

2 Reflecting on Approaches to Jesus in the Qur'ān from the Perspective of Comparative Theology

Klaus von Stosch

Choosing the Topic and Way of Proceeding

The first issue to which comparative theology must respond when its methodology is questioned is choosing a topic for discussion. As religions offer such great variety of starting points for discussion, these points should not be chosen only according to the preference of the researcher or institution, if comparative theology wants to show its relevance to the Church and society. In my opinion, theology, like any other science, should try to solve problems and to respond to contemporary issues. Therefore, I see three legitimate starting points for comparative theology: problems of society, problems of theology, and problems that arise out of the interaction of people with different religious backgrounds.

Dealing with topics important to society provides the possibility for comparative theology to show its specific knowledge of religious traditions and to point out different religions' ideas on how to respond to these problems. To do this, comparative theology relies on its knowledge of different religious traditions. Challenges in the economic sector or the environmental sector can therefore be better accepted with the help of comparative theology's guidance—especially if different religions argue for the same response to a common problem, but by drawing on their respective traditions. However, if the participants do not learn from the other religions anything that enhances concepts in their own religions, such an approach should not be called comparative theology. I think that the term “comparative theology” should be restricted to theological contributions that are shaped and enriched by comparison. Thus, topics such as those mentioned previously can become comparative theology

if specific resources of the other religion are taken into account to correct or expand one's own response to a problem.¹

A second legitimate reason to practice comparative theology is the desire for reflection on a problem in one's own religious tradition. This chapter therefore deals with a discourse within Christianity that has become problematic for many contemporary Christians: Christology. Many contemporary Christians find it difficult to understand Jesus as truly human and at the same time truly divine. For them, the question of a consistent theory of the hypostatic union, which always has been a problem dogmatically, arises on an existential level. Taking the Qur'an into account in order to respond to this issue shows great potential because the Qur'an also points out and criticizes notions that challenge Christian dogmatics.² However, this essay does not focus on further developing Christology; I focus my discussion on a different issue that is very much in line with a last possibility of comparative theology.

This third possibility of practicing comparative theology refers to problems arising out of the interaction among people with different religious backgrounds. In Islamic-Christian relations, Christology is generally considered the decisive point of difference between both religions. For Christians, it is essential to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; the rejection of this confession seems to be a constituent part of Muslim identity. This is why the discussion about Jesus seems to lead necessarily to points of controversy central to Islamic-Christian dialogue.

Engaging in a dialogue about Jesus with Islamic theology should not, of course, aim to change other people's views to fit one's own. Neither can the dialogue negate the differences between the religions. Nonetheless, I hope to show that Christians can learn a lot through a deeper look at the perception of Jesus in the Qur'an. That the Qur'an can indeed contribute to a better understanding of Jesus of Nazareth is exactly what different Muslim scholars—for example Mahmoud Ayoub, the American pioneer in Islamic research regarding Jesus of Nazareth—claim when speaking of a legitimate Christology on the basis of the Qur'an.³ So, too, the Qom-based Shiite theologian Muhammad Legenhausen, arguing that the time has come for Muslims to engage in discourse about Christology,⁴ contributes to this engagement. Legenhausen is of the opinion that through such engagement, the similarities and differences of Islam and Christianity can be looked at in a different light. Moreover, he asserts that Muslims may be able to help Christians to better recognize Jesus as healer and savior.⁵

Therefore the question arises whether something can be learned from the Qur'ānic understanding of Jesus of Nazareth, or whether, at this point, the difference is so essential to the formation of a religious identity that the depreciation of the other's belief is indispensable. This chapter intends a first attempt to respond to these questions from the perspective of comparative theology. Contributing to a Christian comparative theology, this chapter aims to take the Islamic appreciation of Jesus of Nazareth as seriously as possible in order to ask whether this appreciation can be integrated into Christian theology without abandoning one's own claims on truth. In other words, what is important is whether the Qur'ānic approach to Jesus of Nazareth can be accepted and whether it can be granted a place in reflection on Christian belief. Moreover, this chapter wants to ask whether this unfamiliar approach might enrich one's own identity.⁶

At this point, the danger of expropriating the other and making the other's religion a means to an end also has to be taken into account. Therefore, I suggest using comparative theology as a methodological tool for the review of one's own work, and also for finding a way to include the arguments of theologians of other religions in this project. According to my own definition of comparative theology, it is important that comparative theology not happen through solitary research—even if extensive knowledge of the other religion is already present—but by developing a theological position through dialogue with theologians from other religions. It is clear that the ideas of these theologians can also be accessed through reading their books or commentaries, but I think that more cooperative work between theologians of different religions should be done. Scholars can evaluate each other's work and help to improve it. I have applied these suggestions by writing this chapter in dialogue with Islamic theologians.⁷

How do we have to do comparative theology? I am suggesting that we work in a way that is oriented toward problems and toward dialogue, as well as working micrologically, i.e., by turning to case studies. Participants in a comparative theological conversation have to be willing to engage the others' traditions and to debate one another. Moreover, a third party situated outside the dialogue needs to be involved in the process in order to challenge the dialogue's results and to question the temporary results of the dialogue. The Middle Eastern Studies scholar Angelika Neuwirth is the third party involved in this chapter, as I deal with Jesus in the Qur'an. She encouraged us to work more diachronically in

our study of the Qurʾān and to examine individual verses in the context of the respective surah.⁸ A diachronic reading means a reading that follows the chronological order of the emergence of the verses in the Qurʾān. This requires much historical work, which I cannot do in this first approach to the verses. Although the first results of this study have already been published, until now I had not taken into account all the implications of this new methodological approach.⁹ Thus, I see that what is particularly desirable—but what this paper cannot yet carry out satisfactorily—is a diachronic investigation of the Qurʾānic references to Jesus of Nazareth and their location in the context of each surah. But for the time being, I consider the option for a synchronic interpretation of the Qurʾān to be legitimate for the purposes of a first orientation—i.e., I will look at all the relevant verses of the Qurʾān at the same time. Therefore I will go into diachronic aspects of exegesis only at particularly salient passages.

