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Salvific community

Part Two: the Koran

The first part of this exploration¹ has studied salvific community in Ignatius of Loyola's understanding. The question now to be answered is what *the Koran* presents as salvific community. Again, a methodological reflection might clarify what is intended.

I. KORANIC THEOLOGY?

How can one, and how can a non-Muslim, for that matter, outline the Koranic view on a chosen subject in scholarly responsibility? The following three principles seem fair.

1. Historical matching

The Koran needs to be read historically. We might simply list quotes from the Koran. Such a procedure has the advantage that, by its positivist nature, it cannot be wrong. Three points have to be kept in mind, however. First, a radically synchronic reading of the Koran's verses would have to accept blatant contradictions. Many can be resolved, if one sees the individual Koranic propositions as contextualised in particular situations of Muḥammad's career. Second, it is not only the occidental and thus foreign critique that poses historical questions to the text; it is, rather, a traditional Islamic approach to see each verse in its specific situation, as a response to a certain problem: the classical *tafsīr* (exegetical) discipline of *asbāb an-nuzūl* (the occasions of revelation) is studying precisely this. Third, such contextualised reading, though closer to Muḥammad's life and to Muslim exegetical tradition, is in fact not of mathematical certainty; but that is not to say it is thwarted from the outset. Once you do history, some conjecture is inevitable.

¹ *Gregorianum* 94 (2013) 593-609.

That does not render arbitrary all historical claims. There are criteria for historical research that help us attain a level of certitude. Therefore, we will, carefully, coordinate the Koranic quotes in a chronological framework. Guidance for this are not the traditional Muslim presentations of Muḥammad's life (*sīra*); rather, a historical order which, in the footsteps of Theodor Nöldeke², starts from literary features of the Suras and verses, may provide a relatively reliable framework here.

2. Restriction to the Koran

Why should one only use Koranic formulations? Are there no other sources for Muslims, and thus, for Islamic Studies? Should *ḥadīṡ*s (Arabic plural: *aḥādīṡ*) not be used equally, i.e., messages about normative actions and logia of Muḥammad? The answer that they are pretty much all a product of forgery and thus completely unreliable is too easy. The *isnād-plus-matn* method³ offers a reasonably safe grounding for historicity claims in *ḥadīṡ* research. Within Muslim theology and legal methodology (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), «authentic *aḥādīṡ*» have always been reckoned as a second revealed source next to the Koran.

Moreover, recent Muslim reflection has been able to challenge successfully the assumption that for a truly Islamic life in its classical manifestations, the Koran has ever been of definitive authority⁴. The «Koranicity» of Islam seems a false belief shared by Islamic fundamentalists, Muslim modernists and Western scholars. This surprising agreement can be explained. All of them may be, in their own ways, victims of a modern textualism. Still, a theology based on scriptural rather than traditional quotes, will, especially when offered by a non-Muslim, normally be considered as less controversial, given the spiritual role of the Koran in all forms of Islamic life.

² F. SCHWALLY, ed., *Geschichte des Qorāns von Theodor Nöldeke*. I. *Über den Ursprung des Qorāns*, Leipzig 1909. Now convincingly applied by A. NEUWIRTH, *Der Koran als Text der Spätantike. Ein europäischer Zugang*, Berlin 2010; ID., *Der Koran*, I. *Frühmekkanische Suren*, Berlin 2011. G. Weil had, already by 1860 (*Historisch-kritische Einleitung in den Koran*, Bielefeld 1878²), developed a four phase scheme of Mecca I, II, III, and Medina, similar to Nöldeke's.

³ Cf. especially H. MOTZKI, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence. Meccan Fiqh before the Classical Schools*, Leiden 2001.

⁴ Cf. M. Paçacı's researches; especially: «Çağdaşçı Dönemde Kur'an'a ve Tefsire Ne Oldu?», *İslāmiyāt* 6 (2003) 4, 85-104, translation and commentary by F. KÖRNER: «Was ist in der Moderne aus Koran und Koranexegese geworden?», in *Alter Text – Neuer Kontext. Koranexegese in der Türkei heute*, Freiburg i. Br. 2006, 130-163; «Klasik Tefsir Neydi?», in *Klasik Yeniden Düşünmek Sempozyumu*, Istanbul 2006, translation and commentary by F. KÖRNER: «Klassische Koranexegese – was war das?», *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 58 (2007) 127-139; «Çağdaşçı “Kur'an'da Kadın” Yorumunun Eleştirisi», in B. GÖKKIR – N. YILMAZ – Ö. KARA – M. ABAY – N. GÖKKIR, ed., *Tarihten Günümüze Kur'an'a Yaklaşımlar*, Istanbul 2010, 559-585, which F. Körner hopes to publish in commented translation.

