

In Your Light do we see the Light. God's invisible reality and Monotheism

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Introduction, Greetings

It is a great pleasure for me to be your guest. I'm very grateful for getting the chance to talk to you. We are unified by the following: God's peace and the importance of religion in our lives. There has been a long history of dialogue between the people of the revealed religions. Islam demands the belief in the great "caravan of prophets" of which Abraham is the vanguard. His offspring includes Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Peace be upon them all!

They are the teachers and role models to mankind whose stations were solely assigned by Allah. Preserving the integrity of the prophethood and its lineage paves the way of cooperation among the people of faith. It is especially impressive to me that the invitation to this meeting came from your side, from the side of Islam which demonstrates interest in and toleration of Christian religion, a distinguishing mark of Ibadi-islamic confession and tradition.

(1) An invisible reality which determines our lives

I would like to explain the title of my talk: "In YOUR light do we see light". This means the light of GOD in relation to the light of worldly existence. I try to broach the issue between the poles of "God's invisible reality" and the visible world, this life and life beyond. God's reality is so special because it can be denied as it represents a transcendental reality. This means that God is invisible, that he presents another reality than life on earth. However, in God's light we see how life on earth really is, how it is thought from God. In God's light we see light on earth. God's invisible light enlightens our world and being. This is a quote from the Book of Psalms in the Bible and I relate it to the light-verse in the holy Qur'an sura 24:25: "*Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth.*" **Arab.:**

I talk about an invisible reality which determines our life if we open our eyes of faith. This is a basic idea of both, Islamic and Christian religion. I combine it with the meaning of monotheism, the believing in one God, for both our religions.

The nature of religion cannot be understood from the outside but only from the centre. If somebody wants to understand Christianity he has to ask for Jesus Christ, the son of God, the mediator of salvation and redeemer who reconciled the creation with himself and God through his death on the cross. By his raising from the dead he pointed the way that life will prevail over death. If somebody wants to understand Judaism with its different movements he has to deal with the Torah (Arab.:

) and comprehend it as a way for successful living, for liberation and salvation, which leads to the one God, to the Eternal. If somebody seeks to understand Islam, may it be orthodox-Sunnite or Shi'ite or in the form of Sufi mysticism, he has to start with the Qur'an and the prophet for a comprehension of monotheism: *"Do not say 'Three'. Cease! It is better for you. Allah is only one God"* (sura 4:171).

In spite of the different developments of the "ideal way" which each religion acknowledges, the three Abrahamic religions share one essential point of reference: Believing in the ONE God characterizes the three major monotheistic religions and their image of God and human beings. The following is stated in the Schem'a – Jisrael and is considered as a nucleus of Jewish creed (Dtn 6:4): *"Listen Jisrael, the eternal our God is a unifying eternal being!"*

Christianity expanded the belief in one God with denominating Jesus as the son of God but without wanting to relativize monotheism in the origin of creed. *"We believe in One God..."* is the start of the Christian creed. If you ask them, Christians will always answer *"We believe in One God, we really are monotheists!"*

In all three religions, monotheism determines the relation of the believers to the world; as a basic principle the world is de-deified [*di-deiefeid*] and humankind is responsible for its scope of creativity. There are no gods or godlike beings within the world and the only God existing is far out of the world. Beyond the boundaries of the universe! So world becomes the primary place for people to prove themselves, and for believers a new reality of spiritual effort and strain, from which eternal salvation will conclude. At the same time, however, world and man are related to a reality

Sura 2:3-6, The Unseen reality

“Who believe in the Unseen, and establish worship, and spend of that We have bestowed upon them; and who believe in that which is revealed before thee, and are certain of the Hereafter. These depend on the guidance from their Lord, These are the successful. As for the disbelievers, whether thou warn them or thou warn them not it is all one for them; they believe not.”

