophet to perform a miracle – the so-called "qualifying miracle" – that provides evidence of his divine mission. In about the tenth century, Muslim theology proclaimed all the prophets of history to be sinless, although the Koran in several passages reports that individual prophets had prayed to God for forgiveness for the wrong they had committed: Adam (7:23), Noah (11:47), Abraham (14:41), Moses (28:16), David (38:24), and Muhammad (110:3; 48:2). The tradition also contains individual reports about Muhammad's lapses.[22] The prophets are valued especially by God and will assume a special rank – even higher than that of the saints, martyrs, and angels – in Paradise.[23] The belief in the prophets is one of the fundamentals of the Islamic religion.

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[22] See, for example, a report in STIEGLECKER, *Die Glaubenslehren,* pp. 477f.

[23] STIEGLECKER, *Die Glaubenslehren,* p. 707.

In view of Muhammad's original assumption that the message he proclaimed was identical with the Jewish and Christian writings, and in view of a presumably lively "dialogue" with Jews and Christians in the first years of his proclamation, it is not surprising that the Koran contains numerous reports about the prophets and models of the faith from the Old and New Testaments. Of course, the Koran pays no attention at all to the specific circumstances and the different times in which the biblical persons concerned lived and were active. It is only the always identical mission of the prophet, that is, to warn his people about polytheism, that is of interest for the Koran. In this way, the biblical prophets are reduced by Muhammad to "types" or stereotypes who lay the foundations for his own mission as the last prophet in this series (so, for example, Noah in 10:72 or Joseph in 12:101).

Different Schools of Thought Within Islam

Sunnis

Muhammad's unexpected death in 632 A.D. left the Muslim community without a codified text of the Koran, without a completed compilation of tradition, without a systematic Islamic law set down in writing, and without a regulation of the succession in the leadership.

For this reason, a conflict developed immediately after Muhammad's death around the question of the succession, from which those emerged victorious who had taken the position that a capable military leader from the tribe of the Quraysh, who was to be elected and confirmed by a council, had to become Muhammad's successor. This group was designated later as the "Sunnis", and they today comprise the majority of all Muslims worldwide. From their midst came, initially, the first three caliphs ("successors") (they ruled from 632 to 656) before the competing Shiites were able to seize power for a short period under the fourth caliph, 'Ali (656-661). With his murder in 661, the rule of the "four righteous caliphs", and thereby the "Golden Age of Islam", in which the secular and spiritual power over the entire Muslim community was united in one hand, ended.

After 'Ali's death, the Sunni dynasty of the Umayyads (661-749/50), with their center of power in Damascus, was able to win power. They were followed by the likewise Sunni Abassids (750-1258) in Baghdad. Both dynasties made the office of caliph hereditary. In the Muslim empire, which already shortly after Muhammad's death was extended to the borders of Europe and Central Asia, however, they were able to assert their power only partially. They had to resign themselves to the fact that, in parts of the Muslim world where influential families assumed local positions of power, there were opposing rulers (sultans, and even caliphs). The rule of the Abassids began to disintegrate beginning in the ninth century. Caliphs and opposing caliphs ruled until the Ottomans (ca. 1299-1923/24) were able to bring the Islamic world under their regency. They even ruled over the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Their greatest shortcoming, however, was the fact that, in the Arabic view, they really were not entitled

to be rulers over the Islamic "umma", since they did not belong to Muhammad's tribe of the Quraysh, and indeed were not even of Arabic origin.

With the founding of the Turkish Republic through Kemal Atatürk in 1923/24, the institution of the caliphate finally came to an end. Different groups repeatedly strove for a return to the caliphate in order, once again, to create a secular-spiritual rule transcending all national and confessional borders. This rule, considered as ideal by many Muslims, was, however, never realized.

Shiites

The Shiite community, today a minority of approximately 10-15% of all Muslims, is divided into several sub-groups. The most important grouping is that of the "Twelver Shiites", who revere a series of twelve infallible, sinless imams from among Muhammad's descendents. The last imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, is said to have been carried away into a state of concealment in the year 874. It is expected that he will reappear on earth at the end of times as the "Mahdi" (that is, the righteous one), as a savior and as a ruler of the end times.

The Shiites, named after the "shi'a" (that is, the party) of 'Ali, the nephew and son-in-law of Muhammad, with whose daughter Fatima he was married, took the view in regard to the question of the succession that only a direct relative of Muhammad could be the latter's successor because the power of blessing rests only on this relative and on no other. Since at the time of Muhammad's death, none of his sons was still alive, the nearest descendents would have been the sons of his daughter Fatima (died 632), his grandsons al-Hasan (died 670/78) and al-Hussein (died 680), who, however, were still children at the time of Muhammad's death and, for this reason, were not eligible as the latter's direct successors. Therefore, the Shiites initially tried to position Muhammad's son-in-law, 'Ali, as successor. As justification for their claim, they asserted that, before his death, Muhammad had called 'Ali to his deathbed and had made him his successor. They claimed that he had wanted to dictate his decision in the matter, but that his followers thought that he already was near death and, for this reason, did not carry out his instructions – whereby there thus existed no written evidence of any kind for Muhammad's alleged preference for 'Ali as his successor.

For this reason, 'Ali became the fourth caliph (656-661) only after the deaths of the three Sunni caliphs Abu Bakr (632-634), 'Umar (634-644),

and ‘Uthman (644-656). After ‘Ali’s death, the Shiites attempted to secure rule for themselves on a permanent basis, and to this end, fought the battle of Kerbela in the year 680 under the leadership of the Prophet’s grandson, al-Hussein, against a numerically superior Sunni army. Al-Hussein and, with him, the Shiite community were defeated. This event is the dramatic highpoint of Shiite history. Since the year 963,[24] the Shiite community commemorates this event yearly – in the month, Muharram, of al-Hussein’s martyrdom – with tragedy plays and processions. In the Shiite view, the actors and the spectators, through their own self-castigation and their weeping for al-Hussein, have a part in the redemption that his suffering achieved.

In the course of Islamic history, the Shiite community was able to win power only in isolated cases. The Fatimids – founders of Old Cairo and the al-Azhar University – were Shiites as well as the Safavids, who held power in Iran from 1501 to 1722. Today, Iran is the only country in which the Shiite school of Islam is the state religion. In Iraq, the Shiite portion of the population forms the majority; in Lebanon, it is said to be 40%, in Bahrain 70%, and in Afghanistan and Pakistan 20%.[25]

The Shiite school differs from Sunni views in several doctrinal questions, for example in the affirmation of temporary marriage (“mut’a” – marriage) that is concluded for a limited time and that is rejected overwhelmingly by Sunnis as a form of prostitution. Most crucial, however, is the Shiite understanding of righteous government. While this, for Sunnis in general, presupposes the establishment of the Sharia and the rule of an elected righteous leader who enables a life according to the strictures of Sharia for his subjects, Shiites hold to the model of the imamate. The office of imam is considered to be a continuation of Muhammad’s function and supposes a sinless imam (“leader”) ruling in concealment who exercises a mediating role between God and human beings and issues instructions to the Shiite community.