Comparing Ignatius and the Koran, that is, one form of 16th century spirituality with another religion's basic text, that is, 7th century formulations, seems a rather unfair attempt. Our purpose is not to find out which is better, but to permit mutual illumination. We must keep in mind the profound differences in origin, nature, self-understanding and status of the Koran over against Ignatian spirituality.

3. Formulating Theology

The Koran is not presenting a full-fledged theology of salvific community. On this or similar subjects, the text is not explicit, let alone is it offering a thematic passage; therefore, we need to survey the whole. Then, a theological outline needs to draw on what the Koran says and implies. This step leaves room for violent and still hidden hermeneutic manipulations. The result will therefore need discussion, especially with Muslim interlocutors.

II. THE LINGUISTICS OF KORANIC COMMUNITY

What kind of a community does the Koran describe, create and offer? And to what extent is it salvific? The Koran has three typical ways of expressing community.

1. Group

Often, the Koran's verses end in the formula «they belong to those who are...»: *mina l-...-īn*. This ending could be called the *clausula partitiva*⁵. The clausula sounds unnecessarily periphrastic. «They belong to those who are righteous (*mina ṣ-ṣāliḥīn*)», is apparently more complicated than simply saying «They are righteous (*ṣāliḥīn*)». Perhaps this is not mere coincidence or compulsion to rhyme. The Koran likes to think in terms of groups, and, for that matter, of binary groups. You should be part of the right group, is the Koran's basic message.

Often the righteous are characterised as those who will receive reward. Promised is both a this-worldly compensation, and, especially, eternal happiness⁶.

⁵ This is how the present author suggests to call it. It had a bad reputation in Western research, especially since T. Nöldeke's verdict that it was a product of lacking poetic imagination and of rhyme compulsion (*Geschichte des Qorāns*, 6); but A. Neuwirth is eloquently trying to rehabilitate it, pointing out the clausula's triple function as poetic speech, party dichotomy and paraenetic appeal (*Der Koran als Text der Spätantike*, 753-760).

⁶ Suras 12:101; 26:83; 16:122; 5:84;4:69; eschatologically explicit *wa-alḥiqnī bi-ṣ-ṣāliḥīna*: Suras 12:101; 26:83; 27:19; 21:75.86; 29:27; 68:50.

For a theology of community, this has three consequences: (a) There seem to be already established values, and groups associated to them; what you are to do is not to create a new cell, but decide for the right party. (b) A good–bad dualism seems presupposed. (c) The Koran tries to motivate its hearers with the attraction of belonging to the right group.

2. *Share*

What the righteous ones get in paradise — and, contrary, the evildoers in hell — is, «their portion». The word is elucidating: *ḥalāq*, «portion, share» is the Hebrew *ḥēleq*, which can have the same meaning. It is in fact a key word for Israel's theological self-understanding. The Lord (*YHWH*) is Israel's portion, and Israel is God's portion⁷. The word comes into the Koranic vocabulary only in Medina, i.e., after 622 C.E. For a Koranic theology of community, three lessons can be learned from this evidence: (a) Israel's theology of the relationship between God and his people, as personal and mutual belonging, is not being continued in the Koran. Rather, «portion» has become de-personalised: a reward in eternal living conditions (luxury, over against torture). (b) The logics of portions is now legal, that is, one has a commercial claim to one's compensation in the hereafter (Sura 2:102). The portion is result of divine reckoning (Sura 2:202). (c) But the portion granted to human beings is not restricted to the hereafter; the concept includes, rather, what you get in this world now, in order to use it (Sura 9:69).

3. *With*

A study of community needs to take into account Koranic usages of the preposition «with». The associative aspect can be expressed in Arabic by the preposition *ma'a*. Is there a «with» relationship between God and the believers? That God is «with» the patient ones, is a recurring formula (Suras 2:153.249; 8:46.66); but «with God» is only used in a polytheist sense — putting other candidates of adoration «next to Him» — and that is, of course, rejected (Suras 6:19; 17:22). What does it mean for human beings that God is with them? It means that God is helping them for victory, though the successful outcome may not be immediately obvious in the course of the events

⁷ Deuteronomy 4,19-20: «And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars — all the heavenly array — do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshipping things the Lord your God has apportioned (*ḥ-l-q*) to all the nations under heaven. But as for you, the Lord took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are». Jeremiah 10,15-16: «They [the idols] are worthless, the objects of mockery; when their judgment comes, they will perish. He who is the Portion (*ḥ-l-q*) of Jacob is not like these, for he is the Maker of all things, including Israel, the tribe of his inheritance — the Lord Almighty is his name».

(Sura 8:65-66; expressly, with «troops», Sura 9:40). Contrary to what one might expect from our previous findings, this relationship of helping is mutual between God and human beings: *in taṣṣurū llāha yanṣurkum* (Sura 47:7: «if you help God, he will help you»). Helping God means accepting Muḥammad's mission and taking part in it actively and unselfishly (Sura 29:69): «those who fight with (fī) Us, We will lead them in Our ways, God is with those who do good» (*wa-llaḏīna ḡāhadū fīnā la-naḥdiyannahum subulanā wa-inna llāha la-ma'a l-muḥsinīn*).