This chapter is structured in the following way: First, I acknowledge the Qurʾānic appreciation of the person of Jesus of Nazareth by looking at the Qurʾānic attributions as “Prophet,” “Servant of God,” “Messiah,” “Healer,” “Word,” and “Spirit from God”. Second, I look more deeply into the Qurʾānic rejection of Jesus as Son of God, and into other seemingly anti-Christian interpretations of Jesus of Nazareth, in order to locate these in their original historical context. Third, a short conclusion offers first results regarding the prospects and limits of a Qurʾānic Christology.¹⁰

Acknowledging the Qurʾānic Appreciation of Jesus of Nazareth

Jesus of Nazareth is one of the prophets most frequently mentioned in the Qurʾān. Martin Bauschke notes 15 surahs, 6 Meccan and 9 Medinan, and 108 verses in total, which speak of Jesus directly or refer to him.¹¹ In this chapter, I cannot, of course, discuss all these verses in detail. Therefore, I confine myself to those central to the evaluation of Qurʾānic Christology. In this section, I will concentrate on the most important titles, attributes, and names given to Jesus of Nazareth in the Qurʾān.

JESUS AS PROPHET AND SERVANT OF GOD

What may be the most famous characterization of Jesus and what is stressed time and again in the Qurʾān is his identification as prophet

(19:30; 33:7).¹² Only from the Medinan period onward is Jesus also recognized as having been sent by God (*rasûl*) (3:48f.; 4:171; 5:75.111; 57:27; 61:6). Being named prophet is already one of the highest honors given by the Qur'an; when this is combined with other titles, it becomes even more obvious that in the Qur'an Jesus holds the highest honor possible for a human being.¹³

From a Christian point of view, the title "prophet" lies at the heart of the New Testament.¹⁴ Still, the Qur'anic characterizations of Jesus as prophet or as *rasûl* find only little enthusiasm with Christians. This can be explained by the fact that the Qur'an acknowledges Jesus only as one among other prophets. It repeatedly declares programmatically: "We make no distinction among any of them" (2:136 and 3:84). Although this declaration is relativized elsewhere and the importance of Jesus is stressed,¹⁵ the fact that he, like all others, "was but an apostle" (5:75) cannot be ignored. Therefore, the title does not seem adequate for appreciating the uniqueness of Jesus, but it can be helpful in reminding Christians of an important aspect of the mission of Christ.

Another title repeatedly applied to Jesus of Nazareth in the Qur'an is "servant of God." As early as in the cradle, Jesus declares himself to be servant of God (19:30). At this point he also emphasizes that he, as servant of God, will always be blessed by God, wherever he goes (19:31). It is especially striking that Jesus is a role model for Israel; he is the one who can save it from its contentiousness (43:58f) due to his position as servant. He is the servant radiating peace and renouncing violence (19:32f). Using titles¹⁶ and concepts that identify him as servant of God, therefore, brings him closer to the servant of God we know from Isaiah, presumably also very important to the historical Jesus and his self-understanding.

The self-predication of Jesus as servant of God is also a correction of exaggerated claims put into Jesus's mouth in the apocryphal infancy gospels. Here, just as in many other passages of the Qur'an, every exaggeration in the adoration of Jesus is rejected. At the same time, the identification of Jesus as servant of God does not indicate a depreciation of his person but is rather like the first, early Christian formula of confession which did not say, "Jesus is the Kyrios," but "Jesus is the Servant of God."¹⁷ As a matter of fact, at this point, the similarity to statements of Paul is striking.¹⁸ Even if there are no specific allusions to Paul in the Qur'an,¹⁹ specifically Pauline notions, such as the connection between Jesus's being servant and being lord and having authority, can also be found in the Qur'an. Jesus is not only depicted as servant but also as

someone to be heeded (by the Jews): "Remain, then, conscious of God, and pay heed unto me" (3:50; 43:63). The Qur'ān repeatedly emphasizes this.

Certainly, by these same claims, the Qur'ānic talk of Jesus is always strictly theocentric. Jesus, precisely in being servant, radically points away from himself and toward God; in being obedient to Him, Jesus is always engaged in the service of God (cf. 3:51). In this respect, Jesus is a role model for the essence of Islam because of his total devotion to God.²⁰ Similarly, Mahmoud Ayoub defines Jesus as a model of fulfilled humanity;²¹ in him, the destiny of humankind and the model of humankind's relationship to God are mirrored²²: "The human spirit in all its richness, its faith and hope, its love and creativity, is mirrored and indeed celebrated in the life of Jesus."²³ This forms, according to Ayoub, the exceptional nature of Jesus. By this interpretation, Jesus "is much more than a mere human being, or even simply the messenger of a Book."²⁴ In the Islamic tradition, his exceptional nature lies precisely in his radical humanity, such as is expressed through attributes such as "love" and "meekness."²⁵

Regarding newer approaches to Christology by theologians such as Wolfhart Pannenberg or Karl Rahner (in his "searching Christology"): What becomes clear is the fact that the focus on Jesus's humanity can indeed be in tune with a modern Christology. It is well known that Karl Rahner emphasized Jesus's particular nature as a human being as the starting point of Christology. Modern Christian approaches to Christology do not link the divinity of Jesus to any supernatural or superhuman properties, but precisely to his human nature. The Qur'ānic emphasis of Jesus as servant of God, therefore, should not be prematurely rejected. This opens much space for a new encounter between Muslims and Christians.

JESUS AS MESSIAH AND HEALER

What seems to be even more compatible with Christology, in addition to the titles "prophet" and "servant of God," is the fact that the Qur'ān repeatedly describes Jesus as Messiah. The description of Jesus as Messiah can be found in the Qur'ān eleven times, primarily in the Medinan suras.²⁶ Islamic Studies now take for granted that this title originated in Jewish Christianity²⁷ and that it is a literal translation of the title of Christ,²⁸ but it is assumed that "messiah" here has no conceptual mean-

ing, but is only a proper name.²⁹ However, during the formation of the Qur'an, it was not unknown that the "Messiah" title could evoke a number of Christological connotations. Indeed, the traditional commentators on the Qur'an are also aware of the fact that the "Messiah" title indicates a theological appreciation of Jesus. What is normally understood by this appreciation is that Jesus is the one blessed by God and the one without sin.³⁰ Admittedly, from a traditional Muslim's point of view, being without sin is not only assigned to Jesus; this is, in fact, an indispensable feature of all prophets and imams in Shi'ite Islam. Still, it is noticeable how the central singularity of Jesus in Christian belief, his being without sin, is taken up. A crucial point of reference for an Islamic appreciation of the exceptional nature of Jesus of Nazareth is thus put in place, compatible with modern concepts of Christology.