Thus, in Shiite Islam, a central concern is spiritual instruction from out of the realm of concealment. Secular – and all the more Sunni – rule is for this reason, according to classic Shiite doctrine, godless and unjustly usurped. Genuine rule belongs to the imam, from whom the highest Shiite scholar receives instruction from the world beyond.

Shiites go on pilgrimage, above all to the graves of Shiite imams, among which the graves of ‘Ali in Najaf near Kufa and of al-Hussein in Kerbela

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24 Wilfried BUCHTA, *Schiiten* (Kreuzlingen/Munich, 2004), p. 65.

25 So BUCHTA, *Schiiten*, p. 60.

assume a special position; many Shiites consider these pilgrimages to be a replacement for the pilgrimage to Mecca, which replacement Sunni theology, of course, rejects.

As a rule, a rivalry exists between Sunnis and Shiites, indeed, in part, a bitter hostility. Both groups pray in most cases only in their own mosques, and consider some faith convictions of the other group as heresy. During the Shiite commemorations of the death of the grandson of the Prophet, the first three (Sunni) caliphs – in the Shiite view, wrongful rulers – are not seldom cursed. In earlier times, festivities in commemoration of the murder of ‘Umar, the second caliph, are said to have been held, in the course of which a straw effigy of ‘Umar was burned.[26] Also, the traditions that go back to the companions of the Prophet and the first three caliphs have no normative significance for Shiites; they recognize only the traditions of the Prophet’s family. And, when Shiites say that only the one who knows and accepts the imam of his time is a true believer,[27] then this amounts *de facto* to an “excommunication” of the Sunni majority.

Kharijis

A third group involved in the conflict following Muhammad’s death were the Kharijis (“those who go out”), who took the view that the family origin of the ruler was insignificant so long as he was a capable military leader. They stood initially on the side of the Shiites, but later separated from them (therefore their name) and became politically insignificant.

Alevis

The Alidis or Alevis, not to be confused with the Alawis (or Nusairis), represent a sub-group of Shiite Islam. Alevis live primarily in East Anatolia and revere ‘Ali, the fourth caliph, as well as twelve imams. The most important holy man for the Alevis is Haci Bektash Veli. The Alevis observe neither the Five Pillars of Islam nor the commandments of Sharia. Thus, they do not fast during Ramadan, but rather during the short half-month of Muharram. Likewise, they reject the prohibition of alcohol and

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26 BUCHTA, *Schiiten*, p. 60.

27 Werner ENDE, „Der schiitische Islam“, in: *Der Islam in der Gegenwart*, ed. Werner ENDE and Udo STEINBACH, 5. newly revised and expanded ed. (Munich, 2005), pp. 70-89, p. 82.

pork, polygamy, and the requirement of the veiling of women. Alevis do not have mosques, but rather houses of assembly (Cemevi), in which men and women celebrate the worship service together. Perhaps 400,000 people from Turkey profess the Alevi faith in Germany.

Ahmadiyya

The Ahmadiyya movement is, to be sure, a young movement, originating only at the turn of the twentieth century in the Indian-Pakistani area, but its influence extends to many – also Western as well as African – countries.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (ca. 1839-1908), the founder of the movement, proclaimed beginning about 1880 that he was a messenger and had received a revelation from God. He described himself as a messiah, as Krishna and Jesus returned to earth, as the Mahdi and reappearance of Muhammad. In 1902, he proclaimed to his followers that he had received the word of God that matched the words of the Koran. Thereby, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad broke with the view of the Koran that Muhammad had been the last prophet in history (33:40).

The movement split into two groups in 1914, after the death of the successor of the founder. A "moderate" branch that judged Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as merely a reformer established its headquarters in Lahore. The "more extreme" wing, which agreed completely with the founder's claim of his prophetic office, remained first in Qadiyan, Pakistan, and is settled today in London.

The Ahmadiyya movement was expelled from the Muslim community in 1974 by the Pakistan National Assembly at the behest of Saudi Arabia. Since then, it is considered officially to be a non-Muslim group, while its members consider themselves to be true Muslims and condemn Muslims from other schools of thought as infidels.

The Ahmadiyya movement is persecuted, especially in Pakistan. Many of its members have applied for asylum in Western countries. The group always has distanced itself from violence and a combative understanding of jihad.

The Ahmadiyya movement, however, also stands for an extremely harsh critique of Christianity. Several polemical texts against the Christian faith and the West also have been published in European languages. In the movement's view, Jesus was taken from the Cross in an unconscious state and was afterward revived, whereupon he emigrated to Srinagar. There, he

is supposed to have established a family and to have died at the age of 120 years.

Above and beyond this, the Ahmadiyya movement advocates an exceedingly strict observation of the Islamic teaching of religious duties, gathers in its own mosques, imposes relatively high levies on the members of its faith community, and holds a very conservative view regarding the role of women.

The Ahmadiyya movement, which claims a certainly much too highly estimated membership of twelve million for itself, is very active in mission in Asia and Africa, but also in Western countries, disseminates literature and its own editions of the Koran, and in the last few years has made application in Germany for the construction of several large mosque centers.

Mysticism

Already in the early Islamic period – possibly as early as during Muhammad's life[28] – there must have been individual spiritual personalities who gathered students and followers around them in the effort to experience God in a personal, internalized, and mystical way above and beyond the observance of the religious regulations anchored in Sharia. Mysticism does not necessarily mean a rejection of, or contempt for, Sharia, but rather a further development of religious practice beyond the literal observance of the individual regulations.

The basic concern of mysticism is, through renunciation, obedience, contemplation, and asceticism, to abandon the desires of this earthly life and to align one's entire being, desiring, and loving with God. The goal of mysticism is the love of God, that is, the complete surrender of one's own will and being, the approach to God, and finally the merging of the God-seeker with God Himself.

This highest stage of the reception of God into one's own self assumes a long spiritual journey that is begun under the direction of a master, a Sheikh; it includes vigils and fasting, self-castigation and obedience in sincerity, self-knowledge and repentance, poverty and trust in God, thankfulness and knowledge of God, and, as the final goal, the destruction of

[28] So Fritz MEIER, „Der mystische Weg", in: *Welt des Islam. Geschichte und Kultur im Zeichen des Propheten*, ed. Bernard LEWIS (Braunschweig, 1976, reprint Munich, 2002), pp. 117-140, p. 117.

one's ego-soul (Arabic: nafs) in order, finally, to be able to become one with God.