(2) Men’s difficulties to believe in the invisible: extreme attitudes in respect to the invisible world

However, it is difficult for people to believe in the invisible. Many doubt the existence of the beyond. Muhammad had to experience that in the beginning of his ministry. Many Meccans rejected him because he preached the beyond and the resurrection of the dead. They held the opinion that the beyond did not have real power over them. And therefore, there could not be anything like a revelation. The material world sufficed them. Within that, they solely see their complete advantage. Since the Enlightenment, there have been many academic people in the West who explain religion and religious beliefs as a product of evolution, the human psyche or in historical context. For many, religion is a human illusion and counselling at the best, help for better living. Today, there is the talk about “new atheism” or a “scientific world view”. A dogma hides behind this: It’s all biology and evolution, there is no mind without human brain, it follows that neither God nor angel nor live beyond and afterlife exist. Is it still possible for “reasonable” people to believe? For them, it applies what the Holy Qur’an says in suras 87, 16 and 17: *“Nay, you prefer the life of worldly / > although the hereafter is better and more lasting!” Arab.:*

They deny *“The Great Day”* (Arab.: youm ‘athim,), *“The Day of Recompense”* (Arab.: youm ad-din,), cf. suras 83, 4 ff. And say: *“These are merely tales, legendary fairy tales!”* cf. suras 83,13 ! Arab. :

Yet there is the other extreme as well: Those who only believe in the invisible reality and for whom this life on earth becomes meaningless. They are the fanatics of the

beyond! They believe that they hold the absolute truth; for them the invisible reality is total. To which everybody and everything must subordinate. The beyond becomes the driving power of a zeal-potential which oppresses all tolerant forms of living together. The current discussion about monotheism in Europe and its violent, militant side thematized that. It was researched why especially the big monotheistic religions think “exclusively”, i.e. why they regard their point of view as absolute and exclude all the others from truth. And why, hence, it comes to religious wars. And to book burnings. And to the extermination of people of another religion. The very famous German scholar of religions, Jan Assmann from the university of Heidelberg, examined this in the culture of the old Egyptians and illustrated it with an example out of the Torah of Moses:

Dtn 30:15ff:

“See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. (16) If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you... (17). But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear... (18) I declare you this day that you shall perish! ... (19) I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, (20) loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; for that means life to you and length of days.”

Jan Assmann calls this the “discrimination of Moses”. It divides the cultural space in “true” or “false”, in polytheism or monotheism, in “right” (i.e. capable of plurality) or “wrong” (i.e. exclusive) monotheism. To quote Jan Assman: *“The space which was created through this discrimination in the first place was the space of Jewish-Christian-Islamic monotheism. It is a spiritual or cultural space which was constructed through this discrimination and which has been inhabited by Europeans for almost two thousand years.”* This is evident proof for how transcendence sustainably influences human behaviour and generates a new, different space. And also in a radical sense. Then, the discrimination between “true” or “false” leads to a war ordered by God. Actually, this was a European problem for many centuries. It is a historical fact that especially Islam, a monotheistic religion, has been very tolerant toward its related religions Christianity and Judaism. The prophet knows that bondage and oppression does not lead to any benefit in the field of religion. The

following verse in sura 2:256 is well-known: “*There is no compulsion in religion.*”

Arab.:

This is shown even clearer by sura 109 which depicts a situation in Mekka during early Islamic times. Muhammad calls to his opponents: “Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion!” (Sura 109:6), Arab:

This is an obvious foundation for both sides! This first reflection shows us two positive things about God’s invisible reality:

- 1) The invisible, the idea, the spiritual human power, the religion: the world of the invisible *is powerful and at least as present as the visible*, material world. I do not understand atheists at all who say that only what one can see is relevant. In truth, the world of spirit is very real. It can even become more important than anything else for us human beings. Then, people become witnesses and also martyrs [marters] of this invisible reality and they are ready to die for their idea or for their religion.
- 2) The invisible reality of God and his believers *realizes, becomes present* in form of Religion and religious institutions. However, it must not be imposed on non-believers or people of another religion. The unfolding of its virtuality rests upon the decision of the people. God’s invisible reality respects human decision. Although it is the greater, the more comprehensive reality. Its greatness precisely manifests therein, to refrain from violence. For the believers, GOD is this comprehensive reality: ZITAT Qur’an 2:257

