No Change in God's Creation! Reflections on the Concept of "Nature" in Dialogue with Qur´ān, Sūrah 30,30

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Abstract: This article deals with Sûrah 30,30, one of the better known, more famous, Sûrates of the Qur´ān. It follows this specific Sûrah's direction into the heart of the Islamic monotheistic faith, including the mystery of creation (fitrah), of humankind. One of the most important announcements of Sûrah 30,30 is that the creation mystery coincides with the instauration of the very first ritual or religion (dīn) of humankind. The next step the Sûrah takes is to reveal in whose name the process unfolds itself, namely in the name of the Prophet Ibrahīm. His name is not mentioned by 30,30. However, the primordial ritual of prayer and adoration that emerges from the act of creation is called "hanīfan", i.e., "hanīf"-like. If there is one person in the Qur´ān who presents itself as a "hanīf", it is Ibrahīm the monotheist. Once this is established, the Sûrah does not leave any doubt that the original faith of humankind is the Islamic faith. In other words, that every human being is born as a Muslim. Obviously, this differs from the Christian viewpoint that puts into the center of creation the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

Keywords: creation (fitrah), monotheism, faith, Ibrahīm, revelation, religion (dīn)

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> Turn your face towards the true religion, the religion of Ibrahīm. This is the creation according to the pattern on which He has made humankind. There is no change in God's creation. This is the only true religion, but most people don't know it. (*Sūrah, 30,30*).

> Vulnerati sumus ingredientes mundum.
> (We are wounded when entering the world)
> [Robert of St. Victor]

Introduction

We live in a time that values, above all, authenticity and the virtues that come with it. Thus authenticity leads to this other cherished concept of our time: *nature*. While our real life-space, phenomenologically speaking our "Lebens-Welt" (Husserl) becomes more and more digitalized and soon will be handed over to *AI*, the artificial intelligence of robotic machinery – "nature" in lifestyle (yoga classes), eating habits (bio-food, etc.) and in certain religious experiences emerge as a priceless, and yet often, in real money, very costly, counter-value. As for religions, this trend has already been noticed and brilliantly interpreted, over hundred years ago, by William James. Everywhere in Europa and America, so James, "we see the ground laid for a new sort of religion of Nature, which has entirely displaced Christianity from the thought of a large part of our generation."[1]

Yet, what "nature" are we talking about? Not for nothing A. Borghini calls nature "one of the most ill defined (ideas)"[2]. What has our idea of nature still to do with the Aristotelian physis? For Aristotle physis (φὐσις) is basically growth and thus *movement*, either out of itself or thanks to an outer force (as in the case of

[1]James, 104/5.
[2]1IN, 1/3 (IN=Internet; see bibliography, plus indication of page).

art). Furthermore, a movement with the goal of "being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily"[3] in its nature, "by reason of itself and not accidentally."[4] Nature provides the place where *being* has arrived at home, has arrived at its point of destiny and is at peace with itself.[5]

This "peace", however, has long been lost, since mathematics took over as the sole valid representation of *nature*. Such a takeover was apparently justified by the fact that mathematics could be translated into *technique*, thus rendering, by the same token, any idea of a meaningful *telos* in nature's action superfluous.[6] What had begun with Cusanus,[7] Giordano Bruno[8] and others has finally grown into the impressive tree of our modern scientific world view with its multiple branches of specialized sciences.[9]

As long as the human being thinks, it also thinks about itself, from humble beginnings up to the contemporary explosion of "human sciences". Suffice to mention here, in a paper on "nature", Jean Jacques Rousseau (1753-1778).[10] Hence more than with every-

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[3]2IN, 1/8 (Aristotle, *Physics* 192b21)

[4]3IN, 5/10.

[5]Cf. too 4IN, 5/9: "Aristotle believed that change was a natural occurence. He used his philosophy of form and matter to argue that when something changes you change its properties without changing its matter."

[6]For the development of modern science and the abolishment of teleology see, for example, Spaemann, 102; 4IN, 5/9; 2IN, 14/8; Koyré, 286/7, etc.

[7]His cosmos is no longer the medieval one, but not yet the infinite universe of modern sciences. Cf. Koyré 36.

[8]His universe was already eternal, infinite and always changing. Cf. Koyré, 65.

[9]For details see again Koyré's study on the universe; also Spaemann, e.g. 102-125, 165-215.

[10]See 5IN, 1/35-2/35 and 1/3-6/6. – On the problem of "human sciences" as such see too Mooren, Freedom... .

body else, also for a greater public, his writings, ideas and life are linked with the idea of *nature*, more precisely of *nature* and the human person's freedom.[11] In sum, as the case of Rousseau already shows, "nature" is not an easy idea to handle, in particular when it concerns us, the human beings. And this shows itself again in a specific dramatic way, when we turn toward theology.

"Nature" is certainly one of the most central concepts in theology – salvation, christology, incarnation, ecclesiology, heaven, hell and grace – you name it – they all "need" *nature*. Almost every important topic in theology touches this mysterious item. For sure, this is done differently in different ages. The nature-freedom-grace-question presents itself differently with St. Augustine[12] than with any theologian of today in a post-enlightenment, post-modern, (post)secularized society and so forth.[13]

However, in this paper, trying to enter into dialogue with Sūrah, 30,30 of the Qur´ān, I would like to concentrate on "nature" and creation. I mean by that, concentrate on the moment when everything began, the *ictus condendi* (Augustine), the moment of "Ur-Nature", of pristine, primordial matter; the very moment that saw creation of the world and of us humans the way the Book of Genesis saw it.

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[11]See for this also the detailed study by Spaemann, 165-187 on the ambiguity of the concept of nature in the 18th century. As Spaemann points out with regard to Rousseau, the whole civilization process is as much a liberation *of* nature (a letting free of nature) as it is also a liberation *from* nature (a setting oneself free from nature); ibid., 168. See too 5IN, 2/3.

[12]See the recent study by Brown on Augustine, Through the Eye of a Needle, 359-368, 473/4, etc. See also Brox, 140/1; Franzen, 90-93.

[13]For the challenges of theology today se e.g. Biser, Wende; idem, Gleichnisse and idem, "Zur Freiheit..."; cf. too Mooren, The Challenge... .

In other words, the purpose is not to develop any new cosmology, any new scientific theory about the beginning of cosmos and humankind. Rather the purpose is to show how religions – in our case Islam and Christianity – "fill up" so to speak the creation story thanks to *their own* theological tools and preconceptions. Put differently, *how they claim for themselves* the beginning of everything based upon their own theological impulse and vocation.