Mystics already in the early period of Islam gathered around a spiritual master, of whom it was believed that he had supernatural powers at his disposal and was able to make contact with persons from the world beyond. A master, together with his followers, founded a brotherhood (Arabic: tariqa) whose members from the tenth century on lived in monasteries in accord with self-imposed rules. Orders were called into life beginning in the twelfth century, such as, for example, the Naqshbandiyya Order, founded by Muhammad Naqshband in Buchara in the fourteenth century, the Qadiriyya Order founded by the philosopher and jurist 'Abd al Qadir Gilani (1088-1166) in Baghdad, as well as the Bektashiye Order founded by Hajji Bektash in the Ottoman Empire presumably in the twelfth century. The orders are organized in a strictly hierarchical manner. The novice is examined especially in regard to absolute obedience and the willingness to subject himself. He is instructed step by step and is initiated more and more into the inner circle of the knowledgeable.

The "contemplation of God" (Arabic: dhikr) as a form of meditation is of central significance for the mystic. Some orders practice it loudly (through the constant repetition of the divine name Allah or the prophetic name Muhammad), others in silence, others by dancing, and still others with singing or musical instruments (official Islam permits neither music nor dance during the worship service). The goal is always ecstasy, the separation from the world on this side, and immersion in the world on the other side, in order to commune with God and with Muhammad.[29]

From the eighth century on, these "God seekers" also were called "Sufis". This name probably goes back to the woolen robes worn by the mystics, for "suf" means "wool". The teaching and practice of the Sufi orders exhibit not only Islamic elements, but also ideas drawn from Christian mysticism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

On the basis of their views and faith practice, which were judged as syncretic, many mystics came into conflict with representatives of official theology, indeed, some even suffered persecution and death. The most important martyr from the mystic movement is certainly al-Husain ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (born 858), who was executed in the year 922 after he had proclaimed that God lives in all things, that is, also in human beings, and that the human being thus becomes God.

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[29] So Annemarie SCHIMMEL, *Mystische Dimensionen des Islam. Die Geschichte des Sufismus* (reprint: Frankfurt am Main/Leipzig, 2003), p. 369.

Folk Islam

Certain customs, convictions, and practices of living Islam, which are in part in competition with and in part in contradiction to official Islam and the theology of the universities and mosques, are understood under the concept of "folk Islam". Many of these practices are linked with magic, many with exorcism and conjuring. The phenomenon of folk Islam is not necessarily linked with a certain educational level, although, where the essential content of the Koran and theology are not known, it may be given even stronger expression. Inexplicable illnesses and deaths, however, in general are attributed to the effect of the "evil eye", which causes harm through the eye of the envious person. Amulets, Koran verses, blue pearls, animal bodies, symbols of the five-fingered hand, or slippers still are used as means of warding off the effects of the spirits that wish to do harm to human beings. A further area of folk Islam is the keeping and veneration of relics such as, for example, the hairs of the beard or items of clothing once belonging to Muhammad.

A central concern of folk Islam is the perception of the power of blessing (Arabic: baraka), in which a believer must share in order to protect him- or herself from evil, sickness, death, infertility, and misfortune. This occurs through the use of amulets (pearls, Koran verses, silver jewelry) or of holy objects (for example, the dust from the court of the Ka'ba) and through the recitation of the confession of faith or through the reading or the touching of the Koran, in which, according to general perception, a great power of blessing is inherent.

Inseparably connected with folk Islam is the veneration of the saints, and this, in turn, is connected inseparably with the burial cult. It is not uncommon that leaders of the mystic orders, who stand in contact with the supernatural, are considered to be saints already during their lifetimes. After their deaths, their graves become places of pilgrimage not only for the members of the order concerned. At times, it is even forgotten who is buried at the location in question. Sometimes the name of the man – more seldom, also, the name of a woman – is known, but otherwise nothing more about the person of the saint or martyr. This is, in a certain sense, unimportant for the living, since a power of blessing is inherent in the grave, a power of which one can avail oneself beyond the death of the one buried there. This power makes the petitioner, upon whom the power of blessing connected with the saint devolves, just as agreeable to God as the saint himself. Whoever comes into contact with a saint at his grave and has

received help from him in a concrete predicament also hopes for his intercession with God in the Hereafter.

Although the strict monotheism of Islam actually contradicts calling upon the saints, and although official theology indeed constantly prohibits such practice, vows are made at the gravesides of the saints, sacrifices are offered, help is implored, prayers for the blessing of children and for the healing of the sick are offered, and even minor pilgrimages are made to the graves everywhere in Islamic countries, the only exception being Saudi Arabia. Mysticism as well as folk Islam are the expression of the profoundly human desire for a concretely-experienced presence of God and for help in times of trouble.

Islam: Culture and Society

The Lunar Calendar

The Islamic calendar is oriented on the lunar year, which, with its 354 days, is about eleven days shorter than the solar year. For this reason, the twelve Islamic lunar months, six of which comprise twenty-nine days and six thirty days, migrate backward through our lunar year. This has the consequence that the fasting month of Ramadan also migrates through the seasons and in the summer, when there is about eighteen or nineteen hours of daylight per day in many parts of the Western world, makes very high demands on those who fast. The varying lunar calendar, however, also leads to the circumstance that a birthday on the ninth of Rajab, for example, says nothing about whether the person concerned was born in winter or on summer. In the discussion about the introduction of an Islamic holiday in Western countries, it also ought to be kept in mind that its date would change every year. If, for example, holidays would be set for the Feast of Sacrifice or the Feast of Fast-Breaking, then these sometimes would fall in spring and sometimes in the fall, and indeed even could coincide with Christmas or Easter. Since, in addition, the beginning and end of Ramadan is announced only immediately before these points after the crescent of the moon has been sighted, it would be impossible to calculate the actual date of the holiday several years in advance.

For this reason, it can come as no surprise that birth dates and birthdays have no tradition at all in Islamic countries. Not even the year of birth is known for most of the significant personalities in Islamic history; statements differing from each other by up to seven or eight years are not at all a rarity. Up into the modern period, birthdays were hardly ever recorded, at least not in those places where they are not officially registered, and even mothers themselves sometimes can provide only the approximate season of the birth of their children.

The Mosque

The mosque (Arabic: masjid) is the "place where one prostrates oneself" (Arabic: sajada, "prostrate oneself"), that is, the place of communal prayer. The first mosque presumably was Muhammad's residence in Medina, which served as a place of assembly for the first congregation. In principle, prayer can be performed anywhere as long as the place concerned allows ritual purity. Mid-day prayer on Friday, however, must be performed by all adult men in the largest mosque of the town, in the so-called Friday mosque.

