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Centre Suisse Islam et Société entre Suisse Islam et Société

From Zakāt to Theological Anthropology

Systematic and Practical Approaches in Islamic-Theological Studies

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Acknowledgements

Establishing Islamic-Theological Studies at a university in Switzerland is a demanding endeavour and a real adventure. At the University of Fribourg, we started on this path in 2015. Without the support of numerous institutions and individuals, we would not be where we are today. First and foremost, we would like to thank the Mercator Foundation Switzerland, which has supported the doctoral programme "Islam and Society: Islamic-Theological Studies" since 2016, providing the most important instrument for developing the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society (SZIG/CSIS). The foundation has been courageous in following the whole development with great interest and sympathy. It was a special pleasure for us that Annegret Reisner, President of the Foundation Board, and Corina Freudiger, collaborator in charge, were present at the final conference "On the Future of a Young Discipline: Islamic-Theological Studies between Systematic and Practical Research", held on 30 and 31 May 2022 at the Paulus Akademie in Zurich, from which this publication emerged. This publication brings together a report on the lectures, as well as systematic reflections on the establishment of Islamic-Theological Studies in the context of Switzerland by providing a theoretical framework and a synthesis of the doctoral programme.

Sincere thanks are due to all the speakers at the conference, who travelled to Switzerland from six countries, to bring their research into conversation with the results of the graduates of our programme. Our doctoral students are to be thanked for the contribution they have made to the Centre over the years, for engaging in an extensive conference preparation and for presenting the conclusions of their work. The contribution of Arlinda Amiti, who was the coordinator of the doctoral programme until 2021, especially needs to be highlighted.

Furthermore, great thanks go to all the researchers who have participated in our numerous workshops and, in some cases, also co-supervised dissertations. Islamic-Theological Studies, as a new discipline, needs an underpinning and a resonant space not only in academia, but also in society, and in Muslim communities. The SZIG/CSIS Advisory Board and all those institutions and religious organisations who have accompanied our work with much interest and support over the years also deserve a special mention.

Finally, we thank all those who supported us in preparing the conference and producing the publication. Valérie Benghezal has shaped our communications in many directions beyond numbers and letters. The vivid pictures of the conference we owe to the photographer Anna Pohorielova. Catherine Nicholson Pfammatter meticulously helped us with proofreading, as we decided to write this publication in English. This decision allows us on one hand to reach target groups in the different language communities of Switzerland. On the other, we are keen to enter into dialogue with the international scientific community, to whose impulses we owe a great deal. Therefore, we look forward to the discussions that this publication will initiate.

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Esma Isis-Arnautović, Amir Dziri, Hansjörg Schmid

Preface

By Dr Annegret Reisner, President of the Board of the Mercator Foundation Switzerland

After six years, the doctoral programme "Islam and Society: Islamic-Theological Studies" offered and coordinated by the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society (SZIG/CSIS) of the University of Fribourg has come to an end. Its closing conference "On the Future of a Young Discipline: Islamic-Theological Studies between Systematic and Practical Research", held in Zurich on 30 and 31 May 2022 marked a provisional highlight. In 2015, the doctoral programme was approved by the board of the Mercator Foundation Switzerland, even before I became active in the foundation. At that time, the foundation focused on the promotion of young, talented researchers and intercultural encounters. The doctoral programme combined these two concerns in a remarkable way, by promoting young scholars in the new field of Islamic-Theological Studies. It had the potential to shape the discipline rooted in the specific Swiss context.

In 2016/17, I got to know the programme and three of the doctoral students, who presented the beginnings of their research projects. Back then, I was impressed by the diversity and breadth of the topics chosen. Today, when I look at the programme of the conference, the picture of this young discipline of Islamic-Theological Studies is crystallising: on one hand, there are questions from the everyday religious life of Swiss Muslims, which are brought to light and interpreted in a local context. On the other, there are theological questions derived from religious texts, which are examined for their meaning and relevance in the local context and in relation to potential tensions with the peculiarities of Swiss society and way of life.

The doctoral programme is exemplary of the SZIG/CSIS's work, since it combines basic research in Muslim theological thought with applied research on the realities of life for Muslims in Switzerland. In doing so, the Centre works across linguistic and cultural boundaries between German-speaking and French-speaking Switzerland, as well as across national borders. The foundation particularly appreciates that it works intensely at the interface between research and society. The conference is one example of many different formats of knowledge transfer and intermediation activities, which is characteristic for the Centre, as well as for every single thesis. The results both radiate in Muslim circles and contribute to raising awareness in Swiss society.

The doctoral programme has contributed significantly to defining contours for the young discipline of Islamic-Theological Studies. Every thesis has made an effort to explore the diversity and breadth of this discipline. Relationships with Muslim communities – as places of religious education, spiritual care or social work – were established and expanded, so that resilient networks have emerged. These relationships and networks have helped to identify needs and hotspots that the SZIG/CSIS wants to work on in greater depth.

Despite feeling sadness at the doctoral programme drawing to an end, it is nonetheless very gratifying that the doctoral students have advanced their work so greatly and developed a solid foundation for their future through the accompanying programme. The seeds planted with this

programme have grown and flourished and will certainly bear further fruit along the participants' life paths. It is perhaps easier to view the termination of this doctoral programme in the context of its significance in the development of the SZIG/CSIS: it has laid the foundation for further steps in the development of the discipline of Islamic-Theological Studies in Switzerland.

In the future, the Centre will delve deeper into particularly relevant issues identified through the follow-up project "Islamic-Theological Studies: Diversity and Orientation", also funded by the Mercator Foundation Switzerland. This will once again sharpen the Centre's profile and strengthen its social impact. The focus of this new research project will be on identity processes among young people of Muslim faith, especially in the fields of religious education and spiritual care. Certainly, identity processes are important on a personal level, and in these moments, there is a particular need for well-founded theological answers, that are also adapted to everyday life. However, religious education and spiritual care are also relevant topics at the societal level – one only has to think of the polarising catchwords such as radicalisation of young Muslims or training of chaplains or imams. Once again, the SZIG/CSIS will explore the negotiation processes between Muslim self-attribution and foreign attribution, the relations between individual practice and collective social meaning, in a transdisciplinary way.

What Mercator Foundation Switzerland particularly appreciates about this new project is its participatory approach. That is, how these burning issues are dealt with in discussion with representatives of the Muslim communities in Switzerland and in dialogue with actors from public institutions. We hope that in this way a further contribution can be made, so that Islam is understood as an enriching component of today's Switzerland. We want to move away from a dichotomy of "us and them", towards a differentiated togetherness. The motivation of the Mercator Foundation Switzerland in supporting both the doctoral programme "Islam and Society: Islamic-Theological Studies" and the "Islamic-Theological Studies: Diversity and Orientation" project remains the same: to give expression to our hopes for diversity being recognised as an opportunity in Switzerland, and for peaceful coexistence becoming possible.

1. Islamic-Theological Studies as a New Discipline

Although the scientific engagement with Islam and Muslim societies has a long history in Western Europe, the formation and establishment of academic Muslim self-reflection and the corresponding discipline of Islamic-Theological Studies are – especially in Switzerland – quite young and still taking shape. But what exactly is new and how does this discipline differ from already established research on Islam? A quick look into the complex history of the study of Islam and Muslim civilisations shows the important characteristics of this formation process.

1.1 History and Context of Islam-Related Research in Switzerland

The study of Islam and Muslim civilizations in Switzerland – as in many European countries (cf. Nielsen, 2023 for an overview) – goes back at least to the 16th century, where Christian theologians dealt in particular with Arabic as a Semitic language, cognate to Hebrew, and consequently with the Qur'an and aspects of Muslim religious teachings. One of these scholars was Theodor Bibliander, to whom the first Latin printing of the Qur'an in 1543 is owed. This research took place primarily out of theological interest and was predominantly carried out with a philological focus (cf. Würsch, 2019, pp. 23–25). This does not exclude that other aspects were also explored, but mastering the Arabic language was considered to be an indispensable skill for gaining access to Islamic thought and culture. However, Islam-related study was not institutionalised and largely depended on individuals.

From the 19th century onwards, a gradual detachment from Christian theology took place, initially by establishing independent chairs for Arabic language, usually located within the Faculties of Humanities, e.g. in Geneva in 1820 or Berne in 1858 (cf. Reinkowski & Würsch, 2019, pp. 41–45; Würsch, 2019, pp. 29–39). Finally, various independent Oriental Seminaries were founded: 1919 in Basel, 1961 in Berne, 1969 in Zurich, and 1964 in Geneva. Over time, the thematic research expanded so that in addition to Arabic, Turkish, Persian, poetry, religious history, culture, social history and anthropological field studies were added. Although each of these seminaries developed its own priority, a commonality is that they focus on history and social topics of specific regions such as the Near and Middle East and work on questions of religious and cultural phenomena from a descriptive-analytical perspective (cf. Reinkowski & Würsch, 2019, pp. 51–52; Stenberg & Wood, 2022, pp. 1–31; Hussain, 2009, pp. 239–242). With this shift in content, some of the institutions have been renamed (several times) to reach their present titles of *Seminar for Near and Middle Eastern Studies* in Basel, *Institute for the Study of the Middle East and Muslim Societies* in Berne, *Institute for Islamic Studies* in Zurich, and *Arabic Unit* in Geneva. At these institutes, Muslim theological thought was chiefly researched through historical examples and manifestations and guided by the personal interests of professors, doctoral students and students, but not pursued programmatically.

Initiated by a needs analysis study (cf. Lüddeckens, Ulrich & Uehlinger, 2009), which identified a lack of educational possibilities for Imams and other people responsible for youth work or religious education, the *Swiss Centre for Islam and Society (SZIG/CSIS)* was established in 2015 at the University of Fribourg with the support of the Swiss Confederation. It was commissioned to establish Islamic-Theological Studies as the first institute in Switzerland that – in addition to aspects of religious and social studies – explicitly pursues theological approaches (cf. Dziri et al., 2020). It was important to include Muslim communities, associations and individual actors in this academisation initiative of Islamic self-reflection and allow them to participate in the process. The Centre has therefore grown out of a genuine scientific, as well as social, interest in reflecting the presence and plurality of Muslims academically (cf. Sejdini, 2022, pp. 13–15; Agai & Omerika, 2017, p. 331; Agai & Engelhardt, 2023, pp. 70-73). The discipline of Islamic-Theological Studies, which has a long tradition in Muslim countries but also in the European Balkans, was thus established within a new context, one marked by Switzerland's secularity and its own academic history and culture. Doing Islamic-Theological Studies under the roof of a secular university means that this discipline subordinates its scientific discourse to the epistemic principles by which modern sciences gain knowledge (cf. Schulze, 2022, pp. 4–6; Leirvik, 2016). In turn, this means that the discipline of Islamic-Theological Studies faces two challenges: firstly, it has to learn how to navigate within a secular institution, while simultaneously offering propositions of theological reasoning. Secondly, in conducting research, it has to adopt a scientific perspective that is marked by a post-metaphysical paradigm, which strives for an analytical or empirical approach in key theological categories such as Revelation, for example, in order to gain scientific plausibility (cf. Suleiman, 2022, pp. 43–46; Özsoy, 2015, p. 62; Leirvik, 2016). Producing theological thought means therefore reflecting on theological principals and justifying them argumentatively by making the process of knowledge production intersubjective, comprehensible and methodologically sound (cf. McClintock Fulkerson, 2012, pp. 360–361).

This development of Islam related research, beginning under the roof of Christian Theology from the 16th century onwards, its separation and consideration from a religious, cultural and social science perspective under the roof of Islamic and Oriental Studies, and finally the introduction and addition of an explicit intra-Muslim, theological perspective under the roof of Islamic-Theological Studies illustrates the long historical development that currently allows a multifaceted approach to Islam. With the establishment of Islamic-Theological Studies, the SZIG/CSIS faces the challenging task of developing this discipline academically, methodologically, contextually and in relation to other disciplines, especially Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies, Christian Theology and Religious Studies, but also Sociology and Social Anthropology.

1.2 Terminological Reflections and Choices

While today in the English-speaking world the term 'Islamic Studies' subsumes a variety of approaches, including theological ones – albeit with accompanying debates on whether this is adequate and appropriate – in German and French speaking areas, a distinction is made institutionally and/or terminologically between theological and non-theological approaches (cf. Siddiqui, 2007; Stenberg & Wood, 2022, p. 4–6). In France, due to political reasons, only research from a religious studies perspective, i.e., analytical-descriptive and non-theological, is conducted at public universities and is mainly subsumed under the term *Études de l'islam* or *Islamologie*, whereas research with theological intentions occurs within private institutions and is mainly referred to as *Études islamiques* (cf. Benzine et al., 2017; Messner & Abou Ramadan, 2018). In Germany and Austria, the differentiation is made terminologically and functionally: for an external perspective, the term *Islamwissenschaft* is mainly used and for an inner-Muslim perspective, mainly the designation *Islamische Theologie* (cf. Agai & Omerika, 2017, pp. 350–357; Engelhardt, 2017, 2021; cf. Gilliat-Ray, 2023). Nevertheless, it is important to note that these are just tendencies and a variety of designations exist in all these countries.

Islamic-Theological Studies differ from non-theological approaches in three key features: firstly, Islamic-Theological Studies are characterised by an intention of making one's own faith explicable to others. This intention includes an openness towards theological premises such as the possibility of revelation as well as its compelling justification (cf. Özsoy, 2015, p. 60; Topkara, 2018, p. 283). Secondly, the theological dimension manifests itself in a willingness to continue and participate in the production of Islamic knowledge discourses, not only by administering or reproducing them, but innovatively developing them (cf. Ben Abdeljelil et al., 2019). Thirdly, it is distinguished from other disciplines by its double obligation of proof, to both science and faith communities. The knowledge produced does not assert itself through authoritarian enforcement, but through discursively negotiated recognition and acceptance by the scientific and religious community (cf. Agai & Omerika, 2017, p. 349; Schulze, 2022, pp. 4–5; Dziri et al., 2020, p. 23).