Context and Text of Sūrah, 30

The centerpiece of our investigation will be verse 30 of the 30th Sūrah of the Qur´ān. The Sūrah is called *ar-rūm*, the Romans, i.e., Byzantium. The name appears in v.1 of the Sūrah: "ghulibat ar-rūm", the "Roman Empire", Byzantium has been defeated. It means that the Coranic message is entering in or being confronted with the "great history", the world history. The point of entrance is the defeat of Heraclius against the Sāsānians of Persia in the second decade of the 7th century. This event resulted in the total loss of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt (the fall of Damascus in 613, of Jerusalem in 614).[14] However, what looks like a totally

[14]To see in v. 1 a reference to a Byzantine defeat depends on the reading (vocalization) of the verb ghalaba [to conquer; Wehr, 680; note: the transcription of Arabic terms throughout this paper has been simplified]. If, as it seems to make more sense, ghalaba is to be read in the passive voice (ghulibat, has been defeated), then v. 3 has to be read sayaghlibūna = they will be victorious. This is the reading adopted here, following Paret, Kommentar, 388; also Yusuf Ali, Shakir, Blachère, The Noble Qur´ān of the King Fahd Complex; the *Al- Qur´ān al-karīm* (Cairo, Dar al-mushaf); etc. (Blachère ad.loc also offers the opposite reading, which makes less sense: Byzantium is first victorious and will then be defeated). At any rate vv. 1-4 imply, if one follows the traditional chronology of the life of the Prophet, that Sūrah 30 was revealed when the Muslim community was still not victoriously established – hence the famous hijra, the flight of

disastrous situation for Byzantium will turn around – Heraclius will start an offensive in 622 that will end with a decisive defeat, this time of Persia.

That Byzantium, against all the odds, would be victorious (v. 3), already after few years" (v. 4), is a prophecy of God, since *only He* knows the secrets of history – because He makes it! The events in history are His decision (al-amr) for the past and for the future (v. 4). If the followers of the Prophet will rejoice that day (v. 4), since *pagan* Persia will be defeated, they should, however, not forget, who is behind all this: God, who helps whom He will (v. 5), God, who is at the same time the powerful *and* the merciful (al-´azīz al-rahīm, v. 5). Whatever happens is a promise of God (wa´d Allah) and what He has promised, He keeps (la yukhlifu Allah wa´dahu, v. 6). However, most people don't understand it (v. 6).

This is important. Since what they don't understand, captured as they are only by what they "see", by the "outside" of the world's life (zāhiran min al-hayawati al-dunyā, v. 7), is the fact that thanks to these few opening lines of Sūrah, 30, we have all the ingredients necessary for a true *salvation history*! Change is not denied, since change is the essence of history, and neither is salvation, since God holds it all in His hands, according to His promise.[15] It makes sense to keep this in mind,

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the Prophet from Mekka to Medina took place only in the year 622. In other words, at the moment of the revelation of Sūrah 30, some enemies of the Prophet could still hope for a turnaround thanks to events outside of Arabia. (See Yusuf Ali, Introd. into Sūrah 30, p. 1049).

[15]See Wielandt, 20, that for Muhammad "all history (is) revelation", and that revelation makes "history significant" (my transl., ThM). Wielandt, 19/20, also refers explicitly to Sūrah, 30. See too for possibilities and difficulties for a construction of salvation history in Islamic theology idem, 52/3, 68, 97, 151, etc. See too the study by Irabi, 16-23.

since in v. 30 of the same Sūrah we will be confronted with a position that does not seem much to be in favor of history as such, of its changing nature, that is. For now, our Sūrah proceeds with a giant jump immediately toward the end of history, salvific or not – i.e., the day of final judgement (v. 8).

Indeed, people should have known what was coming, if they had thought carefully about the other side of the world, about "the end" of things (akhirat, v. 7). Then they would have known that things are not what they seem to be, autonomous independent entities, but rather that they are all *created* (v. 8). Furthermore, from the fact of creation they then would have concluded that the one capable of creating a first time would also be able to create a second time (v. 11) – a standard argument of the Qur´ān, also found in the Bible! In other words, creation calls for *re*-creation, for the "end-time", the "final hour". That is the hour of judgement (v. 8), when the guilty ones will be full of despair (yublisu: "struck dump with despair" [Yusuf Ali]; "frappées de mutisme" [Régis Blachère]). This will again be affirmed in v. 27: He is the one who creates for a first time ["begins" the creation, yabda´u al-khalq] and then repeats it [thuma yu´īduhu] at the day of resurrection. For us humans this seems to be an impressive act of power, to be able to do it twice, yet for God that is easy [huwa ahwan ´alayhi]. Such is His power *and* wisdom [wa huwa al -´azīz al -khakīm].

It is the same wisdom that not only creates and recreates the world, makes the world stable through regulating lightning and rainfall (vv. 24/5) – but which is also at work when it comes to populate the earth with human beings, males and females; something that must have been done (vv. 20/1) before God could call them to come out of their tombs at the day of resurrection (when He calls you with a loud voice out of the earth, thuma

idza da´kun da´watan min al-ardh). About humanity (males and females) we learn this:

> v. 21) Among His signs (ayat) is this: that He has created you from dust (earth, turab). And then – behold you are human beings scattered (far and wide, basharun tantashirūna).
> v. 22) And among His signs is also: that He created for you wives (azwaj) out of your own "substance" (min anfusikum) that you may dwell in tranquillity with them (litaskunū ilayha). And He has put love and mercy between you, man and wife (wa ja´ala bainakum mawaddatan wa rahmatan). Verily in that are signs for those who reflect.[16]

Furthermore, we are reminded that God not only created heaven and earth, but with them also the multitude of languages and "species" ("colors", v. 22). Also, that the human beings are gifted with night and daytime perceptions, the night for sleep and the daytime for work (v. 23). We are then reminded that to God belongs everything in heaven and on earth and that all beings are *obedient* to Him (v. 26).[17] To call upon obedience as the irreplaceable manifestation of true piety seems absolutely necessary, since (v. 28) some people seem to have given associates (shuraka´) to the One God – as partners in power and might. They thus committed the sin of *shirk*, polytheism.

Evidently, polytheism is thought out by people who are not capable of *correct* reasoning (they are out of

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[16]For the translation see Yusuf Ali's (slightly changed) translation.

[17]"Qanata", to be obedient, submissive, humble and "qunūt", obedience, humility, piety [Wehr, 792]. In this line of piety there are people who will not forget the ritual prayers (vv. 17/8) in praise of God's power to revive what is dead (or to do the opposite), thus to revive the earth, when no life would be found on earth. In sum, again an argument that God is capable of performing the general resurrection (v. 19).

their mind, bighairi ´ilmin [v. 29]), unable to decipher the signs (in history) and the verses (ayat) of the sacred messages (cf. v. 28). The situation of these people is hopeless, nobody will help them when they need help, at judgement day for example, since, according to v. 29, it is *God himself* who made them go astray: "But who will guide those whom God leaves astray?" (fa man yahdī man asalla Allah?[18])

In any case, it is right here, at this place in the text, that v. 30 appears, like a clap of thunder or a single beat of the drum! Paret calls v. 30 (together with vv. 31 and 32) "isolated verses"[19]. However, "isolated verses", i.e., verses not connected to what precedes nor to what follows, should not come as a surprise on the Coranic level. The Qur´ān, "direct speech of God, [is] on the level of topics not unified and does in no way – contrary to the Gospels – comprise a continuous suite of actions."[20] Add to this that Coranic verses are usually open to a vast range of interpretations.[21] In some mystical circles up to 60000 interpretations of one verse are taken for possible![22] Thus, the "isolation" of v. 30 (and vv. 31/2) does not constitute an insurmountable problem, in particular if we take also into account that in v. 31 right

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[18]Read the "s" in asalla as emphatic "s". – Obviously this is a verse in favor of "predestination" which poses a theological problem whose discussion would lead us far beyond the limited scope of our present investigation.