The mosque is not only a place of assembly. It is frequently a place of teaching and instruction, of political discussions or state announcements. Soup kitchens for the poor can be attached to mosques, and today also bookstores, hairdressers, and women's, youth, or sports clubs. In some mosques, relics from Muhammad, his companions, or saints are kept.

A mosque includes an anteroom in which the visitors remove their shoes so that the dust from the street is not brought into the building. Larger mosques can possess a forecourt with an arcade, in which a spring or washing facilities for ritual cleansing frequently are found. The floor of the prayer room itself is covered with carpets, on which those praying kneel down in rows behind the imam, the prayer leader. The mosque contains, in addition, a prayer niche (Arabic: mihrab) that marks the direction, toward Mecca (Arabic: qibla), of prayer. Friday mosques also have a pulpit, possibly several lamps or Koran stands for Koran-school instruction, and the walls perhaps are decorated with tiles and mosaics or Koran verses running the length of the walls. On the basis of the prohibition of images in Islam – not strictly practiced, but at least generally accepted for mosques – pictorial representations of persons, or statues, are never found in a mosque. In some mosques, however, one can find a schematic illustration of the Ka'ba.

In most countries, women have access to the mosque; they pray, however, separated from the men, on an upper floor or in a cellar room, seldom in the rear part of a mosque. A woman should not enter the mosque during the time of her "impurity" (menstruation, lying-in period). Other theologians take the view that a woman should perform prayer at home if at all possible; some would like to prohibit her fundamentally from taking part in prayer in the mosque.

The Headscarf and Clothing Regulations

As a rule, the manner in which people clothe themselves in Islamic countries expresses more and has greater significance than in the Western world. Colors and items of clothing symbolize in part a particular theological rank or a descent reaching back to Muhammad's family. The white, unhemmed cloth of the pilgrim, as well as the black turban of the scholar, has symbolic power.

Not only the color of the clothing can be of significance; great value also is placed on cleanliness. If a less wealthy person may wear frayed clothing, attention still is paid to cleanliness, since dirt makes one ritually unclean. The washing performed before every kind of ritual practice of religion points to the significance placed on purity.

Children are clothed from the beginning in a manner specific to their sex. Girls in conservative areas quite early wear dresses and skirts, but never pants. Boys there wear pants that reach at least to the knee. The clothing worn by the woman or the man expresses not only individual taste, but also an attitude – conservative or "modern". A beardless face and Western clothing may indicate a tendency toward liberality, and, in the view of some Muslims, even permissiveness and immorality. A longer beard and Muslim clothing are worn in most cases in conscious imitation of Muhammad's conduct of life and frequently are an expression of a conservative orientation.

In the opinion of many Muslim women, covering with a coat or a headscarf identifies a respectable woman, while an additional covering of the neck, hands, or face signifies a particularly conservative bearing in the personal conduct of life. To veil oneself – in the Western view: to be required to veil oneself – is for many Muslim women not a sign of oppression, but rather a self-conscious demonstration of belonging to Islam, of the distinction from the (frequently judged as immoral) West, and an expression of dignity. The views among Muslims about what constitutes respectable clothing (a headscarf, a covering overgarment, or a cape covering the entire body) diverge widely and the practice in individual countries is quite different.

In Turkey is it true that women are forbidden to wear the headscarf in public institutions, a fact which repeatedly offers the opportunity for debate. In Western countries with Muslim minorities, too, the headscarf or the covering of the head of the woman – especially when it is worn by state employees – has become a political issue. Is the headscarf a religious or a political confession of Islamism? Is it prescribed according to the Islamic

teaching about religious duties, or is wearing it placed at the discretion of individuals?

The relevant Koran verse on the covering of the woman is in Sura 33:59 (cf. 24:31): "*O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad). That is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested*." Neither this nor any other Koran passage defines more exactly which article of clothing could be meant by "outer garments". Muslim women who themselves do not wear the headscarf advocate the view that the Koran orders merely the covering of the woman – in contrast to explicit clothing – but does not prescribe the covering of the head. Other Muslim women argue that a covering of the body and a covering for the head are obligatory when leaving the house, so that the woman may be recognized as an honorable woman and may not be molested.

In principle, the woman is the one who is responsible for maintaining public morality. She must safeguard it by clothing herself in an appropriate manner, speaking with no one, if possible, and not spending time in public places "without a reason", in order not to lead men into temptation and thereby endangering the stability of the society. She is the bearer of family honor, which she easily can bring into danger through illicit conduct. The koranic instruction "*And stay quietly in your houses*" (33:33), thus, is so interpreted in conservative areas so that, for women, the preferred place to stay is the house, while the public sphere to a great extent remains reserved for the men.

A certain covering which conceals a person's "'aura", that is, the private body parts, is prescribed also for ritual prayer. For men, this body area is understood to reach from the navel to the knee. In the view of conservative theologians, the "'aura" of a woman, in principle, consists of all body parts. In another view, the face and hands may remain uncovered for ritual actions.

The Woman and the Family

In Islamic countries, women have quite varied rights and opportunities that are defined not only through the laws in each country, but also just as well through the very pronounced gap everywhere between city and country, the differences in the level of education, and the measure of conservative piety in the family concerned.

For all the differences in the practical conduct of life illustrated by an independent female lawyer or female doctor in Ankara and a nomadic woman in the Algerian desert, Islamic marital and family law as defined by Sharia still determines the position of the woman quite considerably. Since Sharia in all Islamic countries is one, or even the only, foundation of legislation (Turkey forms an exception) and the emphasis of the Sharia, in turn, lies upon marital and family law, the legal position of the woman in the Islamic world is determined primarily by the guidelines of religious legislation in the marital and domestic spheres. This, in turn, was laid down in the Koran and tradition and interpreted by leading theologians of the early period of Islam.

In some countries today, efforts are under way to improve the situation of the woman and, for example, to raise the minimum age for marriage or to make the traditionally quite simple divorce more difficult for the man. A fundamental reform of domestic legislation, however, is not an easy task when, at the same time, the Sharia is considered to be inviolable, perfect divine law for all times and for this reason fundamentally may neither be changed nor replaced by laws made by human beings.

In accordance with Sharia, women are placed at a disadvantage. An example of this is in inheritance law, since they basically inherit always only half of that which a masculine family member would receive. It is likewise in marital law. The great number of marriages even today still are arranged unions in which the woman has only a limited right of decision in the matter – and sometimes none at all. Sharia provides for discrimination against women also in divorce law, for traditionally the man can divorce himself from his wife through the pronouncement of a divorce formula such as "I repudiate you", while the woman on her part always must bring a court action and prove that her husband is guilty of severe misconduct.