“*Allah is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe. He brings them out of darkness into light.*” Arab.:

Billions of people are religious and feel obliged to follow the divine will in each own’s religion. However, from the perspective of the monotheistic religions, it is not feasible to reach peace among the religions by accepting all possible Gods. Instead, all people have to accept the true God. Yet, this goal cannot be reached by using violence because violence contradicts the inner essence of religion - freedom of decision - which is an essential part of faith. The decision for the worship service is a significant decision in life. I must not prescribe it under constraint but set an example

in my own way of living. According to this understanding one cannot simply “own” the right, the true religion as it is possible to own material goods or a fortune. One can and has to live it! This is about “being”, existing in the religion and not about “having” religion. It is not the “dogma” which does correspond to the invisible reality but the living existence; the invisible reality does not correspond to the “ownership of religions” but to the dynamics of religious life. For me as a Christian, it is very interesting that especially Islam attaches great importance to religious practice, to the doing in the religion. Four of the five pillars of Islam relate to religious practice in the community - they contribute to the realization of the invisible reality of religion in the family of believers. Maybe, this is why Islam has adapted a very tolerant attitude toward the religious practice of people of other religions and has always shown this in the course of history, too.

(3) The reality of Monotheism and its impact on Islam and Christian religion

Many Muslims regard the essence of Islam to be formulated in sura 112. It is called surat ul- ihlass or surat ul- tauhid. Arab.: In the scientific standard translation by the German scholar Rudi Paret the heading reads: “*Faith without reservation.*” The Arabic word “*somad*” (Arab.:) means the solid, rocky, compact God, as set in stone and everlasting as the mountains, but also as inscrutable as a deeply hidden secret. At the same time, the invisible God is the reliable and the merciful who can be trusted and to whom one can surrender (Islam – the religion of surrender). With him, there is stability of creation, cosmic and ethical order. The monotheistic religions herald that this God is different from the antique, human-like gods who were driven by their passions, and he is also different from blind fate or arbitrary power.

With this tremendous “*Allahussomad*” Islam emphasizes the same thing which German medieval reformer Martin Luther wrote several centuries later for Christians in the hymnbook, prayerbook: “*A mighty fortress is our God*” (cf. Ps 18,3; 31,3 u.ö.). It is the image of God in the Psalms as reflected in the Old Testament: God is a faithful one along the whole history of mankind. He stands true to his words of Revelations in the Holy Scripture, as he stands true to his creation. This is why sura 112 is also called the sura “*Chalass*”, namely the sura of those believers who have completely

engaged with God. Here, “*Chalass*” means: “Being faithful, being reliable”. As faith confesses: the invisible reality is the truly reliable dimension in my life.

The last two lines of the sura refer to God’s independence and otherworldliness. Everything in the world has an origin. God *is* origin. Everywhere in the world there are comparabilites, analogies. With God these analogies end. Here, the boundary to the other reality emerges stronger than in Christianity. God is unreachable and uncomparable, the one whom we cannot visualize because he precedes the beginning of time and space. Everything worldly is separated from him in an own act of creation and did not emerge from him, “emanate”. In him, there is no hierarchy of beings or gradations. Islam acknowledges: Nothing can be associated with him, no principles or philosophical structures, no further godlike powers, neither negative (dualism!) nor positive ones. Face to face with God, the human being is a servant, menial, or messenger, minister, prophet, but never deified or God’s rival. The formula of faith points towards this: “*I confess: there is no god except the one God and Muhammad is the messenger of God.*” Messenger explicitly means: mercury and not mediator of salvation as in the sense of ancient religions.

The religious Muslim completely trusts in his guidance through God and responds with surrender to God’s will. Thus, he finds peace with God through the attitude of Islam. The West has often confused this Islamic attitude with “resignation to fate” and “fatalism” and, in this way, misread the Turkish word “*Kismet*”. Islam, however, understands this as a seeking, conscious movement of alignment with God’s guidance: “*Whatever God wants...*” / “*If God wants...*” / “*In the name of the merciful and gracious God...*”. These are the quick prayers which get gladly repeated before each activity by the believer who, in doing so, conceives his freedom as alignment to God’s will, as surrender! This is how everyday life and business get regularly related to the invisible reality of God.