The usage of the Koranic *ma'a* can be summed up in two theses: (a) The divine-human co-operation is expressed by the preposition «with», showing that God is not replacing but supporting human activity. (b) There is a mutuality of action; not only God helps the believers, they are also encouraged to help God.

III. A KORANIC THEOLOGY OF COMMUNITY

In the course of the Koran's proclamation, a development of its community theology can be observed. Community means, for the Koran, salvific participation in five different realities:

1. Community as harmony with cosmic rhythms

The day cycle of the sun and the month cycle of the moon (cf. 6:96) seem to have been the primary points of regulation for Islamic conduct from early on. Cultic practices — several daily prayers — according to cosmic rhythms were probably part of Islam's founding impulse, first without deliberate dissent from other Meccan prayer styles. Living within the structures of creation was, then, a criterion for salvation in the eyes of the first Muslims.

2. Community by access to the original

The heavenly book (*kitāb*) grants guidance in how to think and speak about God, and in how to act correctly. It grants authority to the proclaimer of such guidance. The ability to quote from this source also creates, according to the Koran, a unity of understanding between all groups who base their lives upon such an access. During the phases «Mecca II» and «Mecca III» (that is, ca. 616-622 C.E.), a particular fraternity is expressed towards Christians and Jews as «People of the Book»: *ahl al-kitāb*. For the later Meccan Muḥammad, this community in the *kitāb* is a way of achieving independence from the cultic life around the Ka'ba and its theological implications. The Jewish outlook with its concentrated direction and its exclusive orientation towards the one God becomes the salvific alternative to the manifold inclusivism around the Meccan sanctuary. This explains why Muḥammad now teaches to prostrate

with the Jews: towards Jerusalem. The change of prayer direction, *qibla*, seems to have been a turning away from a cosmic (eastward) orientation of prayer towards a place that is justified, not by natural conditions but by the history of salvation: the election of Israel and Mount Zion.

While this union with Jewish prayer will later, in Medina, be abandoned for a Mecca orientation of prayer (2:142), access to the heavenly deposit of divine revelation, the *kitāb*, remains a theologically important claim. It now provides a different freedom. It legitimates Muḥammad's authority to mark his disagreement with the Jews. It also becomes clear that «having part in the Book» is no sufficient salvific condition: it is no guarantee for correct conduct (4:44).

Next to the *kitāb*, another original reference point now gains importance, viz., Abraham (Sura 2:124-241). Abraham is earlier than Moses and his «book»; Abraham is not restricted to the Jews; and his foundation is, according to the Koran, at hand in Mecca. Being in communion with Abraham is, therefore, the winning card over against Mosaic community, and the perfect justification to conquer the Ka'ba.

3. Community as agreement

Disagreement becomes a major issue in the growth of the Islamic community. Meccan lack of obedience was processed rather easily; those who rejected Muḥammad's monotheistic thrust were declared unbelievers. In Medina, however, even the People of the Book expressed disagreement with several of Muḥammad's claims concerning his political and prophetological posture, and consequently, also concerning his theological position. Now, «unbeliever» came to mean a person who rejected Muḥammad's mission. A new theology of agreement had to be developed. It seems in this context that the Koran is presenting an interpretation of the whole of history in terms of agreement and disagreement.

The initial human situation was «one people», (*umma wāḥida*, Sura 2:213); our present human state, however, is discord (*iḥtilāf*). God's project is a re-establishment of universal agreement, humanity's natural and original condition. It had been for this reason that all prophets were sent. It is not the prophets that were in contradiction; they were, rather, all equal in what they said (monotheism) and experienced (rejection and late success). It is, rather, other human beings that develop discord. The Koranic theology of religions implicitly distinguishes two types of differences between religions (Sura 5:48). There are variations — they only concern random forms of cultic observance (*šir'a* and *minḥāğ*), that is, adiaphora; and there are, on the other hand, divergences — they are essential, and concern, due to their doctrinal nature, truth. According to the same verse (5:48), variations are willed and made by God (*ğa'alnā*), they need no correcting judgement and have a

positive effect: they entice the competitors for the better. Divergence, however, is a product of human deviant arbitrations (*ahwā'*). Divergence is to be avoided (*lā tattabi'*) and needs prophetic judgement (*fa-ḥkum*) according to the *kitāb*, so that truth be re-established.