Beyond this, Sharia discriminates against women in the matter of childhood care, since the father fundamentally is considered as the legal representative of the child and the mother traditionally possesses personal responsibility for the care of boys only to the age of seven and of girls only to the age of nine or twelve. Afterwards, she no longer has rights of representation of any kind for her children. Here, too, a series of countries in the meantime have undertaken improvements.

A characteristic of Islamic marital law is polygamy. The majority of Muslim theologians sees fundamental permission for polygamy in Sura 4:3: "… *marry women of your choice* (or: *as you wish*?), *two or three or four…*" A minority detects a warning against polygamy in this verse because it continues: "… *but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal*

justly (with them), then only one…" The Indian Koran exegete Yusuf Ali (1872-1953) comments upon this Koran verse as follows: "*The unrestricted number of women … is here limited strictly to a maximum of four, provided that one can treat them in a completely equal manner… But, since this condition is very difficult to fulfill, I understand this recommendation as tending to monogamy*."[30] Except in Turkey and in Tunisia, where polygamy was abolished in 1926 and 1956 respectively, it is in principle possible for a man in every Islamic country to enter into a second or third marriage. Today, however, several countries have erected corresponding hurdles – as, for example, the proof of the economic means to support a second family.

Even if, in many places, the expectations placed in marriage are surely different than in the Western context, and improvements in the legal status of the woman have been undertaken in numerous countries, the manifold forms of discrimination against women in law still remain to the present as a hindrance to the implementation of universal human rights in Islamic countries.

Muslim apologists, to be sure, assume that men and women in principle have equal rights, since they are created equal by God and also possess identical religious duties, primarily the Five Pillars of Islam. But, it is said, it becomes clear already on the basis of the nature of the human being that differing tasks have been assigned to the man and the woman by God in accordance with their respective biological characteristics – to the woman the care of children, and to the man the earning of the means for living. From these different tasks, different rights also were derived. This, they say, does not mean any discrimination against women, but rather justice between the sexes.

Therefore, in this view, there can be no discrimination if the two pillars of Islamic marital law – the obligation of the man to earn the means for living, and the obligation of the woman to be obedient (especially in sexual matters) – are considered as essential and unrelinquishable. The Koran also underlines this duty to obey: "*Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient*" (4:34), for "*… men have a degree (of advantage) over them*" (2:228). In the opinion of most theologians, the husband according to Sura 4:34 (quoted below) possesses the right to reprimand his wife as a means for teaching her, or even to punish her, although he may not seriously injure or damage her in the process: "*As to those women on whose part you*

[30] Quoted without source information in BOBZIN, *Koran*, p. 82.

fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) chastise them (lightly)!"

In many places, religious and cultural values go hand in hand and cannot be separated clearly from each other. Thus, the circumcision of girls practiced in some African countries (and still today – with a high number of unreported cases – in Europe) is originally an African custom known as early as the pharaonic period. However, Islam has picked up and continued this custom in African countries so that, in African-Islamic societies, millions of women are circumcized in the name of chastity and so are subjected to a cruel practice of mutilation.

In comparison with the pre-Islamic period, Muhammad certainly improved the situation of women by restricting polygamy as well as the man's right of repudiation, and by granting women a right of inheritance – albeit a reduced right. The problematic nature of Sharia legislation concerning marriage and the family lies in the fact that the laws that might have been progressive in the seventh century were elevated to the status of a divine social order valid for all times and all people. It is not only that the conduct of Muhammad's wives as the "mothers of the believers" is considered to be normative for all women after them up to the present day, but also the exegesis of the early Islamic jurists and theologians.

In probably all Islamic countries, there exists in the meantime a women's movement that demands more rights for women. This women's movement, however, on the whole does not advocate the abolition of Sharia or the suppression of religion. Rather, it justifies its demands by citing the "correct" exegesis of the Koran and charges theology with an interpretation of the religious scriptures that is false and favors men.

Apart from polygamy, the woman's duty to practice obedience, and the man's right to discipline, one of the essential differences between a Christian and an Islamic marriage lies in the fact that the latter recognizes no petition for the blessing of God. Marriage is not a religious action, but rather a contractual agreement that, with the regulation of the dowry, quite concretely arranges the details of a possible separation in the case of divorce. In addition, neither is the promise of faithfulness on the part of the marriage partners formulated at the time of marriage, nor is the promise given to care for the marriage partner precisely in "bad times". Should these "bad times" (incurable illnesses, prison sentences, impotence, childlessness, etc.) actually occur, then they are generally considered in Islam as recognized grounds for divorce for both men and women. The conclusion of a marriage, thus, does not mean the life-long, exclusive commitment to a human being. And, the idea of a spiritual relationship before God – mar-

riage as a service-oriented association – also does not lie at the core of marriage in Islam, but rather the regulation of mutual rights and duties, such as the claim for support and obedience, as well as the legalization of the marital relationship and the children from this relationship. And, finally, the Islamic marriage contract does not contain any promise to "love and to honor" the marriage partner, for Islam does not impose an obligation to love upon either marriage partner, as the Bible formulates this for men and women (Ephesians 5:28), but also for the congregation and society.

Feasts and Customs

The two most important feasts on the Islamic calendar are the "Feast of Fast-Breaking" (Arabic: 'id al-fitr) at the end of Ramadan (also called the "Sugar Feast" in Turkish), and the Feast of Sacrifice (Arabic: 'id al-adha') at the end of the month of pilgrimage, the tenth of Dhul l-hijja. The Koran mentions neither feast, but the tradition does so. The celebrations of these feasts are considered as meritorious before God. They last several days and are celebrated extravagantly with the extended family.

The Feast of Fast-Breaking requires extensive and time-consuming preparations in the kitchen, since the women prepare dishes and baked specialties for it according to traditional recipes. The children receive new clothes and gifts for the feast – in part, also money – and the families visit each other, in increasingly broader circles according to the degree of relationship. The poor receive special alms and the mosques are visited, sometimes also the graves of the dead.

The Feast of Sacrifice forms the conclusion of the pilgrimage to Mecca, and is celebrated there by the pilgrims with the ritual slaughter of a sheep or a goat for a family, or of a camel for several families. Those who have not conducted the pilgrimage also prepare themselves at home for the Feast of Sacrifice and also slaughter an animal. Many families in Western countries buy imported ritually slaughtered meat; others slaughter an animal themselves or obtain meat from a Muslim butcher. It is one of the religious commandments in Islam to distribute a portion of the meat to the poor. In Mecca, where tens of thousands of animals are slaughtered at the end of the pilgrimage and the hot climate would let the meat spoil quickly, a large portion of it is frozen and delivered to state organizations for later distribution. Many pilgrims delegate the entire process of slaughter and distribution to such an organization, and for this pay a pre-determined sum, whereby the religious duty is considered as fulfilled.