However, in the Qur'an, Jesus is not only described as Messiah but also appreciated through the use of another characteristic, which is central to the Christian understanding of the Messiah: He is experienced as healer and savior. The Qur'an reveals that Jesus heals blind people and lepers and brings the dead back to life.³¹ Since the Qur'an does not link the name and honorary title of Jesus to the apocalyptic exegetical tradition pertaining to the Messiah, the title is being placed in a new context. In this way, the Qur'an alludes to some crucial characteristics of Jesus as a charismatic faith healer; it also adopts the biblical way of understanding the miracles as symbols. In light of this, Mahmoud Ayoub notes that all miracles of Jesus are targeted to a specific purpose and always have a symbolic function.³² Mehdi Bazargan points to the fact that in this way the Qur'an grants an exceptional position to Jesus, one "that it does not grant any other prophet."³³ Therefore, Jesus seems not to be one prophet among many, but receives a unique position through his healing and saving. In this context, Mahmoud Ayoub understands the actions of saving and redeeming as emanating from healing, and thus takes up the Christian idea of the Messiah: "He is the savior of us all, for what is salvation but healing?"³⁴ Of course, some Christians will say that "saving" is more and even different from "healing," but the idea is not entirely foreign to Christian theology. It is interesting for example that in African Christology today the notion of healing is a key to the idea of salvation.³⁵ Perhaps we have to learn this lesson in the West again and be more aware of salvation as something that has to do with our daily lives and our bodies. Moreover, Muslim theologians are also aware of the spiritual dimension of the idea of salvation. For example, Muhammad Legenhausen

goes so far as to describe Jesus as savior from sins, although he does not ascribe to Jesus the ability to forgive sins that one expects in the Christian perspective.³⁶ All in all, the Qur'anic depiction of Jesus as Messiah cannot be dismissed as lacking theological import. On the contrary, we can learn a lot from the Qur'anic point of view. We can rediscover Jesus as savior through healing, we can rediscover his divinity in his servanthood, and we can appreciate anew the importance of being a messenger from God, the importance of being the person who is coming from God and pointing to him. For a Christian, however, the most exciting characterization of Jesus in the Qur'an is probably his appreciation as the "Word from God."

JESUS AS WORD, SPIRIT, AND SYMBOL FROM GOD

In the last section, I pointed to the fact that the Qur'an, in accordance with the biblical understanding, maintains the symbolic function of Jesus's miracles. From a Christian point of view, however, Jesus not only delivers divine symbols, but is the symbol. Jesus does not only speak the Word of God, but is the Word. In this, he is the incarnate divine word of promise to the world. Is there also any evidence for this perspective in the Qur'an?

To discover this evidence, many strands of reasoning in the Qur'an need to be considered. First, it is indeed the case that Jesus—in one of the earliest suras from the Medinan period (3:45)—is described as a word from (or of) God. Only a little later, he is even called "His Word" because he apparently has been this word from God since shortly after his birth.³⁷ Early commentators in particular have seen this depiction of Jesus as a hint of the exceptional nature of Jesus's creation, thereby distinguishing him from all other human beings.³⁸ Some scholars even claim that this title is intended to reveal Jesus as the "embodiment of the good news of God's mercy"—a claim very close to the core of the Christian interpretation.³⁹ "Râzî . . . [for instance] understands Jesus as Word and Spirit in the sense that he as a person would embody the good news of God's mercy."⁴⁰ This interpretation has, since then, been only rarely brought forward in the course of Islamic history of theology, and not only for apologetic reasons, but also because some verses in the Qur'an seem to show that its prophetology always thinks of messengers as persons who get a message. Thus, it is quite unusual for a prophet to be a message.

The aforementioned fact makes it even more interesting that interpretations of this kind are again winning ground in contemporary Iranian theology. Muhammad Legenhausen, for instance, critically engages with the positions of the extremely influential modern theologian Tabataba'i. In Legenhausen's further development of Tabataba'i's arguments, all of which Legenhausen considers to be equally legitimate, he distinguishes three different manners in which Jesus could be interpreted as the Word from God. First, he refers to an interpretation that describes Jesus as the Word from God because he is seen as the fulfillment of God's promise to the prophets of the Old Testament.⁴¹ And, in fact, some passages of the Qur'an can be found to suggest that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Torah. For instance, the Qur'anic Jesus declares: "And [I have come] to confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of the Torah, and to make lawful unto you some of the things which [aforetime] were forbidden to you" (3:50). Another passage about Jesus reads: "And we have vouchsafed onto him the Gospel, wherein there was guidance and light, confirming the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah; and as a guidance and admonition unto the God-conscious. Let, then, the followers of the Gospel judge in accordance with what God has revealed therein" (5:45f.). Thus, the authority of Jesus for those living according to the Gospel is explicitly affirmed, and Jesus appears to be the affirmation and fulfillment of the Torah. In this way, Jesus has the same function for Christians that the Torah has for the Jews. This definition of the Jewish-Christian relationship has plenty to offer from the perspective of modern Christian hermeneutics, especially for the dialogue with Jews.⁴²

Another interpretation of the description of Jesus as Word from God supported by Legenhausen is that Jesus is described as Word from God due to his receiving the divine revelation. And finally, he presents the possibility that Jesus is described as Word from God due to his virgin birth—a reading that is also favored by Tabataba'i. In this reading, the virginal conception suggests his birth to be directly from God and, in fact, to be a direct expression of divine power. Through the virginal conception, Jesus obtains an exceptional honor.⁴³ Moreover, the creation of Jesus is quite noticeably paralleled with the creation of mankind. In both cases God says: *Kun fa yakun* ("Be"—and he is.).⁴⁴

From the Qur'anic perspective, the title "God's Word" can therefore be understood as in contrast to the Christian confession of Jesus as the Son of God. But this contrast is not intended as open opposition, but

rather intends to focus on another aspect that the Qur'ān apparently considers more important and deems less ambiguous.