[19]Kommentar, 391: "Die Verse... stehen... isoliert."

[20]Kermani, 216 [my transl. ThM]. Not only that. Even contradictions are "allowed" under the umbrella of the theory of abrogation (naskh, see Wehr, 961) the replacement of some verses by better ones: "And when We change (baddalna) a verse of the Qur´ān in place of another – and Allah knows best what He sends down – they, the disbelievers say: '(Muhammad) you are but a liar`." (v. 16, 101) [transl. The Noble Qur'an] See too Sūrah 2, 106 and 22, 52.

[21]See too Kermani 121-170.

[22]Cf. Kermani 137.

at the beginning, some words probably have been lost![23]

At any rate, if v. 30 gives the impression to be "outstanding" or even in contradiction to the rest of the Sūrah, the art of interpretation should be easily capable of smoothing the edges. This is all the more feasible, since the rest of Sūrah 30, vv. 33-55, do develop only very few *new* topics – vv. 33-37, e.g., call for repentance and gratitude for God's gift together with a right life style under "monotheistic rule"; vv. 38/9 deal with the problem of poverty and how to deal with the question of interest in business; v. 47 mentions predecessors to the Prophet Muhammad that have been sent with clear "proof" (bil-bayyinati) to their respective peoples.[24] In sum, if one aims at smoothing the edges one only has to point toward the two main topics dealt with so far: creation and the day of judgement. Like a "leitmotiv" in an opera these two themes constitute the profile of whole Sūrah 30.

a) dīn

Sūrah, 30,30 begins with a command, aimed at the Prophet and through him at all Muslims (and humankind):

> Turn your face toward (the) religion (fa aqim wajhaka lil-dīni).

This clearly is a position of payer, or more generally speaking, of a mind which is on a search – for God? Which God? The meaning of life? Can religions, can any

[23]See Paret, Kommentar, 391.

[24]Those, however, commited the sin (ajramū) of not believing and became object of God's revenge (fa intaqamn), while the believers received God's help (kana haqqan ´alayna nasru al-mu´minīna) (v. 47).

religion still be part of such a search? Yet, that is what is proposed: look out for a "dīn"! In Hebrew the same root gives the meaning of judgement, law, discernment.[25] In Arabic we rather have for dīn "religion, creed, faith, belief"[26]. Yet, the origin of dīn as "religion" points toward "dana", "to borow..., to be a debtor, be indebted; to owe s.th." [27] That is, the term dīn "conveys an entire group of meanings related to the idea of debt."[28] And what could be the human being's greatest debt with regard to God? Under the title "The Pious Slave of God" the same text (8IN) answers: "In Islam the most important debt that the human being owes to God is that of his or her existence."[29] The realization of such a great gift on the part of God – given that dīn clearly points toward a reciprocal relationship between God and the human being – provokes in the heart of the "anthropos" the feeling of responsibility: reciprocity and responsibility going together:

> Who is the one who will lend to God a goodly loan, which God will double to his credit and multiply many times? (Sūrah 2, 245)
>
> or:
>
> Verily we will ease the path to salvation for the person

[25]See 7IN, 1/3 and 2/3; see too Ennery, 45, where we learn for dīn "judgement, droit, jurisprudence".

[26]See 7IN, 2/3, which even gives "ascendency, sovereignty, dominion", to name some from a long list. See too 6IN,1/6-4/6 and Wehr, 306, furthermore see too the Oxford Dictionary of Islam, 68, that mentions for dīn: "way" as much as "obedience", "judgement", "reward".

[27]Wehr, 305.

[28]8IN, 1/20. See too for "dīn" the Oxford Dictionary of Islam, 68: "Way of life for which humans will be held accountable and recompensed accordingly on the Day of Judgement."

[29]8IN, 3/20.

> who gives out of fear of God and testifies to the best. But we will ease the path to damnation for the greedy miser who thinks himself self-sufficient and rejects what is best. (Sūrah 92, 15-10).[30]

All in all we can say that the concept of dīn clearly has an Islamic flavor; that, according to the recipients of the Coranic message what is meant by dīn is *Islamic monotheism*. As such, then, dīn finally says faith *and* shariah together![31] For dīn, fath, and shariah, the way, it can he be said:

> Don't turn your face to any other direction after you have accepted this way of life. Then you should think like a Muslim and your likes and dislikes should be of a Muslim. Your values and standards should be the one set by Islam and your character and conduct should bear the stamp of Islam, and the affairs of your individual and collective life should be ordered according to the way taught by Islam.[32]

The metaphor of the pious slave says it all: "The total submission to God is what is meant by the term Islam."[33] And again in terms of reciprocal purchase: "Verily, God has purchased from the believers their persons and possessions in return for paradise... So rejoice in the sale of yourself which you have concluded, for it is the supreme achievement."[34] However, what text 8IN does not mention is the fact, that part of "being

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[30]Quoted in 8IN, 4/20; cf. too 8IN, 2/20.

[31]Cf. 7IN, 2/3.

[32]9IN, 6/10= Tafsīr Maududi; Sūrah 30,30. Maududi (1903-1979), Reformer and Fundamentalist, who played a main role in the politics of Pakistan. See Sourdel/Sourdel, 552. For his extreme views and fundamentalist Islamism see too Platti, 243-251, in particular 245/6.

[33]8IN, 3/20.

[34]Sūrah 9,111; transl. 8IN,3/20; al fauz=victory, attainment, accomplishment [Wehr, 732], Paret, Koran, ad. loc. has "(grosses) Glück ("happiness")".

purchased by God", means – as the same verse 111 also states – that one has to fight for God, i.e., either "to kill or to be killed"![35] That sounds brutal, but isn't this part of slavehood? It is true, however, that text 8IN – rightly feeling that "being a slave to anyone, even God, is difficult to accept" (8IN, 3/20) – tries to downplay the hardship of slavery by pointing out that a slave in the 7th century is not the same as a modern slave: "slavery was a more complex phenomenon..."[36]

However, there is no easy escape road from the fact that slavery, being a slave, including the psychological degradation such a state includes, plays also on the Coranic level a substantial role in arguing in favor of *monotheism*, including the Islamic dīn. Thus in 30, 28, two verses before the famous 30,30, we are confronted with he following argumentation:

> God has prepared for you a parable taken from your own life-situation. Do you have among your property, i.e., your slaves, those who share in the goods We have bestowed upon you, the free people, so that you two were equal regarding your possessions? This with the result that you would now have to be afraid of the slaves [because they now would be your partners sharing the same amount of property] in the same way as you free people would have to be afraid of one another! This is unthinkable! In the same way it makes no sense at all, if you associate your idols as alleged partners

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[35]"They fight (yuqatilūna) in His Cause [on the path of God: fī sabīl Allah] and slay and are slain (fayaqtulūna wa yuqtalūna)". (transl. Yusuf Ali). And Yusuf Ali comments: "... God takes man's will and soul and his wealth and goods, and gives him in return everlasting Felicity. Man fights in God's Cause and carries out His will, the Universal Will. All that he has to give up is the ephemeral things of this world, while he gains eternal salvation...". ad loc, p. 474, nr. 1361.