Establishing Islamic-Theological Studies requires numerous clarifications in the fields of philosophy of science, epistemology, methodology and terminology. This includes the challenging search for a suitable denomination for the discipline, which even in Arabic-language terminology – as in other important Muslim languages – has several designations, among them *al-ʿulūm al-islamiyya* (Islamic Science), *ʿulūm al-islām* (Sciences of Islam), *dirāsāt al-islamiyya* (Islamic Studies) and *uṣūl al-dīn* (Fundamentals of Religion) (cf. Dziri et al., 2020, p. 17; Engelhardt, 2017, pp. 71–74). While the corresponding academic discipline at German-speaking universities is predominately referred to as Islamic Theology, the SZIG/CSIS works with the preferred denomination Islamic-Theological Studies for two reasons: firstly, the Greek term *theología* has been historically and conceptually shaped by Christian theologies, whose structures and subject logics are not entirely transferable to an Islamic canon of disciplines and body of knowledge (cf. Schulze, 2010;

Şahin, 2021, p. 162; Agai et al., 2014, p. 14). Secondly, the composition of the noun *theo-logía* etymologically suggests a dominance of the doctrine of God, which is why it is disproportionately used in Islam-related research to refer to *ʿilm al-kalām*, the classical place for addressing questions about God, his nature and attributes. Such an abbreviated association narrows and reduces the umbrella discipline Islamic-Theological Studies to one specific sub-discipline (cf. Winter, 2008, pp. 3–4; Engelhardt, 2017, pp. 71–74).

Nevertheless, the marking as a theological, and thus confession-oriented discipline, is useful in making a certain intention transparent, differentiating it from other disciplines and approaches. While the noun 'theology' associatively directs to the object *theos*, the use of an adjective offers the advantage of opening a space for alternative conceptions and classifications, by indicating a perspective rather than a specific object. Such an understanding guarantees not only the perception of a differentiating criterion for claims and research intentions, which is becoming increasingly important, but is also capable of bearing an institutional orientation towards Islam and society. Furthermore, using common terminology allows an inscription in ongoing discourses and facilitates the transfer to society and other academic disciplines. So, Islamic-Theological Studies is used in this publication as a generic term, which designates an umbrella discipline consisting of various sub-disciplines among them *tafsīr* (exegesis), *fiqh* (theory of norms)*, kalām* (systematic theology)*, sīra* (prophetic biography), *ʿaqīda* (creed), *falsafa* (philosophy)*, taṣawwuf* (mysticism*)* or *ādāb wa-akhlāq* (ethics).

1.3 A New Structure: Systematic and Practical Research in Islamic-Theological Studies

The establishment of Islamic-Theological Studies requires reflection on the related sub-disciplines and fields of research, including their self-image and definitions, their content, as well as their conceptual and terminological equivalents in West-European languages. Knowing that different categorisations have been developed and used in the history of ideas in Islam, no universal canon can be assumed (cf. Dziri, 2022, p. 19; Agai & Engelhardt, 2023, pp. 80-81). The question of whether there is a unique disciplinary canon and what advantages and disadvantages arise from a topic- or purpose-oriented categorisation must be re-examined.

In addition, much of the current research conducted in Islamic-Theological Studies can no longer be clearly assigned to one single sub-discipline of an Islamic canon. In many cases, it deals with cross-cutting issues, located at the interface of two or more sub-disciplines. Chaplaincy, religious education or theological anthropology do not fit easily into classical terminology, nor an established canon. Meanwhile, there is some discussion regarding whether these should be classified as autonomous sub-disciplines or simply as research fields – and, if so, to which leading discipline they should be assigned. Although categorisation into sub-disciplines serves to help with orientation, both in the history of Muslim sciences and in transdisciplinary research today,

content-related methodological interconnections as well as their resulting interfaces are of great importance for further research.

Furthermore, many sub-disciplines have also evolved and changed over time. This is visible, for example, in the field of *kalām*, considered as one of the first disciplines of the Muslim religious canon. The *kalām* of the early period was functionally fixed on a legitimation and (apologetic) defence of the Islamic doctrine of God, both within one's own faith community and vis-à-vis other religious worldviews. In terms of content, the discussion was strongly influenced by the nature and characteristics of God, including his attributes (cf. Frank, 1992, p. 27). With the turn of the 20th century and the challenges of modernity, a reorientation took place. Under the name of *ʿilm al-kalām al-jadīd (tr. yeni ilm-i kelam)*, i.e., new systematic theology, anthropological questions, references to social issues (e.g., gender issues, human rights) and the expansion of methodological approaches (e.g. recourses to modern philosophy and social science) were strengthened and a stronger orientation towards the Qur'an was sought (cf. Wielandt, 2016, pp. 749–752; Öztürk, 2018; Poya, 2023). Thus, *kalām* (*speech, dispute*) was formed – in accordance with its etymology – into a discursively and systematically conducted dispute that is open to different topics since it is *not the object* of the research but the *systematic perspective* which became decisive. Therefore today, simply locating research within *kalām* may not be self-explanatory, due to its plural associations.

In view of these emerging upheavals, the SZIG/CSIS is orienting itself towards a classification of science that is common in the modern era and which generally distinguishes between historical, systematic and practical research (cf. Schulze, 2010; Agai & Engelhardt, 2023, pp. 80; Seiffert 2016, pp. 234–244; Pannenberg, 1976; Ganzevoort, 2004, pp. 56–57). Historical research explores inherited knowledge and interpretations and aims to explain and reconstruct their historical geneses and developments over time. It analyses the milieu in which such knowledge originated and its interactions with other cultures (cf. Renard, 2014 and Schmidtke, 2016 as examples for historical research). Systematic research discusses knowledge, in the form of ideas and concepts, in the light of current scientific findings and develops them further. Systematic research is primarily oriented towards textual analysis and pursues the goal of both analysing and evaluating existing arguments and developing new ones in response to a specific question (cf. Winter, 2008; Karimi, 2015 and Sievers, 2019 as examples for systematic research). Practical research takes life realities and experiences as its starting point. It uses empirical approaches to examine various fields of social action and interactions. These findings are linked to theories and thus flow back into the systematic production of knowledge (cf. Schmid & Sheikhzadegan, 2022 and Ali et al., 2022 as example for practical research). Given that historical research, with its strong focus on the past, does not really fit with contemporary questions at the interface of science and society, the SZIG/CSIS prioritises systematic and practical research, which, of course, refer – at least partly – to the historical references they are founded upon.

1.3.1 Systematic Research: Some Reflections and Characteristics

Systematic argumentation has always played an important role for theology and philosophy, in particular as ideological ideas had to be justified and legitimised within faith communities and vis-à-vis other world views. Even though systematic theology is predominantly associated with *kalām* – and serves as one of its designations in Western European terminology –, systematic reflection is not reserved for a single (sub)discipline (cf. Winter, 2008, p. 1–18). Therefore, it is important to distinguish between systematic theology as a sub-discipline, aiming to describe and provide a coherent system of religious beliefs, and systematic research, as an approach applied within various sub-disciplines such as *fiqh* (theory of norms), *ādāb wa-akhlāq* (ethics) or *tafsīr* (exegesis) and used to address different questions. Fundamentally – and therefore common to both – systematic indicates a methodologically guided and coherent approach that is intersubjectively verifiable and consequently thought through – although the standards and criteria of how replicable, sound research is conducted have changed over time (cf. Ohly, 2019, pp. 11–14; Sievers, 2019, pp. 26–30; Tatari, 2021). Nowadays it is essential for systematic research that no dogmatic premises are set; rather, preliminary assumptions, interpretations and conclusions are conclusively derived and argumentatively substantiated. Doing systematic research in a post-metaphysical age requires a recognition that the transcendent can only be accessed indirectly, which entails epistemological realignments and methodological openings (cf. Özsoy, 2015, p. 62; Leirvik, 2016, pp. 129–131).

Despite its predominantly theoretical orientation, systematic research is neither to be understood in the sense of a hierarchical demarcation by classifying (systematic) theory over its (practical) application, nor as dichotomy marker between theoretical and practical. Comparative intercategory relations – for example differentiations between speech, narrative and poetry – are an important element of systematic research, but also find their way into historical or practical research. Therefore, reductions do not do justice to research on either side. Research, whether systematic or practical, is conducted under scientific standards, including rational justifications, that always refer to theories and always have implications for reality and practice. Systematic and practical research are therefore not opposed but are complementary approaches that take different perspectives. They may even share the same research object, while asking different questions and differing in their epistemic intentions and methodologies.

Two characteristics of systematic research in the field of Islamic-Theological Studies can be identified: firstly, systematic research deals primarily with contemporary or currently urgent issues. In contrast to historical research, the focus is not directed towards the past, but to the present and future. Within systematic approaches, historical research is only carried out to the extent that it is relevant to the research question, i.e., it is not concerned with the historical value of an issue. Rather, systematic-theological research queries the relevance for today and reflects the claim to truth and the orientation the Islamic faith provides in the context of current scientific, intellectual-historical and socio-political developments (cf. Danz, 2016, pp. 6–9; Surall 2009, pp.

28–36; Sievers, 2019, pp. 213–217). Furthermore, it is characterised by continuous engagement, instead of sporadic investigations, in order to guarantee its foundation and relevance.

Secondly, systematic research pursues the double goal of analysing and developing arguments in relation to a specific question, by contextualizing, re- and deconstructing arguments and contrasting them with other positions (cf. Ohly, 2019, pp. 37–41; Özsoy, 2015, p. 64). Although the methodological work is largely based on texts, empirical examples and arguments from different fields, such as exegesis or history, can also be pursued and incorporated. The emphasis and focus are therefore on the elaboration, interpretation and appreciation of core arguments, regardless of their origin. By relating the arguments to key research questions, argumentatively convincing and well-thought-out positions can be developed.

Hence, the task of systematic research within Islamic-Theological Studies is to systematically evaluate validity claims and reflect the contents of faith, its presuppositions and its consequences, in order to substantiate conclusive and coherent teaching. In doing so, it guarantees scientific connectivity to and for different disciplines, insofar as it works at interfaces and takes into account different rationales.

1.3.2. Practical Research: Some Reflections and Characteristics

Practical research in Islamic-Theological Studies is quite a modern phenomenon, characterised by its strong relation to practice, experience and action (cf. Dillen & Mager, 2014, p. 302). Although practical questions – e.g., ritual practices or dealing with poverty – have always been the subject of theological reflections, a methodological and theoretical basis for an explicitly Islamic practical theology is yet to be developed (cf. Barzegar, 2019; Hussain, 2009). Therefore, a systematic foundation for practical theology in Islam is still pending and is considered to be an urgent contemporary research desideratum (cf. Isgandarova, 2014, p. 218; Şahin, 2021, p. 159; Schröder, 2022, p. 55).

Usually spiritual care, religious education, welfare and social commitment, community life, ritual practice and liturgy are considered as typical representations of practical theology (cf. Weyel et al., 2022). Such a view is based on a thematic classification which holistically assigns a topic to the category of practical research by taking its practical reference and application as the leading criteria. However, it is essential to emphasise that such fields are not only constituted and formed by practical aspects, but at least as much by systematic research questions. More indicative than the actual topic or subject area is therefore the question, which can be posed with a practical or systematic intention.

One strong trend in practical research in Islamic-Theological Studies is a methodological base in social sciences combined with applied empirical methods, especially since qualitative methods are suitable for exploring and making accessible new fields and practices (cf. Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p. 67). In contrast to systematic research, where ideas are mainly deduced from

texts, in practical research the process of knowledge production runs mainly bottom up, by exploring field and lived realities, with a shift from text-oriented teaching to research on religious practice (cf. Barzegar, 2019; Isgandarova, 2022, p. 164). Still, practical research is not merely the exploration of faith experienced from an observer's perspective but is characterised by the interlocking of empirical social research and theological reflections (cf. Dillen & Mager, 2014, p. 318). Therefore, Christian Theology serves as an important reference point for Islamic practical theology, by providing a counterpoint for similarities, by examining Christian concepts for connectivity within the Islamic tradition or even by laying down new and autonomous foundations. In this sense, Muslim intellectuals call for new approaches to practical theology, "which can be defined as a conversation between the lived experience and the Islamic faith and as an attempt to engage Islam both empirically and hermeneutically" (Isgandarova, 2014, p. 218). These interactions, which Isgandarova refers to as 'conversation', are to be explored "by drawing out the implicit and explicit theological dimensions of the situation" (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p. 91). Practical research in Islamic-Theological Studies is called upon to uncover theological dimensions, by exploring how humans refer to God and how their manifold relationships are reflected in their actions and attitudes (cf. Dillen & Mager, 2014, p. 302). These theological dimensions can be hidden, for example, within the motivations that lead Muslims to engage in activities such as social work, chaplaincy or religious education, in the legitimacy of certain activities, with regard to the expectations of service users, or in their worldviews on specific topics. Practical research takes the human being as its starting point, and from there, explores references to God and religious sources by applying various methods from social science. In this respect, social science and theology mutually enrich each other.

Practical research in Islamic-Theological Studies can therefore be understood as critical theological reflection on the practice of Muslim individuals and communities, with the aim of examining how practical manifestations and implementations interlock and interplay with theological convictions and legitimations. Practical research represents a circular approach where empirical data collection is followed by analysis and theological reflection, which is then transferred to practice once again and may even possibly lead to a practice being revised.

1.4 Doctoral Programme "Islam and Society: Islamic-Theological Studies"

The doctoral programme "Islam and Society: Islamic-Theological Studies" was launched by the SZIG/CSIS in 2016 as a key instrument for establishing Islamic-Theological Studies in Switzerland, by giving young academics the opportunity to shape the field through their research. The subject-specific research programme assisted the young researchers to build up expertise in various fields of research in Islamic-Theological Studies and discuss their results. It was complemented by a programme consisting of block seminars on various topics, methods and contexts; research workshops with national and international researchers; lectures and specialised conferences, which offered a space for discourse, networking and interdisciplinary exchange. These event formats

have enabled scientific exchange between different academic actors and ensured connectivity to contemporary discourses.

The focus on the interface between Islamic-Theological Studies and society as well as the reference to the Swiss context, are two important characteristics of this doctoral programme. Reference to Switzerland can result both from an empirical analysis of a field of practice as well as from the socialisation of researchers, insofar as they approach Islamic knowledge discourses with specific questions stemming from their identities, biographies and educational backgrounds.