The famous throne verse in sura 2:255 expresses the seemingly insurmountable, almighty otherworldliness of God:

“Allah! There is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who is he that intercedes with Him save by His leave? He knoweth that

which is in front of them and that which is behind them; while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save that what He will. His Throne includes the heavens and the earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous.”

The so-called “prohibition of images” is a practical, spiritual and culturally shaping consequence of the strict monotheism in Judaism and Islam. It rejects any figured features of religion – and more than ever an “image of God”. In this “vacancy”, the invisible reality of God shows at its plainest. In the synagogue, mosque, (religious) book, the flat of the believers, everywhere this principle applies: “You shall not make for yourself any graven image!” At the same time, writing and ornamentation get significantly upgraded (calligraphy!). The Qur’an does not know an explicit prohibition of images; as the creative “imaging” is similar to “creating” in Qur’anic terms and therefore, the visual artist would be a “creator”, this is blasphemy for the Muslim, human arrogance toward the only creative power of God. In Christianity, the prohibition of images was a controversial issue from ancient times until 843, and again in Western Christianity since the Reformation. In Islam, the prohibition of images asserts in the lore of the sunnah as can be read at Al-Buchari for example:

“Is it allowed to pray in churches and synagogues?, Umar said: ‘We have never entered churches. Because in these buildings there are images and statuary’. Ibn Abbas prayed in churches and synagogues provided that there was no statuary”. (Reclam edition of Sahih al-Buhari by D. Ferchl, Stuttgart 1991, p.110.)

In a broader sense, the prohibition of images has an ideologically critical power against the self-made gods and idols on which one depends in the mundane world. It always recalls the believers out of the hardenings of the world to remember the One, invisible God. It refers to the only absolute (one) and can fluidise everything which seems firmly established on earth, put it into motion and work against each false stiffness.

In principle, this also accounts for Christianity: By no means, monotheism is a mere abstract theory but a confession of eminent practical significance. Since it tells us: The reality of the world **is** because it is grounded in the one God, no final chaos in the end; God endowed it with order, sense and cohesion ... The more we have God

alone as our only Lord, the more we are free sons and daughters in the common house of the one father. Still today, distancing from polytheism is anything but outdated – also if there are no longer gods in the religio-historical sense. As gods and idols are everything that we hold as ultimate values instead of God. These could be: money, prestige, work, power, progress, pleasure, but also: nation, race, state, finally: world views, ideologies, principles and others.

(4) Dealing with the intertwining of visible and invisible world

The above mentioned intertwining of realities now shows in the following: In spite of his otherworldliness, the one and only God covenants with human beings to guide them in their life story and to make them their family:

„And then We exacted a covenant (arab.: mi:tha:q) from the prophets, and from thee (o Muhammad), and from Noach and Abraham and Moses and Jesus son of Mary. We took from them a solemn covenant. That He may ask the loyal of their loyalty” (Sura 33 : 8). “O children of Israel! We delivered you from your enemy, and We made a covenant with you on the holy mountain’s side, and sent down on you the manna and the quails” (Sura 20:80). “And with those who say: Lo! We are Christians, We made a covenant, but they forgot a part of that whereof they were admonished” (sura 5:14). And finally Sura 5:7 where we read: “Remember Allah’s grace upon you and His covenant by which He bound you when ye said: We hear and we obey; and keep your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah knoweth what is in the breasts (of men).”

We must take into account, that arab. “mi:tha:q” in the language of Holy Qur’an means “commitment” to emphasize that this is not a bond of partnership. It is a covenant of a sovereign (‘sovrin) granted to his subjects.

In creed and prayer, Christianity constantly expresses the difference, the distance between God and His creatures as well – especially in the Theologia Negativa that doesn’t even dare to talk about God in human concepts.