[36]8IN, 3/20 and: "In early Christianity the Apostles of Jesus were called 'slaves of God'" (8IN, 3/20).

with the one God.[37]

A better description of "Wall Street" would not be possible. There is greed and then there is automatically fear among greedy equals. Polytheism, however, would mean exactly this: God surrounded by equals who are all motivated by the same greed and fear which would mean total chaos in heaven and the governance of the world. Not only that! The potential partners of the free "capitalists" are all (ex)slaves. In short, nobody in his or her healthy mind would let slaves share his or her possessions (i.e., to free slaves from slavery), because *then* one would have to be afraid of them. It is true that using the harsh reality of the time (slavery, greed, fear, etc) in a theological parable is not the same as sanctioning such a reality. Far from it![38] Nevertheless the "mental essence" or aura the parable is impregnated with has the tendency also to "invest", so to speak, the aura of the topic (in our case monotheism and "religion") one wants to elucidate thanks to the simile.

Yet, whatever the worth of slavery might be as a simile for our relationship with God – it is clear by now that the kind of dīn we have to embrace can only be the Islamic-monotheistic one. Therefore, Paret is right in his translation to add in parenthesis: the "only true one" as adjective to "religion"[39], since that is Islam for the Muslims. The Coranic text makes this clear by specifying, thanks to the term "hanīfan", that dīn, including the whole operation of turning one's face, should be done "hanīf-like". The meaning of hanīf is debated. It seems

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[37]Free transl. after Paret, Koran.

[38]See Sūrah 24, 33 on setting free slaves by means of a letter (kitab) of emancipation and also Sūrah 90, 13-17, where freeing a slave is called to take "the steep road" ('aqaba) that leads to paradise.

[39]"... die (einzig wahre) Religion", Paret, Koran, ad.loc.

that the originally somewhat negative connotation of the term, pointing to something "not quite straight",[40] a kind of "dissidence",[41] has been turned around by the Qur´ān into the most positive qualification possible, namely that "hanīf" is to be read as "monotheist". Hence many translate "hanīf" in this way, while others keep it as "hanīf" in the text or circumscribe it with adverbs like "steady" and "truly".[42] Only one thing is sure: the Qur´ān declares Ibrahīm to be neither a Jew nor a Christian, but a Hanīf (Sūrah 3,67), clearly meaning a Muslim and not a polytheist.[43]

In sum, we do know at this stage that we are dealing with the one, true Islamic monotheistic religion, incarnated, so to speak, by the Prophet Ibrahīm. The next question is, what more can we learn about the "nature" or the "essence" of this monotheism. Thus the Sūrah goes on: (this is) "God's fitrah according to the pattern on which He has made (fatara) humankind". Here we encounter the key term fitrah (verb fatara), which is in our context as intriguing as the term dīn.

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[40]For the root *hnp* see Syriac "godless", Hebrew "perverse", Aramaic "deceitful", Ugaritic "without piety".

[41]Meaning a group of people that did not adhere to the official polytheistic culture, but rather practiced a kind of a-confessional monotheism.

[42]See Yusuf Ali, ad loc: "Set then our face steadily and truly to the faith". Yusuf Ali comments: "Here 'true' is used [for Hanīf] in the sense in which we say,'the magnetic needle is true to the north'." 11IN, 1/2 has: "turn your face single mindedly to the true faith"; the King Fahd version of The Noble Qur'an reads: "set your face towards the religion (of pure Islamic monotheism) Hanīf (worship none but Allah alone)..."; 10IN, 3/7= Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr (1300-1373; hanbalite school in Syria under the Mamluks [see Sourdel/Sourdel 369]) has: "the religion of Ibrahīm".

[43]"Wa lakin kana hanīfan musliman wa kana min al-mushrikīna." – For the whole question see also my discussion in "I do not adore", 62-65; idem Macht, 32, 44, note 42, idem "Unity in Diversity", 89, note 40. See furthermore Monneret, 213, regarding Sūrah 6, 161 and 12IN, 2/6; 13IN. 1/2; 14IN, 1/2-2/2.

b) fitrah

The dictionary gives for the verb "fatara": to split, cleave, break apart; for "fatr": crack, rupture and for "fitrah": creation, nature, disposition, innate character, instinct, temperament.[44] In our context it means both: creation *and* nature or nature *as* creation. That the connotation of "breaking", "producing a rupture" is used for "creation" (He created, fatara…) is not surprising, if we take into account the specific kind of creation the Sūrah has in mind, namely the very first one, the pristine, primeval, primordial one, the "ur-creation" and thus "ur-nature" of the very first beginning. It is noteworthy that the same idea of *creation as fracture* is also expressed in the Bible, thanks to the verb "bara", the second word of the story of Genesis and thus of the whole Bible.[45]

God's creation is "breaking open" life in a "one time action" of will and power, different from creation mythology of the non-monotheistic religions. The fitrah is not transferable into any kind of *mythological* discourse. It is the "ictus condendi", the creation thrust (Augustine) and quite the opposite to any lengthy theogonical speculation via sexual co-production or any other kind of manipulation of already existing matter. On the other side, the purpose of myth-formation is nicely expressed by a Navaho Indian: "Knowing a good story will protect your home and children and property. A myth is just like a big stone foundation – it lasts a

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[44]See Wehr, 719/20; see too Encyclopedia, 179: Fitrah "signifies the manner in which all things are created by God." Furthermore see The Qur´ān: an Ecyclopedia, 210: Fitrah is the "natural disposition or inclination for something..." and also, ibid., 211, that fitrah stands for "... inner nature, moral constitution and suitability". See too 15IN, 1/2; 16IN, 1/1; 17IN, 1/10. (The "t" in "fitrah" is the emphatic "t").