4. Community by «in-recitation»

The semantic development of the word *qur'ān* demonstrates how, in the case of Islam, community is being created by verbal proclamation. One might speak of three phases, viz., reading, recitation, and lectionary. H. Wolfson had formulated that, as opposed to the Christian notion of incarnation, the Koran implies the claim of being the divine word's «inlibration»⁸. This leaves us with a major problem. The Koran's own claim is not so much to be the *kitāb* (liber, «book») but to be the *kitāb*'s actualisation. Therefore, we will propose another formula. The Koranic view is that in the Koran, the divine word finds (rather than its incarnation or inlibration) an «in-recitation». (a) Muḥammad presented readings from the heavenly book, that is, appropriately contextualised proclamations originating from the transcendent text. Community by «in-recitation» means, in this early phase, that all who listen to those readings are part of the salvific congregation. (b) These readings were orally absorbed by the early community. They were not recited only once, they were, rather, re-used in cultic practice by Muḥammad and its followers. *Qur'ān* now comes to mean, rather than situational reading from the heavenly book: recitation of a text that had been proclaimed earlier. Community by «in-recitation» is to say in this phase, that the assembly is becoming itself because it has its own, identity-marking texts to declaim. Recitation used to be the actualisation of heavenly words by the prophet; recitation now becomes the quasi sacramental action of manifesting divine presence. It is a chanted, therefore aesthetic and numinous — rather than rational — encounter with God's message. (c) During its codification, *qur'ān* acquires a third meaning, following the Syriac *qeryānā*: a collection of texts, not arranged according to a thematic order other than user-friendly liturgical access. It is to serve as a handy but solemn source book for the community's various cultic occasions: lectionary. Community by «in-recitation» now means that the group is made up by those who have, and have access to, the visible text with all its dignity; community by «in-recitation» has become union in the recitation's codified version.

⁸ H.A. WOLFSON, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, Cambridge (MA) 1976, 246: «inlibration, that is, the embookment of the pre-existent Koran in the revealed Koran». A decade before him, H. Haag had already spoken of God's Word becoming book («Buchwerdung des Wortes Gottes»): J. FEINER – M. LÖHRER, ed., *Mysterium Salutis. Grundriß heilsgeschichtlicher Dogmatik*, I, Einsiedeln 1965, 289.

5. *Community as umma*

The Koran's project is to establish a tribe that is not defined genetically but by accepting God's guidance and thus potentially unites all of humanity⁹. The Hebrew Bible's word *umma* («tribe», Genesis 25:16, etc.) is becoming the Koran's programmatic designation of the salvific community. In Medina, the followers of Muḥammad receive their designation to be «proper/middle-of-the-road community» for the whole of humanity (*umma wasaʿt*, Sura 2:143). The *umma*'s prayer life at the day of «coming together» (Sura 62:9, *yawm al-ḡum'a*, that is, «Friday») is markedly different from Judaism and Christianity, and it is expressing a universal unity, like any *qibla*-directed activity. Now, salvific community has become a sociologically established entity; unity in the quantitative sense of inner undividedness and external distinctiveness. It is exclusive in two senses: in so far as God is not a part of it, and in so far as not everybody belongs¹⁰.

IV. OPEN EXCLUSIVISM

A Koranic theology of salvific communion is, however, not presented appropriately if it is only seen as exclusivist. For a more balanced picture, three points need to be made, the first is setting the Koran's view into its original context, the second reflects upon its fundamental intention, and the last is sketching a Koranic ontology of participation.

1. *Context: anti-associationism*

The Koran's exclusive tendencies and its reluctance to use, for example, *ma'a* («with») as designating a relationship between human beings and God need to be seen in their religious context. The Koran's main concern is

⁹ A. NOTH, «Früher Islam», in U. HAARMANN, ed., *Geschichte der arabischen Welt*, Munich 1987, 11-100.

¹⁰ One might contest this by pointing out that God is portrayed as being close to humanity and that therefore, exclusivism is not the right concept for a Koranic theology of community; one might try to prove this with the famous Koranic saying that God is closer to human beings than their jugular vein (Sura 50:16). The verse is, however, not speaking of a closeness in communion but in control. That is clear from the wording of the same verse: «We (God) know what his (man's) innermost self whispers within him: for We are closer to him than his neck-vein» (translation: M. Asad). — There is another form of exclusivism in the conception of *umma* in the so-called *Constitution of Medina*, which may be a historical document. There, the Muslims declare themselves literally to be an *umma* at the exclusion of all others: *min dūn an-nās*; the text in: IBN HIŠĀM, K. *Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen 1859-1860, 341-344; a translation is offered by W.M. WATT, *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford 1981, 221-225.

tawhīd, literally: letting (God) be one¹¹. What does «one» mean here? It is primarily a quantitative claim. It means, there is no other divinity, so, God is unique; and it means that there are no parts in God, since having parts is seen as a sign of imperfection.