Another religious holiday is the celebration of Muhammad's birthday (Arabic: mawlid), which, out of ignorance of his birth date, was moved to the day of his death, the twelfth of Rabi'I, and is observed in many countries with parades and processions. These birthday celebrations are only of relatively late origin – they go back presumably to the twelfth century – and for this reason were condemned by many theologians as an inadmissible innovation, as "heresy" (Arabic: bid'a).

Beyond this, Muhammad's journey to heaven is celebrated on the twenty-seventh of Rajab. This feast is a reminder that Muhammad is said to have ascended to Heaven one night in Jerusalem on a ladder into the presence of God and to have spoken with God. In addition, the 'Ashura Feast on the tenth of Muharram has special significance. On this day, the sufferings of al-Hussein are commemorated with tragic plays and processions and with self-flagellations and collective weeping at the death of the grandson of the Prophet. Furthermore, the birthdays of locally-venerated saints are celebrated at the relevant locations.

Funerals

At the approach of death, the dying person will perform the ritual washings, in so far as he or she is at all able to do so. Koran verses are recited and, when possible, the last words of the dying person should be the confession of faith.

After death has occurred, the lamentation for the dead is started and the deceased is ritually washed and perfumed. A female corpse may be washed only by a woman, a masculine one only by a man. Only martyrs should be buried unwashed in their blood-spattered clothing.

After washing, the deceased is to be buried in white linen cloths on the same day as death, if possible. The funeral prayer is spoken, which includes the request for forgiveness for the deceased, as well as the appeal to the dead person to intercede with God on behalf of the living.

The funeral procession – consisting traditionally of men only – carries the corpse to the Muslim cemetery or burial ground, where it is buried lying on its right side. Those present fill the open grave and once again ask for forgiveness for the dead person, recite Koran texts, and once again speak the confession of faith to the dead person so that he or she is reminded of it on the other side.

Decoration of the grave and gravestones are not usual. According to the Muslim view, the peace of the dead may no longer de disturbed after in-

terment; for this reason, a Muslim burial ground may not be reused. In most cases, however, Muslim families transport their relatives who have died in Europe to their countries of origin.

Dietary Regulations

The most important dietary regulations in Islam concern the prohibition on the consumption of carrion, pork, and alcohol.

Meat is considered as "halal" (allowed) only when it was ritually slaughtered, which means that the neck vein of the non-anaesthetized animal was severed while God was called upon and was bled as completely white as possible. Numerous theologians, however, permit the consumption of meat that has been slaughtered by "people of the Book" (Jews and Christians). According to the majority opinion, thus, there is no unconditional necessity to consume exclusively meat that has been ritually slaughtered.

Pork is considered fundamentally to be unclean. All products made from pig bristles or pig skin are rejected likewise in most cases. In a genuine predicament – for example, in the face of threatening starvation – however, pork as well as carrion may be consumed, according to the opinion of leading theologians.

On the subject of alcohol, a gradual development can be detected in the Koran. The earliest Koran verses warn about an excess of alcohol that is reached when believers come to prayer in a drunken state (4:43). Later verses expand on this admonition and warn that, with gambling and alcohol, the damage involved is greater than the profit (2:219). And the verses presumably revealed at the latest point quite universally forbid the drinking of intoxicating beverages as an "*abomination and Satan's handiwork*" (5:90-91). The tradition, compiled temporally after the Koran, threatens those who drink alcoholic beverages with forty lashes, and, in another passage, with eighty lashes. For this reason, the consumption of intoxicating beverages falls in Islamic law under the category of capital crimes, the so-called "hadd" offenses, which have the most severe punishment as a consequence.

Islam and Politics

Islamism

Islam from the beginning was not just a religion, but also in the early period combined a religious as well as a secular claim to leadership in the person of its founder. The Islamic community became at the same time a political creation and Muhammad became its lawgiver, political ruler, and military leader. The Koran and also the Islamic tradition contain not only religious commandments, but also numerous regulations that concern life in the family and society – for example, inheritance and marital law – as well as the relationship of the "umma" ("nation, community") to religious minorities, to those under subjection (slaves), and to the state.

In this way, Islam presents a comprehensive claim, and really cannot be practiced as a purely private religion. When the religion provides certain regulations in regard to marriage, divorce, or the care of children, religious Muslims in a non-Islamic country, in which the Sharia is not the foundation of legislation, will always have the feeling that they are not able to live their faith completely. Even in an Islamic state, an Islamist (Islamic-political) opposition can form. It aims, through the imitation of Muhammad and the exact observance of all the commandments of Islam, to create an Islamic society, and rejects the – in its view, un-Islamic – government of its country and desires to establish a "truly Islamic" government.

Islamists are not to be equated with extremists ready to resort to violence. These comprise only a part of Islamism and are of the opinion that, after about 1400 years, the period of the peaceful invitation to Islam has passed. Now, it is said, the struggle against the "infidels" must be waged, and this the more so since Muslims in many parts of the world – but above all in Palestine – suffer injustice and oppression. For this reason, they say, the Muslim community must join forces to shake off the yoke of the enemy and to erect a society of justice and peace under the Sharia encompassing the whole world.

Islamists neither have remained stuck in the Middle Ages, nor are they "diehards" who do not reflect upon the realities of the present. In their desire to restore the original Islamic society, the "Golden Age" of Islam in which secular and spiritual leadership lay in one hand, they believe that Islam should be helped to full acceptance in every area of society. Modernity is not denied, but its achievements are judged from the perspective of their compatibility with Islamic principles, and are placed in the service of the complete pervasion of society with Islam.

Islamism is directed primarily against its own Islamic society, which is felt to be willing to compromise and which, it is believed, should be led back to the "real" Islam of the Koran and "sunna" (tradition). Islamists are of the opinion that only Islam gives identity and orientation to the "umma" (the Muslim community), and that Western influences must be suppressed. This occurs when all laws are aligned with the guidelines of the Sharia, for Sharia is considered as divine law that is to be given preference before all legal systems created by human beings.