Indeed, in accordance with Muhammad Legenhausen, one can maybe even speak of a similar meaning in the Biblical and Qur'ānic speeches, if we leave aside for the moment the Qur'ānic denial of Jesus's sonship, which I will consider shortly.⁴⁵ Moreover, it is interesting that the Qur'ān confesses Jesus not only as "God's Word," but also as His spirit, therefore combining and mixing distinctions made in Christian Trinitarianism. According to the Qur'ān, Jesus is a spirit from God (4:171). Therefore, not only the Qur'ān's identification of Jesus as the Word from God, but also his identification as spirit, distinguishes Jesus from all other human beings.⁴⁶ Aside from these direct identifications of "word" and "spirit," which are obviously directed against exaggerated Trinitarian speculations, God's spirit in the Qur'ān is described as having a very similar relation to Jesus of Nazareth as the relationship between the Spirit and Jesus depicted in the Bible. The confession that Jesus is conceived from the Holy Spirit is very similar to that made in the Gospel of Luke. This is especially noticeable (21:91), even as the parallel with Adam is relativized (15:29). Moreover, the Qur'ān considers Jesus as being strengthened by "the spirit of holiness" (2:87; 2:253; 5:110). He is strengthened through this spirit in order to proclaim God's message throughout his life—"in thy cradle, and as a grown man" (5:110). It is the spirit of God that strengthens the one sent by God and announces the conception of Jesus. Traditionally, this spirit is identified as Gabriel, but this identification is never explicitly confirmed by the Qur'ān itself (26:192f; 58:22; 70:4; 78:38; 97:4).

Beside these interesting remarks about the spirit of God, what is even more important for the understanding of the Qur'ānic speech about Jesus as Word from God is, I suggest, the Qur'ānic theology of symbols. According to this theology, the whole world is full of "symbols" (*āyāt*) pointing to God's benevolence and almightiness. Jesus is given a special standing because he is described as symbol of God not just once but three times in the Qur'ān. First, the Qur'ān emphasizes that God makes Jesus a symbol for mankind to express the divine mercy; indeed, he is a symbol virtually embodying it (19:21). As "symbol [of Our grace] unto all people" (21:91; Cf. 23:50), Jesus not only seems to be important to Israel or Christianity, but also to bear universal significance. Jesus, therefore, is a divine symbol for the world, not merely a miracle.⁴⁷ Moreover, this not only applies to his birth but also to his whole life.⁴⁸ As Martin Bauschke puts it: "Jesus is entirely God's human being and as such a

'symbol' of God in his being, conduct, and speech."⁴⁹ "Jesus, even already before his birth, is a symbol pointing to God's almightiness,"⁵⁰ similar to Adam and the whole creation which is also a sign of the very same almightiness because it is done out of nothing. As in the Pauline tradition, where Jesus is a symbol and image of God (cf. Col.1.15), the Qur'an emphasizes that Jesus is a symbol for humanity.⁵¹ Here, the Qur'an evidently sees a peculiarity in Jesus, setting him apart from the other prophets. This presents another argument regarding why Jesus alone is described as the Word from God. Maybe the Qur'an could be interpreted in a way that sees Jesus as the personified communication of God for humankind, through whom humankind can symbolically (in the sense of Karl Rahner) experience His merciful closeness. Thus, reading the Qur'an from a Christian perspective can contribute to some fresh insights in our perception of Jesus. It can help us to rethink some of our basic concepts and to search for a deeper meaning. Thus, it seems that agreeing with some of the Qur'anic interpretations of the person of Jesus would be possible, if it were not for other passages arguing against a pro-Christian interpretation, for it seems that another series of Qur'anic passages repeatedly and explicitly rejects those specifically Christian conceptions. The following section therefore discusses some of these anti-Christian demarcations. Only if those anti-Christian demarcations can be understood constructively, from a Christian point of view, will it make sense to appreciate the Qur'an as possibly being the word of God also for Christians.

REJECTION OF JESUS AS SON OF GOD AS AN ANTI-CHRISTIAN DEMARCATION?

The Qur'an repeatedly rejects the identification of God with Christ: "Indeed, the truth deny they who say, 'Behold, God is the Christ, son of Mary'" (5:17 and 5:72; similarly 19:35). However, in Catholic orthodoxy too, Jesus is not seen as identical with God. By a Christian understanding, Jesus is indeed not the triune God, but only the incarnation of the divine Logos, the divine Word of promise to humankind. He is in a sense God's "body language," but it does not make sense to identify him with the Trinity. In this context, Christian speech can therefore tie in with the Qur'anic understanding of Jesus as Word of God, and make clear that Jesus is precisely this word from God in human form. As a matter of fact, there is not a single biblical passage directly identifying God with Christ.⁵²

But the Qur'ān not only opposes the identification of God with Christ but also the belief that Jesus is the Son of God. It declares: "God is but One God; utterly remote is He, in His glory, from having a son" (4:171). For God does not need an intermediary (10:68; 2:116f.). Therefore, the Qur'ān repeatedly emphasizes that Jesus of Nazareth is a normal human being, "but an apostle" (5:75) and thus consequently describes him as "son of Mary" (2:87, among other passages).⁵³

However, the context of these demarcations in the given passages needs to be considered. Upon reflection, it becomes doubtful whether the Qur'ān really opposes a properly understood Christianity or really criticizes orthodox Christology in the sense of Catholic belief, for example. When the Qur'ān, for instance, emphasizes the human nature of Jesus in 5:75, it argues for it by pointing to the fact that Jesus, just as his mother, had a totally normal diet. What seems to be important to the Qur'ān, therefore, is that Jesus and Mary are real human beings with real human needs. This, however, is not contested by Christianity—neither for Mary nor for Jesus. Moreover, the Qur'ān opposes the view, also not claimed from a Christian side, that God would need a son to turn toward humankind (10:68). Later, the Qur'ān warns against the substitution of human beings for God.⁵⁴ What becomes clear in the context of this warning, however, is that it is first concerned with the deification of scribes and priests. The scene appears to be somewhat surreal because the Jews are accused of worshiping Ezra as Son of God (9:30). This, however, does not apply to any Jews in history or any Jews known to me in the present day. Here, the Qur'ān obviously has very specific groups of Jews and Christians in mind and makes clear to them that they must not substitute anything for God. One may question, though, whether Qur'ānic criticism on Jesus's sonship really addresses an understanding of this sonship as understood by orthodox Christianity.

