

Abstract Subproject ,Qur'ānic Anthropology' – DFG Project BR 4177

Introductory remarks on the subproject ,Dynamics of Qur'ānic Anthropology'

The multilogicality of Qur'ānic theological anthropology

One of the fundamental insights that emerges from the encounter with different anthropological approaches in contemporary Muslim discourse is the inseparable connection of anthropology and (qur'ānic) hermeneutics. For every analytical approach to a theological anthropology or to the question of the 'dignity' and determination of man (regardless of the methodology or research perspective) is inevitably confronted with hermeneutical premises and assumptions, and must therefore take into account its own interpretive practice and local constraints in a self-reflective manner.

With respect to the qur'ānic discourse, one of the major implications of hermeneutic self-reflection is a critical analysis of the inherent tendency of any interpretation of the Qur'ān to restrict in a conceptualising manner the variety of meanings inherent to this discourse and its narratives, and thus to diminish its open dialogue to a 'meta-narrative' (theological, legal or religio-philosophical). But the awareness of the *dialogical, triological or multilogical* quality of the qur'ānic discourse also enables a new understanding of the interlinked levels of identity-based, existential and anthropological discourses that underlie the theological premises of the Qur' ān and constitute the specific *functionality* of its narratives.

Of the cognitive advances that are generated by the analysis of the diverse hermeneutical approaches a few examples are highlighted below, subdivided into *literary, hermeneutical, anthropological* and *legal-philosophical* perspectives of research.

From the perspective of *literary studies*, the attention is to be directed to: a) the *triologicality or multilogicality* of anthropological narratives in the Qur'ān, whose critical revision of earlier interpretative traditions is revealed only by their embedding in a triological or multilogical context, determined by old Arabian, Jewish and Christian anthropologies; b) the *functionality* of the Qur'ān's narrative rhetoric as well as the *corrective reconfiguration* of rabbinical revisions of biblical myths; and c) the *epistemological function* of (e.g. Jewish) demarcations from other (e.g. Christian) interpretations of biblical narratives for the understanding of qur'ānic references.

From the *hermeneutical* perspective, the attention is to be directed to: a) the *genealogy* of the qur'ānic proclamation, which fits into an established inter-religious dialogue, combining affinity with and divergence from Jewish and Christian traditions, and seeking to overcome their exclusivism and particularism; b) the *genealogy* of the religious *normative* in the framework of a continuous inner-qur'ānic *interpreting* discourse, whose special characteristics (*typology, intertextuality, exemplarity*) have the potential to lead the incorporated Late Antique traditions and mythical narratives to a *normative* interpretation; c) contemporary approaches to the Qur'ān that start with different (contextual) discourse dynamics for their hermeneutic referentiality, and thus reflect the *perspectivity, temporality and contextuality* of its interactive and productive discourse.

From an *anthropological* perspective the attention is to be directed to: a) the socio-political *contextuality* and *functionality* of anthropological motifs and traditions in the process of a continuous recalibration of qur'ānic anthropology; b) the *re-definitions* of biblical anthropological accounts (exemplarily Adam's *dominium terrae*) in the course of the inner-qur'ānic appropriation and transcendence of the rabbinical criticism of Christian anthropology; c) the *dynamism* and *openness* of the qur'ānic discourse on man, which opposes an essentialising concept of 'dignity' as well as the concept of a homogeneous anthropology. It therefore allows an anthropological *multiperspectivity* of man, which enables not only different evaluations of a religiously independent humanity, but also different determinations of religious *normativity*.

From a *legal-philosophical* perspective, the attention is to be directed to: a) the *heterogeneity* and *plurality* of conceptions of freedom and human dignity in the cultural sciences as well as in the Muslim-theological discourse and b) the potential of new *intentional determinations* of Islamic law (especially the concepts of the *maṣlaḥa* and *maqāṣid*) regarding its relationship to traditionally disadvantaged groups of people.

These interlinked *levels* of (hermeneutical, anthropological and legally normative) discourses demonstrate the advantages of critical interactions between different research perspectives in a scientific approach to the topic of "man in the context of Islamic/qur'ānic anthropology". The analyzed hermeneutical approaches are consistent in the view that honour (or dignity) as a fundamental anthropological topic must ultimately be legitimised by a transcendental source or a divine creative act in order to remain distinct from *conventional* honours, which are hierarchically divided and limited.

The anthropological multiperspectivity on the notion of 'human dignity'

Although the material essence of 'humanity' or human 'dignity' is not mentioned as such, the exaltation ('apotheosis') of man carried out in sacred texts and its narratives (see e.g. the notions *imago dei*, *ḥalīfa*) is one of the main roots of specifically *religious* universalisation of honour as a *general* human dignity. This exaltation of man is made possible in a religious context by the introduction of a third person into the philosophy of honour and dignity: God, the creator himself.

The analyzed hermeneutical approaches consistently address man in the context of the Qur'ān's testimony as revealing his *special* dignity by actualising his potential for goodness and for repentance for his sinful behaviour. Human dignity is thus seen primarily as a moral *quality* in an open-ended process of being, which calls man to realise his divine vocation as a representative of God on earth (*ḥalīfa*). This emphasis on human qualities unites especially modern Muslim approaches to a qur'ānic anthropology, and can be regarded – above all the different perspectives of man that are encountered in Islamic contexts – as a common link that gives Islamic theological anthropology its specific features.

The question as to whether these features allow one to speak of a distinct 'Islamic (theological) anthropology' would require a more thoroughly scientific cooperation and interdisciplinary endeavour between Islamic Studies, Jewish Studies, and the Study of the Christian Orient. With regard to the fact, that the subject matters of these disciplines belong ultimately to one shared geographical and cultural realm of discourse, it is hardly to understand, that these disciplines are institutionally, with few exceptions, still separated.

Interdependencies and implications

The implications of the above-mentioned *multiperspectivity* of the qur'ānic anthropological discourse are far-reaching and need further interdisciplinary research. The dynamic interdependencies between the hermeneutics of the Qur'ān, theological anthropology and legal philosophy (particularly in the European context) are a promising field of research inasmuch as the associated challenges and possibilities have the potential to facilitate the long overdue discursive cooperation of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. The decisive issue is the definition of the significant 'humanity', and the realisation that concepts of 'humanity' and 'dignity' (as empty significant) will remain open, dynamic, and subject to negotiation in all religions, and will be closely linked to the question of the communication and relationship between man and God.

For further details see: Braun, Rüdiger (ed. with Hüseyin I. Çiçek), *New Approaches to Human Dignity in the Context of Qur'ānic Anthropology – The Quest for Humanity*, Newcastle (Cambridge Scholars Publishing) 2017.