Table 1: Key data on the doctoral programme

Project name	Islam and society: Islamic-Theological Studies
Duration	2016 – 2023
Supporter	Mercator Foundation Switzerland
Funding	1 430 000 SFr.–
Scientific directors	Amir Dziri and Hansjörg Schmid

Six doctoral fellows, Arlinda Amiti, Baptiste Brodard, Alexander Boehmler, Safia Boudaoui, Nadire Mustafi and Dilek Uçak-Ekinci, and one associated researcher, Esma Isis-Arnautović, participated in the programme. Since there hadn't yet been a study programme in the field of Islamic-Theological Studies in Switzerland, most of the fellows either had a Master's degree from neighbouring disciplines such as Islamic and Middle Eastern or Arabic Studies, or from neighbouring countries, for example, in Islamic-Theological Studies in Germany or Islamic Religious Education in Austria. In order to create a common base and acquire a theological approach, it was firstly important to level out the diverse knowledge the fellows had in different fields through the accompanying programme.

Although all seven projects could be classified as either systematic or practical research, interfaces, links and implications on the other research domain can be demonstrated. For example, in her research, Arlinda Amiti analyses the collected Friday sermons of Albanian-speaking imams, to examine how the diaspora situation affects the imam's understanding of Islam. Although her starting point is in practice, Amiti works with theoretically grounded concepts such as transnationalism and addresses the systematically important question of how normativity and contextuality relate to each other. In his PhD, Baptiste Brodard explores, through empirical analysis, the fairly new phenomenon of Islamic social work that complements state institutions in addressing economic insecurity, poverty and social exclusion. On a systematic level, this theological reflection on concrete activities raises important questions, about the relationship between empowerment of the faith community and charitable actions for the common good, and about religious adherence and citizenship.

In his research, Alexander Boehmler examines the thinking of the Swiss Sufi convert Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998) with particular interest in his idea of perennialism, e.g., the inner unity of all religions. This systematic work is therefore situated at the interface of religious pluralism,

which has consequences for the practical implementation of interreligious dialogue. In her philological-linguistically oriented work, Safia Boudaoui examines the relationship between wealth and poverty in the Qur'an and the values which arise from this. These systematic considerations of exegetical approaches to the Qur'an result in practical consequences for ethics. Nadire Mustafi dedicates her work to field studies on how religious education is conducted in Muslim organisations in Switzerland and the significance the realities of young people's lives have in this. This empirical research offers the possibility to systematically design models for the didactics of religious education that offer addressees and recipients an inclusive space for reflection and their concerns. In her PhD, Dilek Uçak-Ekinci focuses on the fairly new phenomenon of professional Muslim chaplaincy in Swiss hospitals. Taking concrete case studies as a basis for examining how Muslim chaplaincy is implemented in secular institutions and what the understanding of a Muslim chaplain role is, the research reveals systematic questions that stem from theological challenges in everyday life – e.g., the ritual handling of stillborn children – which need discussion and clarification. In her work, Esma Isis-Arnautović discusses the possibility of justifying a theological anthropology in Islam, based on a communicative model of revelation. The practical flip side of this systematic question lies in its social relevance for real-life attitudes towards ethical issues, for example dealing with the environment, organ donation or abortion.

*Table 2: Complementarity of the **practical (light blue)** and **systematic (dark blue)** aspects of the research carried out by the seven doctoral students*

Fellow	Research topic	Examples of linkages to further research
Amiti, Arlinda	Relation between contextuality and normativity, through analysing the influence of diaspora on Albanian imams' understanding of Islam in Switzerland	Linguistic, liturgical and content shaping of Friday sermons and homiletic characteristics
Boehmler, Alexander	Religious pluralism viewed through Frithjof Schon's understanding of perennialism and its consequences for contemporary theology	Influences on how interreligious dialogue is and could be conducted
Boudaoui, Safia	Ethics behind the concept of *zakāt* and how the Qur'an deals with poverty and wealth	Consequences of the perception of these ethics for believers and communities
Brodard, Baptiste	Provision and implementation of social services by Muslim communities and motivations for social work by activists	Theological embedding of social work within liberation theology and relationship between the empowerment of community and the common good in society
Isis-Arnautović, Esma	Justifiability of theological anthropology in Islam from a revelation-theological perspective	How different conceptions of the human being influence ethics when dealing with environment or medical issues, such as abortion or organ donation

Mustafi, Nadire	Incorporation of life-world-references in youth religious education in Switzerland	Model building for the didactics of religious education
Uçak-Ekinci, Dilek	Institutional and theological embedding of Islamic chaplaincy in Swiss hospitals and the understanding of the chaplain's role	Theological considerations relating to concrete challenges, such as possible rituals for stillborn children

The final conference of the doctoral programme, held in Zurich on 30 and 31 May 2022, brought together all of these research studies – some of which had already been completed and others which were in their final stages – to ask what contribution they make to the establishment, orientation and focal points of Islamic-Theological Studies in Switzerland. While the distinction between practical and systematic research serves as a common thread and structures Chapters 2 and 3, further intersections in terms of content, methodology, results and conclusions will be made visible in the synthesis presented in Chapter 4.

2. Practical Research in Islamic-Theological Studies

Although the outlines of a theoretical foundation for practical research in Islamic-Theological Studies have not yet been fully clarified nor an overall concept elaborated, research on practical issues has increased and enriched over time (cf. Isgandarova, 2014). Practical research using an inductive approach illustrates the diversity and subjectivity of Islamic faith and practice in different contexts. This can relate to individual practice, but due to the communal character of Islamic faith, community is a key dimension of practical theology. There are three different fields of common activities offered by Muslim communities which have also become areas of practical research within and beyond Islamic-Theological Studies: education and teaching, spiritual care and social services.

Figure 1: Hansjörg Schmid

Whereas many of these activities are provided by volunteers or integrated into the tasks of imams, professionalisation trends in the 20th century had an impact on these three fields, generating three autonomous professions: namely, religious education teacher, chaplain and social worker (cf. Franken & Gent, 2021; Gilliat-Ray, Ali & Pattinson, 2013; Warden, 2013). Linked to these processes, three corresponding scientific fields of religious education, spiritual care and social work have emerged and developed. This makes evident that the aforementioned fields of activity in Muslim communities are not only inscribed in a religious framework, but also in a broader secular one. What this framework looks like exactly depends on the political context: in separation models, the possibilities of collaboration between a secular state and religious communities are limited, while in cooperation models they are enabled and pursued (cf. Agai & Engelhardt, pp. 74-79; Engelhardt & Schmid, 2019 with a wider historical focus). Depending on the country and context, religious teachers can thus be part of the state school system, chaplains part of health institutions, the army or the penal system, and social workers operate on behalf of religious communities as

part of public welfare funding (cf. Laird, Abdul Majid & Mohamed, 2021; Michalovski, 2015; Schmid, 2022; Khalfaoui, 2019). Whichever the case, this results in interfaces that both have an impact on practical research in Islamic-Theological Studies and touch on interdisciplinary issues. Insofar as professionalisation requires training and academic reflection, these developments open up different questions for the practical fields of social work, chaplaincy and religious education from an Islamic-theological perspective:

Over recent decades, several Muslim organisations have specialised in social work and humanitarian aid, by delivering welfare services to both Muslims and non-Muslims (cf. Schmid & Sheikhzadegan, 2022). How do Muslim organisations use Islamic sources and discourses to shape, justify and legitimise their practice? Can welfare gain more relevance by being embedded in Islamic liberation theology as a goal of social work? These questions are tackled in the first section.

Muslim hospital chaplaincy is a second field that has gained in importance globally as a means of providing spiritual and psychosocial care for patients (cf. Gilliat-Ray, Ali & Pattinson, 2013). However, this accompanying practice and its theological justification require reflection and an academic foundation. How is Muslim chaplaincy implemented in public institutions that are secular? How can it be theologically referenced and justified? Questions like these are discussed in the second section.

The question of where and how religious education takes place in plural and secular societies is a focus of social and academic debates, because it affects religious self-understanding (cf. Franken & Gent, 2021). To what extent do the educational programs in mosques consider the life-world references of young Muslims and to what extent do they respond to their existential enquiries? How should the lessons in mosques and Muslim organisations be designed so that they complement the descriptive lessons about Islam in schools? These questions are addressed in the third section.

2.1 From Charity to an Islamic Theology of Liberation: Religious Foundations of Muslim Welfare Practice

According to Baptiste Brodard, Islamic social work is a concept used to qualify charity work and welfare services undertaken by Muslims in the name of their faith or religious identity. Among the welfare services provided by mosques and Muslim organisations are: feeding the hungry, tuition, counselling, meditation and material aid (cf. Schmid & Sheikhzadegan, 2022). Although these organisations claim to base their practice on Islamic principles, they generally do not define and specify what these references to Islam look like. Furthermore, an association may emphasise its Muslim background today and present itself as a humanist NGO in two years' time, so that categorisation and labelling as Islamic social work is debatable and evolutive (cf. Brodard 2023). Therefore, Brodard explores in his thesis the question of where and how such predominantly implicit

Islamic references manifest themselves and to what extent they are evident in religious affiliations, in motivations for social commitment, in the selection of activities and support provided or the legitimisation of these.

From his empirical material, Brodard has drawn three observations and hypotheses: firstly, Muslim social work providers hardly ever refer to theological argumentations to explain their actions (cf. Brodard, 2019). Secondly, concrete issues encountered in the field can shape theological discourses and produce new Islamic norms. Thirdly, a differentiation can be made between theological norms produced and set by traditional scholarship authorities and a so-called collective imaginary which can label something as Islamic practice, without reference to scholarship.

Figure 2: Baptiste Brodard

With several examples from his collected case studies, Brodard showed how practical experience can affect theoretical discussions in theology. In their daily work, Muslim organisations face challenges and questions that require clarification. Should Muslim recipients be prioritised over non-Muslims in the distribution of *zakāt*? Should pork meat be thrown away or distributed to non-Muslim beneficiaries? Does Muslim social work aim to empower its own community or act for the common good in society (cf. Brodard, 2022)? He provides the example of a counsellor who was confronted with the suicide of a young Muslim girl, which furthermore illustrated how experiences in the field can even question and challenge personal beliefs. While, initially, the counsellor's understanding of suicide as a grave sin which forbids the Muslim community from performing a funeral prayer dominated, her actual confrontation with suicide caused a re-evaluation of her convictions, finally leading to an understanding of suicide as a result of mental illness, which enabled her to see the young girl as a victim. Difficult social experiences, especially if they are connected with mental health, drugs or violence, force Muslim organisations to find an appropriate way to

deal with them, beyond moral judgement (cf. Brodard 2023). The decrease in influence of transnational movements and the origins of charitable movements as individual initiatives has meant that most organisations providing Islamic social work in Switzerland are independent nowadays and develop their own narratives and religious discourses (cf. Schmid & Brodard, 2020). This marks a new phase in Islamic activism, which is characterised by an individualisation and personalisation of religious and social commitments (cf. Roy, 1999). Questions emerging from the field force theology to reconsider existing norms and interpretations by taking new developments into account.

As *zakāt* may have a double function in tackling poverty on an individual level, as well as funding welfare in the form of long-term change, for example, by establishing entrepreneurships or farming, Brodard asked the theologically relevant question of whether the philosophy and objective behind *zakāt* are simply charity or social change (cf. Brodard, 2023). Islamic social work that understands *zakāt* in terms of social change will not only help on a micro level but – like Islamic liberation theology – tackle the roots of social inequality on a structural level. To be coherent and consistent, however, an appropriate approach is required. As a solution, Brodard proposes a *maqāsid*-based methodology which seeks to protect higher principles such as social justice (*ʿadāla*) and the common good (*maṣlaḥa*) (cf. Kamali, 1999; Ibn Ashur, 2006).

"Differentiating between an understanding of Islamic social work as a way of empowering a faith community, as opposed to seeing it as an act for the common good, lays down different theological models for ethics and social change."

(Baptiste Brodard)

In his paper, Haroon Bashir began with the historical embedding of the liberation theology approach, which emerged in South America in the 1960s as a moral reaction to social injustice, poverty and violence. This experience triggered Christian theologians to reflect on the relation between social reality and the divine (will) and the question of how God can help people living under oppressive circumstances. Arguing that the poor, oppressed and marginalised would more properly represent the original audience of biblical texts, they claim that they are in an exceptional position to understand their significance (cf. Gutiérrez 1971; Mesters 1989).

Within Islam, a similar type of theology arose, following the idea that religious experts (*ʿulamāʾ*) do not represent the divine will, but rather that the text is accessible for everyone who strives to understand it (cf. Esack, 1997). As in liberation theology, scriptures do not simply contain meaning that is to be uncovered, so the hermeneutical focus is not so much placed on the text itself but on the meaning the text has for those reading it (cf. Rahemtulla, 2017). Acknowledging that, since the early Islamic period, there had been different interpretations regarding to whom

zakāt could and should be given, as well as the purposes for which it could be used, liberation theology raised the important question of how to deal with modern forms of slavery and oppression, which are shaped by modern logics and systems. Though slavery was officially abolished during the 19th century, dehumanising and oppressive practices such as human trafficking, racist and discriminatory prison systems as in the USA, or the exploitation of housemaids in the United Arab Emirates, still exist (cf. Bashir, 2019). As *zakāt* should be given to free those in bondage, in order to improve their situation, these examples could easily be assigned to this category. But is this a legitimate reading of the Qur'an?

Figure 3: Haroon Bashir

Liberation theology faces several critiques, among them being seen as subjective, political motivated and reductive, by only applying a socio-economical lens. In light of the diversity of topics raised in the Qur'an, the question remains as to why the Qur'an should be read specifically to liberate the poor. In order to explore this question more deeply, Bashir raised the hermeneutical question of how interpretation is validated. Hermeneutical positions in the tradition of Eric Hirsch consider a text as an entity which always remains the same and is independent from time, context and reader (cf. Hirsch, 1967). They assume that an objective reading is possible and that the task of hermeneutics is to uncover meaning. Therefore, differences in interpretation are seen as caused by interpretative errors. In contrast, liberation theology argues that every interpretation is shaped by the context in which it develops and therefore naturally contains a level of subjectivity. This subjectivity needs to be reflected since "reading from nowhere" is not possible.

Bashir concluded that within Islamic tradition there has never been *the* ultimate *tafsīr* of the Qur'an. The lack of a binding-authoritative exegesis has led to multiple meanings, as well as to numerous hermeneutical models, which nonetheless follow certain criteria. The acceptance of subjectivity and a lack of universal criteria caused nonetheless major concerns, because of the

implication that the ability to judge an interpretation becomes lost. Taking into account that not all interpretations are equally valid, Stanley Fish offered a fruitful approach by claiming that interpretive legitimacy does not reside within the text. Rather, legitimacy could only be deemed (in)valid based on the criteria that were shared by a set body of readers (Fish, 1980). In line with this, Bashir emphasises that interpretation can only be discursively determined as (il)legitimate by the community, i.e., through their acceptance or rejection.