According to Kenneth Cragg "the logic by which, for the Qur'ān, Jesus can never be 'Son' to God, is precisely the logic by which, for Paul and the New Testament, he is."⁵⁵ One difference between Christians and Muslims, of course, is the fact that Muslims find the divine in Jesus without deifying him.⁵⁶ What seems open to question, however, is whether one therefore needs to go so far as to deny entirely the exceptional nature and uniqueness in Jesus.⁵⁷ And it is not his deification but the exceptional nature of his humanity, which in modern theology is the most important path to his divinity, as I explained previously. Thus, Christians should be ready to learn from the Qur'ān. We can also ask: To

whom is the Qur'ānic criticism of aberrations in Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity addressed? At this point, it seems to be helpful to me to cast a glance at the historical situation of the seventh century on the Arabian Peninsula. Even if it is assumed that the Qur'ān is the ultimate Word of God, one needs to understand to whom it is actually addressed and to which specific situations its message refers.⁵⁸

SEVENTH-CENTURY CHRISTOLOGY ON THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

In the seventh century, the majority of Christians on the Arabian Peninsula were the so-called Jacobites. They opposed the Council of Chalcedon and are therefore also referred to as anti-Chalcedonians. However, after “pacification” by the Persians in 570, Nestorian influence was present mainly in the capital city San'a and was therefore only a marginal phenomenon on the Arabian Peninsula as a whole.⁵⁹

The anti-Chalcedonians' (i.e., Jacobites') presence on the Arabian Peninsula was characterized by weak hierarchies in their churches and also by their popularity with believers, especially those within the Ghassanids-Residences.⁶⁰ The Ghassanids of North-West Arabia also appear to have been Anti-Chalcedonians.⁶¹ Christians in South Arabia likewise seem to have been dominated by anti-Chalcedonian notions; this group includes Christians settled in Naḡran in mid-fifth century.⁶² Scholars assume that there were anti-Chalcedonian clergy in Naḡran, whereas there were no Chalcedonian clergy on the Arabian Peninsula.⁶³ Ethiopia, which converted to Christianity in mid-fourth century,⁶⁴ acted as a protecting power for south Arabian Christians.⁶⁵ It is reasonable to assume that Christians in the southern region of Arabia, integrated into the Anti-Chalcedonian movement during the second wave of mission,⁶⁶ were predominately Anti-Chalcedonian.

Christianity in Ethiopia also seems to have been influenced significantly by Jewish-Christianity.⁶⁷ Abyssinian theologians seem to have cultivated the notion that the “chosen people” status of Israel had been transferred, such that Abyssinian Christians were God's chosen people.⁶⁸ They especially emphasized Jesus's dignity as the messiah, such that the title “messiah” in Abyssinia conveyed a meaning similar to the meaning conveyed by the title “Logos” in the Byzantine Empire.⁶⁹ Their theology and piety were oriented in such a way that “in some cases Mariology is over-emphasized to the extent that even a Eucharistic anaphora is stylized

marianically.”⁷⁰ Oriental Studies therefore regards the Abyssinian church as a church wherein “Mary—as the successor of Isis—is venerated in a manner that differs from any other branch of Christianity.”⁷¹

The anti-Chalcedonians under Syrian influence belonged to the west Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. Their Christology asserts Christ to be “an incarnated nature (or Hypostasis) of the God-Logos . . . Polemicists accused them of mixing and called them Monophysites and Eutychianists.”⁷² However, it seems more appropriate to call them “Miaphysites” or “anti-Chalcedonians”⁷³ because they did not follow Eutychianism’s heretic teachings, but Cyril of Alexandria’s Christology.⁷⁴ By the second half of the sixth century, anti-Chalcedonians had been separated into groups condemning each other.⁷⁵ Everything points toward this situation having become worse in the seventh century. How widespread the Miaphysite approach was in the Syrian Church becomes apparent in the disputation of Antioch (596), which asserted that Jesus’s human nature was pre-existent.⁷⁶ In the predominant contemporary Christology, this notion is absolutely unacceptable. Anti-Chalcedonianism suffered the secession of so-called tritheism in the middle of the sixth century. These tritheistic views were shaped by John Philoponus’s philosophical notions.⁷⁷ During the formation of the Qur’ān, tritheism seems to have been especially common among the anti-Chalcedonians in Syria. In contrast to contemporary teachings of the Church, tritheism claims that the persons of the Trinity are three inner-triune hypostases, each with its own *ousia*, *physis*, and divinity. Alois Grillmeier states that “another monk named Polycarp spread this ‘Polytheism’ in parts of Asia and Caria. Even the emperor’s family was prone to these speculations, as John [Philoponus] found an enthusiastic follower in Athanasius, the grandson of empress Theodora.”⁷⁸ We can therefore assume that tritheism from Syria influenced Christology on the Arabian Peninsula. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Qur’ānic references allude to this particular understanding of Christology rather than Chalcedonian formulations.

Moreover, closely related to the aforementioned idea is the divine reverence shown to Mary in Miaphysitism since the times of Cyril of Alexandria. For example, according to Martin Bauschke:

[Epiphanius of Salamis mentions] a group of Thracian women emigrating to Arabia and showing divine reverence to the Mother of God . . . Analogous to the ritual eating of the body of Jesus they offered (bread)/

cake . . . to Mary. According to Theodor Klauser it is “as good as certain that the forming of this sect based on the assumption that Mary’s, at that time popular, title as Theotokos was meant to express her divinity.”⁷⁹

There are also similar tendencies in Jewish-Christian, Coptic, and Syrian theology, to identify the Holy Spirit with Mary, thus resulting in a triadic conception of God as Father (God)—Mother (Spirit)—Son (Jesus).

The Christology of West-Syria emphasizes Jesus Christ’s divine nature while marginalizing his human nature—probably as a polemic self-differentiation from the allegedly Nestorian theology of East-Syria: “In fear of Nestorianism, Jacob [of Sarug, one of the best-known West Syrian theologians—KvS] describes Christ’s human characteristics very cautiously—perhaps even obscures them.”⁸⁰