A classical triple unfolding of the Koran's monotheistic thrust in social, cognitive and cultic practice would be: promoting social structures, religious talk and cultic forms that correspond to God, who has neither parts nor peers¹². This classical list could be completed by a fourth level, spiritual psychology. The decisive question is where one directs one's intentions, if fully accepting God's oneness. «Oneness» as spiritual attitude means total commitment to the «ways» of God, i.e. his cause (e.g., Sura 5:54). The Islamic mystics, the Sufis, will radicalize the understanding of oneness as purity of intention: *tawhīd* is, then, not acting for reward but for God¹³; even, *tawhīd* can come to mean attributing «being» only to God¹⁴. *Tawhīd* as perfect spiritual orientation may well be the Arabic version of the basic Christian attitude the New Testament and the ascetic traditions of and the Early Church called ἀπλότης — simplicity¹⁵.

The Koran's intent is to bring humanity back to its primeval belief in the one God (7:172). This is, according to the Koran, a necessary project of reform of human conditions. That is to say, the original posture of the human being vis-à-vis the Creator and Judge has to be re-established over against false belief, just like other social grievances, too, have to be eradicated, e.g. killing children for material concerns¹⁶. The grievance against which Koranic *tawhīd* is deployed is demarcated with a commercial term¹⁷. It means «association, partnership»: *širk*. Theological association is the Koranic critique's core point of 7th century Arab society; and it is the unforgivable sin (Sura 4:48); we are used to translate *širk* by «polytheism». *Širk* should, however, also be seen as a conception of participation, community. In other words, *širk* is a *koinōnia* notion; but in God's realm, community is now being seen as reducing God's oneness, divinity, honour, power and efficiency.

Since fighting *širk* is the Koran's fundamental thrust, we will hardly find Koranic enthusiasm for any theology that offers a communion in which God is giving himself. Still, the Koran's conception of salvific relationship can be

¹¹ The word is a noun in the causal form of the numeral «one» (*wahad*); so, *tawhīd* is something like: «the one-ing».

¹² D. GIMARET, «Tawhīd», in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, X, Leiden 2000², 389: *rububīya – asmā' wa-šifāt – 'ibāda*.

¹³ R. GRAMLICH, *Der eine Gott. Grundzüge der Mystik des islamischen Monotheismus*, Wiesbaden 1998, 179.

¹⁴ R. GRAMLICH, *Der eine Gott* (cf. nt. 13), 289.

¹⁵ E.g., 2Cor 11,3; on the early Christian tradition, cf. H. BACHT, «Einfalt», in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, IV, Stuttgart 1959, coll. 821-840.

¹⁶ Cf. T. NAGEL, *Mohammed. Leben und Legende*, Munich 2008, 326.

¹⁷ J. HOROVITZ, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Berlin 1926, 60.

formulated also in terms of inclusive community. The Koran wants to bridge existential gaps. One is the distance between God and human being, the other the separation among human beings. The two Koranic bridging projects may be called inter-human universalism and divine–human cooperation.

2. *Project: universalism*

We have already seen the Koranic project for humanity: the Koran reminds its hearers of the initial human situation when all of humanity was one *umma* (cf. above, section III.5; Sura 2:213). Here, the Koran is not only looking back. Intending to re-establish the initial state of humanity, the Koran is in fact presenting a future human unity: a universal project. Because of this thrust towards unification, the Koran does not want to develop an understanding of historical particularity. Particularisms, claims of election and special vocations create, in the Koranic vision, disagreement. That is also why not even Muḥammad is seen to be different from other prophets (Suras 17:77; 2:136); quite to the contrary, he is legitimised through an appeal to his similarity to the messengers before him. Special is only that the message is, this time, secured from distortion. Therefore, no further prophets needs to follow him¹⁸. In comparison one can say the following: the Church claims to exist out of the ἐξουσία¹⁹ which Christ had been given to give; in Koranic thought, by contrast, it is out of respect for God's absolute power that neither the community nor even the prophet himself feels entitled to pass on prophetic authority. The *umma* does not represent God; it corresponds to his orders (cf. Sura 16:90); and it is in surrendering to God's will that union is established. This consists, in fact, in a triple movement: accepting what cannot be changed as God's now incomprehensible will (cf. Sura 18:65-81); fulfilling God's intention in cultic and social practice; and letting, thus, unity grow among human beings.

3. *Active participation*

Four, possibly surprising, aspects may show that there is actually a thinking of active human–divine participation at the basis of the Koran's theology.

a. God at work in the believers' action. When the *umma* proves to be successful in matters military, Medinan Koran passages provide a theological reading of these victories. Thus, there is a Koranic reflection of the events at the battle of Badr, where Muḥammad and his followers won against the Meccan elite in 624 C.E. What seemed to be the Muslims' success at Badr was in fact God's retribution of the unbelievers, foretold by the Meccan

¹⁸ Sura 33:40 can be read this way.