These reflections illustrated how the new field of Islamic social work, as an important pillar of Muslim engagement in a plural society, moves between state mechanisms and religious self-justifications. This requires social and institutional anchoring, as well as theological reflection. At the same time, it indicates that the theological foundation of Islamic social work as an autonomous phenomenon within Islamic social practice, rather than it being embedded in a more broadly conceived theology of liberation carries implications, which needs be discussed further.

2.2 Muslim Chaplaincy: Between Psychosocial Practice, Islamic-Theological Legitimation and Institutional Functionality

Dilek Uçak-Ekinci began her paper with a personal story, illustrating that the practice of visiting ill people, listening to them, comforting and supporting them, in short taking care of them on various levels, has always existed among Muslims, but was not necessarily labelled under names like chaplaincy or spiritual care. The practice of chaplaincy is therefore old, but as a profession based on educational qualifications and further trainings, it is new (cf. Uçak-Ekinci, 2019; Laird, Abdul Majid & Mohamed, 2021). This raises different questions, which are central to Uçak-Ekinci's research: what does it mean to provide Muslim chaplaincy in the context of Swiss hospitals? In which specific fields of action does it operate? What self-image does this kind of chaplaincy have? What are the religious-spiritual needs of patients and how can chaplaincy deal with these? To answer these questions, Uçak-Ekinci evaluated reports from volunteer chaplains in the canton of Zurich, using Fitchett and Nolan's case study method (cf. Fitchett & Nolan, 2015; Fitchett 2020).

The analysis has so far revealed different tasks, including: supportive accompaniment such as assistance and empowerment, practical religious accompaniment at birth and death rituals, ethical counselling before therapy decisions, mediation between institutions and individuals or between family members, and educational assignments as speakers in training courses for healthcare professionals.

To further explore the role(s) of a healthcare chaplain, Uçak-Ekinci used a case example. During the third phase of the COVID pandemic in Switzerland, a male Muslim patient lay in the intensive care unit, connected to an ECMO machine, which maintains respiratory function. Since this measure does not achieve any therapeutic benefits, the doctors wanted – following medical standards and proceedings – to switch off the device and release it for other patients. The patient's daughter wanted to prevent this, claiming that from an Islamic perspective everything possible must be done, regardless of therapeutic progress. In her rage and despair, she addressed an imam

who referred her to the chaplaincy. She then asked the female chaplain sent to see her to attend an upcoming meeting with the doctors and fight for the desires of family members for maximum therapy. For the chaplain, this caused internal tension regarding the options, which are determined by various factors, including the rules and regulations set by the institution, the chaplain's professional self-image, as well as the definition of tasks, mandate, responsibilities and borders within the profession. By recognising the emotionally distressing situation and giving the daughter a safe space to talk about her perceptions, feelings and fears, the chaplain was able to release the crucial question of the legitimacy of switching off life-sustaining devices from the dichotomy of permitted and forbidden. Hence, the daughter's search for theological authority and original normative mandate was shifted without withdrawing support: a shift from advocacy for a – specific – theological interpretation to advocacy for the daughter and her emotions. However, before this conversation took place, the father died.

Figure 4: Dilek Uçak-Ekinci

Uçak-Ekinci concluded that this example gives a small insight into the variety of roles of chaplaincy, ranging from experts on religion related issues, advocates for patients and their families, mediators between different positions (between institutions and individuals as well as between family members) to participants in clinical ethics committees (cf. Massey et al., 2015; Timmins et al. 2018). She believes that an awareness of these roles and their further differentiation is essential when considering the available options for action and that this therefore contributes to the professionalisation of Muslim healthcare chaplaincy (cf. Peng-Keller, 2018).

"When practice precedes research and theory, as Muslim healthcare chaplaincy does, qualitative research can play a crucial role in improving practice, by offering a deep understanding of specific issues and needs."

(Dilek Uçak-Ekinci)

Ingrid Mattson began her paper by focusing on the added value that chaplains from religious communities bring to secular institutions like hospitals. In a place where medical decisions dominate, people remain confronted by existential fears that cannot be treated by medication but require pastoral care. The reaction of a case study patient is representative of this: although screaming loudly, the patient fell silent when the Muslim chaplain entered the room. He became instantly calmer and expressed his thankfulness, explaining he did not want to be alone. The very paradox that the room was filled with medical staff when the chaplain entered demonstrates that in this case his sole presence already had an effect (cf. Long, 2022).

However, for Mattson, the professional training of chaplains is essential. Typically, traditionally educated Muslims are used to teach doctrine and answer questions concerning Islamic law, but they rarely reflected on how to engage with a suffering soul who might not know how to articulate the distressing emotions inside and their feeling of alienation from God. The common reaction of rushing into ritual actions like recitation, instead of focusing on the individual, makes it obvious why training in pastoral care is so important. A professionally trained chaplain knows that he/she does not have to take action to fill the silence or to control the narrative but listens rather than talking. His/her main task is to create a safe place for the patient, who might at some point ask for a prayer. So, regardless of how deep his/her personal faith may be, a professionally trained chaplain is able to offer an effective pastoral presence for anyone in need, including those with no faith commitment or from another faith, since dignity figures as a guiding principle and he/she is trained to reflect upon his/her behaviour, which allows him/her to act according to context and purpose (cf. Abu-Ras, 2011; Ansari, 2022).

Such professionality also requires an attitude which allows deep grief and deep faith to co-exist and which encourages and supports the deeper exploration of spirituality. Mattson raised awareness of the fact that lamentation and complaining is actually part of faith. In the narrative about Joseph (Yusuf), as in Surah 12, or Mary (Maryam), as in Surah 19, verses 16–26, for example, lamentation to God is made publicly in the Qur'an. Therefore, the Qur'an does not classify falling into despair as disbelief at all. Rather, according to Mattson, disbelief can be understood as an ideology which means not believing that life has a purpose. Human beings are not expected to carry their burdens alone through life. For Mattson, the chaplain supports those who are grieving, to prevent them from falling into disbelief and losing faith in the purpose of life. The still widespread idea that feelings are to be suppressed – especially by men – contributes to people being

ashamed to talk about their feelings. The denying of emotions, the essentialisation of femininity and masculinity and resulting behaviours can block the flow of compassion, healing and forgiveness, that is, having *raḥma* toward oneself (cf. Mattson, 2020; cf. Abd-Allah, 2004).

Figure 5: Ingrid Mattson

In addition to these existing resources within the Islamic tradition, which perceives all kinds of feelings as human and therefore normal, Mattson showed how the Christian term 'chaplain', which derives etymologically from the Latin word *cappa*, meaning "little cloak", could be embraced by Muslims too. Referring to the narrative about Khadidja, who wrapped the prophet in a mantle after his first experience of revelation, as well as to the narrative – significant for the Shi'ite tradition – about the prophet who took his daughter Fatimah, her husband Ali and their children Hasan and Husain under his cloak to mark them as his family, Mattson illustrated that the mantle is a symbol in Islamic tradition too (cf. Ali et al. 2022).

Uçak-Ekinci and Mattson illustrated how the field of chaplaincy is taking shape in Switzerland, as well as internationally. The underlying rationales show connections and demarcations that take place within intra-Muslim debates, interreligious dialogue and in secular institutions. Building upon this, the question of the relationship between theology and chaplaincy and what spiritual resources Islam can provide to cope with suffering, crises or loss needs to be explored further.

2.3 Mosques as Places of Learning: a Reflection on Religious Education and Muslim Youth

The relevance of research in religious education results from the fact that religious knowledge is to be handed down to future generations and that it ultimately entails the question of which knowledge should be passed on, and how. According to Nadire Mustafi, religious education can be

understood as a reflection of the religious learning and educational processes throughout a person's entire biography. It is considered not just as an applied, but as a combined science, comprising a pedagogical as well as a theological side. Correspondingly, its characteristic is connecting religious questions with the actual living conditions of humans. Since, according to Mustafi, religious education aims to increase the autonomy and maturity of learners, it cannot be discussed simply as matter of integration or security policy (cf. Ulfat, 2021).

Figure 6: Nadire Mustafi

Islamic religious education, as the teaching and acquisition of different kinds of skills and competences concerning religious knowledge, is offered and institutionalised in Switzerland mostly in mosques, in informal learning groups outside the mosque and, in rare cases, in a school environment where often only the rooms are provided for lessons (cf. Schmid, Tunger-Zanetti & Winter-Pfändler, 2021). Since the introduction of the new curriculum (*"Lehrplan 21"*) in Switzerland, all pupils in public schools learn about Islam from a descriptive, religious studies perspective. At the same time, however, there is no legally regulated entitlement to confessional religious education for Muslims, which is why teaching occurs within Muslim families, organisations and mosques.

While mosques were initially described in research as places of imitation and memorisation, more recent studies focus on mosques as places of spiritual and communal experience and for the formation of personality and character (cf. Karakoç & Behr, 2022). In her research, Nadire Mustafi tackles the guiding question of how much space is given to Muslim youth in Switzerland for self-positioning – or 'Islamicity' (cf. Kulaçatan & Behr, 2016) – and to what extent their life situation and the surrounding world is considered. In order to find out what significance the reality experienced by youths has, Mustafi conducted narrative interviews with learners and teachers from all over Switzerland and evaluated them according to the documentary method (cf. Bohnsack, 1999).

Mustafi's results show that Muslim pupils and teachers alike opt for student-centred teaching with professional didactics: Muslim youths wish to have a religious education that enables them to form their own opinions and to discuss them openly. They would like methodologically diverse lessons, instead of just lectures from the teachers, as they want to be included in the lessons and to reflect on contemporary topics too. On the other side, Muslim teachers critically reflect on the lack of age-appropriate teaching materials, emphasising that children, young people and adults have different needs that should be taken into account. In contrast to stereotypical memorisation, they emphasise the observations and experiences of the pupils and the relation between the content taught and their own lives. Furthermore, they complain that despite the need for it, no continuous professional training has been offered in Switzerland for over 10 years, and they call for training programmes to be established.

Mustafi concluded that teachers are eager to include their pupils' circumstances, giving them space to locate themselves autonomously within the Muslim tradition and develop their own self-images as Muslims. This allows pupils a voice to express their own religious convictions in everyday language, which strengthens their hybrid identity as both Muslims and Swiss. Although the majority of the lessons are student-oriented, attempts to adapt didactics mainly occur in an autodidactic way, which indicates a lack of teacher professionalisation in the Swiss context. How and whether mosques can function as places of religious education in the future depends on the extent to which they are able to move from migration to inclusion processes and implement changes concerning didactical questions in a systematic way, moving beyond the individual, autodidactic level.

> *"My field study in Switzerland shows how strongly references to the lifeworld are anchored in Islamic religious education, both among young people and teachers."*
> *(Nadire Mustafi)*

As publicly founded religious education in Europe differs between countries (cf. Berglund, 2018), Jenny Berglund gave an insight into an empirical study that she and her colleague Bill Gent had done in Stockholm and London. In Sweden and the United Kingdom, public schools offer inclusive religious education where all students learn about all religions. Whereas in both the UK and Sweden, private Muslim schools are publicly funded, in Sweden the confessional education provided by Muslim organisations is approved and endorsed by national supervisory authorities. As many children and youth attend both, i.e., public and so-called supplementary religious education, the question arises of how Muslim pupils experience this dual education. Questioning the postulated

dichotomy of a supposedly "western-critical" and "Muslim-indoctrinaire" education in the literature, the pupils' perceptions were emphasised, an aspect which has rarely been addressed in research so far (cf. Berglund & Gent, 2019).

The study revealed similarities as well as differences: providers of supplementary religious education in both countries offer different activities such as learning Arabic, memorizing the Qur'an, stories of prophets, ethics as well as homework and artistic performances, theatre, cycling or discussion groups. While classes in London were usually held every day after school, students in Stockholm usually attended classes only at the weekend. In London, school uniforms and gender-segregated classes were common, in Stockholm, no school uniforms were worn and mixed classes occurred. This shows that the national context has an influence on the supplementary religious education provided by Muslim organisations (cf. Berglund & Gent, 2019).

Figure 7: Jenny Berglund

When asked about their experiences, the students expressed different as well as overlapping skills concerning both educational types, as reported by Berglund: often mentioned and considered as helpful skills gained from public religious education were English reading, knowledge on how to do research, to socialise and to communicate as well as respect, tolerance and learning from diversity. On the other side, commitment to learning, concentration, memorisation, talking in front of a group, patience, tolerance, respect, the sense of togetherness and right and wrong figured among the skills that were gained from Islamic supplementary education but considered as useful for public school and life in general. Some of the students emphasised the benefit of Qur'anic recitation in front of teachers and classmates, arguing that it was easier for them to prepare presentations for public school and to stand in front of people, to learn other languages and even math because they are used to memorising techniques from learning the Qur'an by heart. As disadvantages of the public school system, examinations, stress and the amount of homework were

mentioned, whereas rushing to Islamic lessons after school, the sometimes-repetitive character of Islamic supplementary education and the attitude of some teachers, such as being bossy or instilling fear, were critically remarked upon (cf. Berglund, 2017; Gilliat-Ray, 2023).

Berglund concluded that these results show that supplementary education functions and is appreciated as cultural capital, where Muslim pupils not only learn religious content, but also gain skills that help them outside the Muslim context. But it is important to note, that the lessons provided differ from mosque to mosque, so there is *not one* mosque education. Muslim pupils consider public and supplementary religious education as complementary and value both educational pathways. All of them indicated they would also like their children to experience both types of religious teaching, although some of them would like to see modifications to supplementary Islamic education, such as including more different perspectives instead of just one school of religious thought (cf. Berglund, 2019).

Berglund and Mustafi's studies provide an insight into the activities of mosques, along with how these are perceived and received. They demonstrate that despite diverse contextual differences within Europe, Muslim students and teachers do not take the content and materials offered without questioning, but rather show a critical approach, by deeply reflecting on them. Subsequently, the question arises as to the role the economic capacity of pupils' parents plays in how supplementary Islamic education is organised and to what extent pedagogical standards are implemented.

3. Systematic Research in Islamic-Theological Studies

Systematic research has become highly relevant nowadays, in light of the diverse challenges of modernity and technical advances. Current debates within natural sciences, new possibilities of medical treatment and divergent explanations of social phenomena require Islamic-theological reflection in order to present a coherent and consistent worldview. As systematic research emphasises profound, methodologically guided evaluations of arguments on contemporary relevant issues, it lays the foundation for compatibility and connections to other disciplines (cf. Ohly, 2019).