However, in comparison to Islam, Christians emphasize the togetherness of God and man more strongly, the “partnership”, yes the mutual surprise in encounter, the meeting or missing of each other. The positive tension between God and man is reconciled in Jesus Christ who is God and human being at the same time, while Mary rather embodies the Islamic attitude of surrender and submission. Christians in the world understand themselves at the same time as God’s children and co-heirs of Christ’s kingdom, liberated through the son of God (Joh 1,12 and 8,36; Rom 8,14ff; Gal 3,26ff; Kol 3,11). It’s no accident that Reformer Martin Luther seizes this idea at the beginning of the Renaissance and circles around it in the tension between human freedom, new autonomy and remaining devotion to God.

Regarding the question of God’s hidden reality, Islam especially impresses the unity, uniqueness and uniformity of God while Christianity seems to be fascinated by God’s union with the people, by the riddle of God’s devotion to the creation – as praised by the Philippians hymn (probably under the influence of ancient mysteries of redemption): (Phil 2,5-11 in the Christian’ s Bible):

“Jesus Christ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

This image of redemption as death on the cross and out of the origin that is equated to God is not comprehensible to Islam and will never be accepted by Muslims. The consequent rejection of Trinitarian thoughts probably has to do with the fact that Christianity itself still discussed its notion of God in the 6th and 7th centuries AD, and also that Muhammad did not know about the orthodoxy of the councils in the 4th century. Maybe, he rather came into touch with Christians who had Nestorian views or were influenced by Egypt. They probably connected their religious beliefs with the ancient Egyptian cult about Isis and Osiris and understood trinity as follows: God the Father – Mary – Jesus Christ: *[Hier engl. Text aus dem Qur’an]* (sura 5:17 and 116).

“They indeed have disbelieved who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary. Say: Who then can do aught against Allah, if He had willed to destroy the Messiah, son of Mary, and his mother and everyone on earth? Allah’s is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them.” “And when Allah said: O Jesus, son of Mary, didst thou say unto mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods beside Allah? He saith: Be glorified! It was not mine to utter that to which I had no right! Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I know not what is in thy mind!”

The Islamic creation theology is about the distance between God and man. The “only” way to bridge the distance between the completely different reality of God and the reality of His creation is by revealing His will in the Qur’an. This is why some talk about an “inlibration of God” (instead of the “incarnation” in Christianity). Harry A. Wolfson introduced the term “inlibration” in his book “The Philosophy of Kalam” (=God’s word, Cambridge Mass. 1976).

Despite the existing tensions between relative creation and absolute autonomy of God beyond, there are intertwinings and bridges. One, which is not always realized in the West, is the one of “mirror imaging”, for example when Islamic buildings are reflected in a water basin. The subtitle of Henri Stierlein’s book about the Old Persian capital Isfahan reads: “Mirror of Paradise” (Stierlein, H.: Isfahan. Genf 1976, p.161ff.). Only the mirror image completes the sight of the mosque and makes it a picture of paradise as a whole. In transcendental symbolic, mirror imaging plays an important role because it leads to the “wholeness” of reality (or realities). Other such “transcendental hints” in architecture would be the cupola [kjupola], the minaret, the niche or grotto, the Tree of Life.

As a further element of the intertwining of heavenly and earthly reality, both Islam and Christianity know the “thought of succession”, however with the important difference that Islam prepares for the succession of the prophet Muhammad (sunna of the prophet) or “restricts” to it, while Christianity argues for the Imitatio Christi (the imitation of Christ) what also affects revelation in a more historical setting and framework. Islam is based on the actualization of God’s word and demands the imitation of the prophets, especially of Abraham and above all of Mohammad. The priority to Imitate is complete submission to God’s will as Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob,

Mose, Muhammad and other believers did. God himself is infinitely distant from any form of human imitation. No equality does ever exist between creator and human creature, for He is the One and Only God!

In Islam, everything gets related back to God's unity – including the diversity and beauty of the world. The intertwining of the mentioned dimensions of reality performs completely through the remaining "relationship of origin" of "all visible reality". For the religious person, its transcendent sources unfold at a tearing pace and virtually "absorb" him or her. According to orthodox Islam, it is needless to say that the right view on things, the knowledge of the word of revelation precedes the arrival at this right angle: return, conversion, orientation toward the perspective of trust in faith.