Islamism in this form is a relatively young movement, and originated at the end of the colonial period early in the twentieth century. Some Islamistic groups became genuine mass movements – the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, founded in Egypt in 1928 – and in the course of the last century have become factors to be taken seriously in almost all Islamic and also Western countries. The local governments meet this political threat to their own legitimacy in part with repression and in part with integration into governmental responsibility. Some Islamistic movements developed extremist branches that are responsible for attacks, kidnappings, and coup attempts in several countries.[31] In a time in which Western powers intervene in the politics of Islamic countries perhaps more fundamentally than in the colonial period, Islamism and extremism experience new popularity. This is the case even more so when, under the claim of the "return to the Golden Age" of Islam, the promise is made to restore the unity and strength of the Islamic world, as well as to offer concrete solutions for home-made problems such as overpopulation, the educational malaise, unemployment, underdevelopment, lack of perspective, and mismanagement. From this perspective, the Western world is considered, on the basis of its social decay and its secularization, to be immoral and fundamentally inferior, since, with its humanly made laws, it is doomed to extinction.

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[31] A survey of these movements is offered, for example, by Gilles KEPEL, *Das Schwarzbuch des Dschihad. Aufstieg und Niedergang des Islamismus* (Munich/Zurich, 2002, reprint Munich, 2004).

Human and Minority Rights

The claim that Islam recognizes no human rights misses the heart of the matter. Declarations of human rights also have been formulated on the Muslim side, but these, of course, clearly differ from Western declarations. Muslim theologians emphasize that, in the discussion about human rights, the important point first of all is that God possesses rights in regard to human beings, and the human being has duties to fulfill toward God. Only after this is acknowledged can the rights of the human being be considered.

Islamic human rights declarations – as, for example, the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights from 1990 explicitly emphasizes – fundamentally can grant human rights only within the limits of Sharia, for, as is said, the Sharia can not be criticized by any human rights declaration drawn up by human beings. This means that Jews and Christians, as religious minorities in the Islamic state, possess, to be sure, the right of the exercise of religion – the Koran even characterizes them as wards or subjects to whom self-administration in exchange for payment of a head tax should not be refused (9:29) – but may not overstep the boundaries set for them by Sharia. That is, they neither may promote their faith in the Muslim community (proselytize) nor can they be the heir of a member of the Muslim community.

Whoever belongs from birth to the Christian community thereby enjoys religious freedom, albeit also a limited one. The case is different for the Muslim who would like to become a Christian – he has forfeited all his human rights, even the right to life, for the Sharia orders the imposition of the death penalty for the apostate. Whoever leaves Islam has not made a decision that might concern only his private life. In the eyes of most conservative Muslims he undermines the stability of the Islamic state and society by acting disloyally toward one of its main pillars, the Islamic religion. He thereby, in a certain sense, commits a public crime.

The Koran condemns the apostate and threatens him with punishment in Hell in the Hereafter, but names neither a judicial inquiry nor a penalty imposed during life on this earth. The tradition, however, orders the death penalty for all adult, mentally mature Muslims – views differ in regard to the treatment of women – who turn their backs on Islam intentionally and of their own free will. The fact that orders from Muhammad himself have been handed down which impose the death penalty upon apostates weighs especially heavily. He is supposed to have said: "*Kill whoever changes his religion!*"

In practice, however, a case of apostasy comes before the court only rarely. In most cases, the convert is threatened by his own family, which

believes it must wash away the shame, regarded as extremely great, through his banishment or killing. To be sure, legal proceedings, including the presentation of concrete evidence and the possibility for a return to Islam, strictly speaking must be brought to obtain a conviction in accordance with the guidelines of Sharia, but, in practice, a "rashly acting person" in general will not be punished at all or just as lightly as one who thinks that, through an "honor murder" of a woman in his family, he must restore the honor of all.

The "born" Jew or Christian, thus, has a right to life and existence in the Muslim state, but the "polytheist" in the classic view must choose between conversion to Islam or death. In spite of their fundamental right to exist, Jews and Christians under Islamic rule always were only second-class citizens, enjoyed limited rights, and were exposed to the constant pressure to convert to the majority religion, whether merely to attain equal rights or to be able to marry a Muslim woman. A marriage between partners of different religions is possible only when a Muslim man marries a Jewish or Christian woman – any other arrangement is forbidden according to Sharia – because the father determines the religious orientation of the family. The children issuing from these marriages always must be Muslims. Islam considers itself to be a tolerant religion because Jews and Christians enjoy a legally defined status that does not force them to conversion. The concept of tolerance is not used here in the sense of a recognition based on equal rights, but rather in the sense of the toleration of an inferior.

Islam as a Legal System: the Sharia

What is Sharia? A codified work of laws that one can buy and can consult in regard to certain offenses such as murder or adultery and the punishments provided for them? Not at all.

The Sharia is, on the one hand, written law, but, on the other, hard to comprehend clearly because of the range of its interpretation in individual questions. It is, on the one hand, an archaic system because, in its fundamental features, it goes back to the seventh to the tenth centuries A.D. But, on the other hand, it is also a flexible system of laws because it is repeatedly applied in concrete terms to modernity, that is, it must be interpreted.

The Sharia is understood as the totality of Islamic law as this was laid down in the Koran, in Islamic tradition, and in the interpretations of leading theologians and jurists, above all in the early Islamic period. It covers all the areas of human life. It regulates the religious sphere (prayer, fasting, pilgrimage), the interpersonal relations in society (family, inheritance, and marriage laws), but also criminal law. Thus, it regulates the "horizontal" relationships of the individual to his family and environment, as well as his "vertical" relationships to God.

The Koran is everywhere the first source of Islamic law wherever it gives legal instructions; the corresponding statements of the tradition are the second. Above and beyond these, the interpretations of these legal determinations from the Koran and tradition by early Islamic jurists and theologians are considered to the present to be decisive, especially the legal works of the founders of the four Sunni legal schools (Arabic: madhahib): Ahmad ibn Hanbal (died 855), Anas ibn Malik (died 795), Muhammad Idris ash-Shafii (died 820), and Abu Hanifa (died 767). They, or their students, are considered as the fathers and founders of the Hanbalite, Malikite, Shafiite, and Hanafite legal schools (or legal traditions) that developed from the circles of legal-theological scholars in the rapidly-expanding Islamic world empire in the first centuries of Islam. Since the end of the tenth century, there exists a far-reaching consensus that the four recognized sources for all legal decisions of the Koran, the tradition, the conclusion by analogy applied to new cases on the basis of known cases (Arabic: qiyas), and the consensus among the scholars (Arabic: ijma') should be decisive.

An essential component of Sharia is criminal law. Here, all offenses and their punishments are divided in most cases into three categories: the so-called capital offenses ("hadd" offenses), the offenses with retaliation ("qisas" offenses), and the discretionary offenses ("ta'zir" offenses).