Sources other than the Qur’an offer only a few insights into how Christianity spread in Mecca and Medina. It can be assumed that Mecca, as the center of trade, was in contact with Syria, and at least two caravans per annum travelled between Mecca and Syria.⁸¹ Christianity appears to have had only little influence in Mecca and there is no proof that Christian churches existed at that time in Mecca. According to Theresia Hainthaler, “[t]he Christians we know about were a number of slaves, adventurers, merchants and wine-sellers,”⁸² but according to Henri Lammens, there were also doctors, surgeons, and dentists.⁸³ It is certain that Christian merchants had business in Mecca, at least for a time.⁸⁴ According to Lammens, Mecca was at times occupied by Christian Abyssinians before the Hijra. Moreover, Mecca was strongly connected to Naḡran and other Christian centers of Jemen. This becomes apparent in the meaning of the Naḡranites in the early reports on the life of Muhammad and early exegesis of the Qur’an.⁸⁵ Amongst the Quraysh Shia tribes, the Banu Asad clan, in particular, seems to have sympathized with Christianity,⁸⁶ provided that some of them also were affiliated with the Ghassanids.⁸⁷ Despite all this, Christianity seemed to have had little presence in Mecca before the Hijra. Therefore, Muhammad knew about its existence, but could not or did not want to make a theological distinction.⁸⁸ This changed only in Medina, especially due to the presence of Judaism.⁸⁹ Until now, accounts of the history of Christianity conclude that Christianity had only little presence in Medina. Theresia Hainthaler argues: “There have only been a few Christians in Medina whose names are barely known, and surely there was no structured Christianity.”⁹⁰

Since the Arabic tribes and the Chalcedonian bishops became known through a strong anti-Chalcedonian tendency,⁹¹ it can be assumed that Muhammad probably came into contact with miaphysite Christianity in Medina. Moreover, as Arabia had been a melting pot for Christian heresy since the fifth century,⁹² it can be assumed that other heterodox notions of Christianity also played a role in influencing Muhammad's perception of Christianity. Therefore, a careful analysis of the Qur'anic text is required to clarify the situation. But also in Arabia itself, there was opposition to Miaphysitism—not so much through the orthodoxy but considerably more through the Nestorians, who were opponents of the Miaphysites at the council of Ephesus. In 484 at the synod of Beth Lapat, the Nestorian-oriented church in eastern Syria, for instance, officially revoked the Council of Ephesus and identified Mary's title, "Theotokos," as the root of all evil. This Nestorian Christianity spread from Southern Arabia after its conquest by the Persians in 597, and thus had a substantial influence in Arabia at the time of Muhammad.⁹³

In light of these historical disputes, it therefore becomes clear that the statements of the Qur'ān are directed against Monophysitism and its tritheistic tendencies. Therefore, Monophysitic Christians, who naturally invoked Christ with phrases such as "our God" or even "almighty God," will have been the addressees of the accusation of disbelief in sura 5:17 and 5:72.⁹⁴ It is therefore uncertain whether the Qur'ān only rejects the triadic-tritheistic conceptions of God of Oriental Christian piety or if it indeed opposes orthodox Trinitarian theology as well.⁹⁵ Regarding the historical context, what does become clear is that the Qur'ānic judgments concerning Christology cannot be unequivocally classified as anti-Christian, even though they may appear anti-Christian at first sight.

Prospects

In this first reflection on Qur'ānic statements about Jesus of Nazareth, by comparative theology I have tried to establish that these statements are, in many cases, in greater correspondence with modern Christian theology than scholars have thus far assumed. Therefore, it can be asked whether rejecting the Christian confession of Jesus as Christ must be a constituent part of Muslim identity. On the contrary, Islamic appreciations of Jesus offer ample possibilities that can be integrated into an orthodox Christology.

Since those Islamic appreciations also offer Christians important insights into the characteristics of Jesus, I do not want to say that the Qur'an is not addressing orthodox Christianity at all. The Qur'an is inviting Christians to a revision of their ideas and concepts without being in complete contradiction to them. For instance, a greater appreciation of Jesus's role as prophet and servant of God is such an invitation and this seems—from my point of view—to be very rewarding for Christology. In this context, developments during the last decades have shown the importance of Jesus's humanity as a starting point for a convincing Christology. Both the Muslim interpretation of Jesus as the embodiment of God's mercifulness and the emphasis on his peacemaking power are notions that offer great insight, as does understanding salvation as healing and saving. But now the danger of devaluing Christian soteriology needs attention. The development of indigenous Christologies in Africa and Latin America indicates the fruitfulness of rediscovering Jesus as a healer. Finally, speaking about Jesus as a word and sign from God could be an addition to the traditional view of Jesus as son, and thus could open up interesting possibilities if received into a modern Christology.

As a whole, Qur'anic Christology challenges the Christian approach to Jesus of Nazareth, as it tends to bring him in line with God's messengers and, in this way risks the loss of his exceptional nature. Even if a Christian point of view detects certain dangers in this approach, it could nevertheless be a valuable starting point for making Jesus of Nazareth more accessible in the wider biblical tradition and to the wider human family. By appreciating him as a child of Israel, it could further people's understanding of him. After all, by its dogmatic formulas, traditional Christian speech about Jesus is always in danger of removing Jesus so far from the individual human being and his own religion that his healing and saving power can no longer be experienced.

An interesting question for Islamic theology in this context is whether it is also willing to give serious consideration to the Christian understanding of Jesus of Nazareth, and how then Muslims might redefine their relationship to the biblical tradition. Would Muslims be willing to take the biblical religions into account and thus acknowledge Jews and Christians as their older brothers and sisters who also believe in the one God, just as Christians have acknowledged Jews? Would Islamic theology be willing to acknowledge the intrinsic power of the Bible, and, for instance, seek to make the Gospels hermeneutically productive for a

Muslim understanding of Jesus? If such willingness exists, it would become possible for Muslims to appreciate Jesus of Nazareth's exceptional nature and acknowledge his unique role.⁹⁶ This is the case even if the Christian approach to Jesus may always remain offensive and seem exaggerated to Muslims. Even so, after comparative theological reflection, it will no longer seem necessary to distance Islam so sharply from Christianity. Based on the Qur'ān, degrading this other religion does not seem necessary. On the contrary, the Qur'ān offers possibilities for appreciating Jesus's exceptional nature. This appreciation has the potential to promote discussion about Jesus as the Christ.