¹⁹ *Exousia*: «authority»; Mark 6,7; John 20,21.

punishment narratives: «It was not you [believers] who killed them [the unbelievers who were killed at Badr], it was God. It was not you [Muḥammad] who threw [or, shot], it was God»²⁰. The Koran's interpretation of contemporary events can serve as one hint at a Koranic theology of divine-human collaboration. Possibly the Islamic theologians, subtle and creative in their theories of action²¹, were following this late Koranic theology.

b. The believers helping God. As we have already seen, human beings can, according to the Koran, «help» God (cf. above, section II.3; Sura 47:7). God does, however, not need any help, because he is independent and rich in himself (*ḡanī*, Suras 29:6; 3:97). Helping God means to be committed in the defence and diffusion of Islam; a typical Koranic wording for this is «striving in God's ways» (9:24 etc.).

c. God witnessing. The semantic field of «witnessing» (*š-h-d*) is amply present in the Koran. We find human beings' credal testimony designated by this word. It does not presuppose ideas of perception, presence or memory. Witnessing is, rather, verbal affirmation without doubt (cf. 5:83)²². Human beings can, in that sense, bear witness to God's Lordship (7:172) and unicity (6:19); and that is what God expects (3:81). God has His witnesses on earth; He seems to want such support. There is, however, yet another type of witnessing also present in the Koran. Interestingly, God is, according to the Koran, also Himself witnessing; in what sense? God's witness is an affirmation, meant to remove all doubt. «God witnesses» is not referring to any prove actively given in addition, not even an experience of security. «God witnesses» can have two contexts, viz., verbal propositions or actions. For a proposition, «God witnesses» is an affirmative claim like «God knows», comparable to an oath, giving authority to a statement, possibly by an implied threat of sanction for those who reject what is being claimed (3:18; 4:166). In the context of actions, God's witnessing presence is to remind people of their eschatological responsibility in their existential decisions now (3:81). Both functions are closely related. In each case, the purpose of God's witness is to remove doubt (cf. 11:54).

d. God and his messenger. God has been sending messengers (*rusul*), one to each nation, and prophets (*nabīyūn*) for right guidance. God is entrusting his message to them, their action and fate is in the focus of God's governance. In the case of Muḥammad, God's cause becomes more and more identified with His messenger; the prophet's voice and verdict is to be obeyed like God's (8:46). In Medinan verses we find mention of a third authority. The

²⁰ Sura 8:17, pointed out by D. MARSHALL, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers. A Qur'anic Study*, Richmond (U.K.) 1999.

²¹ Cf. especially J. VAN ESS, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, IV, Berlin 1997, 482-512.

²² The «hypocrites» are hypocrites precisely because they say they testify to Muḥammad's prophecy, without being convinced (63:1).

hearers are instructed to obey God and His messenger, and now, additionally: «and those who order» (*ulū l-amr*, Sura 4:59.83). We encounter growing human participation in God's own authority.

This list of participatory aspects may suffice to demonstrate that it would be exaggerated to say the Koran poses God strictly on the other side of creatures. Rather, we find several Koranic tendencies towards a theology of representation. In human–divine collaboration, the Bible knows of yet another pattern: even human actions *against* God, his plans, his rules, his elect are integrated into salvific history (cf., e.g. Genesis 45:5). Such a pattern is unknown to the Koran.

V. CONCLUSION: NATURAL COMMUNITY

The Koranic findings can be synthesised as follows.

1. A communion of divine and human intention, and even action — military and judicial — is envisioned in the Koran. A quasi-identification of God and creature seems acceptable when the power of those who get their legitimation out of the Koran is in question.

2. Community is, for the Koran, a counter-group with a universal project, that is, with the perspective to overcome contrasts; belonging to it means to have the divine promise of eternal *and* this-worldly reward; and to have the divine right and the divine help to overtake the others.

3. Salvific communion is, for early Koran passages: returning to the natural monotheistic creed; later, in Medina, decision for the one rightly guided community becomes a salvific criterion as well.

4. The Koranic conception of divine–human communion has, however, its clear reservations, too. God is not putting his project at risk by getting involved in human history. The Koran presents God in great, fascinating independence. This may plant in the believers a profound sense of respect for God, a sincerity in their understanding of life, a feeling of their responsibility and a clarity in word and action.

EPILOGUE: CONTRASTING COMMUNITIES

Our guiding question — what is salvific community? — was derived from what we had found in Ignatius of Loyola. Still, so far, each of the two outlooks has been presented in its own right. Now the findings from both sides should be allowed to interact. Ignatian and Koranic theology of salvific community can shed light upon each other so that characteristic parts of their respective profiles can become visible. Five aspects may be pointed out.

a. Construction. Community in its fulfilment is for Ignatius the living

unity in three dimensions: the disciple is called to live in communion with Christ, in God's love (*Exx.* 234), and in the Church. Christ is the giver, the model and the body of this community. It is through him, with him and in him that the communion lives. The community conceived by the Koran also contains a dimension of divine-human togetherness and of the believers' unification amongst themselves to form one future people. There is a third dimension, too, but it is not that of a personal union with the prophet; rather, it is the community in the Book, earlier described as in-recitation (above, section III.4). It seems fair to mark a difference here: the place of the body of Christ in the New Testament construction of salvific community has no counterpart in the Koranic theology of community.