*"Whoever looks at the world because it is God's creation, and knows it because it is his creation, and loves it because it is his creation, only looks at God and only knows God and does not love anything but God. This is the true confessor of unity who does not see anything but God, yes, who does not look at himself because of his own sake but because he is God's servant. Of such a person one says that he was annihilated [anneihiled] in the confession of unity and of himself" (Al Ghazzali according to A. Schimmel). Another text about the unity confession (tauhid) in the mystical tradition of Islam shows how much the invisible reality embraces and encompasses the human being: "The unity confession means that man should be like a figure in God's hands, a figure that is told by him what to do as his almightiness determines, and that he shall be sunken in the ocean of unity, annihilated of himself, dead to people calling for him and his answer, absorbed in the reality of divine unity in true closeness, and lost for senses and actions because God fulfills in him what he wanted of him, namely that his last state becomes like his first state, and that he should become as he was before he was." (Schimmel, A.: *Mystische Dimensionen des Islam – Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Munich ²1992, p.212f - both quotations. Cf. Gramlich, R.: *Mystische Dimensionen des islamischen Monotheismus – Mystical Dimensions of Islamic Monotheism*, Freiburg 1975).*

This is how the inscrutable reality of God becomes the comprehensive and pervasive reality in this world. The Qur'an summarizes it in sura 2:115 with these words: *[Hier engl. Text aus dem Qur'an]*

“Unto Allah belong the East and the West, and whithersoever ye turn, there is Allah’s Countenance. Lo! Allah is the All-Embracing, All- Knowing!”

Arab.:

Thereby, the reality of the visible world is not constituted of boundary, rivalry, contradiction or dialectic, but of a given order out of the unity of God’s will, of clear theocentricity. Just as the Christian faith does, the Muslim faith puts its trust in the following: The whole world, the history of all nations and the life of each person lie in the hand and are in sight of a single power; neither space nor time should evade this power or could even oppose it. This is the core of each monotheistic creed. In Ps 139,7-12 we read: *[Hier engl. Text aus der Bibel]*

“Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!
If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea
Even there thy hand shall lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.
If I say: Let only darkness cover me, and the light about me be night-
Even the darkness is not dark to thee; the night is bright as the day;
For darkness is as light for thee!”

(5) “Working on a common truth in the search for a better world”

The claim for the absolute, and the totality of a “one-sided truth” can not be a common foundation for the Abrahamic Religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam. An open minded universality as a ministration and an invitation to all men however, can be such a common foundation for the work of the Abrahamic Religions in the process of building a better world.

On the one hand we can find indispensable progresses in our modern society (i.e. Human Rights, Democracy with checks and balances, plurality). On the other hand however, we can also find alarming problems, which are connected to a degradation of religion and its decline in the public discussion (i.e. materialism, corruption, lack of solidarity, the collapse of family structures). With a deep spirituality and solidly united

we should try to live up to our religions and help to "... overcome evil with good". (Micha 6,8; Romans 12,12; Sura 41,34.)

The Swiss theologian Hans Küng states: "Out of my own experiences I know everything about the dark sides of religion – about Christianity and about other religions: To this day religions often have a cataclysmic impact on conflicts worldwide. But I also know about the positive aspects of religions: Religions can offer ways to salvation and they can provide doctrines of salvation. Religions can create meaning, they can promote peace and conciliation and they can offer ethical standards and personal orientation for today's society." In this context cooperation, based on the ethical standards of the world religions could be helpful. Hans Küng promotes this idea in his project "Weltethos" (a global ethic): "No peace between nations without peace between religions. No peace between religions without dialogue between religions. No dialogue between religions without global ethic standards. No survival of our planet without a global ethic – a worldwide ethic. Men of different religions don't know much about the others, especially about the common religious and ethical values and traditions."