[45]See Ennery, 29 and Biblia Hebraica, Kittel.

long time."[46]

It is true that the Bible story, for example, is not yet totally free from mythological slag, but a giant first step in the anti-mythological direction is made by subordinating creation under the total dominion of God's *word* – He spoke and it was (kūn).[47] The highpoint and purest form of this current of thinking obviously can be found in the theory of the *creatio ex nihilo,* the "creation out of nothing"! Thomas Aquinas: "creare est aliquid ex nihilo facere".[48]

It has become clear that "nature" (Ur-nature, primordial nature) as part of God's creation (or primordial creative power) – that fitrah and fatara do not belong to the realm of "physics"[49] nor to the realm of "meta-physics"[50] *in the sense* that they are not creatures *depending* on these two scientific realms, physics and metaphysics, although both these sciences have submitted creation to their own criteria, as finally the theory of the "creation out of nothing" demonstrates best. Hence, what I really want to say is that we should consider fitrah (and fatara) as authentic, autonomous *theological* construction! The question then arises regarding the purpose of such a construction. The

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[46]See Mooren, Macht, 87; ibid., 87, on myth as production of stability, comparable to the building of dams – the dams being the mythical stories (the mythical speech) themselves. – For theogony, polytheism and mythological speculation see Mooren, Macht, 87-117, in part. 90, 91-94, 104/5 and idem, "Making the Earth", 93-215, furthermore cf. Blumenberg, Höhlenausgänge, 225 and idem, Arbeit, 145, note 9.

[47]This problem is discussed in Mooren, Macht, 101-105.

[48]For the quotation of Thomas Aquinas see Mooren, Macht 103.

[49]For "physical", "scientific" research into nature (tabī´ah) by Muslim scholars in classical times see e.g., Wüstenfeld, Dunlop, 204-250, Mooren, Macht, 260-268.

[50]See e.g., Averroes' Aristotle-Commentary (Averroes [Ibn Rushd]: tafsīr ma ba'd at-tabī´ah (=commentary of "what is behind physics [nature]", i.e., "metaphysics"); see also Badawi, Averroes, etc.

answer lies in the insertion of the human being (an-nas) into the centre of this imposing building. It is a construction built upon a triple equation: fitrah (nature) with humankind, humankind with Ibrahīm and Ibrahīm with (the true Islamic) religion dīn. The construction of meaning, the theological discourse, can circulate from fitrah to dīn or from dīn to fitrah – yet, always it passes via Ibrahīm through an-nas, humankind. In other words, there is no human being that is not solidly grounded on *both sides*, on the side of fitrah and on the side of dīn! Furthermore, since fitrah and dīn on the Coranic level are identical with Islam (the faith and practice of Ibrahīm), the consequence can only be this: every human being is a Muslim, is a believer, by nature, i.e., *by virtue of birth*!

> "According to Islamic theology human beings are born with an innate inclination of tawhīd (=monotheism)."[51]
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> "Every person, whether young or old, educated or illiterate, rich or poor, strong or weak, urban or rural, dense or bright, believes, in accordance with their fitrah, that there is no god but Allah, the One."[52]
>
> "... fitrah is associated with the dīn of Islam. Since Allah´s fitrah is engraved upon the human soul, mankind is born in a state in which tawhīd (=monotheism) is integral."[53]

Thus, everybody is born a Muslim. Yet, as if this

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[51] 15IN, 1/2.

[52] 18IN, 1/6

[53] 17IN, 2/10; 18IN, 1/6. Al-Ghazzalī (1058-1111), mystic, theologian, jurist and (anti)philosopher [See Sourdel/Sourdel, 312/13] has similar thoughts, here quoted by Wensinck, 44: "In fitrah, each heart is predisposed to know the reality of things, in spite of individual differences. Since the heart is a divine and noble thing. At the beginning the heart of each human being is predisposed toward faith and capable of believing." (My transl. of Wensinck, ThM).

statement would not yet be sufficient, as if "Muslim by birth" would not be enough, a mythical pre-birth assurance is added, so that the human being really undergoes the process of a "double bind". We are thrown back into a kind of pre-time, just after Adam´s fall, when all human beings still to be born took part, near Mekka, in a pact (mithaq), between themselves and the One God. Sūrah 7,172/3:

> 172) "When thy Lord drew forth from the children of Adam – from their loins (min zuhūrihim) – their descendants and made them testify concerning themselves (saying): 'Am I not your Lord (alastu birabbikum)'? – They said: 'Yea! We testify (bala shahidna)'. This lest ye should say on the day of judgement: ´Of this we were never mindful (inna kunna 'an hadha ghafilīna)'."
> 173) "Or lest ye should say: 'Our fathers before us may have taken false gods. But we are (their) descendants after them: will you destroy us because of the deeds of men who were futile?'"[54]

So, hence our "muslim-hood", or being born as Islamic monotheist is anchored so deeply, by birth *and* by pre-birth – why is it then that there are non-Muslims on earth? A prophetic tradition (hadīth) gives the answer:

> Every newborn child is born in a state of fitrah. Then the parents make him a Jew, a Christian or a Magian, just as an animal is born intact. Do you observe any

[54]Transl. after Yusuf Ali. Cf. too The Qur´ān: an Encyclopedia, 211: "The linguistic and religious meaning of fitra is the immutable natural predisposition to the good, innate to every human being from birth, or even from pre-existing state, in which ... the human soul enters into a covenant with God."– Cf. too Monneret, 214, note 13 and 353, note 9. Unfortunately, Monneret's comments show that the story is in the mix up with ideas on predestination. Monneret asks: "Are we dealing with absolute predestination? It does not seem so, since man still has the choice to follow the bad habits of his fathers or to direct himself toward God" (353, note 9).

among them that are maimed (at birth)?[55]

Given the number of obstacles, the multiple sources of bad influence (education, parents, school or the mass media of today [fake news or not], etc.) – is there somewhere in the Islamic tradition a hint, what kind of civilization or culture would be best in view of protecting the fitrah? Is there a "monotheistic" life-style? Some traditions believe so:

> Once, on a mysterious trip to Jerusalem, Gabriel approached the Prophet with two cups, one cup of wine, one cup of (butter)milk. The Prophet chose the cup of milk and Gabriel explained: "You have chosen the fitrah."[56]

No wonder that also Preachers of today – see the numerous interventions on the Internet – certainly

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[55]17IN, 1/10; cf. too 16IN/1/1; 19IN, 1/4 The above prophetic tradition has been collected by Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (817-875). His collection is called "sahīh", i.e., "healthy" in an orthodox way [See Sourdel/Sourdel, 604; 17IN, 9/10]. For the same story see also Al-Bukhari (810-870, see Sourdel/Sourdel, 169), a collector whose traditions are also respected as "sahīh" (collection transl. into German by D. Ferchl, XV, 13, p. 180); see also 20IN, 2/3: "Fitrah... man's natural tendency within the absence of contrary factors... the influence of setting is decisive." – As Wensinck, 44/5, show, Ghazzalī too works on this hadīth on "birth-like" fitrah and its obstacles thanks to parents, education, etc. – Furthermore the Encyclopedia of Islamic Civilisation and Religion underlines the implication of children being turned away from Islam, namely "that children who grow up to anything other than Muslims have been deprived of their natural spiritual patrimony"! (Encyclopedia, 179).