Notes

1. For additional information about this in the context of ethics and economy, see Stosch, *Wirtschaftsethik interreligiös*. For additional information about the theology of liberation in this context, see Stosch and Tatari, *Gott und Befreiung*.
2. In this essay, I discuss a problem rooted in Christian dogmatics. However, other theological disciplines can also be starting points for issues of comparative theology.
3. See Ayoub, *A Muslim View of Christianity*, 156: "there is an authentic Islamic understanding of Christ that deserves careful consideration as a legitimate christology."
4. See Legenhausen, *Preface*, 27f: "[T]he time has come for Muslims to begin work in this area, as well. Through the development of an Islamic Christology we can come to a better understanding of Islam as contrasted with Christianity, and Islam in consonance with Christianity, too."
5. See *ibid.*, 30: "The Muslim always seems to appear as a stranger to the Christian, but perhaps it is from the stranger that the Christian can best come to know his saviour."
6. For the methodology of comparative theology, see Stosch, *Komparative Theologie als Wegweiser*, 203–8.
7. The basis for a first draft of this essay was the seminar for Muslim and Christian students at the University of Paderborn, which I conducted with Mahmoud Ayoub in the summer of 2011. I am very grateful to my colleague Ayoub for the inspiring dialogues that occurred during that seminar. Later, I further developed my thoughts through dialogue with some of my Islamic colleagues in Germany, and presented the paper at several universities in Iran. At the moment, my Islamic colleagues and I are preparing our ideas for publication by appreciating him as a child of Israel in several co-authored books. This essay is therefore still a "work-in-progress," which I present, even while exploring it further with respect to its methodological background.
8. For research on a diachronic reading of the Qur'ān and which includes context of its origin in late antiquity, see the extremely helpful analyses of Neuwirth, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*.
9. See my earlier publication, which tries to consider these diachronic notions, Stosch, "Versuch einer ersten diachronen Lektüre der Jesusverse des Qur'ān."
10. Most of the following passages are a translation from my own text "Jesus im Qur'ān. Ansatzpunkte und Stolpersteine einer qur'ānischen Christologie," 109–33.

11. Bauschke, *Jesus—Stein des Anstoßes*, 22. Also, if we consider indirect references, 15 additional verses can be added, making it 18 surahs and 123 verses.
12. Surah and Verse numbers of the Qur'an appear within parentheses throughout the text. All numbers refer to the translation by Muhammad Asad.
13. See Antepli, "Muslim Mary and Jesus," 301.
14. See Pöhlmann, "Jesus im Islam und Christentum," 499.
15. See 2:253: "Some of these apostles have We endowed more highly than others . . . and some he has raised yet higher. And we vouchsafed unto Jesus, the son of Mary, all evidence of the truth."
16. The Hebrew title for servant "Ebed" corresponds to Arabic "Abd".
17. See Schedl, *Muhammad und Jesus*, 565 [my translation].
18. See Pöhlmann, "Jesus im Islam und Christentum," 499.
19. See Gnilka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran*, 91; Bauschke, *Jesus—Stein des Anstoßes*, 162, fn. 170.
20. See Ayoub, *A Muslim view of Christianity*, 117: "Jesus is a model of true Islam, or total submission to God."
21. Therefore, in Islamic tradition, Jesus is not only regarded as "the example of piety, love, and asceticism . . . , but also the Christ who exemplifies fulfilled humanity" (ibid., 152). "The humanity of Jesus is evident in the narrations of the Shi'ah, but it is a humanity transformed, a perfected humanity, and as such there is no denying its supernatural dimension" (Legenhausen, *Preface*, 30).
22. See Ayoub, *A Muslim view of Christianity*, 115.
23. See ibid., 111.
24. See ibid., 152.
25. Triebel, "Das koranische Evangelium," 276.
26. See Bauschke, *Jesus—Stein des Anstoßes*, 107, for instance in 3:45.
27. Additional information on the meaning of Jewish Christians for the Qur'an, see Gnilka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran*, 111f.
28. See Bauschke, *Jesus—Stein des Anstoßes*, 108.
29. See Gnilka, *Die Nazarener und der Koran*, 117; Triebel, *Das koranische Evangelium*, 277.
30. See Houry, *Jesus Christus im Koran*, 467; Ayoub, *A Muslim View of Christianity*, 117.
31. 3:49; 5:110. See Antepli, *Muslim Mary and Jesus*, 308; Triebel, "Das koranische Evangelium," 274. The Qur'an emphasizes that Jesus can only do those miracles with God's permission. From a Christian point of view, this could be understood as criticism of Jesus's particular claim to authority. However, the Qur'anic emphasis can be accepted as natural to a Christian because the biblical Jesus also understands himself fully from God and toward Him and receives his authority only from Him.
32. See Ayoub, *A Muslim view of Christianity*, 112.
33. Bazargan, *Und Jesus ist sein Prophet*, 26.
34. Ayoub, *A Muslim view of Christianity*, 115.
35. Aklé et al., *Der Schwarze Christus. Wege afrikanischer Christologie*, 73–137.
36. See Legenhausen, *Preface*, 28: "Muslims accept Jesus as savior, along with all the other prophets, for the prophetic function is to save humanity from the scourge of sin . . . Islam denies that salvation is through redemption resulting from the crucifixion."

37. See Bürkle, "Jesus und Maria im Koran," 579, referring to 4:171: He is "his promise which he had conveyed unto Mary." Jesus talking to his mother shortly after his birth seems the most probable interpretation (see Bauschke, *Jesus—Stein des Anstoßes*, 118).
38. See Ayoub, *A Muslim View of Christianity*, 129: "While earlier commentators saw a special creation in Jesus as 'the Word of God', more recent ones have consistently attempted to play down any distinction between Jesus and the rest of humankind."
39. Eißler, "Jesus und Maria im Islam," 177; see Imbach, *Wem gehört Jesus?*, 93.
40. See Bauschke, *Jesus—Stein des Anstoßes*, 115 [my translation].
41. See Legenhausen, *Preface*, 14: "According to the promissory interpretation, Jesus is called the Word of God because he was the fulfillment of God's promise to the Hebrew prophets that he would send a Messiah. According to the revelatory interpretation, Jesus is the Word of God because he was the recipient of divine revelation. According to the creative interpretation, Jesus is the Word of God because God created Jesus without a father. 'Allamah argues in favor of the creative interpretation and rejects the others. To the contrary, I would suggest that all three are consistent."
42. See Stosch, "Philosophisch verantwortete Christologie als Komplizin des Antijudaismus?" 370–86.
43. See Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, 32.
44. See *ibid.*, referring to 3:59; Eißler, "Jesus und Maria im Islam," 177. What is interesting in this context is that this verse also chronologically seems to be the first one revealed that makes reference to Jesus of Nazareth.
45. See Legenhausen, *Preface*, 15: "So, since the Qur'an uses the expression 'Word of God' where the Bible uses 'Son of God' and the Biblical term is used to explain the virgin birth, we could consider the phrase of the Qur'an as having a similar significance minus the idea of divine fathering to which the Qur'an objects."
46. See Flannery, "Christ in Islam," 34: "for the Qur'an no other being is said to be Kalima of God, ruh of God."
47. See Legenhausen, *Preface*, 17.
48. See Shomali, "Mary, Jesus and Christianity," 73.
49. Bauschke, *Jesus—Stein des Anstoßes*, 192 [my translation].
50. *Ibid.*, 114 [my translation]. Sayyid Qutb also confirms the exceptional nature of Jesus as being a symbol of God (see *ibid.*, 193).
51. See Brinkmann, "Christian-Muslim dialogue," 108.
52. Imprecise translations of John 1.1 could create the impression that, in this passage, the "Logos" is identified with God. But in fact, the passage only confesses the word as being with God (HO THEOS). Moreover, it is only identified with THEOS—without a definite article—so that this passage should better be translated in the way that the word is divine, but not that it is God. So, too, when Thomas says in John 20.28, "My Lord and my God," he is not addressing Jesus because the Greek is not using the vocative, but the nominative. Thus, even in the Gospel of John there is no verse claiming that Jesus is God.
53. In the context of the Qur'anic definition of Jesus as being "son of Mary," Martin Bauschke describes the Jesus of the Qur'an as the fatherless one *per se*, without divine or worldly father (see Bauschke, *Jesus—Stein des Anstoßes*, 124). Like many other interpreters, he explains that the speech about Jesus, as being son of Mary, has the pur-