Figure 8: Amir Dziri

Four fields of negotiation are of particular scientific and social interest: dealing with tradition and context, ethical foundations in today's world, approaches to the Qur'an and its exegesis and anthropological questions and requests:

1) It is indispensable today to examine Muslim traditions and the question of which core theological components of Islam are considered unchangeable, which transformations are possible or even necessary and to what degree these are adapted and implemented in daily life, not only because of the diaspora situation but also as topic of intra-Muslim orientation and guidance (cf. Dziri, 2023).

2) From an individual and socio-ethical point of view, it is of great interest to discuss what foundations for a good life can be derived from Islamic sources and what understandings can be asserted, for example, with regard to state, society, (post)secularity or political systems of rule (cf. Hashas, 2021).

3) Key points of reflection in the present include how interpretations of Islamic sources can be embedded in the history of theology, what new insights can be generated through the

application of newly developed methodological approaches or methodological triangulations to the Qur'an, and how exegesis will be conducted in the future (cf. Neuwirth 2019).

4) The answer to the question of what human beings are, and what their position in creation is, has far-reaching consequences for the shaping of social coexistence, for dealing with the environment, but also for medical ethical decision-making processes (cf. Demiri et al. 2022).

These relevant contemporary fields of negotiation within systematic research in Islamic-Theological Studies were addressed across four sections, even if questions regarding individual research projects relate to them in differing degrees and with varying emphases.

Imams are considered as central authorities of Muslim communities because of their education and status. As they move between internal community demands and societal representation, their understanding of Islam is shaped by factors such as their theological education, their biography and socialisation, their professional career, the environment in which they operate and the social context in which they live. How are their understandings of Islam mirrored in their activities and Friday sermons? How do Imams address social issues and how do these affect the religious community? What is the relationship between normative sources and social context in their understanding of Islam? These questions were the subject of the first systematic section.

The truth claims of religions have become a burning issue in the modern age, in view of mixed societies, secular tendencies and religious plurality. The concept of perennialism, i.e., the idea of a transcendental unity across all religions, is one possible way of dealing with pluralism. What potential does the perennial idea of a unity of religions have for interreligious coexistence and secular societies in the 21st century? What influence does it have on individual and social ethics? Questions like these were raised in the second section.

The question of how to interpret the Qur'an not only moves Muslims but is also a pertinent social issue. With a view to its time and milieu of origin, the theological significance of Qur'anic language semantics was highlighted in a third section, through the example of *zakāt*. How can the transformative function of Qur'anic language in generating new theological meanings, as well as modifying existing ones, be explored and explained? In what sense does the Qur'an define a new ethical order between poor and rich?

Theological anthropology is not only a comparatively young field in the history of science, but also a controversial one, within both confessional and non-confessional Islam-related research. As fairly new field of research operating among the tensions between Islamic canonised subdisciplines and contemporary needs, theological anthropology requires various clarifications. What is theological anthropology? Where is it situated and how is it pursued within Islamic-Theological Studies? What anthropological approaches have been developed by Muslim theologians and scholars? These questions were tackled in the last systematic section.

3.1 Friday Sermons Between Normativity and Context: the Example of Albanian Imams in Switzerland

In her research, Arlinda Amiti analysed the question of how the diaspora in Switzerland influences the understanding that Albanian-speaking imams have of Islam. Today forming the largest ethnic group of Muslims in Switzerland, Albanian-speaking male guest workers, mostly from present-day Kosovo and Northern Macedonia, first arrived in the 1960s for temporary employment – hence with the intention of returning to their country of origin (cf. Dahinden, 2005). With family reunification from the mid-1980s onwards, a process of long-term integration into the labour and school system took place, whereupon the maintenance of religious heritage and cultural traditions through founding associations and mosques became more relevant (cf. Behloul & Lathion, 2007). These mosques were considered as multifunctional spaces where imams initially acted as leaders for the five daily prayers and as preachers for Friday sermons (cf. Ceylan, 2012). With the advent of permanent residency among the diaspora, the imams' understanding of their role changed and new responsibilities and roles such as religious teachers, chaplains, advisors or bridge builders in interreligious dialogue and integration emerged (cf. Ceylan, 2010).

Figure 9: Arlinda Amiti

Amiti used diaspora concepts as an analytical tool to examine the relations within the triangle of diaspora community, country of origin and host society. In order to explore these interactions, she took Friday sermons as the object of her research and focused on two aspects: hybridity, which links the diaspora group and the host society, and transnationalism, which links the diaspora group and the country of origin (cf. Ackermann 2004; Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). As Friday sermons serve as a platform for the interaction between imam and community, they often treat theological, social and internal community issues.

In her empirical material, Amiti observed a variety and diversity of topics dealt with by the imams. To her surprise, traditional theological themes were rarely addressed, instead reflections on social coexistence and problems dominated: in one example, the political and socio-economic situation in the country of origin caused by increased emigration from Albanian-speaking areas with consequences such as school closures, as well as the gap between rich and poor people was commented on and problematised. Triggered by Swiss media coverage, the increase in domestic violence, especially among Albanian-speaking Muslims, was raised in another sermon. Albanian nationalism was criticised in a third example, by illustrating an ideal through the historical figure of Bilal, a black Abyssinian slave. In these sermons, frustration about the politics in the country of origin, concerns about the reputation of (Albanian-speaking) Muslims in Swiss society, criticism of nationalist behaviour as well as intra-Muslim conflicts and efforts to de-ethnify mosque associations become visible. The rescheduling of prayers, a temporal reduction of the sermon, the tendency to use one of the official Swiss languages for sermons or the many contextual references shows that the diaspora affects the sermons. Thus, the Swiss context shapes the structure and content of the sermons. The imams try to tailor the sermons to the needs of the local community and treat their concerns with priority. In this way, Imams navigate between religious normativity and historical and geographical context (cf. Amiti, 2024).

Amiti concluded that she would describe the imams as authoritative rather than authoritarian, since they base their statements on the Sunnah and the Qur'an as the only legitimate authorities, and relativise their person. They shift the question of authority by rhetorically using a "we" to mark themselves as part of the community, practising humility and weakening their claim to authority. While the transnational movement experienced by all the imams in the analysed cases when studying outside the Albanian-speaking region facilitates integration and shapes their understanding of diaspora, the intensity and maintenance of transnational networks was pursued differently from case to case, ranging from strong references to the country of origin to a primary focus on Switzerland.

"The Friday sermons given by Albanian imams have strong contextual references to Switzerland, so the influence of the diaspora becomes visible, without losing theological connection."

(Arlinda Amiti)

As the normativity of religious thinking is undoubtedly one of the highly sensitive aspects in the history of Islamic theology, Zekirija Sejdini shared some reflections about normativity and contextuality. The question of normativity is highly relevant for religious communities because it raises the question of claims to truth. Sejdini described three different positions of dealing with

and deriving normativity within the history of Islamic theology, without categorising them too strictly: the first approach claims a timeless and contextless validity of religious sources like the Qur'an. As norms are believed to be universal and given rather than developed, living conditions and social reality do not play a role in the production and establishment of norms. The second approach understands concrete normative commandments from Islamic sources as impulses for the development of an ideal. The context is taken into account so that adaptation is possible, even if the goal of an ideal order remains the same as in the first case. The third approach allows for the diversity of different social orders, as norm extraction is only seen contextually and therefore as a human product. That is why there is not only one particular order aspired to as the ideal, but different models accepted side by side, as contexts may vary (cf. Şahin, 2017; Tatari, 2021; Ulfat, Khalfaoui & Nekroumi, 2022).

According to Sejdini, acontextuality is quite a modern phenomenon, from which Islamic scholarship suffers. He demonstrated that contextual understanding was a constitutive part of Islamic theology with reference to a famous medieval scholar Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, according to whom *fatwās* needed to be adapted to traditions and times, places and circumstances, and respect the diversity of customs (cf. al-Jawziya, 1955).

Figure 10: Zekirija Sejdini

From the perspective of religious education, the question of normativity is intertwined with the question of how the human being is understood and to what degree real life is taken into account. Human beings do not live in a vacuum and can never detach themselves from their context. If the human being is at the centre of theological considerations, then historicity, perspectivity, limitedness, ambivalence and contextuality including language, culture and life situation are important factors of any normativity.

Taking the so-called pedagogical concept of theme-centred interaction (TCI) as guidance, Sejdini illustrated several factors that play a role in the generation of any knowledge, including norms: the content or theme – which in this case can be a hadith or verse from the Qur'an from which a norm is derived – is illustrated by the position of "IT", "I" marks the subjective situation from which one can never break away and "WE" stands for the intersubjective perspective and the community, whereas the "GLOBE" designates the environment in general which may be social, cultural, political, societal and so on. It is only from this last contextual perspective that knowledge is generated, e.g., norms (cf. Schneider-Landorf, Spielmann & Zitterbarth, 2017).

Sejdini concluded that a constructivist approach states that there are different manifestations of Islam. Even though the conflicts in the Balkans and the processes of democratization have led to political, social and religious uncertainty as well as identity issues, as a result of which Salafi and Wahabi movements have been able to gain a foothold in the region, an awareness is gradually returning of the potential of their own, Albanian approach to Islam (cf. Kursani, 2018). Albanian Islam represents an autochthonous European Islam that emerged from an Ottoman heritage. Historically, Muslims in Albanian-speaking countries considered national identity more important than religious identity, diversity was seen as an enrichment and the circumstances of people's lives and their cultural heritage remained central. These historically lived and cultivated aspects are a basic prerequisite for peaceful coexistence and can be rediscovered and further developed in the Swiss context.

This research demonstrates how interwoven the question of religious normativity and context is, where the dynamic and the static interact. While religious education has already designed models for dealing with questions of normativity and its production, the imams' sermons demonstrate how they handle it individually, on a daily base. This leads to the question of which fundamentals are unchanging and which aspects are subject to contextuality and therefore change. This is an important question, which requires further systematic consideration, especially in the context of establishing a new discipline.

3.2 Co-existence in Pluralistic Society: Muslim Self-Reflection and the Contribution of Sufi Thought

In his research, Alexander Boehmler analysed some key thoughts of Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998), a Swiss convert and Sufi who founded the first Muslim congregation in Basel in 1934. Wondering if Schuon's thought might be used as a starting point for the establishment and further development of the new discipline of Islamic-Theological Studies in Switzerland, Boehmler exploited the potential of Schuon's idea of perennialism.

Schuon states in his central teaching that God is one and always the same, but that he reveals himself in different ways, according to the cultures and dispositions of the different peoples who receive these revelations. He claims that there is one eternal – perennial – truth common to all traditional religions, while differences and contradictions exist merely on a superficial level (cf.

Schuon, 1975). This idea seems attractive because it attributes an inherent value to other religions and legitimises diversity by providing for a common ground. What is problematic however, is Schuon's claim to know this as a personal insight received directly from the divine intellect (cf. Sedgwick, 2004). This contradicts not only the general consensus among Muslims that the revelation process ended with Muhammad receiving the last parts of the Qur'an but runs counter to scientific standards that ideas have to be intersubjectively deduced. Moreover, the reception of his teachings, particularly in the United States, has been mixed. Academics inspired by Schuon – like Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Joseph Lumbard or Patrick Laude – consider themselves as his disciples or at least adherents of some of his teachings – especially about perennialism – in a creedal way by using them as axioms (cf. Lipton, 2018). This causes various methodological problems, as it dodges intersubjective understanding and empirical verification. In addition, Schuon's handling and choice of sources is questionable, as he relies mostly on René Guénon, a French convert to Islam one generation older than him (cf. Guénon, 1928), and barely refers to conventional Islamic sources. In general, Schuon seems to be – with some exceptions – just vaguely aware of Muslim writings about Qur'anic interpretation and even Sufism, philosophy or ethics.

Figure 11: Alexander Boehmler

Although these particular assumptions, combined with a lack of intersubjective methodology, led Boehmler to the conclusion that Schuon's way of working is not suitable as a base for Islamic-Theological Studies, his content can serve nonetheless as an impulse. The perennialist appreciation that all religions are wanted by God and valid in their own way can be retained without accepting Schuon's particular claims. According to Boehmler, this kind of pluralism can be legitimated through the Qur'an itself with reference to surah 5, verse 48, where God states he could have made one single community but – intentionally – did not. Moreover, Boehmler reinforces the

opinion that the term Islam has two meanings in the Qur'an: firstly, what was revealed to Muhammad, including the Qur'an and a particular set of commandments and practices, and secondly, what is common to all prophets. In this second sense for example, Abraham is called a Muslim in surah 3, verse 67, although the Qur'an was revealed after him. This leads Boehmler to the conclusion that the Qur'an itself teaches a common divine guidance that remains unchanged – one might call it perennial – with several legitimate forms of accessing it. In addition, experiencing others' sincerity in their own religion can enable feelings of commonality, beyond differences in doctrine and practice, such as sharing religious motivation to fight against oppression and injustice (cf. Esack, 1997). For the further development of Islamic-Theological Studies, Boehmler indicates that it is important not to stick to one single person, being instead open minded towards different thinkers from the long history of Islam. As Boehmler believes Islamic-Theological Studies need to become more intersectional, a comparative look at other academic theologies can provide models for considering previous thinkers.

> *"Although Schuon's methodological approach to his claim of perennialism is quite problematic, Muslim heritage offers many other points of reference for religious pluralism."*
>
> *(Alexander Boehmler)*

After this look into Schuon's understanding of the transcendent unity of religions referred to by Boehmler as perennialism, Marc Sedgwick shed light on further developments by the later Muslims Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933), an Iranian-American scholar, Rusmir Mahmutćehajić (1948), a Bosnian intellectual, and Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad (1966), a Jordanian philosopher.

Differentiating between four approaches to the plurality of religions, namely that a) only one religion is true, b) no religion is true, c) there is a least common denominator and d) there is a transcendent unity of all religions, Nasr adopted the latter, in accordance with Schuon. He especially critiqued the third position, which often figures as a base for interfaith dialogue, as the emphasis on a common denominator casts aside differences which undermine the form (e.g. its exoteric level) of the reality (e.g. its esoteric level) an accord is sought with. Contradictions on the exoteric level, like trinity or incarnation, may be resolved in the short term by dismissing doctrines, but in the long term all religion-specific markers disappear. For Nasr, only the transcendent unity of religion leaves the exoteric level intact, by allowing a diversity of manifestations (Sedgwick, 2004).