[56]Hadith by Anas Ibn Malik, quoted after Hayek, The mystère d'Ismael, 286. See Mooren, Macht, 85. The simple life-style suggested here would fit well with a certain form of mysticism (tawakkul; abandonment in God), that would include the prohibition to assure by means of savings one's future for one year or longer. Does the proverb not say, only three animals spare: the mouse, the ant and the human being? Cf. Al-Ghazzalī, Le livre de l'unicité..., 146 [see transl. by H. Boutaleb].

seem to suggest such a thing, i.e., a culture in accordance with fitrah. In other words, *not* to choose the fitrah could entail that a human being "will suffer hardship and sickness, developing the symptoms of the soul disease, such as arrogance, cruelty, haughtiness, selfishness and pompousness."[57] One would get eventually "disturbed, loses balance, gets bored and sick... and turn into somebody ruthless for trivial reasons, all of which indicates, according to psychiatrists, one's imbalance. This happens on accord of having contradicted one's fitrah."[58]

Obviously we are dealing with pastoral-homiletical efforts of scholars and preachers of the 21st century to actualize, what it means that every human being is born a Muslim, i.e., that it carries with itself the indestructible "image" of God's primeval creation. That this actualization betrays the socio-economical background of the authors does not constitute a surprise. See, e.g., the following statement by Dr. M. R. Nabulsi:

> It is out of fitrah that a mother looks after her child, while the father strives, labours, takes all kind of risks, and undertakes to bring home all his family needs; and when he sees his child warm and dressed, and eating all it needs, he feels indescribable happiness, and that is fitrah.[59]

This description might not be relevant for all cultures on earth – but children that are dressed correctly and can eat according to their needs are certainly no apparent contradiction to the benefits of fitrah. By the same token we are also reminded of this famous hadīth

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[57] 18IN, 1/6.

[58] 18IN, 2/6. – I will not insist on the following "application" of the fitrah: "Five things are part of the fitrah: removing the pubic hair, circumcision, trimming the moustache, plucking the armpit hair, and trimming the nails," 21IN, 1/2 and 2/2.

[59] 18IN, 2/6.

(prophetic saying): When Allah decreed the creation (qadara al-khalq), He pledged Himself by writing in His book which is laid down with Him: "My mercy prevails over my wrath (rahmatī taghlibu ghadabī)".[60]

c) La tabdīla – No change

So far we have encountered some of the important building blocks of Sūrah 30, 30, namely God's *religion* and his pristine original *creation* in the name of *fitrah*, illustrated by the happy smile of the newly born, a smile not yet contaminated by all kinds of "foreign", i.e., non-monotheistic interferences. Consequently, in particular in the light of the above quoted saying that God's mercy prevails over His wrath, the ideal situation would be a perfect harmony between religion, creation and humankind. An equilibrium that is *not*, by no means, stable, motionless or rigid, but rather the result of a permanent intensive *interplay* between all factors involved.

If religion turns into a terrorist ideology, then creation is lethally threatened and the smile of a newborn baby is rapidly fading away. If creation is destroyed, religion and humankind will barely survive and if children die because of war and famine something is very wrong with at least one of the other "players", religion or creation, or with both of them. Each blow against one of the "players" threatens the harmony of the whole which would entail the slow degradation, if not final destruction of the *whole* construction, of "God's khalq", God's creation. Thus, it is in *this* precise sense – namely that we live under the *unchangeable* obligation, a perpetual imperative *to take care of the whole*, the harmony *between* religion creation and humankind – that I understand the famous sentence toward the end

[60]22IN,1/2 = Hadīth qudsi ("saint") by Abu Hurayrah, Muslim, Bukhari, an-Nasa'i, Ibn Majah.

of Sūrah 30, 30: "there is no change in God's creation" (la tabdīla lil-khalq Allah) and that this is the only "true religion" (ad-dīn al-qayyīm).

However, taken for itself and out of context, the saying that "there is no change in God's creation" could serve as a pretext for an arch-conservative *immobilizing* attitude. It would serve the advocates of the "semper idem" in dogma, liturgy and history, all this being something "that cannot support an amendment"[61]! However, against such a rigid position one could point toward the theory of abrogation of verses of the Holy Book (replacement of verses by "better" ones, see above, note 20), although one could argue that such a process happened before the final fixture of the Holy Scripture and that the core truth of revelation was not at stake![62]

A similar picture of the tension between "no change" and "historical circumstances" emerges, if we look at *salvation history* in general, that is the place of Islam within the orbit of other religions. On the one side, tawhīd, the core message of strict monotheism, has to be preserved, while on the other side different places, cultures and prophets have to be recognized. In this case

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[61]20IN,1/3; see too 17IN, 5/10. Against innovation in religion see too the position taken by Al-Ghazzalī's mystical theology; see for this Bannerth, Pfad, 126/7. See for this also the general atmosphere of Al-Ghazzalī's teaching, his stand against a "false freedom"! (See Arnaldez, 323).

[62]"The doctrine of progressive revelation from age to age and time to time does not mean that God's fundamental Law changes. It is not fair to charge a man of God with forgery because the Message as revealed to him is in a different form from that revealed before, when the core of the Truth is the same, for it comes from God." Yusuf Ali, commenting Sūrah 16, 101 (p. 684). The truth would not change as we would not change in spite of our passing through different stages of development: "It is God who created you in a state of (helpless) weakness, then gave you strength after weakness, then, after strength, gave you weakness and a hoary head" (Sūrah 30, 54; after Yusuf Ali).

the Qur´ān offers a "solution" which could be called "theological", but obviously is in blatant contradiction to the facts of "history of religion":

> Say: "We believe in God and in that which had been revealed to us, and in that which was revealed to Ibrahīm and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqoub and the tribes, and in that which was given to Musa and Isa (Moses and Jesus) and in that which was given to the Prophets from their Lord, we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him we do submit". (Sūrah 2, 136).

This *theological* standpoint then allows to see in the Coranic revelation the verification or authentication of previous revelations:

> And what we have revealed to you of the Qur´ān (the Book) is the truth verifying (musaddiq) that which is before it... (Sūrah, 35, 31, see too 5, 48; 3,39).

The same progression is valid for the position of Muhammad as *the* Prophet. Other prophets have been sent to different peoples, like Jesus (to the Jews only), but Muhammad is the Prophet of *all humankind*: "I am God's messenger *to you all*...! (Sūrah 7, 158) surrounded, consequently, by "the best community ever raised up for humans..." (Sūrah 3, 110). In the best of worlds this community would have or should have avoided what is the sort of all others: they split up into sects, every sect egoistically "rejoicing in what they had with them", i.e., their own dogmas and belief-systems. (See Sūrah 30, 32).[63]

All this demonstrates how difficult it is to keep together the one and the many, in our case the core truth, supposedly unchangeable and the vicissitudes of

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[63]For Sūrah 2, 136; 35, 31; 7, 158; 3,110; 30, 32 see transl. after Shakir, M. H., Tahrike... See too Monneret.168-185, section D; cf. for further interpretation Mooren, Macht, 29-38. 84/5.

history. Yet, at this stage in our investigation, my preoccupation is not so much with the question whether the model offered by the Qur´ān in this matter is workable or not. Rather I wonder which *spiritual resources* help Islam to sustain – in the face of the normal run of history – the lofty ideas about dīn, fitrah and their unchangeable character as expressed in Sūrah 30, 30. In other words, we have to turn once again to the concept of human nature.