The most severe punishments apply to the person who makes himself guilty of a capital offense, that is, who, through his capital crime, crosses a "limit" and violates God's law. Among the capital crimes are sexual offenses and adultery, slander because of sexual offense, thievery, highway robbery (armed robbery) with or without manslaughter, as well as the use of alcohol. All of these offenses are punishable with severe physical penalties: whipping with 40 to 80 lashes for alcohol use, 100 lashes for sexual offenses among the unmarried, the amputation of a hand or a foot for thievery, stoning for adultery. Capital offenses, however, also are subject to proceedings for the taking of evidence that are especially difficult to conduct. If neither a confession nor two male eyewitnesses – in adultery cases, no less than four – are at hand, then no trial may be conducted. Trials based on circumstantial evidence are rare. For this reason, capital offenses are brought to trial only extremely rarely. Especially where the suspicion of adultery exists, the crime will be punished primarily within the suspect's own family because of the shame connected with it, which is felt to be extreme.

Among the offenses with the possibility of retaliation are, above all, offenses involving physical injury, manslaughter, and murder. After the clear establishment of guilt and the designation of the authorized person, theoretically the same injury may be inflicted on the offender under the supervision of a judge; in cases of murder or manslaughter, he likewise may be killed. If the family concerned abstains from this procedure, then blood money is paid and, in addition, a religious penance is performed. Here, too, most cases of vendetta will not come to trial, but rather will be "regulated" privately. According to the instruction of the Koran, the matter is closed after a single act of retaliation. But, especially in areas in which tribal traditions still are very much alive, privately exercised retaliation and repeated retaliation can drag on over generations.

The overwhelming number of offenses according to this division falls neither under the capital offenses nor the offenses with the possibility of retaliation, but rather under the discretionary offenses, whose punishment lies in the discretion of the judge because the Sharia provides no guidelines at all for them. Offenses such as blackmail, kidnapping, document forgery, receiving stolen goods, or bribery belong in this category, for whose punishment the judge in principle has a great deal of leeway. He can pro-

nounce a mere admonition, or order a fine or a prison sentence. In exceptional cases, the judge – when no prospect of an improvement in the perpetrator exists – even can impose the death penalty.

The Sharia – and, with it, also Islamic criminal law – at no time ever has been applied fully. Individual countries have declared the re-introduction of Sharia: Iran in 1979 and 1983-83, Sudan in 1983, Pakistan in 1979, Libya and Yemen in 1994, and several northern federal states of Nigeria from 2000-2001; it has been implemented, however, only in individual cases.

Islam and Christian Faith – The Possibilities and Limits of Dialogue

The history of the relationship of Islam and Christianity is strained. Not only the Crusades, but also the "Turkish Wars", the colonial period, and the wars of the twentieth century influence the image of the other held by each side. Today, for the first time, Muslims in great numbers – at present, about twenty million people – live in Europe and Western countries.

On the one hand, this fact offers the possibility that Christians and Muslims can encounter each other in completely new ways and, instead of hearing about each other, can hear from each other. The Islamic and Western worlds have moved so close to each other as never before in history.

At the same time, this opportunity is limited by unanswered social, political, and, as well, theological questions and by unresolved problems. This is true in the social perspective because, to the present, only a minority of Christians is willing to look upon Muslims not just under the aspect of labor migration, but also as fellow human beings, or even to welcome them. But, self-isolation and withdrawal are increasing also on the Muslim side.

In the political perspective, there are great differences in the perception and judgment of political events, for example in the Palestine question. But, the most recent wars in the Near and Middle East (Afghanistan, Iraq), as well as the numerous terror attacks by Muslim terrorists, also do not make the dismantling of old negative images and the establishment of a genuine co-existence wherever people live together any easier. And then, there are still the theological objections that the Koran already makes against Christianity, and the circumstance that it places Islam and the community of Muslims above all other religions and groups.

On the one hand, Islam in many of its basic beliefs – above all in the faith in the Creator and Judge – stands much closer to Christian faith than other religions such as Buddhism or Hinduism, for example. On the other hand, what is at stake in the Muslim view is not only a not further-specified belief in the Creator and Judge, but rather, beyond this, a belief in the mission of Muhammad and, therewith, in the truth of the Koran. This is

expressed already in the Islamic confession of faith: "*There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet*". The prophetic status of Muhammad is of equal importance with the confession of the one God. Thus, whoever does not recognize his mission and the truth of the Koran does not possess the proper faith in the Muslim view, and for this reason cannot hope for entry into Paradise, the less so the more he holds fast to – in the view of the Koran – erroneous views of God, such as those held by Christians, for example their belief in the Trinity, Jesus' status as the Son of God, and salvation through the Crucifixion of Jesus (9:29).

The great challenge of the present exists in Christians encountering Muslims under a new, spiritual perspective, and thus opening a new chapter in Christian-Muslim history.

About the Author

Biography

Christine Schirrmacher, born in 1962 (MA in Islamic Studies, 1988; PhD in Islamic Studies, 1991, University of Bonn, with a thesis dealing with the Muslim-Christian controversy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) has studied Arabic, Persian, and Turkish and is presently Professor of Islamic Studies at the Department Religious Studies and Missiology of the Evangelisch-Theologische Faculteit (Protestant University) in Leuven/Belgium and lecturer of Islam at Freie Theologische Akademie (Free Theological Academy) in Giessen. She is director of the Institut für Islamfragen (Institute of Islamic Studies) of the German Evangelical Alliance, as well as an official speaker and advisor on Islam for the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). She lectures on Islam and security issues, serves in continuing education programs related to politics, and is a consultant to different advisory bodies of the German government.

Dr. Schirrmacher is a member of the Internationale Gesellschaft für Menschenrechte (International Society for Human Rights) (IGFM/ISHR), Frankfurt; a member of the Deutsch-Jordanische Gesellschaft (German-Jordanian Society), Berlin; and a curatorium member of the Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen (Protestant Center for World View Questions), an academic documentation and advisory center of the Protestant Church of Germany (Berlin). She is engaged in current dialogue initiatives, formulating papers responding to the letter of the "138 Muslim theologians" to Christian leaders in October 2007, and will partake in the coming conference "Loving God and Neighbor in Word and Deed: Implications for Muslims and Christians" of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, in July 2008.

Dr. Schirrmacher has visited many countries of the Muslim world of the Near and Middle East, has been the speaker at national as well as international conferences dealing with Islam, and is the author of numerous articles. She has also written ten books, including the two-volume standard introduction *Der Islam* (1994/2003) (Islam), *Frauen und die Scharia* (2004/2006) (Women under the Sharia), and *Islam und Christlicher Glaube – ein Vergleich* (2006) (Islam and Christianity Compared).

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