Pope John the Second met Sheikh Ahmed Kuffaro, the Grand Mufti of Syria, in Damascus in 2001. From the Muslim perspective Sheikh Ahmed Kuffaro can be quoted as one of many important voices. He states: "There are countless texts in the holy Quran and in the Bible, which tell us that these two religions can come together in the worship of the almighty creator. (...) In this troublesome and chaotic world we don't need separation and a lack of understanding. We need philanthropy (love for humans), grace of charity, devoutness and virtue – just what both religions consider as essential. Christianity tells us: No one can be a true believer if he doesn't feel the same love for his brother (fellow man) as he feels for himself. Christ tells us: The merciful will be in paradise because of his mercifulness. Mohammad tells us: The merciful god will be merciful to everybody who is merciful to others. Christ tells us: Help everybody who asks for your help and don't turn down people in need. Mohammad tells us: All creatures depend on god. The generous people he loves the most."

Next to the common orthopraxis, which he shares with Hans Küng, Sheikh Kuftaro could also put an emphasis on the common monotheistic origin of these religions. He could also discuss the notion of God and draw on the theory of Ibn Arabi, who presents the unifying truth of god in a popular mythic poem and thereby even manages to include polytheistic faiths: “My heart transforms in every possible perception: A grazing land for gazelles and a monastery for monks. A temple for idols and a Caaba for pilgrims. Tables of the Torah and the book of the Quran. I believe in the religion of love. It doesn’t matter to me which road god’s camel decides to take – love is my religion and my faith.”

In a similar way the writer and scholar Fatih Uthman, who was born in Egypt in 1928, argues in his book “Together with Christ within the four gospels.” The religious scholar Olaf Schumann discusses this book, writing: “An enrooted ethic can be found in both religions. Both religions have their common roots in a faith which is based on the unique Lord, the god of the whole world. This common faith can be considered as an important foundation for mutual respect. We know from each other that if we take our faith and belief as a serious matter, we have to advocate and promote god’s call for justice and equality among men.” You could call this a “Sharia of altruism and charity” or a “worldwide solidarity of monotheism”.

For this idea one could draw upon eleven guidelines, which have been developed by El Hassan bin Talal in an interreligious dialogue with Hans Küng. The scholar of the royal dynasty of Jordan read these eleven guidelines when he received his honorary doctor at the University of Tübingen in the year 2001:

“1. Start with what we have got in common. 2. Consider the connection between theology and its practice. 3. Realise which political and economical dimensions interreligious dialogue can have. 4. Consider the tradition of the “Aufklärung” (Age of Enlightenment). 5. Advocate the principle of nonviolence. 6. Respect the right of everyone to his personal religious beliefs. 7. Consider peoples level of education. 8. Guarantee access to free and unbiased information. 9. Develop the courage to advocate the heritage and the history of your people and of other people. 10. Develop general conditions which are apt for a controversy. 11. Accept responsibility for words and doings on all levels of life.

In this context Talal talks about a “broad comprehension of humanism” as a background for our actions. This idea is compatible to a theonomy (values based on gods authority), if the same otherworldly god is the origin of this sort of humanity through his invisible truth. Because he gave his visible truth to mankind this connection is possible. This process can be seen as a necessary transition to a new global culture. A culture of “non-bigots” (people not rivalling and competing). A culture where everyone is invited to participate. As a result, the potential for rivalling and competing has to be abolished in order to create such a culture. I hope for all religious believers (in a traditionally good sense) that their religion leads them the way to a positive and good eagerness (or even enthusiasm). I hope that a sensitive responsibility, gentleness and mercifulness, patience and endurance are practiced. Not rolling thunder and storm, but the gentle wave of the spirit should prevail – just as Elijah, the supposedly rivalling prophet was able to experience: (www.biblegateway.com)

“The Angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said “Get up and eat,for the journey is too much for you”. So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the Mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.”

“Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled the cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.” (1 Kings 19, NIV 2010).

The LORD was not in the fire, nor in the strong wind, nor in an earthquake, but in a quiet, small voice, and a gentle whisper. This is a symbol for the merciful and benevolent GOD full of compassion. In the same way, Holy Qur’an reads “In the name of Allah, The Beneficent, and the Merciful.”