The question of human nature

Overlooking Sūrah 30, 30, a thought might arise: if, indeed the human person was created "fitrata Allah", in accordance with God's blueprint of creation and thus being endowed with God's most precious gift, namely to be born a monotheist, that is to be a Muslim by *nature* – should this not provide a person with enough *spiritual power* to confront victoriously the "dark forces" on earth, to not succumb to pessimism but rather to embrace optimism while resisting the power of evil?

Indeed, Yusuf Ali, commenting Sūrah 30, 30 explains:

> As turned out from the creative hand of God, man is innocent, pure, true, free, inclined to right and virtue, and endued with true understanding about his own position in the Universe and about God's goodness, wisdom, and power. That is his true nature, just as the nature of a lamb is to be gentle and of a horse is to be swift.[64]

It sounds like an echo when we read in a contemporary text on fitrah by Yasien Mohamed:

> It is precisely because of man's free will and intellect that he is able to overcome the negative influences of

[64]Ad. loc., Sūrah, 30,30, p. 1059.

> the environment and attain to the highest level of psycho-spiritual development...[65]

Yet, is this truly the case? Is there a seamless transition from intention (good will) to action? Does there never occur, what is called the interference of evil? Yes, it does, in the figure of Satan for example. However, the impact of evil is far less dramatic than in Christianity:

> Sūrah 20, 120-122: Then Shaitan whispered to Adam: Oh Adam! Shall I lead you to the Tree of Eternity and to a kingdom that will never waste away? Then they both ate of the tree, and so their private parts became manifest to them and they began to cover themselves... Thus did Adam disobey his Lord, so he went astray. Then his Lord chose him (Adam) and turned to him with forgiveness and gave him guidance (fataba ´alayhi wa hada).[66]

That was fast and well done! Also, once on earth, things do not seem to be too complicated – although Sūrah 2, 30 has called the earth a place where "man will make mischief... and shed blood" – now God orders the first couple to "go down" from paradise to earth, where "some of you are an enemy to some others" (20, 123). But God's guidance will follow quickly and : "whoever follows My guidance, he shall neither go astray, nor shall be distressed" (20, 123). However, the one who will not take the guidance," for him is a life of hardship and We will raise him up blind on the Day of Resurrection" (20, 124) [transl. The Noble Qur´ān]. All in all the situation is not too bad: "Adam had free will and bore the consequences of his deeds. Mankind has free will and thus is free to disobey God, but there are consequences."[67]

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[67]23IN, 6/13.

All this makes one thing very clear: "Islam rejects the Christian concept of original sin and the notion that all humans are born sinners due to actions of Adam. God says in the Qur´ān: 'And no bearer of burdens shall bear another's burden'." (Qur´ān 35, 18).[68] And with it Islam rejects obviously the doctrine of atonement: "Islam has no doctrine of atonement, and modern Muslim writers, in reaction against the teaching of Christianity, indignantly repudiate the whole idea of God's atonement, of the atonement of the Righteous for the unrighteous, as immoral and unworthy."[69]

We could call the Islamic position Ultra-Pelagianism. It is certainly opposite to Augustine's teaching[70], but also to the more "Christian-like" position of Sufism, where *grace* plays a decisive role.[71] Yet, my purpose here is not to discuss the details of Pelagius versus

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[68]23IN, 6/13. See too the text by Yasien Mohamed 17IN, 6/10-9/10 on "The Christian Doctrine of Original Sin", furthermore by the same author his remarks on "Sin" in: The Qur´ān: an Encyclopedia, 538.

[69]Padwick, 199. Padwick however, ibid., 199, recognizes a limitation with regard to the exclusion of the atonement theory: "This does not mean, however, that our prayer books do not recognize certain holy works and right acts offered by a sinner himself as having atoning power".

[70]On Pelagius (and his emphasis on free will) and Augustine's position against him, see too Brown 308 - 321; 361- 368. Obviously: "... the denial of original sin appeared to undercut the practice of infant baptism". (361, Brown); also: "Augustine placed behind the largely unreflecting practice of expiatory giving the heavy weight of a view of human nature that made daily expiations a necessity."– For the social implications of the whole dispute – among other things the use of the language of slavery – see too Brown, 473- 477. – For the dogmatic background see too Franzen, 90/1-93, and also Brox, 140/1.

[71]And above all the grace to have received Islam. See Bannerth, Pfad, 261, 295, 320/1; also 325: "O my Lord, in the same way you have begun with your grace – without merit [on my side] – also finish with grace without merit [on my side] what you have begun". [My transl. ThM].

Augustine and grace in Christianity and in Islam. Rather I would like to draw attention to the following question, namely how the Muslim authors, criticizing original sin while insisting on free will "*manage*" the existence of the freedom-space, the Qur´ān seems to open up; how to "populate" it, so to speak, and for which avail! Hence – isn't it amazing in a certain sense (at least from a Christian perspective, I admit) to witness, how this priceless asset regarding the human nature, *freedom*, i.e., freedom *thanks* to the fitrah, is simply turned into a tool of *actualizing the shariah*!

It is the shariah that is envisaged by the "dīn al-qayyīm", the "true religion" (i.e., a religion free from changes) as the end of Sūrah 30, 30 declares it; the shariah being the "secret" behind dīn, fitrah and tawhīd all along, behind religion, nature and monotheism! Thus Yasien Mohamed for example simply declares dīn (religion) and tawhīd (monotheism) synonyms of shariah.[72] The person of free will, actualizing the lofty goal of spiritual up-lifting is "able to conform to the requirements of his fitrah and the *dictates* of the Shariah. He actualizes his fitrah, and attains psycho-spiritual integration and inner peace"[73] – inner peace thanks to the LAW! See also the definition of the shariah by Abdur Rahman I. Doi of the Nigerian Ahmadu Bello University:

> Sharī´ah is the path to be followed. Literally it means 'the way to a watering place'. It is the path not only leading to Allah... but the path believed by all Muslims to be the path shown by Allah, the Creator Himself through His Messenger Prophet Muhammad... Muslims are obliged to strive for the implementation of that path, and that of no other path.[74]

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[72]See 17IN, 3/10.
[73]17IN, 4/10//5/10, [italics by me, ThM].
[74]Sharī'ah, 2.