Rusmir Mahmutćehajić applied Schuon's transcendent unity of religions and Nasr's interfaith theory to the situation in post-war Bosnia and Hercegovina. Stating that the political measures agreed on were not sufficient to restore Bosnia and Hercegovina, Mahmutćehajić

founded the *International Forum Bosnia* in 1997 and called for a re-establishment of unity in diversity through a recognition of the transcendent unity of religions. On the basis of a historical narrative, he argued for experienced pluralism and peaceful co-existence, blaming post-war disunity on the modernity which brought secular ideology and growing ethnic nationalism. Although in his explanation this historical experience was a consequence of the people's conviction regarding the transcendental unity of religions, it was in fact, according to Sedgwick, the result of the Ottoman *millet* system, which granted tolerance and a degree of autonomy to different religious communities in Bosnia and Hercegovina (cf. Mahmutcehajić, 2005; Beglerović & Sedgwick, 2020).

Inspired by Schuon's and Nasr's viewpoints, Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, while director of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, drafted *A Common Word Between You and Us,* a widely discussed document on interfaith dialogue that was signed by 138 Muslim theologians from different countries, among them Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Bosnia and Russia. Starting from the basic assumption that some formal differences between Islam and Christianity remain, like trinity or incarnation, the paper aimed to create a common ground by focusing on two essential characteristics of both religious traditions: the love of God and of one's neighbour (cf. bin Muhammad, 2007). Although the paper risked what Nasr once warned against, namely attempting reconciliation at the formal-exoteric level, it distinguished the essential from the formal and emphasised the essential reading of sacred texts and myths from different traditions in the light of one eternal, common truth.

Figure 12: Mark Sedgwick

Sedgwick concluded that Nasr was the first one to apply Frithjof Schuon's perennialism and the idea of a transcendent unity of religions to interfaith dialogue, arguing that this solves the problem of disagreements between exoteric religions, while leaving their esoteric level intact. Although Nasr's ideas were implemented in post-war Bosnia by Mahmutćehajić, and further developed by

Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, the approach of these three thinkers offers little help in identifying the place of Islam in secular contexts, as Nasr and Mahmutćehajić were both outspoken critics of modernity and Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, while sharing their opinion, did not publicise the same position for diplomatic reasons. Their argument is founded on two main ideas: one is perennialism and the exoteric-esoteric distinction which serves as a basis for co-existence in a religiously pluralistic society; the other is an uncompromising critique of modernity which cannot be a basis for co-existence with secular society.

This immersion in the ideas and conceptions of a particular person, as well as his spiritual successors, has revealed potentials and limits of perennialism. At the same time, these exchanges took a critical look at how inter-religious dialogue is and can be conducted. The criticism also asks the question of what resources from Islamic heritage need to be further explored and can be made fruitful for the question of (religious) plurality and its relationship to modernity and secularity.

3.3 The Term *zakāt* in the Qur'an: Between Continuity and Rupture

In her paper, Safia Boudaoui examined the etymology of the term *zakāt* by analysing a number of Western researchers and Arabic linguists, in order to find out to what degree its meaning of "alms" has been shaped by the Qur'an and further Islamic-religious reasoning. Starting with a historical overview of Occidental research, Boudaoui showed that much of this work is based on historical etymology which considers *zakāt* as loanword. In the early 19th century, the attention Western scholars paid to the Qur'an was focused on the origins of Islam, mirrored in a search for influences from Judaism and Christianity. In that period, references to Qur'anic lexical borrowings were extensively discussed. Concerning the term *zakāt*, some orientalist researchers claimed it had an Aramaic origin, arguing that it was borrowed from *zekût/zekûta* which means "gain, merit", and in particular "moral merit" or "virtue" (cf. Fraenkel, 1880). While some scholars assumed that the term is pre-qur'anic and was already used by Jews on the Arabian Peninsula in the sense of alms, others argued for an introduction of this meaning by the prophet Muhammad himself, without knowing the proper meaning for the Jewish people (cf. Fraenkel, 1880; Horovitz, 1925; Nöldeke, 1910). Observing that it was only in Medina that the legal *zakāt* was instituted in the sense of mandatory alms, some argued that the term underwent a semantical change from its general meaning of "merit/righteousness" to the more specific meaning of "charity", but without being able to explain how this change took place (cf. Hurgronje, 1882). In concluding this historical overview, Boudaoui raised the question of when *zakāt* entered the Arabic language and when it acquired the meaning of alms.

The analysis of the usage of the term *zakāt* in early Islamic sources and its absence from dictionaries dealing with foreign vocabulary, such as al-Jawālīqī's *Kitāb al-muʿarrab min al-kalām al-aʿjamiy* (*Arabicised words among foreign words*), demonstrates for Boudaoui, that *zakāt* was neither understood nor borrowed as an Arabicised word, but was a word of genuine Arabic origin. The term *zakāt* is usually linked to the root *zāy – kāf – wāw* and covers two meanings of the root,

according to the linguist al-Khalīl bin Aḥmad (718–790): firstly, to be pure or to purify, linking it to the verb *ṭahāra* and the idea of purification *(taṭhīr);* and secondly, to grow, or increase, especially with reference to plants. From the time of Abū Manṣūr al-Azharī (895–981), Arab linguists tried to harmonise the two main meanings by saying that the purification of good leads to its growth and increase (cf. Bashear, 1993). This is a typical example of homonymy, i.e., the identical root having different, unrelated meanings, which in turn is often an indicator of a lexical borrowing or a diachronic evolution of the language.

Figure 13: Safia Boudaoui

However, Boudaoui concluded with three details which may open new perspectives: firstly, al-Khalīl, as well as many after him, associate and consider as equivalent from early on the term *zakāt* with *ṣalāḥ,* which covers the meaning of righteousness and validity (cf. Bashear, 1993). Focusing on a grammatical analysis of the vowels and thus the Arabic sound and pronunciation, the linguist Sībawayh (760–796) explains secondly that some terms like *zakāt*, *ṣalāt* (prayer) or *ḥayāt* (life) have a particular pronunciation due to the *alif al-tafkhīm*, i.e., an amplification of the phoneme /a/ by a phoneme /o/, which is represented in the spelling of Old Arabic by the letter *wāw* and not by an *alif* (cf. al-Nassir, 1985). Thirdly, some Qur'anic verses associate *zakāt* with the pre-Islamic period and the Jews. Furthermore, a hadith exists, associated with ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAbbās (619–687), explaining that the *zakāt* in surah 2 verse 83 means obedience and loyalty towards God (cf. Bashear, 1993). This hadith, which has not yet been considered by Western scholars, suggests that *zakāt* has a wider meaning then previously assumed. Only a holistic analysis that takes etymology, semantics and context into account can disclose the full meaning and its semantic development.

"The linguistic study of the concept zakāt suggests that the meaning of 'alms' often attributed to it, is in fact the result of a historical construction."
(Safia Boudaoui)

This profound philological study forms a basis upon which to reflect on a theologically important question: whether the Qur'an tends to have a specific attitude towards poverty and wealth. While pre-Islamic almsgiving establishes and reinforces a relationship of dependence between giver and receiver, the Qur'an introduces, in addition to the horizontal dimension of the human being as beneficiary, a vertical dimension as worship in the service of God and an expression of piety. This allows for a new perspective and a questioning of dependency, because the relationship to God has implications for a restructuring of the social order, in which the rich bear responsibility and the poor are not humiliated by receiving alms. The confirmation of such a hypothesis has still further consequences e.g., for the individual perception of poverty as a stigma, as well as for concepts of social work and its implementations. The question of wealth distribution is therefore an important contemporary concern in view of welfare developments, a dependency-preventing approach for marginalised groups in society or an ethical attitude towards responsibilities and resources, and as such it needs further exploration.

3.4 Theological Anthropology: a New Perspective Within Islamic-Theological Studies?

In her doctoral thesis, Esma Isis-Arnautović pursued the question of whether theological anthropology in Islam could be justified from a revelation-theological perspective. In Islam-related discourses, theological anthropology is understood as research about humans and therefore narrowed down to conceptions of the human being. Until now this research was predominantly carried out either with a historical focus, by analysing ancient debates (e.g., about freedom of will); or with an exegetical focus, by exploring concepts (e.g., *fiṭra, khalīfa, 'abd, al-insān al-kāmil*) (cf. Dogan, 2014; Boumaaiz, Feininger & Schröter, 2013; Renz, 2002). Both approaches have their own challenges: while concept-centred anthropology tends to overlook aspects that do not appear *expressis verbis,* the historical reference back to early Islamic sources disregards that anthropology is a neologism from the 16th century and from an historical science viewpoint, is characterised by a detachment from the metaphysically oriented horizon of the world, now displaced by a turn towards empirical explanatory models (cf. Hofmeiser, 1986; Schoberth, 2006).

Guided by the idea that findings on human beings should be assembled in one place, there were some discussions about whether theological anthropology should be established as a new

subdiscipline or integrated into an existing subdiscipline, assigned by a key function. Which sub-discipline this could *not* be, was quite clear for some scholars: claiming that the object of research in theology is *theos,* and in anthropology is *anthropos*, *kalām,* the sub-discipline which historically focused on God and his attributes, was considered as unsuitable (cf. Antes, 1977).

Figure 14: Esma Isis-Arnautović

As both approaches have their inconveniences, Esma Isis-Arnautović showed, based on a model of revelation grounded in communication theory, how theological anthropology can be developed as a paradigm, by elaborating examples of both theological and anthropological significance for terms such as *waḥy, tanzīl* or *qurʾān,* which accentuate different aspects of the communication between God and man. While *waḥy* theologically emphasises the coded character of the message, anthropologically, it establishes a four-actor communication structure involving God, the angel, the prophet Muhammad and his audience (cf. Izutsu, 1998; Loynes, 2021). With *tanzīl*, the factor of space is emphasised on a theological level by channelling the communication process from top to bottom. Anthropologically, in turn, the factor of time is stressed by reference to a gradual pro-cess of communication, going on over two decades and taking place in response to people's re-quests, reactions and history (cf. Wild, 1996; Loynes 2021). The term *qurʾān* emphasises the cul-tic-ritual realization of revelation in the earthly sphere, not intended to represent God, but to make God present, thereby enabling a personal relationship with a currently present God (cf. Sinai, 2006; Kermani, 2018). Insofar as the recitation takes place from memorisation, revelation is in-trinsically anchored in a person and declares the human being as its bearer.

From this, Isis-Arnautović concluded that the human being is not merely the object of the message but is subjunctivised as God's communicative counterpart – i.e., as the one addressed by,

the one who speaks with and the one who speaks after God – and thus forms a constitutive component of revelation. In contrast to an understanding of theological anthropology as descriptive conception of human being, or as a subdiscipline, this paradigm accounts for the different historical and scientific shifts when the field of anthropological research emerged, among them changes of premises, terminologies and methodology, as well as the redefinition of the human as *starting* point of reflection, without losing the relationship between God and human as the constant point of *reference* (cf. Isis-Arnautović, 2024). For Isis-Arnautović, this foundation is to be (further) developed as a systematic-theological task within the discipline of *kalām*, although as a paradigm it can be transferred to other disciplines and can even operate as a guiding principle in the establishment of Islamic-Theological Studies in Switzerland, by directing attention towards the relationship between God and human, instead of God alone (cf. Isis-Arnautović, 2022).

> *"Conceptualising theological anthropology as a paradigm opens new hermeneutical possibilities of reading every single verse of the Qur'an from the perspective of the relationship between God and humans, which can also be applied in other disciplines of Islamic-Theological Studies."*
>
> *(Esma Isis-Arnautović)*

In his contribution, David Vishanoff acknowledged the approach of Isis-Arnautović by emphasising three main dimensions: the proposed anthropological reorientation of Islamic-Theological Studies, the communicative nature of revelation as a new starting point of reflection and the proposed model of Muslim theological thought in a new environment like Switzerland, by means of an intellectual engagement with the European context. These three aspects served Vishanoff as a background foil to present and analyse two Muslim thinkers, who also situate themselves in the anthropological field: the Egyptian philosopher Hassan Hanafi (1935–2021) and the Indonesian academic Aksin Wijaya (1974).

In his *Les méthodes d'exégèse,* Hanafi offers an anthropological reorientation by translating Islamic legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) into the vocabulary of phenomenology and stripping theology of its religious terminology (cf. Hanafi, 1965). With the aim of making theology practical, Hanafi starts his qur'anic interpretation not only from human experience but replaces God – as the indeterminable object of research because He transcends everything – with an idealised universal humanity (cf. Hanafi, 1972). Hanafi's view on revelation is driven by human experience. As a conse-

quence, he redefines the four classical sources of jurisprudence as follows: the Qur'an is understood as anonymous experience, because it describes a general worldview not belonging to one particular person, where in contrast, Sunnah represents the prophet's privileged experience. Consensus is for Hanafi an intersubjective experience, which allows the distinction between personal and universal by comparing them with other experiences, while analogy is treated as an individual experience and therefore fundamental, because it contains the sensory experience of each and every one. Hence for Hanafi, invented hadiths are authentic because they merely describe the particular reception and experience of a situation. In his eyes, revelation is not authority because of its origin and the transmission from God to Prophet, but because it contains universality, which undermines local distinctions (cf. Hanafi, 1965). Hanafi is an example of a deep engagement with European intellectual history, being convinced that not only was this fruitful for his own work, but that vice versa, Islamic history can contribute to European philosophy. He tries to demonstrate this by bridging religious thought with phenomenology (cf. Hanafi, 1972). However, his Islamic legal theory should not but may be perceived as capitulation, as he lost the notion of God, with transcendence passing over to secular vocabulary.
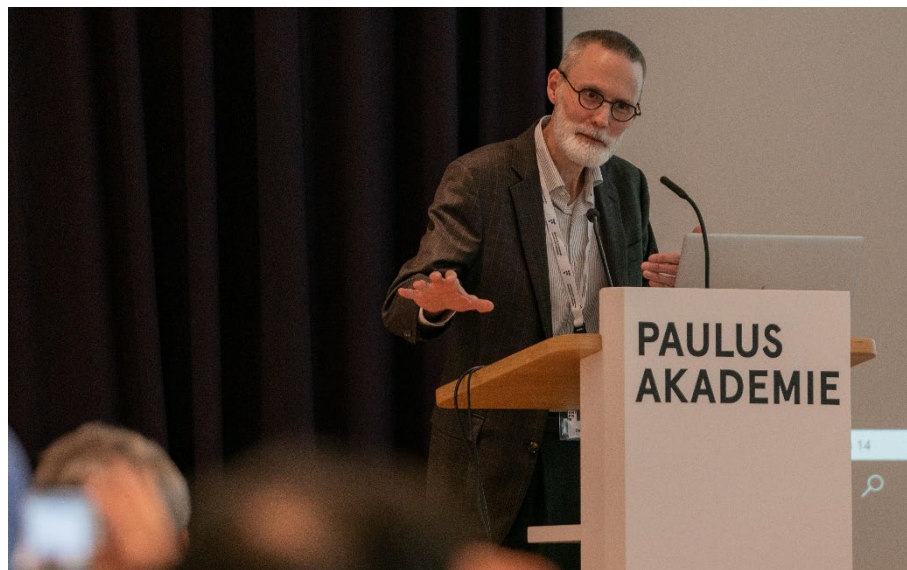