b. Mediation. Especially earlier Koran passages see salvific community in doing what is right, and in immediate relation with God (2:254); mediators are unnecessary, even unacceptable. For Ignatius, God's «immediate» (*Exx.* 15) working with the creature is fundamental, too. He knows, however, that such immediacy can only be attained by mediation: through the service of the giver of the exercises, through the sacramental life of the Church, and through Jesus. After all, for Ignatius, salvific communion is: living with Jesus.

c. Representation. When studying the two theologies of salvific community, we were able to observe different types of representation between God and His community, or between God and individuals. In Koranic perspective, we were able to describe four types of representative relationship: helping, witnessing, prophetic sending, and the affirmation that the Muslims' military success was in fact God's. In all, one might speak of a *supportive representation*. Each has, interestingly, its own type of mutuality. God is representing himself to human beings to support them, also to side with the truthful ones; or he is making human beings represent him in order to support them. If seen in the light of Ignatian theology, one may, however, discover that the relationship of representation is limited. Representation is merely supportive; God is never venturing, according to the Koran, a representation that would allow a fusion of limits between God and his representative. Ignatian spirituality, by contrast, envisages what we might call an *identified representation* between human beings and God himself. In this view, God's honour and his project, but not only his cause, rather: God himself is affected by what is happening in and to his body, that is, his people, the Church, and Christ.

d. Transformation. The Koran's project is evolving during the years of its proclamation. Towards its end, its aim is the foundation of a new human society; a new type of nation. It is for this new nation that the Koran provides a framework: oriented to God, directed by rules that give security to human beings. Individual conversion is explicitly addressed; but with the development of Muḥammad's role from preacher to politician, the basic Koranic gesture becomes more and more legislative. The Koran lends itself to an application in social and political activity for a better world. Consequently,

Muslims of all generations have grounded in the Koranic impulse both their vision of a perfect human society and their political work towards it. Ignatius' approach is different. He does not invest in Church reform, let alone societal change through, say, sharper preaching, clearer rules, not even through a new Council²³. Ignatius seems to see that what is needed and what can really change things is that each person be integrated into the Christ event. Ignatius' means of reform are the Spiritual Exercises. In his perspective, the human predicament is «sinning and acting against the Infinite Goodness» (*Exx.* 52), which leads to hell (*Exx.* 106); what the human being therefore needs is God's grace; and that is redemption (*Exx.* 107), concretely, first of all, pardon and forgiveness for his/her sins (*Exx.* 241). It is offered in Christ's incarnation and death (*Exx.* 53) and can be appropriated during the Spiritual Exercises. God's grace is, however, not limited to pardoning; it works by «helping» humanity (*Exx.* 240.320.98.139) and — because of that help — he can use creatures as help, too (*Exx.* 23). So for Ignatius, the place, means and aim of human transformation is a person's entering into the reconciling community in Christ: from sacramental confession and communion (*Exx.* 44) through poverty with Christ (*Exx.* 167) «within» the Church (*Exx.* 351) into «helping everyone» (*Exx.* 146) and thus coming to share in the Father's glory (*Exx.* 95).

e. Ethical orientation. In both Koranic and Ignatian outlooks human beings come to see courses of action to be done. How do the two outlooks derive and justify these acts? In other words, what is the character and rationale of Koranic, and of Ignatian ethics? The Koran enjoins general regulations revealed in the heavenly instruction (*kitāb*) and can thus claim to be creating the best society (3:110). It is, however, not claiming to provide a new ethic but, rather, to confirm (*ṣaddaqa: taṣdīq*) what is known to be right (*ma'rūf*). The Koran sees itself as the balanced orientation on all levels, doctrinal, ethical, ritual: it comes as alleviation (*tahfīf*: 2:178; 4:28) of earlier, heavier religious demands and it warns against exaggerations (4:171; 5:77). In this, the Koran positions itself in an ethic of the middle way between all extremes (2:143)²⁴. The problem with this is that one can thus justify one's course of action as balanced whatever one is doing, because all depends on where one places the extreme.

Ignatius can also urge people to moderation²⁵; but for him, the middle is neither ethical principle nor aim; it is, rather, the point of departure for an

²³ J. O'MALLEY, *The First Jesuits*, Cambridge (MA) 1993, 321.

²⁴ This sounds Aristotelian. Virtue, for Aristotle, is in the μεσότης (*mesotēs*: *Nicomachian Ethics*, Book II, chapter 6, 1106b36-1107a2) i.e., in the middle way; but Aristotle has built into his designation of virtue the criterion of human reason: «the middle as a reasonable person (φρόνιμος/*phronimos*) would set it» (*ibid.*).