The problem that arises at this level, however, is that Muslim scholars have to recognize that the Law has to be explained, interpreted. And for this, there are schools and rules.[75] It is even conceded that shariah is binding only for Muslims:

> The function of the prophets and Divine revelation is not only to remind man about that which he already knows (that is tawhid [monotheism]), but also to teach him that which he does not yet know (that is, Shariah). Man already knows tawhid because of the pre-existent fitrah....[76]

For the true believer, however, those converted to Islam, the matter related to fitrah is just not the full knowledge. The fitrah-knowledge has to be completed by the knowledge of "*Divinely* revealed laws, the methodology of worship and devotion, etc.".[77] However, as all these scholarly explanations make it clear that we are confronted with at least two difficulties. Firstly, there is Abdur Rahman´s notice (from above) that Muslims "are obliged to strive for the implementation of that path" [i.e., of the shariah]. How far does this implementation order go, and secondly, what has to be done, if and when shariah law collides with the (legal) *public* space of the surrounding society; in case this society is not a homogeneous Muslim society, but rather a (post)modern society of the 21st century society, where Islam is not supported by the state? In such a case one gets the impression that the shariah, all too often, is giving answers – answers qualified as being *divinely* ordered! – to questions that the non Muslim world (Christian or otherwise) *has never asked* (or does not ask any

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[75]See e.g. Philips, Fiqh; Doi, Sharī´ah, 6ff; 17IN, 5/10//15/11; Mooren, War and Peace, the chapter on divine Law, 77-86, etc.

[76]Yasien Mohamed in17IN, 5/10.

[77]17IN, 5/10 [italics by me, ThM].

longer)![78]

Anyway, the polemic around the shariah demonstrates that the "spirit of the shariah" experiences some difficulties to pass through the eye of the needle of 200 years of enlightenment culture![79] Among the important

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[78]Answers that comprise polygamy, wife beating, the place and power of women in society in general (clothing restrictions, political rights, etc.); food restrictions for school-meals, fight for public prayer space or a public space free from all Christian symbols, etc. We cannot be exhaustive here. Some examples might suffice. Thus see Denffer, 88-91, dealing among other things with the difficulties of Muslim parents (in this case converts to Islam) to educate their sons and above all their daughters according to shariah rules and in this way driving them eventually into social isolation (at birthday parties, sport events, school events, etc.). Wife beating, by the same source (Denffer, 173/4), is permitted by religious law, but socially not admissible. – For the gender question in general see e.g. F. M. Göcek, and Sh. Balaghi (eds), Reconstructing Gender, and with regard to the Middle East O. Safi (ed), Progressive Muslims; furthermore, Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid on the women question between fundamentalism and enlightenment in E. Heller, H. Mosbahi (eds), Islam, Demokratie, Moderne. See also the "horror stories in fatawa al-mar'a (Islamic fatawa regarding women (Darussalam, Riyad, Saudi Arabia 1986). See furthermore the contributions by C. Nelson, (on feminism and self-identity) and by S. Ghandour (on gender, post-colonialism and war) in J. C. Hawley, The Postcolonial Crescent. – At any rate, the friction and difficulties in dialogue are perhaps more on the shariah side than on the side of dogma. (Cf. for this also H. Srour on al-Afghani, 208).

[79]I refer here to a saying by the great French historian Fernand Braudel who writes in his monumental "Grammaire des civilisations" with regard to a period of unsuccessfulness of Islam (after the 13th century) after some splendid centuries earlier: "This unsuccessfulness did not cause Islam to die as a civilization. Only, Islam has taken, where Europe is concerned, a material retardation of two centuries. But which centuries!" [these have been, meaning: extraordinary important ones!] (Grammaire, 123 [transl. by me ThM]). – Add to this the statement by I. Abu-Lughod: "In a way the superstructure of the cultural manifestations was transmitted but not the intellectual bent of mind which in the West had led to its establishment. We can speculate, therefore, that the early nineteenth-century transmission of European knowledge had only a

spiritual and intellectual tools that have been developed in this period we find Rousseau's philosophy of nature without which there would have been no slogan like "liberty, fraternity, equality! Then again, we find Muslims that have tried to react "productively" to what has happened in the West, overwhelmed as they might have been by its "power".[80] Those who have answered spiritually most forcefully to the new situation modern times have created for Islam as a "religion" is the Syrian writer and poet Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said). He states in a paper on the "dead end [Sackgasse] of modernity in Arab society" that religion manifests itself today above all as "'Law'– i.e., in categories of 'permitted' and 'forbidden' and that means as *censorship* – and ... consequently as *power*..."![81] Thus it is modern individual's power thirst that transforms the path to God into a "dead end" [Sackgasse] toward nothingness and hope-

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limited immediate effect on the intellectual outlook of the Arab world. It introduced superficial changes but did not shake the foundations of Arab society as that Arab society had been shaken during the ninth century." (The Arab Rediscovery, 72). – For the "spiritual information gab" between the Arab World and the West, including problems regarding to understand the fitrah, see also The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia, 212.

[80]See the reaction to the West formulated by P. Cachia (In a glass darkly, 29): "The most enviable of the West's achievement, indeed, the one that authenticated all others was its power, even though it was wielded at the expense of the Arabs themselves." – For further (productive) reactions to the West see e.g. I. Abu-Lughod's study on the Arab Rediscovery of Europe; Kh. Al-Khusry's research into the life of "Three Reformers"; Al-Khusry's study deals with Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakebi; see too H. Srour's study on al-Afghani; A. Bilgrami (*What is a Muslim*) and H. Rahim (*The mirage of Faith and Justice*) in J. C. Hawley, *The Postcolonial Crescent* – to name only a few out of a vast list of researchers.

[81]Adonis, *Die Sackgasse der Moderne in der arabischen Gesellschaft,* in: Heller, E., Moshabi H., eds, 66/7 [my itals. and transl.].

lessness, a "power" that is nourished and exercised in the name of the "Law".[82]

Obviously, the appreciation of the "Law" in the case of Adonis and similar thinkers is quite different from the "Law's" exaltation as the quintessence of even religion, fitrah and faith. But this kind of tension around the "Law" is as old as Judaism itself, from which Islam has inherited the problem; and even in Christianity it is part of its very foundation. However, be it as it might be with the appreciation of the Law itself – one thing has become clear by now, that it is in the name of the "Law" that Islam appropriates itself the original "space", opened up via Sūrah 30,30, the space of the primordial creation, the *spiritual freedom* offered by the fitrah. Hence into the very heart of this fitrah is written the Law!

Yet, the Law needs a Prophet to pronounce it. Since at the very beginning there is a *word*, a *verbum*, the *kalima*, eventually conferred to the *kitab*, the sacred book. A verbum that can be written, printed, recited, chanted, listened to and be obeyed to! However, the word is *not a person*, not a *destiny to be shared*. In other words: Islam, like Judaism, is *the* religion of the *book* in its most strict form and by the same token – monotheism, tawhīd, in its most radical kind: "Allah, He is the legislator, His Prophet puts the Law into motion and is the Law´s interpreter – as for the human beings – they only have to obey the Law."[83] So much for human nature.

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[82]To shed more light on the concept of "Sackgasse", dead end" used by Adomis see too Ferro, M., *Le choc de l'Islam;* Lacouture, J., Tuéni, Gh., Khoury, G.D., *Un siècle pour rien.*

[83]Mawdūdī, quoted in Platti, "La Théologie," 245 [my translation].

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