Figure 15: David Vishanoff

In his anthropocentric approach, Wijaya calls for an empirical, bottom-up, experience-based epistemology (cf. Wijaya, 2014; Yazdi, 1992). Although he does not preclude knowledge of God's transcendent nature and will, as Hanafi did, he strives for a qur'anic interpretation that addresses local and present human concerns. Wijaya views revelation as one-way communication and divides it between God's direct revelation to the Prophet, the oral Qur'an and the 'Uthmānic Codex. As the prophet conveys the message into Arabic, the Qur'an is encoded and enclosed in a cultural and linguistic system. As a result, according to Wijaya, the Qur'an contains a universal divine message,

approximately 30% of the content, but also contains cultural ideologies, namely 50% Arab and 20% Qurayshi – without explaining how he deduced this data. In his hermeneutics, Wijaya does not want to import Arab culture and heritage to Indonesia, rather to implement the universal core of the Qur'an (cf. Wijaya, 2014). Although he is a creative mind, his engagement with the European context could be described as opportunistic, as he is grabbing ideas piecemeal, here and there. Due to his limited language skills, his reception of European literature is indirect, through secondary sources, and his participation in and influence on European and international discourse is low, although his ideas on the potential of anthropocentric epistemologies in Islam are worth considering.

These systematic reflections offered by Isis-Arnautović and Vishanoff illustrate how the dominant understanding of theological anthropology as systematised knowledge about human beings, derived with a theological intention from normative sources such as the Qur'an and Sunnah, has been challenged by new developments. Moving forwards, the question arises of the relevance that human experience may play in contemporary qur'anic hermeneutics and what concrete image of human beings emerges from the approach presented here of theological anthropology as a paradigm for reading the Qur'an.

4. Synthesis: Towards a Discursive, Contextual and Communicative Theology

With the (forthcoming) completion of the seven research projects presented at the conference, the development and shaping of the new discipline of Islamic-Theological Studies in Switzerland has taken another step forward and gained shape. At the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society (SZIG/CSIS), the approach to Islamic-Theological Studies is simultaneously pursued from two directions. While several research projects (Brodard, Mustafi, Uçak-Ekinci) use empirical observations of concrete social issues to analyse, explain and interpret these phenomena from a practical Islamic-theological perspective, they simultaneously point out the need for more systematic reflection. The observed findings that Muslim practice is adapting to the Swiss context require, as a consequence, opportunities and institutional settings to deepen and discuss systematic follow-up questions. Other projects (Amiti, Boehmler, Boudaoui, Isis-Arnautović) offered initial systematic considerations, by addressing pertinent contemporary issues and seeking answers based on hermeneutical and linguistic analysis. Whereas these provide important systematic reflection on fundamental questions of Muslim reasoning, explicit interfaces and the threshold between practical and systematic research are visible in Amiti's work, while the social relevance and practical implementation still have to be proved in the other cases. One project (Isis-Arnautović) is trying to bridge this gap, by offering a paradigm for doing Islamic-Theological Studies. In order to illustrate the need for contextual, socially relevant theological thought, it combines a meta-theological reflection on anthropology with concrete ethical questions and the hermeneutical consequences of an anthropological reading of the Qur'an.

The seven projects of the doctoral programme follow a range of methodological approaches, from documentary method and case studies to philological-linguistic and hermeneutic analyses. They access their research field from different angles and provide insights that are important not only for answering individual research questions, but for constituting the discipline as a whole. Despite the plurality of topics and methodological approaches, six transversal lines that the individual research projects share can be drawn, albeit to varying degrees: discussions about *terminologies*, *disciplinary embeddings* and *understandings of theology* as well as aspects of *discursivity, contextuality* and *communication*. These are important characteristics of the emerging discipline of Islamic-Theological Studies and will be discussed in the following two subchapters.

4.1 Theology: More Than Doctrine

Terminologies
One challenge that most research has to face is a terminological discussion of key terms, which reflects the dynamic and youthful nature of the Islamic-Theological Studies research field. Social services such as caring for the needy, teaching religious content or visiting the sick, which have

been carried out individually as well as collectively throughout human history, are nowadays subsumed under the specific terms of social work, religious education and chaplaincy, and differentiated into professions (cf. Schmid & Sheikhzadegan, 2022). The practice of preaching that has accompanied religious communities since the beginning is discussed in scientific circles under the specific term of homiletics (cf. Stjernholm & Özdalga, 2018). Furthermore, in contemporary academic discussion, reflections about humans are subsumed under the term theological anthropology, although in the history of ideas there have always been reflections on the human condition and life's purpose (cf. Demiri et al. 2022).

However, whether these terms are adequate for the tradition of Islamic thought and reasoning must be clarified individually for each project. Which genuine terms from Islamic intellectual history exist to describe these phenomena? What opportunities and challenges arise when speaking of chaplaincy, spiritual care or pastoral care? What is the difference between Islamic and Muslim social work? What do terms like education or pedagogy denote, especially in the context of mosques? Can existing theories of homiletics also be applied to Islamic Friday sermons? How has the concept of theological anthropology been appropriated by Muslims and what are its strengths and weaknesses? And, fundamentally, what is specifically *Islamic* about these phenomena? An awareness of different coinages in the history of these concepts – such as Christian imprints in the case of chaplaincy, pastoral care and homiletics or social science influences in the case of social work or anthropology – is indispensable. However, supposedly broader and more inclusive concepts such as spiritual care, religious education or pedagogy may have their own disadvantages, precisely because of their width, and need to be carefully considered too. The consequences resulting from nuances when speaking about 'Muslim social work', focusing on actors, versus 'Islamic social work', focusing on overarching traditions and norms, must be made transparent. Conversely, for terms that originate from the Islamic context, such as *zakāt,* the question of translation, or in some cases even translatability, may arise. Do the English terms *alms* and *charity* denote

exactly the same as the Arabic term and are they able to convey the other fields of meaning, such as purity or merit, that *zakāt* connotes, according to some Islamic sources (cf. Kamali, 2010, pp. 232–242)? What are the advantages and risks of using terms like *al-riʿāya al-rūḥiyya (al-islāmiyya) (arab.)* or *manevi bakım (tr.)* instead of *chaplaincy*, which are genuinely Islamic, but are still a form of neologism (cf. Takim, 2019, pp. 415–416)? What are the nuances between *ādāb, akhlāq* and *muʿāmalāt* discourses within *fiqh*, all of which are assigned to *ethics* (cf. Fakhry, 1994; Schmid, 2012, pp. 184–185)?

These examples illustrate the relevance of a profound examination of the opportunities and limitations of specific terms and their implications. Sensitivity towards terms and key concepts presupposes, for researchers, a deep familiarity with discourses from different disciplines and requires them to weigh up arguments. The discussion on terminology is therefore indispensable and fulfils several functions at once: these argumentative negotiations plausibly outline new fields of research within Islamic-Theological Studies and point out new interdisciplinary interfaces (cf. Agai & Engelhardt, 2023, p. 83). Choosing Islamic-influenced terms emphasises a sense of belonging and of the importance of Muslim identity, while the adoption of common terms can facilitate academic and social participation – but with the risk of losing nuances of meaning and making references to the terminology Muslim communities are familiar with less explicit. In contemporary discourse, therefore, there are often no clear preferences for a single term, so several terms are used in parallel. Within the projects these challenges were handled differently and solved individually.

Disciplinary Embeddings

Similar challenges can be observed with regard to the question of how individual projects are embedded under the roof of Islamic-Theological Studies. Being embedded in an existing subdiscipline within the canon of Islamic-Theological Studies presents a challenge for several projects, since they deal with cross-cutting topics and/or modern phenomena that are inter-disciplinary in nature or were previously (sub)classified differently. This requires each project to be individually situated within Islamic heritage. For some projects, several classification options are possible.

The project on the imam's understanding of Islam (Amiti) is so multi-layered that it can be approached from different disciplines and angles: firstly, the research can be conducted – depending on the research question and objective – from a religious studies, social sciences or theological perspective, or even a combination of these. Secondly, if a theological approach is chosen, it could be assigned to practical research, if the Friday sermon material is assessed as a decisive criterion, for example. It could also be seen as systematic research, if the diaspora serves as a theoretical framework, or if the systematic question of keeping and adapting faith is a guiding principle. Thirdly, the actual research object could then go towards questions of the interpretation of sources (*tafsīr*), of normative challenges in the diaspora (*fiqh*) or of imams' ethical attitudes (*ādāb wa-akhlāq)*.

Likewise, research on the Qur'anic concept of *zakāt* (Boudaoui, Brodard) is feasible from multiple perspectives: as a historical outline of the evolution of its linguistic meaning from a religious studies perspective; out of theological interest, with a systematic intention of understanding the ethics behind it (Boudaoui); or building upon this, to practically analyse the motivations for social work (Brodard); or even to systematically reflect on how it relates to and forms a base for liberation theology. While for an exegetical work, and even for liberation theology, a classification into *tafsīr* is plausible, a contextualisation of social work within the frame of common good in the context of a *maqāṣid*-theory would be more prescriptive of *fiqh* itself.

Theological research on the Swiss Sufi master Frithjof Schuon (Boehmler) could be embedded – depending on the research focus – primarily within Sufism *(taṣawwuf)*, but also within ethics or even in equal parts of Sufism, ethics and *kalām*. Any focus on Schuon's ethical attitude towards humanity must consider that ethical discourses in Islam are distributed across various disciplines such as *fiqh* and *'ilm al-akhlāq,* as well as under the term *adab.* The fact that Schuon is a Sufi does not mean that research on him has to be assigned to the subdiscipline of Sufism per se. Similar challenges are faced when working on theological anthropology (Isis-Arnautović), currently not an independent subdiscipline in the Islamic disciplinary canon. Rather, relevant knowledge about human beings is scattered across various disciplines, among them *tafsīr, fiqh* and *kalām.* These are, of course, just a few examples and there are many more possible combinations.

Embedding practical research is particularly challenging. In some cases, like social work, chaplaincy or religious education, where practice precedes the formation of theory building, research needs to take on the responsibility of combining lived practice and theological meta-reflection, by linking field activities and professions to Islamic tradition and thought. This theory building requires bi-directional connections, referring to disciplinary, subject-specific theories in social

work, chaplaincy and religious education and to Islamic-theological foundations and beliefs. Its innovative character lies in this individual linking, which allows the new to grow.

To convincingly embed research into the disciplinary spectrum of Islamic-Theological Studies requires researchers not only to have knowledge of its subdisciplines and their developments, but also the ability to open up arguments, especially for new terminologies and phenomena. Their contributions of individual research bear a clarification mandate for Islamic-Theological Studies that concerns the discipline as whole: namely the task of carrying out a historical and contemporary examination of the genesis of the disciplinary canon, as well as its logics of classification. This would sharpen the presented classification into historical, systematic and practical research and contribute to evaluating its suitability. It may even help to understand how theological knowledge can claim to be scientific evidence as well as being relevant to society, which is an important question in the process of locating the newly established discipline in a secular context.

Understandings of Theology

The question of disciplinary embedding precedes the reference to theology. Research on the Qur'an or Muslims is not in itself a clear indication that the research is theological, especially since the Qur'an is also analysed from religious studies perspectives, just as the activities of Muslims are researched from the perspective of social anthropology or sociology, for example. This is especially the case for practical theology projects, which work at the interface of Muslim lived realities, societal contexts and Islamic reasoning, and are intertwined with social science discourses. Therefore, these projects must highlight their theological dimensions, in order to affirm their specific relevance for the discipline of Islamic-Theological Studies. Some assignments may even be perceived as unexpected, as several research projects do not deal with contents typically associated with theology, like images of God. Rather, a significant proportion take up socially relevant topics and operate at interdisciplinary interfaces that sometimes do not immediately reveal the theological dimensions of the research. This research therefore faces the challenge of elaborating and naming the theological content of its work.

The high proportion of practical research proves that practice and (self-)experience are being increasingly recognised as *locus theologicus* within Islamic-Theological Studies, i.e., as places for gaining new theological knowledge (cf. Rahemtulla, 2017, pp. 232–246). Emphasising an inductive approach shows that theology is not only found textually within classical works and in tradition in past epochs, but takes place in everyday practice, today (cf. Bevans, 2018, p. 1). This can be seen in various research manifestations and aspects: in religious education, for example, it is not only the teaching of religious content that is marked as theological knowledge, but also the reflection on *how* this implementation happens, which is understood as an important component of doing theology. The teaching content is communicated and situated in relation to the participants, by taking into account their life-world references. The aspiration of relating religious content to one's own life to form one's own opinion situates young people as subjects capable of action

and thus as actors of theological reflection. Although these reflections may not use typical theologised language, they should be appreciated as theological components because they deal with existential questions about identity and the meaning of life, about where from, where to and why.

The research on Friday sermons (Amiti) also bears witness to the need for a broader understanding of theology. Attitudes observed in communities and associations, such as nationalism or racism, are treated as important topics and linked to theological content, by referring to examples and narratives to illustrate the importance of egalitarian values within Islam, for example. Shortening the length of Friday sermons can also be interpreted as a theological act by imams, since it is based on theological principles. In this way, religious knowledge is not only handed down, but read and shaped in relation to the present context. Even if the theological dimensions do not seem obvious at first glance in some projects, they are undoubtedly identifiable.