- pose to form an opposition to the speech of him being son of God (Triebe, “Das koranische Evangelium,” 278). However, “Son of Mary” could also be a link to a particular veneration of Mary, and influenced by Ethiopian Christians (see Bürkle, “Jesus und Maria im Koran,” 578).
54. “Such are the sayings which they utter with their mouths, following in spirit assertions made in earlier times by people who denied the truth! ‘May God destroy them!’ [. . .] They have taken their rabbis and their monks—as well as the Christ, son of Mary—for their lords beside God, although they had been bidden to worship none but the One God [. . .]” (9:30f.).
 55. Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, 30; for a corroborative view, see Flannery, “Christ in Islam,” 31.
 56. See Legenhausen, *Preface*, 27.
 57. Against Shomali, “Mary, Jesus and Christianity,” 81: Shomali disapproves of singling Jesus out. He argues that this would oppose the Muslim view of all prophets having the same message and function. In the aforementioned arguments, I have argued why in this context Q 2:253 can be put forward against Shomali’s disapproval.
 58. See Rahman, *Islam and modernity*, 6.
 59. Tardy, *Najrān*, 165f. Tardy assumes that this kind of Monophysism was influenced by Julianism (*ibid.*, 172). Julianism—named after its founder Juliana’s—taught the immortality of Jesus’s body. This position will again be discussed in light of Q 5:75. Theresia Hainthaler also confirms that Nestorianism after 570 was “found in the cities and especially in the harbors of Jemen; but there is no proof that it had spread to the countryside,” [my translation]. (Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 134).
 60. Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 57.
 61. See *ibid.*, 79.
 62. See Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche. Bd. 2/4*, 312. See also Schmucker, *Die christliche Minderheit von Nāḡran und die Problematik ihrer Beziehungen zum frühen Islam*; Schedl, *Muhammad und Jesus*, 374–97. In the Islamic tradition, Nāḡran’s Christians are considered as the reason for the revelation in Q 3:61–62.
 63. Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 129.
 64. See Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche. Bd. 2/4*, 306.
 65. See *ibid.*, 309.
 66. See *ibid.*, 308.
 67. See Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 139. For information on Jewish-Christian influences on Islam, see Neuwirth, “Imagining Mary,” 412. Neuwirth, in contrast to François de Blois, for example, does not believe that Jewish-Christians had a great influence on the Qurʾān.
 68. See Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche. Bd. 2/4*, 345.
 69. See *ibid.*, 344.
 70. See *ibid.*, 402 [my translation].
 71. Andrae, *Der Ursprung des Islam und das Christentum*, 205 [my translation].
 72. Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 31.
 73. See *ibid.*, 33.
 74. See Oeldemann, *Die Kirchen des christlichen Ostens*, 23.
 75. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche. Bd. 2/3*, 403.

76. See *ibid.*, 436.
77. Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 32.
78. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche. Bd. 2/3*, 280f. [my translation]. Philoponus also claims that the “Father, Son and Spirit [are] three hypostases in the shape of individual natures” (*ibid.*, 290).
79. Bauschke, *Jesus—Stein des Anstoßes*, 154f.
80. *Ibid.*, 655.
81. See Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 137n2.
82. *Ibid.*, 138 [my translation].
83. See *ibid.*, 140, referring to Lammens, “Les chrétiens à la Mecque à la veille de l’hégire,” 29, which she believes to be the best and most extensive source about Christianity in Mecca up to the present day.
84. See Trimmingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 260. Because Mecca was the center of slave trading, the existence of Christian slaves is likely (see Lammens, “Les chrétiens à la Mecque à la veille de l’hégire,” 12).
85. See Lammens, “Les chrétiens à la Mecque à la veille de l’hégire,” 16.
86. See *ibid.*, 37.
87. See *ibid.*, 38.
88. There could be strategic reasons for not making precise theological statements in the revelation’s early stage because these would be likely to open a debate.
89. See Lammens, “Les chrétiens à la Mecque à la veille de l’hégire,” 48.
90. Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 140 [my translation].
91. “Their main representatives were Peter the Iberian, his biographer, John Rufus, who later became bishop of Maiuma, Romanus, and Gerontius.” (Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche. Bd. 2/3*, 160).
92. See Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 56.
93. See *ibid.*, 156, referring to Andrae, *Der Ursprung des Islam und das Christentum*, 7ff., 201ff., and Brock, “The Christology of the Church of the East in the Synods of the fifth to early seventh centuries,” 125–42.
94. See Bauschke, *Jesus—Stein des Anstoßes*, 151. Ṭabari also reads this passage as opposing Monophysite Jacobites (see *ibid.*, 152).
95. With regard to this interesting question, see Tatari and Stosch, *Trinität—Anstoß für das muslimisch-christliche Gespräch*.
96. In Paderborn, we are working in a research group of Muslim and Christian scholars to give a response to this challenge. The Muslim members of the group—Zishan Ghaffar, Mouhanad Khorchide, Hamideh Mohagheghi and Muna Tatari—are all committed to comparative theology and try to use this approach to reshape their perspective on Jesus.