Here, God's invisible reality does not show in violence and destructive power but in placidness. The Holy Qur'an has a beautiful expression of light to illustrate this – verse of the Surat – an – Nur (S 24,34 sequ.):

“Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of his light is a niche within which there is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is like a shining star. This lamp is kindled [kindled] from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth of itself, though no fire touched it. Light upon light! Allah guides unto His light whom He will.”

God's light does not blind, does not hurt, does not destroy. It enlightens the bottom of heart and mind, and shows us the way. Darkness is an experience which all people know. An especially bad torture and punishment. Travelling without light and without hope is bitter and fills us with fear and helplessness. The way out of the dark is not the battle of the fanatic who tries to destroy modern trends out of fear. Neither is it the way of the enlightener who thinks that light does only come from man himself that he can set himself absolute and is enough light for himself! In the Book of Psalms the Bible tells us: *“The LORD is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid?”* (Ps 27:1).

I have quoted the Holy Qur'an before, Surat al-Baqqara 257: *“Allah is the Protecting Guardian of those who believe. He brings them out of darkness into light!”* And in sura 5:15: *“Now has come unto you light from Allah and a plain scripture.”*

Arab.:

The Catholic Church demonstrated its deep solidarity and connection with the Muslim world in its epochal declaration Vaticanum II, published in 1964. The common action in the name of peace and social justice is also a main request of this declaration:

„The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all- powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they

value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.“

Let me try to summarise in ten points what Christianity and Islam have in common and which common basis can be found, according to our Christian church. Ten points we can take for granted - ten points we can be sure about:

1. The acknowledgement of the one and unique god.
2. The personality of god which is shown to us in his ninety-nine beautiful names.
3. The belief that God speaks to men and that he wants to guide us in the right way.
4. The connection to prophecy (to the prophets) and to the important characters of the biblical tradition: Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammad – and also the importance of the religious community.
5. The understanding that “faith” means trust in god and dedication to god. And the praise for important examples of “faith” such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammad.
6. The belief in the day of judgement. The belief in judgement and conciliation. The belief in the resurrection of the dead.
7. The importance of social justice, worldwide peace and the freedom of religion.
8. The willingness to stand up for the welfare of all men, for the protection and promotion of social justice, for morality and peace between all nations.
9. The defence of the dignity and personality of men, which is justified by the creation of god. The defence of the human sense for individuality and community.
10. The effort and courage to deal with past conflicts and to come to a better understanding of one another. The continuing attempt to meet and to communicate. The development of respect and appreciation.

Our Pope Benedict XVI. has continued to carry on the heritage of the council, just as his predecessor Pope Johannes Paul II had done. Both Popes followed invitations to

Muslim countries and approached Muslim dignitary with important messages. As an example I would like to quote one of the Pope's speeches, addressed to Muslim ambassadors in Italy in 2006:

"Dear friends, I am convinced that in the situation of our today's world, it is essential that Christians and Muslims work together, in order to deal with the various challenges mankind is facing. Especially important in this common case is the promotion of dignity and human rights. While the threats against mankind and peace increase, Christians and Muslims can manifest their faith by acknowledging the importance of the human life and personality. Furthermore they have to promote respect for life and obedience to the creator who wants everybody to live in the dignity he gave to mankind."

Our Pope Benedict XVI visited Turkey in 2006 and gave a speech in Ankara, addressing Muslim scholars. At the end of his speech he prays for god's blessing – I would like to quote these words at the end of my speech as well:

"I want to praise the almighty and merciful god for this wonderful opportunity we have here today. I want to praise him for the opportunity to meet each other in his name. I pray that this can be a sign of our common effort for dialogue – the dialogue between Christians and Muslims. I also pray that this can be an encouragement to walk this way together in respect and friendship. May we achieve a better understanding in order to strengthen our sympathy in the common wish for unity, peace and mutual trust. As religious believers we draw strength from prayer – a strength that is essential in order to overcome prejudices – a strength that is essential in order to confess a common testimony of our strong faith in god. May his blessing always be upon us. Thank you.