In the research projects, connections to theology are made in different ways, ranging from references to primary religious sources such as the Qur'an, to implicit motivations that have their origins in religious beliefs, to activities that are assessed as Islamic by the actors themselves. Theology may be localised within a text or an analysed practice, it may already be evident in the researcher's intention or show up later in the process of theorisation. Therefore, references may vary from specific Qur'anic verses, through conclusions from analogies to the Sunnah, to general principles in Islam or the self-positionings of Muslim actors. Even if these explanations follow different guidelines, principles and methodologies, they definitely constitute a part of theological reflection. Accordingly, the associated theology varies and moves between the poles of textual proximity and universal values, which once again requires awareness and reflection.

All these examples demonstrate that the understanding of theology turns out to be much broader than the teaching of canonical content and purely textual knowledge. Among other things,

theology contains a meta-reflection on rational explanatory models of revelation and methodological possibilities of understanding it. Yet, simultaneously, theology is broken down into everyday needs and questions (cf. Engelhardt, 2021, pp. 1–3, 8–9). Since both the degree to which and the way Islamic-theological reasoning is adopted within each project differs, it raises the question of how to define common criteria that allow identification with the specific academic discipline of Islamic-Theological Studies in order to avoid arbitrariness.

4.2 Reflections on Doing Theology in Contemporary Times: Growing from What to How

Some doctoral students – such as Brodard, when he distinguishes between traditional school theology and the collective imaginary of the community which may label something as Islamic practice without reference to scholarship, or Amiti when she expects more theological content in Friday sermons associated with topics such as the afterlife – may seem to suggest that they share a broad idea of theology as a clearly defined set of contents, disciplines and logics. However, a more permeable view of what can be counted as theology can be considered when exploring a little deeper. Although not all researchers in the doctoral program share an identical understanding of theology, there are at least three connecting characteristics: discursivity, contextuality and communication, which, of course, are marked by interfaces.

Discursivity

In the seven projects of the doctoral programme, theology is not handled as a one-directional transmission, as information and dogmatic instruction, but as a discursive process (cf. Dziri, 2023; Asad, 2009). There is an effort within religious education not to teach abstractly, but in relation to human life, by taking personal needs and concerns seriously (Mustafi). Such a teaching approach tries to avoid hierarchical relations between the transmitter and receiver of knowledge by considering students as partners in learning. In the sensitive field of chaplaincy, discursive elements become recognisable while working with vulnerable human beings (Uçak-Ekinci). Faced with suffering people, chaplains cannot stubbornly follow normative guidelines by judging past or future actions as permitted or prohibited. Rather, they are challenged to detect needs and find a continuous exchange with the other person that is viable for all involved and in accordance with structural and institutional frameworks (cf. Schmid & Lang, 2022). Nor can the chaplain throw all his theological convictions overboard. Individual (theological) needs of those seeking chaplaincy – which may range from emotional accompaniment, to the desire for religious rituals, to clear ethical standards for orientation – cannot be ignored either. In particular, chaplaincy that does not seek to be instructive or directive must find alternatives to *ḥalāl-ḥarām* dichotomies and go beyond *fiqh* discourses on juridical-normative concerns by making other theological resources fruitful for everyday practice in secular institutions. Field experiences on the fringes, with suicide or drug addiction for example, as illustrated in social work cases (Brodard), may sometimes lead to

a revision of religious convictions. Knowledge generated from texts and experience from the field thus influence each other and flow back into the re-reading of textual sources.

However, discursive elements not only constitute practical research due through interpersonal exchange but can be observed in systematic research too: the examination of the term *zakāt's* semantic development and the ethics behind this, along philological-linguistic lines (Boudaoui), is just one example. Applied chronological analysis and the contrast between inner-Muslim and Orientalist research results demonstrates several discursive components. Dealing with the Qur'an as a text evolving over time emphasises its character as the negotiating, discursive speech of God which took place in antiquity. Late antiquity itself is marked by debates in which the revealed messages of the Qur'an situate themselves by taking up previous discourses and accepting, adapting or refuting their knowledge content (cf. Neuwirth 2019). Comparing different opinions from within Islamic and Oriental literature represents an interaction between self-perception and the perception of others and constitutes a dialogical-discursive theology that is both appreciative and critical of other positions.

Discursive theology is thus characterised by its high competence in negotiation. Arguments are derived, contrasted with other positions and constantly re-evaluated. Instead of apologetic demarcation, discursive theology seeks to deal and interact with contrary positions. Knowledge is not understood as fixed, but as evolving. The decisive factor for its enforcement is not obedience to authority, but the rational explicability which allows acceptance by a majority (cf. Dziri, 2023, pp. 210–215). This leads to important follow-up questions, requiring systematic reflection: how is Islamic knowledge negotiated in the present? How was it in the past? How does knowledge from texts and practice relate to each other? Is it the reference to a certain content or meaning that characterizes a tradition as discursive tradition – as for example Talal Asad (cf. Asad, 2009, pp. 19–21) suggests – or is it the way religious values are negotiated? The theoretical development of

a Muslim understanding of discursive theology is still in the early stages and needs further elaboration and discussion. However, with its dynamic character, it enables an inclusive and still rationally grounded approach to Islamic theological thought.

Contextuality

Without exception, contextuality is a second core characteristic that runs through all the research projects. Contextual should be understood in a double sense: on one hand, the key question is contextualised by referencing the thematic discourse back to Islamic knowledge discourses and embedding it within Muslim theological thought. By discovering roots, equivalents and manifestations in the Islamic history of theology, anchoring within the Muslim discursive tradition is guaranteed. Contemporary phenomena are not viewed in isolation from historical developments but embedded within time and thus allowed to build a connection with history (cf. Bevans, 2018, pp. 1–4). This is particularly evident when the Qur'an is perceived in its original context of late antiquity, as a text of multi-faceted communication (Boudaoui; Isis-Arnautović), which allows both a historical-contextualising approach and an actualisation for today. Yet it is also the case when manifestations, which are labelled with new terms such as chaplaincy (Uçak-Ekinci) or social work (Brodard), are linked to older, existing Muslim practices or general ethical principles by looking for content-related instead of terminologically related correspondences. This contextualising step marks an important knowledge transfer, since the research questions that are currently relevant and sought by society, are related to an inherited body from Islamic discursive tradition.

On the other hand, a contextual reference to the present time and space is made. The developed references to Islamic tradition and heritage are not left at their historical value but are placed in relation to contemporary discourses and specific geographical areas (cf. Bevans, 2018, p. 1–4). This subsumes several aspects and establishes connectivity in various directions. How this applies in geographical contexts, including country-specific political, cultural and scientific-historical dimensions, is considered particularly in relation to issues that require practical implementation such as chaplaincy, religious education, preaching or social work. Thereby, the socio-cultural environment and living space function as important factors for theology (cf. Pears, 2010, p. 1; Khalfaoui, 2019; Agai & Omerika, 2017, pp. 330, 340–442). Furthermore, references to other disciplines are established and these results discussed and implemented (cf. Gilliat-Ray, 2023, p. 60-62). Such interdisciplinary interfaces are evident in the discussion of divergent disciplinary outlines about anthropology (Isis-Arnautović), in medical and ethical intersections for chaplaincy (Uçak-Ekinci), in references to Islamic ethics and Christian theology in the case of Schuon's worldview (Boehmler) or in social science explanatory models with regard to Islamic social work (Brodard). Therefore, Islamic-Theological Studies should not be considered as a self-contained system, but as fluid, offering various interfaces (cf. Agai & Omerika, 2017, pp. 343, 350–357).

Consequently, all the research points – to different degrees – to a call for the development of a contextual theology that can respond to dynamics and the realities of time and place. At this

point, contextual theology does not denote a specific current or conceptual elaboration but describes a collective way of enacting theology. What different approaches and conceptions of contextual theology have in common, is the environment as the constitutive point of departure and destination. Contextual theology is sensitive to inner-religious plurality and shows a critical attitude towards monopolising interpretative claims and a faith in a vacuum without history (cf. Rahemtulla, 2017, pp. 232–235; Bevans, 2018; Schmid, 2012, pp. 265–270). This must not be misunderstood in the sense of relativising theology; rather, it is relational, taking into account the context *in* which and *for* which it is speaking, in order to have an impact and remain relevant. Furthermore, contextual theology must not be equated with an adaption or inculturation of Islam in diaspora. The challenge of introducing something new in a new context, with the possibility of causing alienation and losing conviction in a unifying supra-temporal truth, are criticisms of contextual approaches that must be taken seriously and reflected upon prudently. One such example would be the handling and possible creation of (new) rituals in dealing with stillborn children. The tension between theologically existing norms and their arguments, as well as the needs and reasons of the parents who are suffering emotionally, must be weighed up in order to find solutions that are compatible with both sides and are not labelled as illegitimate innovations (*bid'a*). Contextual theology has to be sensitive to changing contexts without losing intra-Muslim identification and connectivity (cf. Schmid, 2012, pp. 272–277; Khalfaoui, 2019, pp. 53–58).

As several models (cf. Bevans, 2018, pp. 4–29) and terminologies exist (cf. Pears, 2010, pp. 9–14) – the question remains open, of how contextual theology is to be shaped within the discipline of Islamic-Theological Studies. This includes several systematic questions that need clarification: how was theology practiced in past centuries, considering contextual factors like milieu and time? How were norms methodologically derived in the history of Islamic-Theological Studies and where does the potential for change lie? How far does this contextuality extend? What criteria can

be elaborated from Islamic intellectual history that define something as eternal or contextual? Is it still able to balance out advantages like the possibility of involving the local community and the danger of fragmentation as result of losing a unifying truth? A profound reflection on the tension between contextual theology and unity caused by supra-temporal convictions may even offer insights to the relationship between practical and systematic theology, as it faces similar challenges.

Communication

Another principal idea that is present across all the research projects – albeit again to different degrees and in different dimensions – can be subsumed under the collective term communication. One project (Isis-Arnautović) explicitly takes up this aspect by choosing a communicative model of revelation as a starting point for reflection on anthropology. Within this framework it treats the recitation of the Qur'an as a living, ongoing process of communication between God and humankind (cf. Kermani, 2018). Since rituals like recitation are an integral part of the communicative action within each religion, it enables further consolidation of the question of how theology per se can be perceived as communication and what interface it forms with systematic and practical research. Other works (Amiti, Boehmler, Boudaoui) focus on understandings of specific aspects of the Qur'an by individuals such as imams, Schuon or exegetes in early Islam. They build an exegetical line which entails several communicative dimensions, among them processes of understanding and proclamation. The research on Friday sermons (Amiti) may serve here as paradigmatic example of this: preaching takes places within a pentagonal communication structure by linking five references, namely references to the speaker (i.e., the subject), to the tradition (e.g., a text), to the reality of the listeners (i.e., situation), to the worship situation (i.e., ritual and liturgy) and to the interaction process itself (i.e., communication) (cf. Engemann, 2020). In this way, the aspect of communication manifests itself on two levels: in the exploration of God's communication and the question of how God is (verbally and non-verbally) in conversation with humans and in analysing how God's message reaches people (today) and is understood. Since the origin and goal of theology lie in the communication of God with humans, it raises the question of how theology itself can be understood and systematically developed as communication.

Three other works (Brodard, Mustafi, Uçak-Ekinci) mediate between practical community activities and theoretical embeddings and reflections. Chaplaincy (Uçak-Ekinci) is one of these examples that emerged from concrete necessity, as a response to an articulated need, while social work (Brodard) is another example that tries to fill a gap in government social offers. While individuals, groups and communities seek pragmatic solutions for their questions, academic research seeks to ensure systematic connectivity, by taking into account the articulated needs of the target group, national-legal and institutional standards, which apply to all faith communities, as well as scientific discourses needed for theory building. This kind of research connects everyday knowledge and good practice, which in some cases may only loosely relate to sources and knowledge that is rationally derived and argumentatively justified, especially from written sources. Instead of imposing a rigid theory on practice, the practice that Muslim individuals and

collectives actually have and why this is so, is evaluated autonomously, before being theoretically linked in a second step.

Furthermore, all projects carry out the task of communicating concerns and contents of Islamic-Theological Studies to society. Religious beliefs are translated into local contexts and made understandable (cf. Giliat-Ray, 2023). This transfer of knowledge into society marks an important articulation of Muslim voices. The research elaborates the contributions Islamic-Theological Studies can make to pluralistic societies, by demonstrating the public role theology takes on. Theology therefore has not only an internal function towards its faith community, but also a social one, which is reflected particularly in ethical and anthropological discussions (cf. Şahin, 2018, pp. 27–31; Leirvik, 2016, pp. 129–131; Engelhardt, 2021, pp. 8–9; Engelhardt, 2019).

Consequently, the study of theology as communication includes not only reflections on how God reveals his message, but also how it reaches the world and is received by humans. Doing communicative theology means triangulating four important dimensions, namely personal experiences of life and faith, community experiences, religious testimonies such as texts and their living transmission and social context (cf. Forschungskreis Kommunikative Theologie, 2007, pp. 58–74; Sejdini, Kraml & Scharrer, 2020, pp. 97–102). Communicative theology is therefore a dialogical type of theology, open on diverse sides, among them the intra-faith community, society and neighbouring disciplines. This kind of theology is inclusive, participatory and takes place in communities, because communication per se has a unifying character, even if the same position is not shared. Being connected to each other – to God as well to other human beings – instead of just being informed is one important hallmark of communicative theology (cf. Hilberath, 2016, pp. 188–192).

How communicative theology can be justified and pursued under Islamic premises – for example based on a communicative understanding of revelation that conceives of God's speech as a

relational event between God and humans – still needs to be thought through systematically. A reflection on the benefits and risks of such a theology and discussion of its references and delimitations to other approaches, especially Christian ones, is necessary. Furthermore, it must be clarified whether communicative theology entails one (or more) paradigm shifts – for example, with regard to the question of discursively acquired consensus.

On the way to a discursive, contextual and communicative theology, this is roughly how the output from the doctoral program can be summarised so far. Although there is still a long way to go, the foundation has been laid by these seven research projects. The individual projects provide in-depth insights into specific topics and simultaneously allow an overarching view of the constitution of Islamic-Theological Studies in the European context. Conceptual clarifications, internal sub-disciplinary classifications, as well as reflections on the theological framework have contributed depth, connectivity and form. Despite varying questions, methodological approaches and shared challenges, they point towards opportunities for the development of Islamic-Theological Studies under a discursive, contextual and communicative paradigm, whose further pursuit holds fruitful opportunities and possibilities for global scientific discourse, future societal challenges, and for Muslim faith communities.

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