²⁵ Cf., e.g., Ignatius' letter to Francis of Borja of september 20, 1548, in *Sancti Ignatii de Loyola Societatis Iesu fundatoris Epistolae et Instructiones*, II, Madrid 1904, 237.

election (*Exx.* 179) — the unpredictable call of God's freedom. Insight into what each person is to do and why this should be right does not follow from revealed or naturally known principles; it emerges, rather, from the personal encounter with Christ. In communion with him, that is, with his life style (*Exx.* 167) and out of a personally elective sending (*Exx.* 98), the retreatant comes to know what (s)he is to be and to do. The truth, the ethical validity, of such a vocational injunction — mission — cannot be predicted, deduced or proven before its probation in history; such an injunction's only limit is the Church's life as ethical, formative and missionary framework (*Exx.* 170). An Ignatian ethic will always stress the experience of a personal sending by Christ; in comparison with a Koranic ethic, the Ignatian vision is, therefore, less philosophical in that it cannot be constructed out of general principles.

In the first part of this exploration²⁶, we have outlined an Ignatian theology of person, action and representation. Taking now a closer look at ethics, how would a Koranic perspective compare with that? The human person is, for the Koran, the addressee of the call to serve only God (2:21). History is, Koranically seen, the time, in which a certain set of patterns (faith / success; unbelief / punishment) is repeatedly happening and which is thus offering to human beings now the possibility to choose either side (19:41-58). Human action is the actualisation of a person's decision for or against divine service; accordingly, Final Judgement will rule (2:110). Representation is taking place where human beings are responsibly administering what is entrusted to them (23:8), i.e., when they are fulfilling what is God's general will.

The comparison of two visions of salvific community has led us to outline Ignatian and Koranic ethics. The findings can be pinpointed in three dimensions. (i) For the Koran, correct living only requires to share and practice the Koranic values — with or without knowing the Koranic wording or the person of the prophet; for Ignatius, true life is more than sharing Jesus' values: it is living in communion with him. (ii) The Koranic outlook sees the basic problem of human beings in their need to be energetically reminded of what they have already known to be the good; but in principle, the human person can know it and can do it. The Ignatian view presupposes that the human being has lost original justice (*Exx.* 51) and that it is therefore in need of a healing that is more than injunction. A historical event of salvation is needed, into which the human person can enter in order to be healed: the communion with Christ. (iii) The more «philosophical» approach of the Koran is rationally more convincing — no recognition of a particular historical event is required; the disadvantage of it is that here, a religion is implying to be identical with human reason and that everybody originally was Muslim (cf. 7:172; 3:67). Such an outlook will have less understanding for unbelief in

²⁶ *Gregorianum* 94 (2013) 593-609.

comparison with a faith that is aware of its own status as confession (Romans 10:9), that is, as a free entering into communion.

Though the above comparison of Ignatius and the Koran may have been heuristically efficient, it is epistemologically problematic. The contexts of the two outlooks could hardly be more disparate. After all, what Ignatius offers are «exercises» for an individual entering «con grande ánimo y liberalidad» (with generous freedom, *Exx.* 5) into a prayerful deepening of one's friendship with Christ (cf. *Exx.* 104), while the Koran presents itself as the public proclamation of God's call to conversion in a mostly polytheist setting.

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ABSTRACT

What is salvific community for the Koran? Recurring formulas indicate a Koranic tendency to categorise human beings as members of opposing groups; the believers are God's «share»-holders, and in a co-operative relationship with the Creator. Chronologically, the Koran's community conception develops from harmony with cosmic rhythms via accessing God's original message to becoming one human tribe. The basic attitude is «open exclusivism». In comparison with a Christian view, different accentuations can be made out in the construction of community, its mediation, representation, transformation and ethics.

Keywords: theological anthropology, community (concept), Christian–Muslim dialogue.

RIASSUNTO

Cosa è, per il Corano, una comunità salvifica? Formule ricorrenti indicano una tendenza Coranica a inquadrare gli uomini come membri di gruppi in opposizione tra loro. I credenti stanno in rapporto di partecipazione con Dio e vivono una relazione di cooperazione con il Creatore. Dal punto di vista cronologico, la concezione di comunità propria del Corano conosce uno sviluppo: dalla comunità concepita come armonia con i ritmi cosmici alla comunità destinata ad identificarsi con l'unica tribù umana passando per l'accesso all'originario messaggio di Dio. L'atteggiamento di base è un «esclusivismo aperto». Paragonandolo con la visione cristiana, si possono individuare accentuazioni diverse a più livelli, relativi alle modalità con cui la comunità viene costruita, mediata, rappresentata, trasformata ed eticamente fondata.

Parole chiave: antropologia teologica, comunità (concetto), dialogo cristiano-musulmano.